The Decline of Music History: A Case Study of the Grieg Research

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ABSTRACT

It is the hypothesis of this article that a case study of Grieg’s ‘Forbidden symphony’, probably the most discussed work in Grieg research during the last four decades, can offer new answers not only to the question of why academic interest in Grieg has declined, but to the broader question of why music history has lost its privileged position in musicology. In revealing how Grieg research was ordered and disciplined into a set of fixed argumentative steps (or cadences) which disallowed other perspectives, this article problematizes the musicological quest for systematization, the use of general (analytical) methods and the misuse of authority. In this respect, the present case study of Grieg research may also reveal tendencies that are likely to have relevance for other research topics within musicology and the humanities. To combat these inhibiting forces and disenchanting tendencies, the conclusion is that the prime agency in the humanities must be found in the material – the particular – and never in the model or method, nor in the personal authority of leading researchers. It further makes an appeal to investigate the aesthetic and ideological values that are unconsciously present in the way we actually do research.

Keywords

Music history as practice, Grieg research, music and discursive analysis, national historiography, ‘forbidden’ symphony
Why does research decline? If this pertinent question is rarely asked, the reason may be that academic prestige favours newness. Former scholarly positions and arguments may be criticized, but rarely examined as such as a coherent field of scientific knowledge and activity (i.e. practice). But without knowing how previous research was organized, how can we claim, with any degree of authority, that we are improving scientific knowledge in the humanities? In fact, there is a fair chance that we may simply follow a new lead, and/or that we will, unknowingly, reengage similar principles (e.g. institutional power structures, unreflected aesthetic values and opinions, professional interests, etc.) that defamed former research. New research is no guarantee for improved quality, although it can illustrate frustration with the old.

In this article I would like to contribute to the study of music history as practice by examining the decline of Grieg research. Certainly, music history is no longer the driving force in a splintered musicology. Today music scholars inform their research from a wide range of divergent academic fields, often implementing theories and methods from scientific fields outside the humanities. This current plurality explains why the concept ‘Grieg research’ is no longer self-explanatory or even necessarily relevant for recent publications on Grieg’s music. Nevertheless, if the advantage of the ‘old’ musicology was its greater unity, as well as the assumption of a proper epistemological field within music, it is worth questioning how this apparently strong position with its easily defendable raison d’être could lose its hold. Since this question is complex, and is likely to invite all sorts of general but shallow cultural explanations, it may be useful to examine well-defined cases. It is the hypothesis of this article that examining ‘Grieg research’, dominated by Norwegian and German scholars, as a coherent academic field, can reveal some ordering principles within music history as an academic practice, and may also explain to some degree why music history has lost its privileged position in musicology.

LOST IN THE MIRE OF PREJUDICES

In 1977, a leading Norwegian musicologist, Kjell Skyllstad, made a strong appeal for a new approach to Grieg, an approach that was not to be lost in the ‘mire of prejudices and static, conventional thinking when it comes to Grieg’. He pointed out that Grieg’s music had been judged hitherto ‘on the basis of some vague, undefined criteria, some mysterious means that is never stated’ and in this way he attacked musical scholars who did not, or could not, clarify the aesthetic or musicological values by which they judged Grieg’s music.

Nearly forty years later, it is tempting to conclude that Skyllstad’s critique was justified; but regrettably, it did not bring about any change, which could partly explain why Grieg research came to lose its ability to trigger new research questions (or to escape the ‘mire of

2. True, Skyllstad wrote ‘critics’ and not scholars or musicologists. But this reflects a characteristic of the Grieg literature: most of its readers were amateurs, and the authors – often well-educated musicologists themselves – were conscious of this. Skyllstad’s concept of ‘critics’ is thus appropriate for its time, and would remain appropriate for much of the music literature on any composer written by authors or ‘critics’ during the first three quarters of the twentieth century. In fact, judging the research in historical terms, we need to bear in mind the less clear divide between musicology and music criticism, in which the latter has a clear ambition to popularize the subject. Yet, the context of Skyllstad’s statement implied a reflection on Grieg research.
prejudice’). Yet if Grieg research were simply based on ‘some vague, undefined criteria’, the aim of this article would hardly be relevant, that is, to examine how Grieg research constituted itself as an academic field. In fact, we must assume that there is more to the research than these ‘vague and undefined criteria and mysterious means’; there must be some organizing principles, some recurring methods, some narratives, and some power structures and interests that are analytically discernible.3

The premise of this article is that in order to rethink Grieg, we need to examine the musicological tools and criteria, historical perspectives, and ordering principles by which we have demoted his music to a subject of little academic and maybe also artistic interest. Furthermore, we may need to consider whether there are some intrinsic artistic values in our practice as music historians through which we unfairly judge the music of Grieg. In choosing to examine the relatively recent history of one particular work, Grieg’s ‘forbidden’ symphony, I hope to offer some answers as to the question of why Grieg research has declined. It is important to stress, however, that this is not a quest for the truth or new facts, but rather an exploration of how (and eventually why) the ‘truth’ and the ‘facts’ came to organize the research. As we will see, there are certain documents that keep returning, and the way these documents are used and discussed in scholarly literature can indeed reveal some of the tenets and tactics that give coherence to the research field.4

THE MATERIAL: ONE SYMPHONY AND THREE DOCUMENTS

The symphony (E.G. 119) is a central work in Grieg research. In fact, it is hard to find work by Grieg that has received more attention from scholars and journalists over the last four decades. Of course, much of this is due to its withdrawal by the composer, allegedly in the 1867 (after having been performed publicly at five concerts)5; it was not performed again until 1980 (in Moscow) and 1981 (in Bergen).6 But more importantly, the musicological discussion about the symphony may illustrate how researchers interpret the compositional, generic, and stylistic choices that Grieg made in the 1860s, choices that came to define his musical heritage and to a large extent ‘Norwegianness’ in music. The composer’s rejection of the work demands explanation. It imposes on the researcher a need to understand why Grieg’s only symphony, and in many respect a well-written work, was ‘forbidden’.

There are three documents that seem not only to form the basis of academic discussion of the symphony, but also to influence the way we judge Edvard Grieg (as a person) and explain his music. The first document, ‘My First Success’, written by Grieg himself in 1902–1903, was

3. Of course, today, a greater awareness of how discourses are constructed gives us new perspectives on academic research, not simply as a matter of finding or arguing for ‘truth’, but also as a field where strategies and tactics, narratives and interests are invested. The contributions of Michel Foucault and Michel de Certeau, along with ‘Begriffgeschichte’ and history of reception, have influenced the present scope and emphasis on music history as a practice.
4. This approach resonates with a theoretical position favoured by ‘discursive analysis’. Any discourse has its points of incoherency that the ‘orchestration’ is likely to camouflage.
5. There are some inconsistencies in the accounts on these performances, regarding how many movements were actually performed at each concert.
6. The question of whether to break the ban resulted in a vivid Norwegian debate, where the ethical and aesthetic side of the re-premiering of the work was discussed. See Johnson 1982.
planned for publication in the American periodical *McClure’s Magazine*. The second document is the ‘Testimonium’ (Grieg’s diploma from Leipzig) published in *Musik*, in 1924, and the third is Abell’s interview (supposedly from 1907) with Grieg, first published in 1955. I will begin with the two first documents, the autobiographical sketch and the diploma from Leipzig. Undoubtedly, they set the tone and the intrigue that have dominated the research field.

**My First Success**

Grieg’s autobiographical sketch, ‘My First Success’, was written at the end of his life. What first strikes the reader is the tone of the text. Grieg presents himself in a humorous and self-deprecating manner, not least when it comes to his (lack of) abilities and devotion as a student in Leipzig. His critique of the teaching and musical values at the Conservatory of Leipzig is indeed particularly harsh. Here are two excerpts:

> It was primarily owing to my own nature that I left the Conservatory more or less as stupid as I was when I entered, I was a dreamer with absolutely no talent for competition, I was unfocused, not very communicative, and anything but teachable.8

> It was fortunate for me, however, that in Leipzig I got to hear so much good music, especially orchestral and chamber music. This made up for the knowledge of compositional technique which the Conservatory failed to give me.9

Although *McClure’s* never actually published ‘My First Success’, it soon appeared in other journals, and excerpts were presented in newspapers all over Europe.10 The complete essay appeared in the third chapter of the first biography of the composer, Gerhard Schjelderup and Walter Niemann’s, *Edvard Grieg*, published in German in 1908. Schjelderup and Niemann saw no reason to challenge Grieg’s account of his time and experience in Leipzig. This, however, would soon change. The provocative potential of the autobiographic sketch, in particular Grieg’s critique of the Conservatory and the description of his lack of eagerness as a student, seems rather to have increased than decreased in the following decades, no doubt due in part to his humorous and self-deprecating tone.

