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The Great Dane: Georg Brandes in America

By
Julie K. Allen

Although his name is not familiar to most 21st-century Americans, the Danish literary critic Georg Brandes (1842-1927) was the most internationally-renowned Danish intellectual of the early 19th century. Aspiring writers from half a dozen countries deluged him with manuscripts to review, while German, English, and American tourists in Copenhagen believed, as Brandes remarked in a letter to Asta Nielsen in October 1920, that “I belong to the sights of Copenhagen as much as the Round Tower.”¹

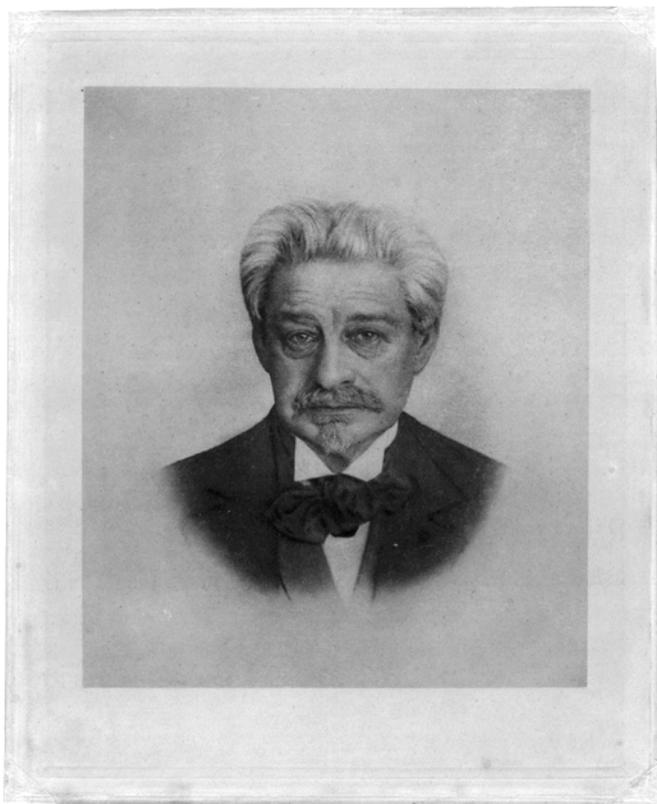
He was in high demand to give lectures all across Europe and his works were published in a dozen languages during his lifetime. Although he was a highly controversial figure in Denmark, the Danish-American expatriate community was intensely proud of this famous Dane, “one of the geniuses of which each century only produces one, ... a Danish man whose intellectual equal has never been produced by our small country,”² and finally succeeded in persuading him to come to America to lecture in May 1914. Brandes only spent a few weeks in the United States, but his momentous, successful visit on the eve of World War I illuminates a pivotal moment in the history of Danish-America and its self-perception in relation to Denmark and Danish culture.

As an internationally prominent socio-political and literary critic, Brandes occupied a *de facto* representative position as the voice of Denmark abroad. His professional endeavors, ranging from the cultivation of a realistic literary aesthetic to his critiques of the merits and significance of such towering cultural icons as Napoleon, Shakespeare, Goethe, and Jesus, encompassed a concomitant metacultural component of shaping contemporary public perceptions of Danish culture, particularly outside Denmark. Benjamin Lee, professor of anthropology at The New School for Social Research, defines metaculture as denoting “judgments people make about similarities and differences, [when] they judge token

instances of cultural production to be manifestations of the same cultural element.”³ By the early 20th century, Brandes was recognized worldwide as a symbol of Danish culture and his pronouncements on subjects as diverse as women’s rights, drama, democracy, and philosophy were viewed by most non-Danes as authoritative articulations of Danish viewpoints, even when his positions aroused opposition in Denmark. When he came to America in 1914, Brandes was eagerly embraced by Danish-Americans, not just as a venerable expert on literary modernism, a subject which likely only a small minority of Danish-Americans found particularly compelling, but even more as an icon of the distinguished culture of their homeland and its international prestige. Announcing Brandes’s upcoming visit in the Omaha-based Danish-American newspaper *Den danske Pioneer*, editor Sophus Neble asserted, “When the Danish-Americans receive Georg Brandes as their guest, they will celebrate him in his dual capacity: as the countryman who has meant more for Denmark’s development than any other in recent memory, and as the great international name which resounds across the entire civilized world.”⁴

