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From Bard to Brand

Holger Drachmann (1846-1908)

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DOI

[10.5117/9789089649638](https://doi.org/10.5117/9789089649638)

Publication date

2017

Document Version

Final published version

Published in

Idolizing Authorship

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

van der Liet, H. (2017). From Bard to Brand: Holger Drachmann (1846-1908). In G. Franssen, & R. Honings (Eds.), *Idolizing Authorship: Literary Celebrity and the Construction of Identity, 1800 to the present* (pp. 105-131). Amsterdam University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.5117/9789089649638>

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Idolizing Authorship

*Literary Celebrity and the Construction of Identity,
1800 to the Present*

*Edited by
Gaston Franssen and Rick Honings*

Amsterdam University Press

Cover illustration: ???

Cover design: Gijs Mathijs Ontwerpers, Amsterdam

Lay-out: Crius Group, Hulshout

Amsterdam University Press English-language titles are distributed in the US and Canada by the University of Chicago Press.

ISBN	978 90 8964 963 8
e-ISBN	978 90 4852 867 7 (pdf)
DOI	10.5117/9789089649638
NUR	610

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Danish Royal Library, Copenhagen

4 From Bard to Brand

Holger Drachmann (1846-1908)

Henk van der Liet

When the Danish poet, painter, and bon vivant Holger Drachmann died in 1908, his death marked the end of an era in more ways than one. His passing symbolically signalled the end of the romantic and late-romantic tradition in Danish art and culture, one that had dominated most of the nineteenth century. From the 1870s onwards, new literary and cultural currents gradually came to the fore and gathered momentum. Just as in many other parts of the world, remarkable progress was made in science, industry, transportation, and communication, as well as in the cultural realm. Commonly this period in Scandinavian cultural history is framed as the breakthrough of modernity, starting in the early 1870s and resulting, at the beginning of the twentieth century, in the advent of modern democracy in politics as well as modernism in art.¹ In the final decades of the nineteenth century, literature played an essential role in the proliferation of new ideas and the notion of modernity, not least due to widespread censorship and deadlock in the Danish political arena.²

In this relatively short and intense time frame, which constitutes a watershed in Scandinavian cultural history, Drachmann was one of the most prominent and versatile authors in Denmark. His impressive body of work comprises more than 60 books and hundreds of separate publications in almost every imaginable literary genre. Clearly Drachmann was aware of the latest trends in literature and constantly on the lookout for opportunities to maintain his position centre stage. The versatility of his oeuvre however, simultaneously gives rise to the impression that his work lacks both 'gravity' and generic focus as all his best-known works were not only written in different genres, but also across different literary periods. Furthermore, none of these principal works – the poem 'Engelske Socialister' ('English Socialists', 1871), the play *Der var Engang* (*Once Upon a Time*, 1885), which includes the famous 'Midsummer Song' and the novel *Forskrevet* (*Signed Away*, 1890) – made any waves outside Scandinavia, and relatively few translations appeared.

¹ Hertel 2004, 19-48; Aarseth 1988, 509-523.

² Jespersen 2004, 147-148, 67-69.

In Danish literary history Drachmann tends to be regarded primarily as a 'national' author with an intermediary and transitional role, functioning as a steppingstone for those who looked for new artistic forms of expression that would be more in tune with the rapid metamorphosis of art and society.³ Drachmann helped to introduce new aesthetic currents, such as symbolism, impressionism, and vitalism, but at the same time he sought to preserve some of the aesthetic forms and values of the bygone era of romanticism.⁴ Hence, probably the most accurate way to characterize Drachmann's position in this period of cultural and ideological turmoil and change is to understand him as an artist who intended to straddle the divide between the two antagonistic cultural orientations – romanticism, representing the past, versus positivism, the ideology of the future. Metaphorically speaking, Drachmann had one leg firmly planted in nineteenth-century romanticism, while with his other leg he was trying to find a foothold in the, as yet unsettled, world of modernity. Of course, such an ambiguous position continues to trouble literary historians in search of clear demarcations, categories and periods, instead of the fuzzy delimitations provoked by an interloper such as Drachmann. It is not surprising, then, that both his literary successors as well as the vast majority of the next generations of literary critics and scholars deemed Drachmann outdated. They judged his oeuvre to be obsolete, and, as a consequence, his fame steadily dwindled.⁵ One critic even claimed that 'no other Danish poet has been belittled by his successors like he. [...] Initially he was idolized and worshipped, then ridiculed and forgotten'.⁶