**‘Testimonium’, the diploma**

By the time of the launch of a new and ambitious Norwegian music journal in 1924, *Musik*, the autobiography had influenced the reception of Grieg for twenty years.11 In the inaugural issue, the journal’s editors wanted to celebrate Grieg, the greatest Norwegian composer, by printing a large picture of his bust on the frontispiece. But the novelty, or the scoop, in this journal was Dr. Johan Bechholm’s discovery of the ‘Testimonium’ (the diploma) that Grieg obtained at the Conservatory of Leipzig. The document implies that Grieg could not

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10. See Grieg 1957.
11. This year was of particular interest in the history of Norwegian music. In various different venues there emerged a strong new emphasis on the ‘Norwegianness’ of music. In many ways, 1924 became a year that saw the establishment of positions and institutions that led, in the 1930s, to the strong emphasis on nationalism.

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have told the truth about his period in Leipzig. As Bechholm writes, the ‘Testimonium’ demonstrates beyond any possible doubt that Grieg was ‘both extraordinary gifted and devoted.’ And he continues: ‘A headmaster that was shown this [Testimonium] said: “This is most clearly a distinguished graduate award!”.’

Bechholm concludes that, on the basis of these proofs, the next biography of Grieg should revise the account of Grieg’s period at the Conservatory in Leipzig and bring it into accordance with the reality.

Bechholm’s wish was indeed fulfilled. In the next extensive biography of Grieg, written by David Monrad Johansen and published in 1934, the ‘Testimonium’ was reprinted along with Bechholm’s conclusions and the reference to the anonymous headmaster. Also in music dictionaries such as the Swedish Sohman’s musiklexicon, 1951, and the Norwegian Musikkens Verden, 1950, the ‘Testimonium’ is brought to bear in the argument ‘correcting’ Grieg’s account. The ‘Testimonium’ is time and again offered as a proof against Grieg’s own self-presentation (thus implicitly confirming the worthiness of the composer and the skills acquired at the Conservatory). It is, for example, presented over several pages in Benestad and Schjelderup-Ebbe’s Edvard Grieg: Mennesket og Kunstneren (1980), and in the five-volume Norges musikkhistorie (1999) the ‘Testimonium’ is featured with a nearly full-page colour reproduction.

As we can see from the reproduction of the presentation in the 1924 Musik, the ‘Testimonium’ consists of handwritten comments and simple confirmations, and includes a ‘private’ letter of recommendation. Without going into an extensive discussion of the importance – or the interpretation – of this ‘scoop’, a few remarks are worth making:

- In this first 1924 presentation of the document, and also in later presentations, the distinction between what is actually written in the official diploma (‘Testimonium’) and what is written in the personal letters of recommendation from Hauptmann and Reinecke is blurred.
- Contrary to the presentation of the diploma in the literature, the declaration concerning music theory and composition is not necessarily overly enthusiastic: ‘Herr Grieg war stets fleiszig u. hat sich vorzügliche Kenntniz u. Fertigkeit erworben.’ What is also lacking is a comparison of this wording with the diplomas that Grieg’s fellow students received.
- The remark that he was much absent from the choir is not commented upon, although it could to some extent confirm Grieg’s own account of being a lazy student.
- Even if we choose to include the private letter of recommendation from Reinecke as a proof against Grieg’s incorrect version, the teacher’s words are encouraging: he recognizes a talent, but also adds that the talent needs to be further developed, so it could be completely educated (‘vollständigst auszubilden’).

12. ‘En rektor, som fik læse det, sa: “Det er jo det reneste præceteris-testimonium!”’. The ‘præceteris’, or rather ‘[Laudabilis] prae ceteris’ was the highest degree one could obtain at the University in Oslo, and was given to only one or two students each year.
14. ‘Herr Grieg was always hard-working and has acquired excellent [vorzüglich] knowledge and skills’ (my translation).
15. That after nearly four years of study at the world-leading Conservatory, Grieg had acquired skills in harmony and counterpoint – subjects that were taught several times a week, and in different classes by different teachers – could hardly be surprising. What would have been instructive is a comparison of the Grieg ‘Testimonium’ with those of his fellow students. To my knowledge, this has not been done.
Figure 1. Reproduction by Musikksamlingen at the National Library of Norway
Figure 2. Reproduction by Musikksamlingen at the National Library of Norway
Yet, the point is not to conclude whether or not Grieg was actually an outstanding student at the Leipzig Conservatory, but that neither Bechholm nor later authors seem to have questioned the postulation that this diploma irrevocably contradicts Grieg’s own account (of being a lazy, slow and immature student). The correction of Grieg appears to be welcomed, and led to one decisive consequence, already stated in Bechholm’s presentation in 1924: one is entitled to doubt the veracity of Grieg’s own account, and not only in his ‘My First Success’ but also in his extensive private communication (where we may read similar statements), as many of his letters were published in different journals.

LYING ABOUT LEIPZIG

Indeed, to rectify Grieg’s own account became a central topic in the literature, and a topic that can explain the musicalological interest in the symphony. In Dag Schjelderup-Ebbe’s dissertation and book from 1964, Edvard Grieg 1858–1867, the rehabilitation of the education Grieg received at the Conservatory is the pivotal point around which the different parts seem to rotate. In discussing Grieg’s own statement, he first gives the reader a presentation of some of Grieg’s harsh comments related to his experience at the Conservatory in addition to those found in ‘My First Success’: ‘The Leipzig period had ruined me’ (from 1897), ‘how I hate this Conservatory in Leipzig!’ (from 1901), ‘the damned Leipzig Conservatory, where I have learned nothing at all’ (from 1884), and ‘I left the Leipzig Conservatory just as foolish as when I arrived. I had learned a good deal, but my own individuality was as yet a closed book to me’ (from 1881).16 Then, after having presented Grieg’s unquestionably critical words, but also (implicitly) the consistency of the composer’s attitude towards the Conservatory, Schjelderup-Ebbe argues:

But to disregard the benefits of his early studies and the knowledge of his craft that he derived from the Conservatory is something which does not serve the needs either of Grieg or his biographers.17

A similar tactic is also used by later writers on the subject: first the consistency in Grieg’s critique of the Conservatory is revealed by giving the same or similar citations, then follows the (rather unprepared) conclusion that the composer could not really have meant what he declared; or even if he was allowed to have meant what he said, then the literature offered a set of explanations (based on psychological and personal reasons).18 Interestingly, when discussing Grieg’s attitude to the Leipzig institution, musical scholars and biogra-

16. Schjelderup-Ebbe 1964, p. 23. Schjelderup-Ebbe’s translation is not quite correct, as he himself may have been aware, as he included a footnote with the Norwegian version. In this we read Grieg’s own words in Norwegian: ‘Jeg havde nok lært en del …’, which in English is perhaps best translated as ‘I had probably learnt something …’ to English. Even if we may say that these alterations in a translation or in the way a citation is rendered (what is left out, what is highlighted, etc.) are of less importance, it is equally possible that they may be revelatory of the ordering principles of a particular academic practice.
18. The correction of Grieg’s own account of his study at the Conservatory became a recurring theme in the research (e.g. in Dinslage 2001, Reisaus 2002, Schjelderup-Ebbe 1964, Skyllstad 1968), and for good reason. In fact, we could say it became a proper research topic, and it was first seriously developed in Schjelderup-Ebbe’s book from 1964. The agenda is not hidden. Again, it is about correcting Grieg’s grim words about the outcome of his musical training at the Conservatory.
phers seem to forget the unequivocal rejection of this institution by leading Norwegian artists and intellectuals already in the 1850s (e.g. Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson and Ole Bull). In fact, a negative evaluation of the Conservatory tradition and its concept of music was a topic of discussion in Norway long before Grieg began his studies. (The Conservatory of Paris was criticized in Norwegian journals as early as the 1830s).