The timing of Brandes’s visit to America was also significant, for it coincides with the high point of the numeric strength and cultural vitality of the northern European immigrant communities in America, including, but not limited to, that of Danish-Americans. The outbreak of World War I in August 1914 and the subsequent introduction of culturally-repressive nativist legislation and restrictive immigration quotas led to a decline of more than 80% in immigration from Scandinavia over the course of the 1920s. H. Arnold Barton’s assessment of the state of the Swedish-American community in this period applies equally well to Danish-Americans, if not more so, given the more widely-dispersed settlement patterns among Danish immigrants to America: “In 1917 Swedish America still represented natural, inherent ethnicity, based primarily upon the living experiences, customs, values, and language of Swedish-born immigrants, constantly reinforced by fresh blood from the homeland. By 1930 the Swedish-born were significantly fewer, older, and generally more assimilated into the American mainstream.”⁵ The Danish-America that Brandes toured in 1914 was

flourishing, but by the time he died in 1927, it was being inexorably transformed from a cohesive outpost of Danish culture to “a matter of personal sentiment, family tradition, and vague nostalgia, no longer strictly tied to ancestral customs or language.”⁶



George Brandes in 1919. (Photo: Royal Library, Copenhagen).

In this context, Brandes’s visit to America can be regarded as heralding both the climax of the age of Danish-American culture as an extension of the homeland and the dawn of a new age of Danish-American identity on its own merits, as the emergence in the 1930s of such notable Danish-American authors as Sophus Keith Winther and Enok Mortensen attests.

By 1914, Brandes was a living artefact of the tumultuous process of literary and social modernization Denmark had undergone in the final decades of the 19th century, in which he had played a central

role. He had catapulted himself to fame and notoriety in Denmark in 1871, when he commenced a series of lectures on “Main Currents in the Literature of the 19th Century” at the University of Copenhagen. In what eventually grew to encompass six published volumes, Brandes outlined the causes and effects of the major literary movements in France, England, and Germany from the French Revolution through the revolutions of 1848 in terms of each national literature’s relationship to the Enlightenment ideals of unfettered scientific research and humanistic poetics. In particular, he praised the revolutionary quality of the works of authors who defended the causes of freedom and progress, such as Lord Byron and Ludwig Feuerbach’s treatment of religion, Ivan Turgenev’s social critiques, and George Sand’s challenging of gender roles.⁷ Arguing that literature must be socially engaged in order to be meaningful, he warned that mid-19th century Danish literature was both aesthetically and socially stagnant, caught in a complacent bourgeois reaction to Romanticism, with the result that it had become meaningless. His mantra became that “the failure of a literature to debate problems is the same as losing all meaning.”⁸ Underscoring the political consequences of meaningless literature for the country that produces it, namely the loss of the ability to bring about development and progress, Brandes laid out a similarly revolutionary course for Danish literature, toward a socially critical, realistic literature in the style of French Naturalist writers such as Émile Zola. He prophesied a dire fate for Denmark of political, social, and even economic irrelevance if the moribund state of Danish literature was not remedied, prophesying that “the nation that produces it... will not be the kind of nation that controls development and progress, any more than the mosquito that believed it drove the wagon, because it occasionally gave the four horses pulling it an insignificant bite.”⁹ Naturally enough, the leaders of Danish society was displeased by his pessimistic view of the insignificance of Danish cultural production.

Given the conservative political climate and social milieu of bourgeois Copenhagen in the 1870s, it was perhaps inevitable that Brandes would encounter fierce opposition to his radical program of literary modernization, but his controversial views on social issues,

and his scandalous private life sealed his fate. While his realistic literary aesthetics resonated with many young Danes, his eagerness to debate formerly taboo subjects and thereby challenge social mores alienated the Danish establishment. His translation of John Stuart Mill's *The Subjugation of Women* into Danish, his condemnation of Kierkegaardian Christianity, and his outspoken advocacy for women's rights and civil marriage, not to mention his affairs with married women, earned him a reputation as a cosmopolitan liberal. In conjunction with his Jewish heritage, this label was enough to make him a *persona non grata* in certain circles of the Copenhagen national-liberal *dannelsesbourgeoisie* [educated elite] and to blacklist him from the pages of the major Danish newspapers.