Despite a mere handful of his works surviving, the paradox remains, that each of these remnants finds itself today at the core of Danish cultural self-awareness and cultural identity.⁷ Although Drachmann's oeuvre has to a large extent passed into literary oblivion, his name and especially his image – or rather his *persona* – is very much alive and kicking and surprisingly extant. One might even argue that the name and the persona – that is, the publicly produced image of Drachmann – have outlived his work and since his death a new 'celeb' Drachmann has gradually come to overshadow and overtake the artist with the same name. Admittedly, this is by no means unique as there will be many more people that know the names of

3 Van der Liet 2006, 146.

4 Ehlers Dam 2010, 153.

5 Van der Liet 2004a, 145-146.

6 Wivel 1981, 147.

7 Van der Liet 2006; Van der Liet 2008, 139-142.

William Shakespeare or Virginia Woolf than readers who have actually read their work.⁸ Nonetheless, Drachmann's case remains interesting, because this new 'image' of Drachmann seems to be more sustainable than factual knowledge pertaining to his life and work. What is of interest here is not merely the author's own agency, his active participation in the production of his celebrity status in the literary domain, but notably the way(s) in which his name after his death in 1908 was – and still is – promoted and appropriated in other contexts.⁹

During his life Drachmann worked incessantly to establish, enhance and protect his celebrity status, which many of his letters – especially those to his publishers – and the portrait photographs he lavishly distributed, clearly demonstrate.¹⁰ Thus, the suggestion arises that his artistic work itself was the source of his fading fame – his oeuvre simply did not live up to expectations. The art historian Brian Dudley Barrett adheres to this opinion and defines Drachmann's efforts as self-fashioning, turning him into 'something of a poseur', someone who 'seemed greatly concerned with his image as a modern *artiste*'.¹¹ If this really is the case, the conclusion must be that Drachmann was a master in keeping up appearances and that it is with good reason that his oeuvre later lost its appeal to contemporary readers. Yet this does not answer the question of why his name is still known to almost every Dane. Alternatively: why are readers today more familiar with Drachmann's image – the celebrity persona – than with the content of his work and the actual person behind it?

An obvious explanation could be that Drachmann's death in 1908 marked the end of his own endeavours to actively preserve his artistic fame and celebrity status through self-fashioning. However, it also saw the beginning of a different phase of renegotiating his artistic value *and* his stardom for reasons other than literary. Clearly Drachmann's celebrity status was so tenacious that it outlived his person and transmuted into new configurations that exclusively originate from processes of commodification and branding, instead of the possible re-canonization or renegotiation of his purely artistic value. One thing that we know for sure is that for over a century after his death, Drachmann's reputation has been in the hands of various cultural stakeholders and intermediaries, such as critics, curators, film producers, journalists, photographers, scholars, schoolteachers, and so on. Over the

8 Handesten 2014, 25.

9 Turner 2013, 3–10.

10 Borup 1968–1970; Van der Liet 1999.

11 Barrett 2010, 272.

years, these professionals have been instrumental in the continuance *and* subsequent transformation of Drachmann's fame. By singling out aspects of his life and work and reinterpreting them in various ways, they have reshaped his legacy. As will become clear, it was this process of redefining Drachmann and his celebrity status, attuning him to contemporary interests, that has kept his name from falling prey to the ravages of time, unlike his literary work. And although it seems paradoxical, in recent years some parts of Drachmann's oeuvre have been cautiously rediscovered, presumably though for other reasons than he himself could have envisaged. Oddly enough, this seems to be a side effect of the circumstance that this author, or at least his persona, continues to represent some cultural capital of sorts. The recent indications of a kind of 'revival' will be addressed later in this chapter, but first a brief introduction to Drachmann's career needs to be provided. Thereafter his efforts to gain and preserve his celebrity status will be discussed, and finally attention is given to the post-mortem appropriation of Drachmann.