Yet what is particularly interesting in Schjelderup-Ebbe’s statement, and looks like a Freudian slip, is the formulation: ‘which does not serve the needs either of Grieg or his biographers’. To speculate on the needs of Grieg in 1964, nearly sixty years after his death, would of course bring forth some rather convoluted reflections – of course, this depends on what we mean by ‘Grieg’, the man or the music, a distinction we all seem prone to unconsciously blurring – but on its own, the emphasis on the needs of his biographers is a revelatory statement. In order to present Grieg well as a Great composer – and thus to defend the amount of time and concern that the biographer invests in the subject – it would be strategic to moderate or even contradict Grieg’s account of his dissatisfaction with the world-famous Leipzig Conservatory, at least his claims of laziness and lack of compositional skills learned under the tuition of internationally well-acclaimed teachers in composition and theory. But of course, there is more to this ‘slip of the tongue’. The techniques and the criteria used by Schjelderup-Ebbe (and by other musicologists) in evaluating Grieg’s early music are largely based on the same analytical tools that derive from the subjects Grieg loathed in Leipzig, conventional harmony and counterpoint (subjects that were crucial in the education of musicologists, at least in Europe). In other words, the knowledge base of the musicological judgment is largely founded on what the ‘suspect’ tried to debunk, or at least to maintain as less relevant for his compositional practice.

SYMPHONY SHOWING SKILLS

The corrective tactic of Schjelderup-Ebbe in his book is threefold. First he offers extracts from Grieg’s own writing to contradict the animosity expressed elsewhere by the composer. Then he analyses Grieg’s sketches and early works from his days in Leipzig, and finally the symphony is given as ultimate proof of what the composer had learned at the Conservatory.

1) In order to succeed the task of best serving Grieg (and himself as biographer), Schjelderup-Ebbe gives three extracts that should contradict the animosity elsewhere expressed by the composer and lead to the conclusion that ‘Grieg’s low opinion of Leipzig was formed at a relatively late date, and possibly under the influence of Svendsen’, a conclusion that would be later repeatedly stated by other writers. Now, the problem with Schjelderup-Ebbe’s proofs is that they do not regard the question of Grieg’s relationship to

19. Bjørnson: ‘Gutten våknet, for i ørsken ned til Leipzig, tenkte der han skulle drømmen finne, Akk, det nytte ikke alt han satt og sleip sig, synet ville ei i sjelen rinne’ (Cited from Schulerud 1960, p. 151). This influence from German music and its institutions had also been described in anonymous writings from the 1830s as a problem for developing a true Norwegian music.

20. To assume the needs of the composer may reveal a view where the composer lives on through his works, and where the biographer or scholar’s most important task is to morally secure this afterlife in art.

21. The examples given are demonstrations of small student works in harmony and counterpoint, beside some early pieces. What lacks both in this book and in other texts treating (or trying to correct) Grieg’s Leipzig experience, is comparison to other students’ works and development.
the Conservatory. In the first example, from an unpublished article Grieg wrote about C. F. E. Horneman in 1881, the composer’s favourable words are directed not at the Conservatory but at Leipzig, ‘the city of music’, and this is entirely consistent with Grieg’s own declaration that he learned more from attending concerts than classes. The next extract is from a review in 1867, where Grieg laments the way musicians are treated by the Norwegian public and says that if this continues one could imagine that they will prefer to seek their future in Germany. Again, praise is not given for the Conservatory, but for the importance of music in German society and cultural life.

2) Through a thorough examination of Grieg’s student works, Schjelderup-Ebbe’s ambition was to correct the impression of the composer as lazy, or that he was forced to write scholastic exercises that allowed for no artistic experimentation or development. In fact, Schjelderup-Ebbe intended to show that Grieg in his exercises and early works had already developed some of the stylistic features that later became characteristic of his work. He also wanted to demonstrate that the young composer actually acquired a high level of compositional skill, allowing him to write a fugue for string quartet.

Other musicologists have also turned to the sketches and exercises from Grieg’s period at the Conservatory (Dinslage 2001, 2005; Skjillstad 1968). However, the use of the sketches carries the danger of being subject to over-interpretation. (Again, what could be have been instructive is a comparison with fellow students’ work.) Sometimes, an awkward passage is simply awkward, not necessarily demonstrating the germs of originality of a future genius, or being a proof of an artistic liberty provided by the many teachers at the Conservatory. Also, given the number of students in each class, we cannot assume that Grieg was closely tutored in his exercises (and we know that he showed the same exercise to several teachers). So it is by no means clear what is actually revealed in the studies of Grieg’s sketchbooks. The fact that the material is limited, and focused on exercises in harmony and counterpoint, in many ways confirms Grieg’s own critique of the teaching at the institution, or at least, its limited scope of subjects and interests. As Grieg himself stated, there were no classes in orchestration or in musical form.

23. There is an interesting question to ask. Why is it that Schjelderup-Ebbe blurs his arguments and tries to contradict Grieg’s critique of the curriculum at Leipzig Conservatory by showing that Grieg also had a favourable impression of musical life in Germany? Undoubtedly, there was a strong anti-German climate in Norway during Grieg’s early years, and both Ole Bull and Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson were outspoken proponents of this critical attitude. For these men, the distinction between Germany and Leipzig Conservatory was anything but clear-cut. Still, Grieg’s critique does not differ much from the critique that also many German musicians (best exemplified by Richard Wagner) had of the Conservatory in Leipzig, which as more conservative than innovative.
24. Still, we need to add that as early as 1866 Grieg expressed a harsh and critical evaluation of the present musical development in Germany. In a letter from 18 March 1866, while in Rome, he wrote: ’Det er farlig for et Folk saavel i politisk som i kunstnerisk Henseende at have en stor Fortid, det leder til enten hvad Tydskerne nu forfalder til, af al Magt at anstrænge sig for at holde sig oppe, og ved denne Anstrængelse frembringes lutter søgte, barokke unaturlige Ting, eller ogsaa som her hos Romerne, ganske phlegmatisk at slaa sig til Ro og hvile paa Laubærende’.
25. In his recent dissertation, Bjørn Morten Christophersen has compared the Leipzig exercises of Grieg and Svendsen. His conclusion is interesting: ‘Grieg, whose career focused more on songs and shorter piano pieces, apparently surpassed the symphonist Svendsen in polyphonic flexibility and repertoire of contrapuntal techniques. This is the opposite of what Benestad and Schjelderup-Ebbe claim’. Christophersen 2016, p. 261.
26. In ‘My First Success,’ Grieg wrote: ‘I, who had no ideas about orchestral instruments or orchestration had to write an overture … It seems incredible but there was no class at the Conservatory where it was possible to learn the rudiments of these things’. Cited in Schjelderup-Ebbe, 1964, p. 24.
3) It is in the context of ‘showing’ that Grieg lied about Leipzig that the musicological importance of the symphony can be best understood. The main role of the ‘forbidden’ symphony in Grieg research is to disclaim the composer’s account: ‘Everything in the score seems to repudiate Grieg’s own harsh criticism of the teaching at the Leipzig Conservatory of Music as being worthless.’ This statement is from Benestad’s article from 1985, but the argument had been articulated in various forms by different scholars for more than twenty years (see below), not least the ‘fact’ that Grieg used only fourteen days to write the first movement – after having been challenged by Gade to write a symphony – which has repeatedly been put forward as a contradiction of Grieg’s harsh critique of the Conservatory and the lack of benefit he had from the education there.