As a result of the professional obstacles and personal opposition he faced in Denmark in the late 1870s, Brandes spent several years working in Germany. He moved to Berlin in 1876, where he built a brilliant international reputation as a literary critic, with articles appearing in such leading German journals as *Deutsche Rundschau* and *Nord und Süd*. Through his publications, speeches, and copious correspondence with a dizzying array of German writers, Brandes became a highly influential tastemaker and used his clout to promote the starkly realistic literary style associated with the Modern Breakthrough in Scandinavia, as realized in the works of Henrik Ibsen and J.P. Jacobsen, among others. He re-settled in Denmark in 1882, after a group of private donors committed to providing his financial support, but his European fame continued to grow, especially after he became known as the man who "discovered" Nietzsche. His interests gradually shifted from modern literature to the great men of the past, motivating him to produce lengthy monographs on historical geniuses as diverse as Michelangelo, Goethe, Shakespeare, and Jesus, but his rationalistic approach to these venerable men was as controversial as his earlier literary critiques had been. By the turn of the century, he had also begun a campaign of public activism on behalf of oppressed minorities in Europe, ranging from the violently persecuted Armenians in Turkey to the culturally-oppressed Danes in Schleswig-Holstein.

Throughout the early 20th century, Brandes was a ubiquitous participant in European cultural and socio-political discourse. He conducted annual journeys throughout Europe, visiting his numerous illustrious acquaintances, such as the French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau, and lecturing across the Continent. In 1912, he spoke in no fewer than 42 European cities.¹⁰ In addition, he continued his voluminous correspondence with intellectuals and writers in Germany, Poland, Austria, France, and England, while continuing to publish articles and books prolifically in several languages. Uffe Østergaard asserts that Brandes's "books and thousands of short and long articles in all of the dominant—and several of the minor—European languages gave him a political influence that has never been surpassed."¹¹ His recommendation was sufficient to secure a publisher for an aspiring author, while his censure sent foreign governments scrambling for political cover.

Brandes's decision to embark on a lecture tour of American cities in 1914, his first visit to America, was a momentous and historic event in the Danish-American community. C.H.W. Hasselriis of the Danish-American Association of Chicago, which sponsored and organized the tour, telegraphed an announcement of the upcoming event to the Danish newspaper *Politiken* on May 8, 1914: "The announcement that Georg Brandes is going to pay a short visit to North America and come to Chicago has awakened lively interest among all Danes. It is a given that Brandes's appearance here will be the greatest event in the history of Danish-American organizations."¹² Scandinavian-Americans had been trying to entice Brandes to visit their communities since the 1880s, when University of Wisconsin professor Rasmus B. Anderson had successfully managed lecture tours for the Norwegian literary luminaries Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson and Kristofer Janson. As the nation's only professor of Scandinavian languages, Anderson was known for his "ardent missionary spirit for the cause of Scandinavian culture,"¹³ and hoped to build the reputation of Scandinavian-American culture by arranging celebrity visits, including one from Brandes. Brandes was not particularly well-known in the English-speaking world at the time, however. By 1881, only one of his many books, his biography of the English politician and novelist Benjamin Disraeli,

had appeared in English translation, but it had appeared in three British and American editions in two years.¹⁴ The first English translation of Brandes' *Main Currents in Nineteenth Century Literature* did not appear until 1901. When Anderson invited Brandes to come lecture in America, Brandes hesitated, as his letter to Anderson of March 1, 1881 reveals: "You believe, that I would also [like Bjørnson] be successful lecturing in America. I dare not be as certain of that. I suppose that I speak quite well, but my bit of eloquence is not of the broad, popular style, nor do I have nearly the same name recognition as Bjørnson. In any case, it is a great undertaking to travel over to you, but if I had a reasonable prospect of success, I might yet do it someday."¹⁵ In their correspondence, Anderson and Brandes reached a tentative agreement about a lecture tour in the spring of 1883, but it came to nothing, as Brandes accepted a private professorship in Copenhagen and Anderson retired from academic life in the fall of 1883. Sporadic unsuccessful invitations followed over the years, including one from Max Henius to speak at the 1913 Danish Constitution Day celebration in Chicago.¹⁶ When the newly-elected chairman of the Danish-American Association, C.A. Quist, made the proposal in late 1913 of inviting Brandes to America, it fortuitously coincided with Brandes's acceptance of an invitation from the Hamburg-America steamship line to grace the maiden voyage of its newest and largest passenger liner, *Vaterland*, from Hamburg to New York in May 1914, and so the ardently longed-for engagement came about at last.