Setting the Scene

When Drachmann made his official debut as a writer with a collection of poems entitled *Digte* (*Poems*, 1872), he was instantly celebrated as *the* quintessential Danish poet of the new era.¹² In the following years he did everything he could to live up to the expectations of his readership and the literary mandarins and journalists of his day. However, Drachmann was much more than a poet: he was an extremely prolific writer, employing virtually every literary genre from novels, poems, lyrics, short stories, essays, plays, vaudeville, and melodramas, to journalism and translating. Apart from being an exceedingly versatile writer, he also was a proficient illustrator and painter – often of his own works. Indeed, Drachmann began his career as a visual artist: he enrolled in the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen in 1866, specializing in marine painting. Three years later his first paintings were exhibited and his talent as a visual artist was immediately acknowledged.¹³

¹² Drachmann's earliest writings (poems, art reviews, and travelogues) already appeared in the 1860s, but were published anonymously. See Ursin 1956, 7.

¹³ Later art historians seem to have mixed opinions about his abilities as a painter. See Mortensen 1990, 197–198; Barrett 2010, 272; Nielsen 2013, 53–62.

In the eyes of his contemporaries Drachmann was *the* prime Danish representative of the new era in *belles-lettres*, along with the ideological founding father of the pan-Scandinavian movement of literary modernity, Georg Brandes.¹⁴ Drachmann was simply considered to be the Danish counterpart of famous Scandinavian contemporaries such as Henrik Ibsen, Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, and August Strindberg.¹⁵

Drachmann's fame as a writer rose quickly and a number of literati not only recognized his talent, but became – during various stages of his career – passionate supporters or even outright fans of his work.¹⁶ Whilst still a student at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, his name was frequently linked to a group of young Copenhagen artists and aesthetes, who rebelled against middle-class propriety and authority. He was also one of the artists who sympathized with Brandes' plea for modernity and the emancipation of women and the less privileged in society. Furthermore these radicals promoted an aesthetics that would do justice to the importance of literature, as they were convinced that literature could play a vital – maybe even a leading – role in modernizing society. In the eyes of the critic Brandes modern literature could offer leverage to political and societal change because it offered a positivist, 'scientific' analysis of social reality.¹⁷

It could be said that Georg Brandes acted as midwife to Drachmann's literary career.¹⁸ In 1871, Brandes – after reading some of his articles in a magazine – approached Drachmann upon his return from London to make him aware of his literary potential. Indeed, until 1883, the year that saw the publication of Brandes' critical work *The Men of the Modern Breakthrough*, a survey of the group of radical modernists, the poetics of both men were congruent. During his career Brandes helped promote Drachmann's work, especially his poetry, even though Drachmann never fully became an

14 On 3 November 1871, Georg Brandes (1842-1927) delivered the first of a series of lectures about the main currents in nineteenth-century European literature ('Hovedstrømninger i det 19de Aarhundredes Litteratur') in an auditorium at the University of Copenhagen. This event was – because of publicity reasons – soon credited as *the* introduction of intellectual modernity in Scandinavia. See Jespersen 2004, 204; Aarseth 1986, 511-514.

15 Although Drachmann assiduously strove to achieve an international reputation, he never reached the same level of recognition abroad, as in his own country. See Van der Liet 2004a, 146.

16 Apart from Georg Brandes, who was a lifelong admirer especially of Drachmann's poetry, others like the authors Peter Nansen, Karl Gjellerup, V. Pinger, Otto Borchsenius, and the restaurant owner F.L. 'Lorry' Feilberg were definitely 'fans' of Drachmann, at least during various stages of his career.

17 According to Brandes Emile Zola was one of the prime examples of this development. See Brandes 1888.

18 Ursin 1953, vol. I, 42-43; Brandes 1907, 75-77.

obedient partisan of the new movement instigated by Brandes.¹⁹ Maybe the fact that Drachmann unremittingly tried to find his own 'niche' in the political and aesthetic landscape of his time made him a liability for both Brandes and the more diehard liberals. At the same time Drachmann's independent strategy made him stand out as an individual and thus helped to maintain and promote an aura of uniqueness, further augmenting his celebrity status.