‘SYMPHONY NOT NORWEGIAN’

As already mentioned, Schjelderup-Ebbe wanted to show how the composer during his days at the Conservatory – and later when composing the symphony – already worked with stylistic features that came to define his music and also reflected features borrowed from Norwegian folk music. In analysing the symphony, the author finds frequent use of the ‘Grieg motif’, sequentially treated; the use of a different ‘modally coloured chord progression’; the use of modality (Mixolydian); and the use of accessory notes which anticipates Grieg’s later style (as found particularly in Norske Folkeviser, op. 66 no. 11, meas. 13–15, which shows considerable similarity of technique). Concerning the third movement, Intermezzo, he writes:

The melody of the first five measures of the Trio section (shown in Ex. 98) is strongly related to the very well-known Norwegian folk song Astri, mi Astri .... The rhythmic similarity is also considerable. This may be noted as the first apparent use by Grieg of an actual folk tune.

He further draws attention to the use of Oleana in the fourth movement, a Norwegian folk song ‘taunting Ole Bull’s hapless plans for Norwegian settlement in America’.

The early influence and use of Norwegian folk music was however strongly toned down in the book he co-authored with Finn Benestad, Mennesket og Kunstneren, which soon became the leading reference in literature on Grieg. Here, in 1980, sixteen years after Schjelderup-Ebbe’s single-authored book, the presentation of the symphony is attributed to Grieg’s ‘Schumannian youth’, and we find no description of modality, rhythmic roughness, ‘Grieg motive’, etc. and no advances of later stylistic features. Even the ‘Intermezzo’ is characterized as a ‘typic scherzo … where the first theme has some similarities to a theme from the first movement in Hartmann’s symphony in E-major’. The only thing that is still maintained is the reference to the folk song ‘Astri mi Astri’. However, these authors do not proclaim that Grieg used this song, but that the ‘ingratiating B theme bears a striking resemblance to the Norwegian folk tune “Astri mi Astri”’.

So what has changed? The 1980 co-authored book is not based on new and more in-depth analysis of the music, rather the contrary; so what can explain the ‘purging’ of influence of Norwegian folk music, and disappearance of later stylistic features? In fact, the structure of the first chapter provides one clue, as the next and conclusive section is entitled ‘Ole Bull var min redningsmann’ [‘Ole Bull was my rescuer’].

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MEETING BULL, THE ‘MEMORABLE SUMMER IN BERGEN’

The two musicologists write:

In the absence of any special documentation, it has always been assumed that this association [with Bull] was important for Grieg. But only after the publication in 1955 of a conversation Grieg had in Berlin in 1907 with Arthur M. Abell did it become clear how epoch-making it really was for Grieg’s awakening national feeling.27

It is this ‘special documentation’ that Benestad and Schjelderup-Ebbe now include in their book. Contrary to the latter’s previous book from 1964, in which Abell’s book neither appears in the bibliography nor is cited, the co-authored book proffers this meeting with Ole Bull in the summer of 1864 in Bergen as the all-important event in Grieg’s life.28

The publication of Benestad and Schjelderup-Ebbe’s book in 1980 (and its translation into English in 1988) marks a watershed in the history of the reception of Grieg. In the articles and books published before 1980, Grieg’s period in Copenhagen (1863–66) was not described as marked by a decisive turn (i.e. meeting Bull in Bergen in 1864), and other influences on Grieg are explored. The writings of John Horton make a good example. In his Books, Horton related that Grieg ‘made common cause with a group of Danish musicians’, and even as late 1974 he wrote that the ‘two and a half years Grieg spent mainly in Denmark were to be among his happiest and most productive’ and ‘Hartmann’s influence on Norwegian music in general, and Grieg’s in particular, was probably stronger than Gade’s’.29 His interest in Romantic legend was not restricted to Danish traditions, but embraced the whole of the Nordic world of the past. We further read that

Grieg also associated with a group of younger Danish composers, some of whom had been at the Leipzig Conservatory and were to remain among his closest friends; these included Emil Hartmann (son of J.P.E.), C.F.E. Horneman, August Winding, and Gottfred Matthison-Hansen. Rikard Nordraak, of whom much more must be said, was half-Danish and belonged to the same circle.30

The ‘special documentation’ of Abell’s interview with the composer, is thus presented in 1980 as the central piece of evidence that it was during the summer of 1864 that Grieg discovered his true musical self and ‘scales fell from his eyes’.31 This new narrative – the ‘memorable summer’ – became a central reference that is repeatedly stated in the literature. As a fact, or rather a dominant narrative in the literature, it also changed the reading of the symphony. After 1980, the symphony’s main function was to demonstrate the musical skills that Grieg, despite his own statements, must have acquired at the Conservatory, rather than to illustrate a gradual development of his own style or the use of Norwegian folk music. It is also now that the dating of the inscription ‘Må aldrig opføres’ [‘Must never be performed’]

28. Even John Horton’s Grieg, from 1974, does not mention Abell’s Talks with Great Composers. In fact, it seems reasonable to claim that it was Benestad and Schjelderup-Ebbe who brought Abell’s Grieg interview into the main ground of Grieg research.
29. Abraham 1949, p. 118; Horton 1974, p. 15. However, an important exception is Johansen 1934. Without giving any documentation, the author stressed the importance of Grieg’s meeting with Bull.
to 1867 is established as a recurring ‘fact’ in the literature (again to be found in Benestad and Schjelderup-Ebbe, 1980). This dating, however, seems not to have been substantiated by any proof.

GADE’S INFLUENCE

Defining the ‘summer of content’ as the key moment in Grieg’s artistic development, the new biographical documentation not only changed the analytical reading of the work but also demanded a change of the biography of the composer. As we have already seen, Horton and others had argued for a plurality of influences on Grieg during his period in Copenhagen, mainly Scandinavian. This approach favoured a collective understanding of writing Nordic music, as well as the gradual development of Grieg’s musical language. By installing this new 1864 watershed in the Grieg narrative (conveniently fifty years after the summer of independence from Denmark), both the biography and the analysis turn towards Gade, in particular when it comes to explaining the symphony. Gade, although celebrated by Schumann as the musical promulgator of the Nordic tone, was in the mid-1860s considered a rather traditional composer, musically close to Mendelssohn (and the Conservatory of Leipzig). The anecdotal account of how Grieg accidentally met Gade and was asked to write a symphony, and how the twenty-year-old composer was able to write the first movement in only two weeks, has the advantage of both sustaining the claim that he indeed must have learned much at the Conservatory, and that this pre-1864 work was influenced by Gade’s Mendelssohnian musical language, not least as the young composer wanted to please the ‘Great Dane’.

The later research literature adheres to this change in focus. Since the beginning of 1980s, the influence of Gade has been developed as the major stylistic influence on Grieg while writing this symphony. This influence was emphatically argued by Oechsle and Hong (but was also in many other writers’ texts. See below). Yet these stylistic comparisons have the weakness that the similarity is based on rather rudimentary evidence, as for example the similarities in the thematic design between Gade’s first symphony and Grieg’s symphony. How convincing these stylistic comparisons are is questionable, and as both Kube and Eriksen argue, the similarities rely on features that stylistically define the symphony as a genre in the mid-nineteenth century; due to their generality, they can hardly be considered as proof of Gade’s influence on Grieg.