When Brandes arrived in New York in late May 1914, he was welcomed as both an important literary critic and a representative of Denmark, a situation that illustrates his dual cultural and metacultural significance. His long-awaited visit was a major event: newspapers reported on his arrival, invitations to more 150 banquets poured in, and thousands of disappointed fans had to be turned away from his lectures. Emil Opffer, the editor of the Danish-American newspaper *Nordlyset*, proclaimed, "We have waited for him [Brandes] for thirty years and he finally arrived with the glory of international fame around his steel-gray head. I don't hesitate to call his visit here the greatest intellectual event to have occurred for us Danes over here."¹⁷ In a subsequent interview with *Nordlyset*,

Brandes complained about being hounded by reporters wherever he went in America, but thanked Danish-Americans for their effusive hospitality: "I have never received a reception anywhere comparable to that which I have received from America's Danes."¹⁸ In light of the fact that relatively few of his books and even fewer of his articles had been translated into English, the conclusion is inescapable that it was Brandes's symbolic stature as a great Danish intellectual, whose fame reflected well on both his Americanized countrymen and their homeland, that merited such ardent outpourings. An article in the Chicago-based Danish-American newspaper *Revyen* articulates precisely this expedient view of Brandes's visit: "This is an opportunity that Danish-Americans have awaited for many years. May it be fully utilized, now that our genial countryman's world-fame is greater than ever and sheds glory over the Danish nation."¹⁹

Brandes's American tour was covered exhaustively in the media, in both the U.S. and Denmark. The *New York Times* featured regular items about his trip, reporting his opinion on such diverse topics as Thomas Paine, Emerson, and women's suffrage, and sending a reporter along to several of his East Coast speaking engagements to conduct an in-depth interview. The *Chicago Tribune* proclaimed that "the United States have never before had a visit from a guest whose presence has been as stimulating and valuable for the entire society" as Brandes.²⁰ *Politiken* carried highly detailed daily reports on Brandes's activities in America, contributed by leading Danish-Americans, including Opffer of New York and C.H.W. Hasselriis of Chicago. In his first dispatch, concerning Brandes's arrival in New York on May 23, 1914, Opffer notes that Brandes was welcomed at the dock by "a group of prominent Danes representing the Danish-American Society, 52 photographers and an army of reporters" before departing to give his first lecture at Yale University that evening.²¹ Opffer also previewed a few of the tributes to Brandes, including a torchlight parade in Brandes' honor organized by Danes in Chicago and a gala hosted by the Academy of Arts and Sciences in Boston. In New York City, 8000 schoolgirls performed Danish folk dances for Brandes in Central Park on June 8, 1914.²² C.H.W. Hasselriis reported in *Politiken* that "no foreign guest in Chicago has ever been the subject of as much attention" as Brandes,²³ an, in

November 1914, the Danish-American Association devoted its entire quarterly journal to an exhaustive account of Brandes's visit and the press coverage it garnered

The acclaim Brandes enjoyed also transcended the linguistic and cultural boundaries between the various American ethnic communities, reflecting the view of Brandes as a cosmopolitan whose accomplishments belonged not only to Denmark, but also to the rest of Scandinavia, Germany, and Europe as whole. According to an article in *Politiken* on May 23, a German-American newspaper in New York, the *New York Staatszeitung*, had published a long article about Brandes and welcomed him to the United States on behalf of all German-Americans.²⁴ Similarly, *Berlingske Tidende* reported on May 27 that "all newspapers have bid him welcome in front-page articles in English, German, French, Hebrew, and Polish. The *Tribune* calls him a Prince of Literature, the most notable living critic, while the *Herald* praises him as the first among Scandinavian writers."²⁵ During his visit, he delivered his lectures alternately in English, Danish, and German, reflecting these multinational affiliations.