Drachmann was a typical representative of the modern *artiste* of the late 1800s, not least by virtue of his deep dependence on the book-publishing market and the changing tastes of the public. While earlier generations of writers depended upon the generosity of wealthy patrons and sponsors, modern authors were at the mercy of a volatile market economy. Authors now found themselves writing for a new anonymous readership, one that increasingly relied on the opinions of critics as voiced through their reviews in journals, magazines and newspapers. Additionally, new and relatively cheap new printing techniques rapidly developed and were quickly commercialized. In response, writers feverishly created more and more text, in order to keep up with the apparently insatiable demand. Furthermore, this new generation of authors needed the literary agility to catch trends and read the moods of their potential readers. Equally, they needed to be on their toes when it came to getting paid for their products. In the late 1800s, this continuous pandering for the attention of the public became an increasingly important (and unpredictable) aspect of literary life. Authors had to be 'interesting' people – in other words, they needed to be personalities that other writers, critics, and journalists would actively watch and write about. Thus, their behaviour, both in private and in public, became an important source for gossip and slander. As a consequence, and in the wake of 'the rise of personality cults', proto-paparazzi came into existence.²⁰

Even for a person as industrious and well connected to the cultural elite of his day as Drachmann, becoming famous was still hard work. One of the most challenging obstacles he faced on his path to fame was that – right from its founding in 1884 – he was for many years banned from the pages of one of the most influential newspapers in Denmark, *Politiken*. The reason was a long-running controversy with one of the owners Edvard Brandes – Georg Brandes' brother – initially over a private matter and later because of Drachmann's brief flirtation with anti-Semitism. Although *Politiken* in reality closely reflected Drachmann's own political sympathies, he was a

19 In Brandes' book a chapter was dedicated to Drachmann. See Brandes 1883, 208–280.

20 Barrett 2010, 19.

persona non grata in the paper for years. The antipathy between Edvard Brandes and Drachmann took on epic proportions and thus represented a significant impediment to the amount of attention Drachmann and his works were able to generate in the 1880s and 1890s.²¹

For the market value of any fin-de-siècle artist, it was crucial to be – and stay – ‘in the picture’: one had to be visibly present in the public domain, which in those days was essentially constituted by print media. Authors, whether they were primarily writing fiction or not, were recruited to fill the columns of the rapidly increasing number of newspapers, journals, and magazines. Consequently, distinctions between being a producer of text and being the *subject* of a text became less obvious. A relatively new kind of writer appeared in the wake of this development: the literary copywriter, who no longer had a steady source of income (generated by a primary occupation, such as a school master or a clergyman, or other direct financial support such as an inheritance or a supporting Maecenas) and who was exclusively dependent on the sale of his or her texts. Whilst there was still no legal protection of authorship or copyright in Denmark until 1903, many writers were nonetheless living either on advance payments by publishers, or scraping by with line- or word-payment for their articles, columns or feuilletons.²²

Drachmann countered this dethronement of sacrosanct authorship by refusing to become a mere copywriter – although in reality he was one – framing himself instead as *the* quintessential festive poet-bohemian. Easily discernable with a dramatic cape and a broad-brimmed hat he appeared a Scandinavian version of the Byronesque or Whitmanesque artist, ‘a superb, period example of a restless bohemian spirit’ who ‘enjoyed the new-found mobility of the age’.²³ It is hardly a coincidence that Drachmann often used Lord Byron as a motif in his own work and translated his *Don Juan* (1880-1902) into Danish.²⁴

21 See Van der Liet 1999 for more details on this issue.

22 Although in 1886 the Berne Convention had been agreed on by a number of countries, Denmark – as the vast majority of nations – refrained from ratifying it until 1903.

23 Barrett 2010, 271.

24 See for example the short story ‘Byron i Vadmel’ (Drachmann 1881, 276-331) and Drachmann’s translation (Byron 1880-1902).