The ‘turning to Gade’ served two obvious functions: to illustrate that there was nothing Norwegian about Grieg’s music – yet – and further, that this lack of ‘Norwegianness’ could

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32. The relationship between Grieg and Gade has often been described as one between a young student and his teacher. This tendency was in particular present in the early literature on Grieg. However, as this claim has been hard to substantiate, recent writers have modified the thesis, bringing forth the more ‘modelling’ role of the Gade.

explain why Grieg withdrew the symphony. Whereas pre-1980 texts would emphasize a gradual development of Grieg’s style, partly in partnership with other Danish and ‘half-Danish’ (i.e. Nordraak) composers, ‘the summer of content’ of 1864 installs a narrative that also imposes a new stylistic categorization. What this may reveal is that the stylistic comments and associations often included in musicological texts are not necessarily developed to a degree that they can instruct the historical narrative. The biographical information is the strongest incentive to stylistic characterization or even analysis. The inclusion of new biographical documentation, procured by Abell’s interview, changed the analytical perspective of the symphony. The analysis must serve what are ‘historical facts’ and causal explanation.34

HEARING SVENDSEN’S SYMPHONY: EXPLAINING AND JUDGING

The musicological ambivalence regarding the symphony is comprehensible. As we have seen, the work has repeatedly been used as a proof of the skills that Grieg must have learned at the Conservatory (then the qualities of the work are accentuated). Nonetheless, the fact that Grieg rejected the symphony challenges the simplistic use of the work as a correction of Grieg’s own harsh assessment of the Conservatory (as well as it problematizing the musical value of the same work). It irrevocably puts forward the need to explain why Grieg withdrew the symphony.35

In the literature, there are two dominant tactics used to explain Grieg’s decision: either explaining its withdrawal as a statement of inferiority when comparing his symphony to Johan Svendsen’s first symphony, or judging critically the musical construction of the work, that is, commenting on its compositional weaknesses. The ‘Svendsen explanation’ was, to my knowledge, first presented in Benestad and Schjelderup-Ebbe’s (1980), and it hinges on what must be called anecdotal ‘evidence’: Grieg’s positive remarks about Svendsen’s first symphony, after having been present at one of the rehearsals.36

In a 1985 article written in English, Benestad gives the following account of this explanation:

34. If anything, this illustrates a recurring problem in the musicological treatment of stylistic influences and categorization: what they show are often general features of a genre. Contrary to what we find in literary studies, analysis of style and genre is underdeveloped in musicology. Our example illustrates further how the analysis of stylistic influence does not seem to counter the biographical facts, but simply serves them. And associations, based on what could be called ‘whimsical’ ideas (i.e. Benestad and Schjelderup-Ebbe’s claim of resemblance with Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony, due to the choice of tonality, C minor) are presented as stylistic and analytical explanations.

35. The fact that Grieg withdrew this work is a challenge to biographers and musicologists. That a young composer chooses to relegate an ongoing compositional work to the dustbin is hardly any surprise, but the symphony had been performed on five occasions, twice conducted by Grieg himself, and both inner movements were transcribed into Two Symphonic Pieces, op. 14, for four-hand piano. It was a work that the composer lived with for four or five years. This demonstrates a certain success of the work, even in the eyes of Grieg himself, and can therefore caution against any simplistic explanation as to why he withdrew the work.

36. ‘Jeg har i dag vært på prøve til Johan Svendsens konsert og hørt hans symfoni. Men der skulle du høre løyser. Den mest spruddende genialitet, den kjekkeste nasjonale tone og en i sannhet glimrende måte å behandle orkesteret på … Alt, alt hadde min fulleste sympati og trengte seg inn i meg med uimotståelig makt’ (October 1867 letter to Mæthison-Hansen). The fact that Grieg elsewhere uttered rather critical views on Svendsen’s use of Norwegian folk music in his symphonies was not noted by (or known to) Benestad.
In Svendsen’s work he found exactly what he had wanted to express himself: not the pale national romanticism of Gade, but the bubbling freshness of a newcomer on the symphonic horizon. He must have felt his orchestral career a failure before it was properly started. His frustration was actually so great that he waited until the late 1890s before he ventured to poach on Svendsen’s preserves, namely to integrate Norwegian folk music in symphonic orchestral works (Symphonic dances, op. 64).37

In this short paragraph, there are several interesting things going on. The explanation as to why Grieg rejected the work (cf. ‘not the pale national romanticism of Gade’) does not quite account for why Grieg later published the two inner movements as op. 14, Symphonic Pieces, for four-handed piano. It further seems to underplay that the Piano Concerto, by which Grieg made his international breakthrough, was indeed a symphonic orchestral work, and one that he composed only a year after he – presumably – rejected the symphony (and thus orchestral music in general). But more importantly is how the whole explanation is based on a ‘diagnosis’, or an assumed privileged access to Grieg’s feelings (c.f. ‘he must have felt’ and his ‘frustration’), and further, on what appears to be belittling Grieg’s compositional abilities (cf. ‘orchestral career a failure’ and ‘he waited until the late 1890s before he ventured to poach on Svendsen’s preserves’).

Again, our main concern is not to judge whether a claim is true or not, but to examine how it is argued. The point here is that this appeal to the composer’s inner feelings remains unattainable, and further, neither contradictory nor confirmable; in other words, it is speculative, sustained only by Grieg’s positive remark about Svendsen’s first symphony. And yet, it is interesting to see how easily other musicologists adopt this explanation, despite its purely conjectural nature. The obvious benefit is indeed its speculative approach: it transfers – and inters – what is an obvious but problematic question to Grieg’s inner feelings.

The other tactic, the ‘judging of the symphony’, comes with the following inherent conflict: if the work should illustrate the degree to which Grieg had acquired compositional skills at the Conservatory, the fact that he nevertheless rejected the work creates an explanatory dissonance and triggers our need to understand the reasons for this decision. Now, judging critically the values of a work can reflect a sound approach, daring to challenge the idolatrous attitude of much musicology. But it may also lead to the justifiable question of what is the knowledge base of this critique. The last argument is highly relevant in relation to the judging of Grieg’s symphony, as the critique of the symphony hinges on some abstract categories of form, symmetry, balance, and thematic coherence, recalling to the mind the words by which Skyllstad described the Grieg literature (cf. ‘some vague, undefined criteria, some mysterious means’).38

Thus said, even Skyllstad – despite his critique of Grieg research – seems prone to apply some rather convoluted explanations (in his 1977 text) when it comes to judging the symphony:

38. In Benestad and Schjelderup-Ebbe’s book, we can read the following argument: ‘Tidvis fornemmer man nok verket som et produkt av en konservatorielærd ungdom som har forelsket seg i den schumannske klangverden, men som ikke helt har lykkes i å sette sitt personlige stempel på den’ (Benestad and Schjelderup-Ebbe 1980, p. 65). This citation is interesting as it reveals the possible combination of both tactics. Here, in order not to undermine the fundamental tenet the symphony shows the skills learned in Leipzig, the ‘rescuing’ term is ‘konservatorielærd’.

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In Grieg’s symphony we meet a composer in the process of development. This manifests itself in a search for a more expressive melodic idiom, a more sharply cut melodic profile. Grieg starts out in the symphony by projecting into it a wealth of uneven melodic material, but without establishing the balance so necessary in large-scale works, or creating a total organization that would hold these ideas together.

And further, ‘in order to hold together the uneven material he has been forced to blow up his epilogues to proportions that disturb the balance’.39

The claims of ‘uneven material’, ‘lack of balance’, and inability to ‘hold ideas together’, come through as quite hollow phrases, similar to those eagerly uttered by critics in the tradition of Eduard Hanslick. This does not necessarily mean that they are without substance, but rather that they may reflect an idealized and formalized type of composition, one that precisely the Conservatory tradition was likely to harbour. Nevertheless, these utterances are quite inscrutable; they may as well be used to judge negatively Beethoven’s Pastoral Symphony or at least Berlioz’s Symphonie fantastique. The knowledge base and the aesthetic criteria that are playing a part are not clarified. The critique also has a tinge of musicological self-importance that may today be regarded as a little out of date. And interestingly, as the less problematic solution of Benestad (i.e. the ‘Svendsen explanation’, which did not need any analytical demonstration) became gradually established, the critical judgment and analysis of the symphony lost its attraction to scholars. The biographical explanation, assumed to best reflect historical truth and give a causal explanation, is favoured in later writings.

POOR GRIEG! CONDESCENDING THE COMPOSER

… poor Grieg was to court an Aesopian disaster in trying to inflate his lyrical substance to symphonic dimensions.

Gerald Abraham40

There is a thread going through and vibrating in many of the writings and positions we have studied so far. Time and again a condescending tone or attitude can be perceived, a tone that is particularly evident when explaining Grieg’s relationship to the symphony and to the Conservatory in Leipzig, but also in the questions related to form, craftsmanship, the lack of development in technique, and so on.

As mentioned above, the finding and publication of the ‘Testimonium’ in 1924 was instantly used to correct Grieg’s own account of his experience at the Conservatory. Based on an uncritical reading of the diploma, Grieg was considered an untrustworthy witness. Schjelderup-Ebbe’s statement of what best serves the interest of the composer further represents a condescending attitude. Obviously, Grieg needed the guidance of a qualified advocate; correcting Grieg was the composer’s best defence. Of course, the self-deprecat- ing, humorous and playful style of ‘My First Success’ did not necessarily help the construction of a ‘genius’, and accordingly, to fulfil the role that Grieg was cast to play.