Since so many cities clamored to host Brandes in the three weeks of his visit, the Danish-American Association planned out a tight schedule, particularly demanding for a man as old as Brandes, who had turned 72 in February 1914. He gave his first lecture in English at Yale, on Shakespeare, on the evening of his arrival in the U.S. on May 23. The next day, he traveled across half the country by train to give the same lecture in Chicago's Orchestra Hall, followed by a two-hour lecture on Napoleon in Danish and a gala dinner in the Auditorium hotel on Sunday, May 25. Despite the heat of the day, the hall, reputedly one of the largest in the city, was filled to capacity, containing "the largest Scandinavian audience ever seen in Chicago."²⁶ On Monday, May 26, Brandes spoke about Goethe in Milwaukee in German, then on Tuesday and Wednesday at the Universities of Minneapolis and Chicago, respectively, on the subject of Hamlet, concluding with a lecture in English to American authors and literary critics at the Twentieth Century Club that evening. He gave his final lecture in Chicago, on Goethe, at the Germania Club

on June 2, before traveling to New York City, where he lectured on the Old Testament to an over-filled hall at the Waldorf Hotel.

The Danish-American communities in Chicago and New York were particularly invested in Brandes's visit. Everywhere he went, he was wined, dined, and toasted extravagantly by local Danish-American associations. On May 24, Brandes met with representatives of the University of Chicago, notable Chicago-area scientists, artists, and writers, as well as a committee of 100 Danes from Chicago and the surrounding area. On the morning of Sunday, May 25, the Danish musical associations *Harmonien*, *Magneten*, and *Arbejder-Sangforeningen* serenaded Brandes outside his hotel on Michigan Avenue. At a banquet in New York City, Echard V. Eskesen, president of the Danish-American Society in the East, described Brandes's visit "like a brilliant comet that only rarely appears in the heavens and then disappears." He continued,

We have longed for years to see you over here, to speak to you about ourselves, our hopes and aspirations in this great new society. You were the inspiration and torchbearer of our youth and we have brought the thoughts and ideas that you once awakened in us with us over here and sought to transplant them in American soil. And we are vain enough to believe that it was in part for our sake that you came and therefore we thank you with all of our heart. We Danes who live over here are just a small fraction of the entire American people, but we have no fear of being swallowed up or destroyed in this large population, for we derive strength from the rich culture we bring with us from our motherland, a great fund of ideas and spiritual values,—and it is our task to draw from this well over here, to strive with all might to remain ourselves, so that Nordic art and spirit can permeate the new society being erected here. ... May you, dear Doctor, live and work for the benefit of the fatherland and for all people for many more years and may your flame continually light the way for us, so that it melts the frost of the cold nights in our hearts. Many have sung your praises and our voice is so small and can only repeat what others have said. But we over here can say one thing with

authority and that is that you have taught us, despite all of the foreignness around us, to love Denmark first of all and be proud of its men and its banner-carriers.²⁷

The effusiveness of Eskesen's remarks is characteristic of the speeches given at each banquet given in Brandes's honor. In Chicago, Carl Antonsen strove to outdo Eskesen, claiming that "there is nowhere you have been that Danes of all camps and social classes have praised you in more sincere admiration and love and gratitude for what you have accomplished than here in Chicago."²⁸

Yet many of those present knew little of Brandes's work; instead, they revered him for the prestige he brought his native land and, by extension, all Danes throughout the world. A rare exception is Kate Parsons of the *New York Times*, who, in her full-page article on Brandes on May 31, 1914, credits him with being "the savior of [Denmark's] literary life."²⁹ By contrast, at the conclusion of his speech, Antonsen exulted, "Georg Brandes belongs to the entire world, but we Danes are still proud of the fact that you are *Danish!*"³⁰ In his remarks, Hasselriis expressed the Danish-American Association's "pride that you are a Dane, and our gratitude for the glory you reflect on our mother country by virtue of your universal and eternal fame."³¹ Despite his notorious irritability and individuality, Brandes seemed to accept, even embrace, this symbolic position, though not exclusively. In his reply to a group of Danish choirs that serenaded him in Chicago, Brandes described the task of promoting Danish culture as a collective task:

Here, where we stand in the middle of the great ocean of humanity, you have caused Danish songs to resound across the sea as a sign that Denmark will never perish. You have sent back your thoughts to the fatherland in the east, which neither you nor I can make larger, but together we have spread its renown, made it greater."³²

At the same time, he also acknowledged his own particularly prominent role in this process, explaining somewhat whimsically, to great applause, that "over my cradle, invisible beings sang: Whenever your name is mentioned in foreign lands, Denmark's name will spring to people's lips everywhere. The prophecy has come true and thus it has been for 44 years. The name of Denmark

will come to sound over my grave as over my cradle.”³³ In both the eyes of his Danish-American audience and in his own estimation, Brandes’s fame as an individual was secondary to his fame as a representative of Denmark.