From Maritime Bard to Cigar Brand

There are a number of ways in which the creation and subsequent development of Drachmann's image can be studied. The process begins with the choices made by the author himself during his lifetime. Later, different images are produced and negotiated by, amongst others, relatives, scholars, and publishers, all of whom share in managing the author's legacy, modifying the ways in which the author's literary heritage and fame are dealt with, both in public space and collective memory. It would appear that Drachmann's continuing appeal to the imagination of subsequent generations of Danes is not in the first instance due to the success of his work, or his own consciously constructed authorial self – his self-fashioning – but rather the result of the activities of – figuratively speaking – his 'heirs', who for various reasons appropriated Drachmann and created new images or personae as I chose to call them here. Thus, a 'new' Drachmann – the result of negotiations with existing images, endowing them with new meanings for new purposes and new generations – was gradually accomplished.

One aspect of Drachmann's personal life, widely known to the present day, is his much-discussed bohemian lifestyle – especially his tempestuous love life – something which guaranteed him a continuous presence in the newspapers. Many salacious details about the author's private life were not only the talk of the town as soon as they became public, but were also eagerly peddled by literary biographers in later years. Most of these stories deal with Drachmann's extra-marital relationships, conducted with various women – or rather young girls – both female admirers and so-called kept women. Not least to cause a stir was the fact that Drachmann publicly acknowledged his relationship with his 'muse' – twenty years his junior – singer-dancer Amanda Nilsson, also known as 'Edith'.²⁵ Naturally, the many public scandals and affairs in which the author became embroiled were criticized by the *petite bourgeoisie* and middle classes as morally reprehensible, whilst others, more liberal in outlook, especially male supporters of 'free love' and 'modern marriage', applauded his behaviour.²⁶ Drachmann seems to have been perfectly aware of the fact that his scandalous love life tarnished his reputation among his upper-class peers, but that it also meant that his name was on everyone's lips, which only strengthened his popular repute and

²⁵ Weis Næraa 2002.

²⁶ See Loerges 1981 for details on Drachmann's marriages. Drachmann was officially married to Vilhelmine Erichsen (1852-1935), Emmy Culmsee (1854-1928), and finally Sophie (Soffi) Lasson (1873-1917).

celebrity status. Nevertheless, by the end of his life, public opinion turned against him, for example on the occasion of the magnificent celebration of his 60th birthday, which turned into a catastrophe.²⁷ The persistent framing of Drachmann as *the* modern bohemian poet of his time was in some part at least false, but has nevertheless outlived the author, and today fully overshadows his literary legacy.²⁸

Despite his enormous productivity, Drachmann was constantly in need of money, and his many personae can thus also be perceived as experiments to find new means of subsistence, simply to keep himself afloat. Therefore, his texts, name, and portrait were used in advertising campaigns, promoting cigars, bicycling, and even luxury hotels.²⁹ However, Drachmann was also present in financially less self-serving contexts, including charity fundraising campaigns for the benefit of others. This had an immense effect on Drachmann's popularity among 'the common people', especially those involved in maritime activities: fishermen, sailors, and their families. It is certainly no coincidence that Drachmann, in many paintings, sketches, and even advertisements is often depicted in maritime surroundings.

Drachmann was familiar with the maritime world, not least because his father, A.G. Drachmann, had been a ship's doctor.³⁰ As previously stated, Holger himself was trained as a marine painter and the sea is without doubt the most prominent topic in his literary and pictorial oeuvre.³¹ However,

²⁷ Nansen 1918, 77-83.

²⁸ Bredsdorff 1973, 39.