The condescending attitude to Grieg is also prevalent in explanations of the withdrawal of the symphony. In discussing the withdrawal, Benestad concludes: ‘But whatever is the explanation of Grieg’s withdrawal of his symphony from the public, we can only regret it. And still more regrettable is the fact that Grieg never again ventured on a symphony.’ One possible framing for the expression of this regret is the value judgment that great composers write symphonies. In this regret there seems to be a line of argumentation along the lines of: pity that he did not succeed with the symphonic genres, pity that he did not trust those skills learned in Leipzig, pity that he (therefore) did not achieve writing and creating large musical structures, but was reduced to become a composer of miniatures or even a ‘miniature’ artist (i.e. Grove/Abraham).

THE NODAL CADENCES AND THE TONE

The present case study has hitherto shown the strong presence of returning argumentative steps or shared tenets that structure the literature on Grieg, in particular when the symphony and his early works are discussed. These are the following (with references to the major texts where these are found):

7. Condescending to the composer. Generally presenting the literature not only as part of the above-mentioned points, but also through the language used by the researchers. It sets the tone in many discussions.

41. The issue is important, as the mastering of symphonic forms (or the lack thereof) was likely to be applied as a qualitative measurement of composers’ artistic aptitude.
42. Benestad 1985, p. 206.
43. The question we might ask is whether it is convincing that Grieg should once for all reject this prestigious genre only because he thought that Svendsen had found a valid alternative to Gade’s symphonic style, which, en surplus, also represented ‘exactly what he had wanted to express himself’? If so, does not this explanation harvest a surprisingly harsh view of either Grieg’s own belief in his abilities, or a downright critique thereof?
44. The discussion of the influence of Gade on Grieg is the main focus in Schwab 2001, Hong 1984, and Oechsle 1994.
We might call these structuring steps ‘nodal points’, and by this term build on the theoretical and analytical position of discourse analysis and theory. However, what we seek to describe are the acts that are repeatedly stated, although with some variations (i.e. different wordings), and partly from different angles (i.e. different material, be it sketches, anecdotes, communication, or by different means, e.g. different techniques of analysis). By preferring the term ‘nodal cadences’, we are still indebted to discursive theory, but by the term ‘cadence’ we seek to describe the acts that are repeatedly stated, and by which the larger form of a research field seems to be formally organized. By emphasizing the acting inside the field, we also understand the field as a coherent academic practice, despite the use of very different material, methods, and linguistic presentation.

The nodal cadences fulfil important functions, not only by defining the ‘state of the art’ – what researchers should mention and deal with, or rather, what kind of conclusions they are expected to draw, hence the ‘cadences’ – but also how these returning and defining argumentative closures are both deeply embedded in the narrative outline (i.e. the history told) implied by the research and determinants of its linguistic styles (i.e. language). They define the (tonal) structure of the research. Of course, not all the writers use every cadence, which would be verging on plagiarism, however the point of the model is to illustrate how these different nodal cadences are organized. From differing perspectives, the writers use the ‘smeuses’ these nodal cadences offer.

THE DOUBLE REJECTION AND CRISIS

There are two ways to interrelate the cadences, either by chronology or as a discursive field. If we begin the chronological order, we can say that Grieg’s rejection of the symphony marks a point of crisis (allegedly dated to 1867) and a musicological problem. The next point of crisis will be Grieg’s harsh critique of Leipzig (1907). It is these two inciting incidents that can largely explain the problem that the research field is trying to solve. As we have already seen, it is the latter rejection and its crisis that the printing of the ‘Testimonium’ in 1924 is trying to amend, and which, as an attempt to find a solution, establishes the nodal cadence ‘Lying about Leipzig’. In Schjelderup-Ebbe’s 1964 book, the amendment of Grieg’s account is central, and the next cadence is now developed; ‘Symphony showing skills’. In other words, Grieg did learn a lot at the Conservatory. However, this cadence cannot explain why Grieg rejected his symphony. Two ‘solutions’ are then introduced. The first consists of presenting some elusive and general references to what the work lacks in pure musical terms, but far more efficient was the second solution, provided by the refutation of any Norwegian influence and the emphasize of Gade’s influence. Further proof of this solution is found in the assumption that Grieg felt surpassed by Svendsen, and it is ultimately given a causal explanation: the work was written before the ‘memorable summer of 1864’, during which Grieg discovered his true mission. ‘Meeting Bull’ and ‘meeting Svendsen’

45. The plurality of material, methods and forms of presentation can in our case also be extended to musical performance. There is also in performing the symphony a strong possibility to apply for example the nodal cadence ‘Symphony not Norwegian’. As an example, this nodal cadence will easily favour a less rhythmically accentuated performing of the third movement, the ‘Intermezzo’, not bringing forth its ‘Norwegianness’ but rather its assumed influence from Schumann.
(both cadences introduced in 1980) thus explain the rejection of the symphony without treating the tenet of the ‘symphony showing skills’ and allow scholars to maintain their differing versions of what Grieg really must have learned in Leipzig.

Now, if we organize these different nodal cadences according to their internal (discursive) relation – and not according to their chronological appearance – we can see a kind of circular movement in which the nodal cadence ‘symphony showing skills’ may be taken as a point of departure. That will give us the following order: obviously, the symphony shows the skills learnt by Grieg in Leipzig, thus the lack of veracity of his account; the symphony is written under the influence of (‘Mendelssohnian’) Gade, which explains why he later rejects it after the summer of 1864, during which his urge to write Norwegian was stimulated, and then definitely after having heard Svendsen’s symphony. Hence, the symphony is not Norwegian but shows skills. (See Figure 3: in the middle of this figure we find ‘the rejection of Leipzig and the rejection of symphony’. The double rejection creates the conflict on which the research evolves or in metaphorical terms, it constitutes its double thematic subject. Resolving this conflict is creating the form of the research field.) Undoubtedly, there is beauty in this model. The problem it sets out to solve, the double rejection, is solved, and apparently convincingly.

Figure 3. The circle of cadences

This figure can be divided in two halves, where the upper half constitutes the basic tenets, and the lower half is based on three meetings: Gade, Bull (‘the memorable summer’), Svendsen (hearing the first symphony). The causality of the model – always high up in the explanatory interest of music historians – is thus allocated to personal meetings and they are assumed to be largely sufficient to prove the upper half, the basic tenets (as the lower part indicates the empirical part of the research).46

46. The exception being again the analytical based studies, which often deal directly with the tenets ‘Not Norwegian’ and ‘Symphony showing skills’.
In order to resolve the crisis created by the double rejection, musicologists needed to doubt not only the veracity of Grieg, but also his ability to understand what best suited his own interest, and accordingly, what he should have composed. This explains the regret on the behalf of the composer; ‘pity he did not’ (e.g. Benestad, see above), which is also a part of the general condescending tone frequently found in the Grieg literature. But interestingly, this shift in tone and perspective is mainly found in the literature after 1924.47

THE PROBLEM OF CLASSIFICATION
The basic structure, without which the double rejection would lose its force (i.e. the ‘crisis’), is the value system set by conventional musicology (largely based on simplistic ideas of form, analysis and functional harmony) and the national-historiographical role the composer had to play (i.e. the need to establish Grieg as a hero for Norwegian music). But there is a further conflict that coordinates Grieg research. In fact, we could say that our study has revealed a lack of alternative explanatory strategies in the musicological approach. The rejection of Leipzig (and the German institutionalized concept of music) did not in Grieg’s case continue on towards complexity and tonal dissolution, and thus, to the alternative modernistic path (e.g. ‘Wagner–Schoenberg–Stockhausen’ or ‘Wagner–Debussy–Varèse’).