Yet for all of the celebrations, speeches, and ceremonies, Brandes’s visit to America did not have the lasting impact on Danish-American cultural life that its organizers had hoped. One reason for this might be the generation gap between Brandes and his audience that ensured that his words, which had such a revolutionary effect in Copenhagen nearly a half-century earlier, would make no lasting impression on his American listeners. As several of the banquet speakers noted, they had grown up with Brandesianism and the Modern Breakthrough as respected ideals to emulate, not the radical departures from convention they had once been. University of Minnesota professor Poul Houe argues that “behind all of his modernist rhetoric, Brandes was deeply anchored in the enlightened Romantic and Naturalistic culture of the old world.”³⁴ Ideological differences also played a part in this disconnect; in Houe’s view, Brandes was disappointed by the American interpretation of freedom as “freedom to earn money without society’s interference, not a freedom that promotes intellectual independence.”³⁵ In his correspondence with Rasmus B. Anderson in 1881, Brandes had expressed his reservations about how American audiences would react to his style of lecturing: “I would fit damned poorly in a country where what matters is craftiness, working for one’s own advantage, taking a businesslike view of things. I am afraid that I would be tricked wherever I went.”³⁶ Some of the press coverage of Brandes’s visit in 1914 highlighted his famous temper, his impatience with mediocrity, and his skepticism of democracy, all of which served to isolate him from the Danish-Americans clamoring for his approval.

These relatively minor obstacles might have been overcome, however, were it not for the outbreak of World War II less than two months after Brandes’s departure and a dramatic increase in pressure on Danish-Americans to assimilate more completely into American culture. While both Denmark and the United States declared official neutrality in August 1914, the two countries

followed very different trajectories during the war, leading the United States to ally itself economically with Great Britain and France long before it entered the war on the side of the Allies, while Denmark continued to trade with both Britain and Germany until 1917, when America's entry into the war and refusal to continue exporting raw materials to Denmark forced Denmark into a greater economic dependency on Germany. The political climate in the United States rapidly became hostile toward anyone suspected of sympathizing with Germany, which meant that Scandinavian-Americans were subjected to sharp scrutiny, due to their centuries of close cultural interaction with Germany. Social pressure to "Americanize" intensified, culminating in the oft-repeated call by former President Theodor Roosevelt for immigrants to abandon the speaking of their native tongue in order to demonstrate their undivided loyalty to America. The governor of Iowa, William L. Harding, went even further, issuing the so-called "Babel Proclamation" on May 13, 1918, which outlawed the speaking of all foreign languages in public and on the telephone. As a result of these pressures, many Danish-American congregations began conducting services in English, while several Danish-American newspapers ceased publication after seeing their circulation numbers drop precipitously. The fierce pride in being Danish exhibited by Danish-Americans throughout Brandes's visit had become a liability to economic and social acceptance in America and was, therefore, suppressed and reserved for private occasions, such as holiday celebrations.

Meanwhile, in Europe, Brandes had emerged as one of most outspoken opponents of the war, earning the enmity of Germans, Englishmen, and Frenchmen alike. His longtime friend, French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau, broke with Brandes in a series of open letters published in major newspapers. In his response to Clemenceau, which was printed in several major international newspapers, including *The Evening Post: New York*, Brandes vigorously defended his country against Clemenceau's charge that "Danes are a nation 'without pride,'" outlining instead a very clear-sighted assessment, devoid of nationalist rhetoric, of the complex situation of the war.³⁷ He noted soberly that "the belligerents are all

optimists.... Every one hopes to win and is certain of success," and posed the prophetic question, "What if none of the belligerents should come out supreme? What if all the horrors now endured should leave the grave question unsettled which inspired the strife?"³⁸ In Brandes's view, the war was the result of European imperialism and, as such, was not a fight over ideals but markets, which invalidated the nationalist rhetoric being used to rally public support for it. Time would prove Brandes right, but it would not repair the damage done to his international reputation by his honesty.