²⁹ In 1906, Drachmann gave permission to the tobacco company Karl [sic] Petersen & Co to name a cigar after him and for that purpose the poet wrote a few lines and added his signature, thus increasing the cigars symbolic value. See <http://archive-dk.com/page/34397/2012-06-02/> <http://www.brandts.dk/da/component/content/article/41-institutioner/mediemuseet/nyhedsbrevsartikler/247-reklamer-for-et-elsket-og-hadet-nydelsesmiddel>, last accessed 10 November 2015. Drachmann promoted cycling in 1890 in one of the first bicycling magazines in Denmark, *Cycletidende* (Saturday 1 March 1890, test issue). The poem 'Cycle-Sang' was subsequently set to music (by the composer Fr. Rung) and published separately in an advertorial tie-in to promote the magazine: *Cycletidende*, no. 1, 2 April 1890. I am grateful to Prof Peer E. Sørensen for bringing this to my attention. See Sørensen 2009, 261; Gregersen 2013, 156-158; Hofman Hansen 2015, 13. Drachmann's promoting luxury hotels happened on a number of occasions when he visited the then newly established and fashionable seaside resort of Fanø on the North Sea coast, where he was invited – together with other Copenhagen celebrities, among others Brandes himself. See Hofman Hansen 2015, 31-36; Bang 2011, 272-273. Brandes wrote an article about this event in *Politiken* on 20 May 1894. A transcript of this interesting piece is to be found in Hofman Hansen 2015, 125-131.

³⁰ His autobiography entitled *Min Rejse gennem Livet: en gammel Skibslæges Erindringer* (1942-1943) was reprinted in 1990.

³¹ See Hendriks 2007.

Figure 15 Commercial newspaper ad for so-called Drachmann-cigars, without year

'Drachmann-Cigaren'

*Et Ord om min Cigar - dertil er jeg villig.
Jeg ryger den hver Dag, den er god, let og billig!*

Holger Drachmann

Saa vel „Drachmann-Cigaren“ som
vort anerkente mærke „Fuente“ faas hos
Købmændene over alt paa Island.

Carl Petersen & Co.
København.

the reason why Drachmann became held in such high esteem in maritime milieus, originates more from a number of instances where he acted in favour of fishermen and mariners. In one of these cases he assisted the courageous fisherman Lars Kruse, who also worked as a volunteer lifesaver on a lifeboat in the remote coastal village of Skagen, on the most northern tip of the peninsula of Jutland. Kruse had saved many lives, but was denied his well-deserved royal decoration for valour and self-sacrifice by a narrow-minded local official – primarily because of some juvenile misdemeanour. Drachmann intervened and with his help, Kruse eventually obtained his medal. Of course this feat added luster to Drachmann's fame, who – for his part – did not hesitate to grasp the opportunity and 'capitalized' on the dramatic story by writing *Lars Kruse: En Skildring fra Virkelighedens og Sandets Regioner* (*Lars Kruse: A Picture from Regions of Reality and Truth*, 1879).³²

This, and other public interventions characterize Drachmann's PR strategy. He often used topics of this kind in his work, describing heroic maritime endeavours performed by honest, ordinary people, simply doing their work to the best of their abilities yet rarely receiving proper appreciation from their superiors. Drachmann found these 'authentic' working-class heroes in remote, picturesque coastal villages, notably Skagen and Hornbæk, north of Copenhagen. In effect, erecting literary monuments for real-life mariners such as Kruse from Skagen or Peder Andersen ('Store Bjørn') from Hornbæk.³³ Thus, by writing dozens of popular maritime stories, poems, and plays Drachmann ensured his immense popularity in maritime and working class milieus.³⁴

Another characteristic example of how Drachmann managed his popularity and PR, was the publication of the booklet *Ved Dampskibet Jarl's' totale Forlis* (*On the Shipwreck of the Steamer Jarl*, 1890). The cover proclaimed that the entire profit earned by the booklet was to be donated to the bereaved widows and children of the twelve sailors who perished when the Danish steamer *Jarl* capsized and sank in early March 1890.³⁵

³² Wivel 1981, 147.

³³ See for example the poem 'Den store Bjørns Endeligt' (Drachmann 1878, 155-158).

³⁴ This also explains the popularity of his works dealing with maritime subjects, such as *Sømandshistorier*, one of his few bestsellers. See Nielsen 2013, 32. The fact that his mistress and muse, the young singer-performer Amanda Nilsson, was a working-class girl, did not seem to harm Drachmann's reputation among the lower strata of society – possibly even the contrary.

³⁵ Besides twelve crewmembers also fourteen passengers died. The relief campaign for the bereaved families raised the substantial sum of DKK 42,000. See <http://www.nexoe.museum.com/soslashforhoslashr-juni-1890.html>, last accessed 10 November 2015.