The simplicity and accessibility of Grieg’s music became both a historiographical and musicological problem; it resisted the system of classification, the historical modelling of progress and the techniques of analysis of musicology. What could have been the third path is covered by the term ‘lyricism’, by which for example Abraham describes Grieg’s talent and music. This path can indeed tolerate the double rejection without seeing either the rejection of Leipzig or the symphony as any ‘crisis’, but it brings with it a tinge of ‘lesser composer’, not suitable for ‘serious’ musicological research or playing the main role in defining ‘Norwegianness’ in music. The paradox seems to be that even if Grieg was supposed to fulfil the role as the hero of Norwegian music, he is all the same judged, by the same authors who proffer his national role in Norwegian music, on the basis of the values and compositional techniques that he was forced to reject in order to create his own style or music.

ON STYLE AND FORM
Linguistic styles not only colour but also condition the content of research. In the Grieg literature there are three different stylistic approaches that define the modus operandi of the research. The linguistic style used by Benestad and other leading scholars when explaining the withdrawal of the symphony as Grieg’s acceptance of its inferiority to Svendsen’s, is pre-

47. The year 1924 could be said to mark a shift in Norwegian musical life, which is demonstrated in the journal Musik. This year marks a turn towards a harder musical nationalism, partly inaugurated by the leader of the Society of Composers, David Monrad-Johansen, a man who in 1934 write one of the most widely read biographies of Grieg, in which, occasionally, statements revealing the author’s growing adherence to fascist ideology can be found. Even if there were corrections to the use of Grieg after the Second World War, the ethos of Norwegian history was still related to the building of a nation, which explains also the ‘ideology’ of Benestad and Schjelderup-Ebbe.
dominately styled in a ‘psycho-biographical’ language. This style also conditions the explanations of why Grieg was (‘wrongly’) critical of the Leipzig Conservatory. The advantage of this style is a freer access to ‘truth’: the intentions and reasons of the artist are directly accessed through the congeniality (or even geniality) of the author. In other words, this is a style that pretends insight into the mind of the artist.

In the writings of Skyllstad and others, in particular when judging the symphony, the style is criticism. What this approach seems to offer is an alleged analytical insight that however remains unmediated. This analytical insight is neither shown nor referred to, but presented as a matter of fact; the use of quasi-scientific concepts (i.e. ‘balance’, ‘uneven melodic material’) and phrases seems to validate it (see above).

Certainly, pure analysis rarely makes an easily readable text (although there are exceptions), which can explain why so much of the Grieg research seems to presume and not present analytical insight. And since the Grieg literature has a strong affinity to popularization (and partly for this reason omits the tedious work of examining music in detail), the literature does indeed seem to impart ‘vague, undefined criteria, some mysterious means that is never stated’.48 Still, intuitively one would have assumed that in-depth analytical works would inform the more popularized part of Grieg research, but this does not seem to be the case. What we do find, however, is that there is a division of labour between those who do the groundwork and those who represent, communicate, and define the research on Grieg. Undeniably, and in particular in the 1970s and 1980s, much of the musicological in-depth research were done by master’s students, whereas the published books on Grieg tended to be aimed at the popular marked, and thus avoided any in-depth analysis or critical study of their subject. What seems to be the case was that the younger scholars and students had to adopt the cadences already dominating the Grieg literature (see later). Furthermore, the lack of analytical clarity or precision in the leading scholars’ texts, could hardly helped younger scholars and students in their effort to develop other and better perspectives on Grieg’s music.

These linguistic styles come with different ‘affordances’, or ways to claim ‘insight’ without having the need to demonstrate. When the psycho-biographical style and criticism are dominant, the authority of the writer is decisive, which implies either a privileged access to the mind of the composer (‘Grieg must have felt . . .’), or privileged insight into the nature of music (revealed by the quasi-analytical references present in the writings). Obviously, there is also a question of authority in play here. Benestad and Schjelderup-Ebbe became the leading Grieg scholars, and regardless of whether their book aimed at a wider audience or not, its main tenets were soon introduced in the research.

THE CASE KIRCHHOFER: HOW NOT TO TACKLE THE DOUBT

There is thus an accord in the literature on the subject of the forbidden symphony, and a coherence that is confirmed by the constant use of the same nodal cadences and further enhanced by the linguistic style (and its ‘affordances’). One exception, however, can be found in a German student’s work from 1985. Christoph Kirchhofer’s exam work (‘Schrift-
liche Hausarbeit’) at the department of education at Kiel University did – contrary to the newly established truth – examine the Norwegian influences in the symphony.49 Since the author was only a student, it was at first neither mentioned nor refuted by any leading Grieg scholars. This task was however undertaken by Ivar Alver, a master’s student of Benestad.50 In Alver’s otherwise excellent master’s thesis, Kirchhofer’s arguments were, one by one, examined and then contradicted, although not convincingly.51 Another of Benestad’s students and future colleagues, Asbjørn Eriksen, returned to this topic as late as 2009, and like Alver wanted to contradict any claim of Norwegian influence on the symphony. For Eriksen, building on Alver’s thesis, it was particularly important to refute Kirchhofer’s claim (without mentioning this work) that the third movement had any resemblance to a ‘Springar’ (a Norwegian folk dance): it should rather be classified as a Mazurka.52

The question we can ask is why the position taken in Kirchhofer’s unpublished and unavailable exam work was still worth refuting in 2009. One answer is that it represented a position that challenged the existing body of analytical observations. Indeed, it would have been a severe provocation if an unknown German student of pedagogy could by means of precise references to Norwegian folk music better detect elements used by Grieg than the leading scholars. But we may further speculate to which degree this position could have represented a doubt that was not quite convincingly put to rest by unified research.

Notwithstanding the correctness of Kirchhofer’s position, the reception of his unpublished text brings to mind the idea that Foucault develops in The Order of Discourse, where Canguilhem’s expression of ‘being in the truth’ is a key idea. Kirchhofer did not understand the ‘tonality’ of the research, he did not use the appropriate nodal cadences, he was not ‘in the truth’, and thus he became ‘a real monster’ (to use Foucault’s terms), or in our terms, a dissonant author.

REGARDING ‘MEETING BULL’

After the publication of Benestad and Schjelderup-Ebbe’s book in 1980, one (if not the) dominant master narrative in Grieg research hinged upon the interview presented in Arthur Abell’s book, Talks with great composers. It is this ‘special documentation’ that can

50. Alver also received from Benestad what was probably the only existing exemplar of Kirchhofer’s work in Norway. The present author has a copy of this exemplar.
51. Again, the purpose of this article is not to find the truth, but there are many aspects of the refutation of Kirchhofer that are not quite convincing. Alver did not base his discussion on the already existing collection of Norwegian Mountain Music (Lindeman’s Ældre Norske Fjeldmelodier). If he had more actively consulted this collection, some of the arguments he enlists against Kirchhofer would have been contradicted. Most of the typical Norwegian elements that Kirchhofer finds in the symphony are indeed also present in this collection.
52. Eriksen’s solution was to claim that the third movement was a Mazurka, despite the fact that the ‘Mazurka’ Grieg himself intentionally wrote at the time does not at all resemble this Intermezzo, and further, that ‘Mazurka’ could hardly be said to be a typical solution to the dance-type implied in a third movement. ’Uten tvil er det en dans, men en med et litt diffust opphav. Det er neppe en springer, snarere er satsen mazurka-liknende, som en Chopin-mazurka litt tungt instrumentert for symfoniorkester. … jeg skal ikke bestride at disse fire taktene … kan likne på motiver i en norsk halling, men det forutsetter at segmentene blir helt isolert fra den musikalske konteksten’. Eriksen 2009, p. 49.
explain the changes in the history of reception of the symphony, that is the change in perception of the stylistic and compositional content of the work (i.e. the ‘influence from Gade’, and ‘not Norwegian’, or even ‘pre-Grieg’), which further prepares the ground for the ‘Svendsen explication’. An interesting point, however, is that the veracity of Arthur Abell’s book is highly contested, not only in relation to Grieg, but also regarding the other great composers he allegedly interviewed (in particular Johannes Brahms and Richard Strauss).\(^{53}\) Indeed, at least to my knowledge, it is not proven that Grieg actually ever met Abell or had this interview with him. Still, it is this interview that gave validity to the idea of the sudden Norwegian awakening in the ‘memorable summer of 1864’ when Grieg met and spent time with Ole Bull. And further, it is this narrative that can justify the unwillingness to credit any Norwegian influence in the writing of the symphony. That the last four decades of Grieg research is largely dependent on a narrative outline, authenticated by a ‘special documentation’ that is highly questionable, is of course surprising if not downright shocking.