At the same time, however, Brandes's passionate defense of Danish neutrality resonated with many Danes on both sides of the ocean. As both Brandes and his fellow Danes were aware, his opinions were frequently interpreted abroad as expressions of Denmark's views. In this case, his opposition to the war coincided so closely with Denmark's national policy of neutrality (the official statement of which was, incidentally, drafted by his brother Edvard, Minister of Finance) that Danes welcomed and appreciated his unsanctioned ambassadorial services. Bourgeois Danish society forgot much of its earlier antipathy toward Brandes, to the point that when his essay collection *Verdenskrigen* [The World War] was published in 1916, it sold out immediately, a rare occurrence for Brandes in Denmark.³⁹ Across the Atlantic, where public and governmental support for American involvement in the war increased over the course of the 1910s, many Danish-Americans shared Brandes's anti-war stance, even when it earned them the distrust of their American countrymen. One of the most memorable articulations of this position, which shows clear affinity with Brandes's views, can be found in Sophus Keith Winther's 1936 novel *Mortgage Your Heart*, in which his young Danish-American protagonist Hans Grimsen convinces his brother not to enlist, arguing that "war is the last refuge of capitalist exploitation. You become the servant of the imperialistic nations who build their power at the expense of the exploited workers."⁴⁰ At the University of Nebraska, Hans adopts Brandes's confrontational stance, telling his classmates, "If you ... weren't such fools, you would know that this is not your war, but a war for foreign markets, because the

governments at home can't sell all their goods to those who produce them."⁴¹ When his classmates call him a coward and a foreigner, Hans proudly defends his American citizenship, but his arguments demonstrate his affinity with Brandes and Denmark's anti-war ideology.

By the 1920s, when the emotional turmoil of World War I was being crowded out by widespread economic and social upheaval in both Denmark and the United States, Brandes found favor in the American press and educated public once more. His byline appears in English-language publications much more frequently during this period than ever before, with commissioned articles appearing in *The American-Scandinavian Review* in 1921, *The New Republic* in 1922, *The American Hebrew* in 1925, and *The Nation* in 1926, to name just a few. An article in *Politiken* (Copenhagen) on November 3, 1921 confirms Brandes's enhanced status in post-war America: "In America, Georg Brandes is now more than an empty name: his comments are cited again and again in the debates of the day, his works are referred to time after time, and his reputation is now so well-founded that even his most recent works, which have not yet been translated into English, are exhaustively reviewed in journals such as *The Nation*, *The New Republic*, or in high-brow newspapers like *New York Evening Post*, *New York Herald*, or *New York Times*."⁴²

More than just demonstrating his renewed popularity, however, this brief renaissance of interest in Brandes secured his American legacy, however little his name has been preserved in America's cultural memory. Writing from New York, the author of the article in *Politiken*, Georg Strandvold, cautions that Brandes and America will never have a close relationship, due to a lack of a deep affinity, but asserts that Brandes has still contributed appreciably to American intellectual life:

All around America, there are men and women, primarily in academic circles, who try to understand many of life's problems through the lens Brandes has provided. The little group of "intellectuals," who are the salt of the future of American culture, know Brandes by heart, and while they admire him, they learn from him. ... Therefore, one can, in a certain sense, speak of Brandes's own little congregation

over here—a congregation that is numerically insignificant, but which in all other respects plays an important role in the cultural community that is beginning to flourish in the New World.⁴³

Strandvold's assessment of Brandes's impact on America, though written for a Danish audience, pinpoints the enduring value of Brandes's American visit; far more important than the momentary boost in prestige that his presence lent the Danish-American community, Brandes's memorable introduction to America's cultural elite in 1914 ensured that his ideas, whether branded as Danish or not, would have broad and long-lasting impact on emerging century cultural and political discourses in the United States in the mid-20th century. Brandes's lifelong quest to change the world for the better, by challenging whatever aesthetic, social, and political stagnation he encountered, continues to resonate with America's culture of optimism. In an article published in *The New Student* (New York) on November 18, 1922, the 80-year old Brandes, whose byline reads, "Great Danish Critic and Essayist," urges the youth of America to set aside the fears and prejudices engendered by the recent war and focus instead on making the world a better place, however futile the effort may seem:

The fine privilege of youth is its belief that it and it alone can stamp the future of mankind. It does not take into account the difficulties, looks only toward the goal and doesn't doubt of its ability to find the means leading up to it. The older man knows how little of that which he as a youth hoped to be able to reform he in fact has succeeded in changing. In face of the hard resistance of existing conditions, he is most surprised that he has even succeeded in bringing about some change towards a betterment. The belief that it can revolutionize the world is not, however, only the privilege but also the poetry of youth and its force. This belief, if not dejectedly given up midway, gives to the whole life its consecration.⁴⁴

This quote is particularly poignant for its candor, as Brandes alludes to his own life and the disappointments he has faced in his ongoing attempts to better the world, but it also raises an idealistic standard

for American youth—Danish-American or not—to carry into the future.