Moreover, the two other empirically based nodal cadences can easily be challenged. Grieg’s evaluation of Svendsen’s symphonic style is revealed to be rather critical in other writings, and the studies that have tried to demonstrate the influence of Gade have been also subject to just criticism.\(^{54}\) Are we then entitled to doubt the correctness of all the three empirically based nodal cadences on which Grieg research is based? There is a further paradox inscribed in the heart of this field of research: what Grieg tried to amend and challenge – exemplified both through his persistent critique of the Conservatory and his circumspect rejection of the symphony – boomeranged back as the value set and methods (adopted by the musicologists) from which his music was evaluated. No wonder the research presented a conflicted view of Grieg, and has now declined.

**CONCLUDING REMARKS**

All research is subject to power structures and social constraints that condition the field. In Norway, much of the raison d’être for musicology was to offer content to a strong politically motivated Norwegian national narrative. It was expected that musicologists should make Grieg into the iconic figure this national narrative needed. But if we simply conclude that Grieg was hijacked by nationalistic historiography, this will dislocate other issues. The main aim of the present study has not been to unmask Grieg research as such, but to examine how it is dependent on ordering principles and mechanisms that may stimulate as well as hinder new insight, but which we should all the same conceive as worthy for critical reflection and analysis.

So, how do we explain the decline of Grieg research? The answer offered here is the presence of a limited repertory of nodal cadences combined with stifling academic authority and lack of intellectual openness. Undoubtedly, in Grieg research the nodal cadences became inhibiting forces, creating a self-encapsulated research field that further promoted a con-

\(^{53}\) Willi Schuh writes that Abell’s book ‘is full of mistakes and should be consulted only with greatest caution’. Schuh 1982, p. 179. Harald Herresthal has also questioned the veracity of this interview. Herresthal 2011, p. 42.

\(^{54}\) See above. See also Eriksen 2009 and Kube 2001.
licted view of the aesthetic quality of Grieg’s music. What further aggravates the situation is that these cadences seem highly questionable and that they confirmed, at least in Norway, a nationalistic historiographical model or ideology that gradually lost its dominance. But there is more. If we return to Figure 3, it could be seen as illustrating a tendency towards loftiness. As the ‘circle turns’ (that is, as new texts are included but reproduce the circular argumentation), it gradually lifts itself from the ‘ground’. If the works in which the nodal cadences first appeared were based on analysis or ‘first’ readings of source material, later works mainly offer variations on the theme – they are rarely based on any new in-depth and open-minded study of the empirical material as such. Of course, this reveals something about who ‘owns’ the research and what defines it, which was partly also illustrated in the Kirchhofer case. In our case study, Finn Benestad could probably be called the guardian of the nodal cadences on which the research was constructed. His personal authority and institutional power must be considered as a structuring element in this research.

So what implications might our case study have on future research on Grieg? If we seek new research perspectives, we may begin by not trying to correct the composer, but to take his creative choices seriously. In fact, if we follow the lead of Grieg’s own account, we may well conclude that he indeed acquired skills in harmony and counterpoint in Leipzig, but that (just like Debussy) he saw that these conservatory-grown skills were of little help in creating new music. That he rejected a symphonic work he had lived with for over five years and had himself conducted can indeed reveal matured aesthetic choices that came to define his future compositional practice. In this perspective, the double rejection is an honest confirmation of a composer consciously seeking an alternative to the mainstream German conservatory music.

But how does our case study relate to other fields of historical research? Unquestionably, there is a conceptual beauty in this modelling of Grieg research. Not only does it tie up all loose ends, it is also logical and ‘self-confirming’. In fact, you could begin at any cadence and being convincingly led to the next, in a circular movement. The model has a neat symmetry between its causal or empirical basis at the lower half and the descriptive or concluding cadences at the upper. And the initial problem (i.e. the double rejection), which is in the centre of the research (and in the model), is apparently well solved. In fact, this model is capable of mastering the inciting conflicts or dissonances by ordering a sequence of interrelated nodal cadences. The choice of the cadences and their importance is thus related to the wish to solve a problem, or to accommodate a harmonic relation between the research questions and the available musicological toolbox.

Now, I do think we can be quite sure that this model was never consciously conceived as such by any Grieg scholar, nor is that the point. The modelling is a way of analysing a research field, that is, of finding the ordering principles of an academic practice. It is not designed to describe planned and premeditated theoretical or methodological intentions of the researcher. Yet, what the model can explain is why research questions and choices (e.g. regarding what material is to be examined) time and again confirm the same conclusions even when there were good reasons to doubt the correctness of these conclusions as well as the relevance of the research questions. The ordering of a field obtains a gravity of its own, which exerts tacitly a power of conviction and creates (inhibiting) structures preventing other research questions to be asked.
The advantage of taking the ‘Forbidden’ symphony and Grieg research as a case study is of course the relatively limited body of texts and their transparency. But even if the scope of this research field is limited, there is no reason to assume that similar ideological interests, methodological misconstructions (of the subject) and inhibiting forces could not to be found elsewhere, in other fields of research in the humanities. Analysing how an academic practice orders what is known and knowable is a way to reveal how research constructs its proper structure. It also explains how researchers may have the best of intentions – defending something they believe is coherent and correct – yet overlook the obvious, distort their subject and let the models and methods exert an inhibiting force upon themselves and others. The argument is that the presence of similar models can explain how there can be a strong and collectively shared conviction of objectivity in something that is positively wrong.

And yet, modelling knowledge is what research does. The problem is that our quest for systematization, sometimes reflecting an infantile wish to equal sciences outside the humanities, can impose an order that disfigure the very thing we want to examine. The present case has shown that not only can a field of research be systematically misconstrued, it can also be analysed and judged by values and techniques that are either too general or at odds with the topic of research. Added to these shortcomings is the question of authority, power structures, and career possibilities. (In Norway at least, any young ‘Grieg scholar’ who would defy the established research would most likely ruin his or her chances for an academic career.) The totality of these factors may create something we could call the ‘feel of research’. Modelling research can reveal why some academic fields and interests are experienced as low on opportunities, embedded in restrictive academic practices, or purveying a general feeling of inhibiting finitude or out-dated academic and aesthetic interests. Again, our case study is relevant. Only thirty years ago, musicology in Norway was dominated by research on Norwegian music history, in which Grieg research was the pinnacle. Today, in Norway, music history is a marginalised subject of a musicology in which leading scholars seek their theories and methods outside the humanities to such a degree that it is worth asking whether they should even be called musicologists any longer. This brings us back to the introductory question as to why musicology may have lost its confidence in a proper epistemological field within music and humanities, and in which historical methods were considered primordial. The purpose of this article has not been to argue against ‘academic migration’, rather to examine whether there are some ‘intrinsic’ reasons in the way music history is practised that can explain its decline. So what is the conclusion? What can we learn?

Our conclusion must be that the prime agency in the humanities must be found in the way we as researchers engage with the material: in the particular, rather than in the compliant reapplication of pre-established historical modelling and musicological methods, or by subjecting ourselves to the personal authority of leading scholars. Humanities must offer epistemological opportunities in which the individual can appropriate knowledge in an open and questioning manner, not as a science already codified in static tenets and rigid methodology. And we would be wise to remember Immanuel Kant’s words: ‘Out of the crooked timber of humanity, no straight thing was ever made’. Music and its history – products of the crooked timber of humanity – must never be regarded as straight things.
I do believe that the decline of music history can to a large extent be explained as a reaction against similar shortcomings we have found in Grieg research. When research appears as a sealed book either reflecting ideological positions no longer shared or personal academic interests invested in institutional practices, and in so doing, denying others the right to question or redefine research, then it will ultimately decline. Still, to sacrifice music history of the basis on these shortcomings would be a high price to pay. History offers a unique access to the arts and humanities, and it can today play the role as a necessary counterpoint to present academic and institutional power structures. The good question is how to improve the way we do history, not how to do without it.

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