¹ Ib Monty, ed. *Asta Nielsen. Breve 1911-71* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1998), 36. All translations, unless otherwise noted, are my own.

² C.H.W. Hasselriis, *Georg Brandes. Besøg i Amerika* (Chicago: The Danish-American Association, 1914), 5.

³ Benjamin Lee, "Foreword," *Metaculture. How Culture Moves Through the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), xi.

⁴ Qtd. in Hasselriis, *Besøg*, 6.

⁵ H. Arnold Barton, *A Folk Divided: Homeland Swedes and Swedish-Americans, 1840-1940* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 1994), 264.

⁶ Barton, 264.

⁷ Uwe Englert, "Der Moderne Durchbruch." *Wahlverwandtschaft. Skandinavien und Deutschland 1800 bis 1914*. Berlin: Jovis, 1997), 209.

⁸ Georg Brandes, *Emigrantlitteraturen*. Hovedstrømninger i det 19de Aarhundredes Litteratur. 1st ed. Vol. 1. 6 vols. (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1872), 15.

⁹ Brandes, 15.

¹⁰ Uffe Østergaard, "Georg Brandes og Europa i dag," *Georg Brandes og Europa* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum, 2004), 34.

¹¹ Østergaard, 34.

¹² "Georg Brandes i Amerika. Danskerne træffer store Forberedelser," *Politiken*, May 8, 1914.

¹³ Einar Haugen, "Georg Brandes and his American Translators," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* XXXVII: 4 (October 1938), 462.

¹⁴ Haugen, 465.

¹⁵ Qtd. in Haugen, 467.

¹⁶ Hasselriis, *Besøg* 5.

¹⁷ "Georg Brandes hyldet i New York," *Nordlyset*, June 11, 1914.

¹⁸ Emil Opffer, "Georg Brandes fortæller om sine Indtryk i Amerika." *Politiken*, June 6, 1914.

¹⁹ Hasselriis, *Besøg*, 6.

²⁰ C.H.W. Hasselriis, "Georg Brandes blandt sine Landsmænd i Amerika." *Politiken*, May 28, 1914.

²¹ Emil Opffer, "Georg Brandes' Triumpftog gennem Amerika." *Politiken*, May 23, 1914.

²² Emil Opffer, "Georg Brandes i Amerika." *Politiken*, June 3, 1914.

²³ C.H.W. Hasselriis, "Georg Brandes i Amerika." *Politiken*, June 3, 1914.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ "Georg Brandes i Chicago," *Berlingske Tidende*, May 27, 1914.

²⁶ C.H.W. Hasselriis, "Georg Brandes blandt Landsmænd i Amerika." *Politiken*, May 27, 1914.

²⁷ "Georg Brandes hyldet i New York," *Nordlyset*, June 11, 1914.

²⁸ Qtd. in Hasselriis, *Besøg*, 17.

²⁹ Kate Parsons, "Georg Brandes, 'Big, Strong, Unamiabile, Yet Lovable.'" *The New York Times*, May 31, 1914, 3.

³⁰ Qtd. in Hasselriis, *Besøg*, 18.

³¹ Hasselriis, *Besøg*, 9.

³² Hasselriis, "Landsmænd."

³³ Hasselriis, *Besøg*, 14.

³⁴ Poul Houe, "Georg Brandes i Amerika." *Weekendavisen* August 11-17, 2000, 9.

³⁵ Ibid, 20.

³⁶ Qtd. in Haugen 468.

³⁷ Georg Brandes, "Georg Brandes on Denmark's Neutrality." Trans. by M. Wreschner. *The Evening Post: New York*, July 6, 1915.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Jørgen Knudsen, *GB. En Georg Brandes biografi* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 2008), 585.

⁴⁰ Sophus Keith Winther, *Mortgage Your Heart* (New York: Macmillan, 1937), 263.

⁴¹ Winther, 292.

⁴² Georg Strandvold, "Brandes i Amerika," *Politiken*, November 3, 1921.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Georg Brandes, "The Cosmopolitan Ideal," *The New Student* (New York), November 18, 1922.