Through this booklet, Drachmann became a benefactor of people in need, at the same time bolstering his own popularity. The fact that Drachmann's name does not appear on the cover or on the title page of the booklet, but merely (in a smaller typeface) at the end of the text, is an indication of his generosity – and his strategic genius in terms of celebrity management. His charity work undoubtedly increased his fame: the vast collections of Drachmann's letters at the Royal Library in Copenhagen bearing witness to how frequently he was asked to contribute to charity initiatives. Often he would write a letter, a poem or a story in response. Such gestures may not have been solely philanthropic, as they helped to support his continuous presence in the media in a positive way. Perhaps Drachmann could simply afford to be generous in this particular case, because 1890 was an extraordinary productive and fortunate year for him. He had plenty of commissioned work, wrote numerous contributions to magazines, journals, and books, and on top of that, his second major work of prose, the two-volume *roman à clef* *Forskrevet*, and the first instalment of the second volume of his monumental translation of Lord Byron's *Don Juan*, were published that year.³⁶

Whether he acted out of generosity or not, it seems that Drachmann consciously constructed a public image of a 'modern' celebrity-*artiste* – one who was concerned with the fate and lives of 'ordinary' people, especially the unobtrusive and taciturn heroes of everyday life at sea. Drachmann's popularity among the working classes was initially sparked by one of his first poems, the powerful 'Engelske Socialister', which has attained an enviable literary omnipresence, appearing in virtually each and every Danish anthology of poetry ever since.³⁷

Drachmann constantly oscillated between various – often conflicting – literary roles and personae, for example between the role of the romantic 'bard' and the modern bohemian artist, and between the representative of chivalrous ideals and dreams on the one hand, and leading man of the earthy realism of the common people on the other. This ambiguity is also reflected in the reception of Drachmann's literary celebrity, which seems to be a mixture of popular veneration and respect for his positive attitude towards the working classes – irrespective of their gender – and bourgeois curiosity fuelled by his nonconformity and bohemian behaviour. Essentially, Drachmann catered for multiple audiences, as exemplified by

36 The poem first appeared in a journal in 1871 under Drachmann's *nom de plume* Marc Cole. Together with a number of other 'revolutionary' poems it was incorporated in his debut collection the following year, which was simply entitled *Digte*. See Ursin 1956, 48–50.

37 Ursin 1956, 9.

the political variety of the journals and publication platforms in which his work appeared. Additionally, his books often appeared in two or three different editions – corresponding to different price ranges – offering the same content in a cheap ‘popular’ edition, a mid-priced ‘regular’ or a more expensive ‘deluxe’ binding.³⁸

Home at Last?

The first time Drachmann visited the remote fishing hamlet of Skagen was in the autumn of 1871.³⁹ A group of painters had started to gather there in the 1870s, to spend the summer together in simple dwellings in unspoiled natural surroundings for very little money. In those years a number of artist colonies popped up all over Europe; in Denmark they were established in Hornbæk, Skagen, and on the island of Fanø, attracting artists and art lovers from all over the country and beyond. Notably for Skagen, Drachmann became an important catalyst, offering just the right leverage at the right moment to make the village known all over Scandinavia and thus subsequently turning it into a cherished tourist destination. Rather than being a direct result of his repeated visits, this process was encouraged primarily by his writing about its charms, in poems, stories and also in a proto-coffee table book – one with clear touristic objectives.⁴⁰ Indeed, Drachmann's name became so strongly associated with Skagen that following his death his fame made it possible to transform his last place of residence there into a museum, thereby further preserving his VIP status. In 1911, Drachmann's main publisher and one of his most profound admirers and benefactors Peter Nansen, took the initiative to turn Drachmann's last home, ‘Villa Pax’, into a museum.⁴¹ ‘Drachmanns Hus’ is situated in the southern part of

38 From an economic point of view Drachmann's publishers did not substantially profit from him, but print runs seem to have been substantial, most first editions were printed in 2,000-4,000 copies. According to an article in the newspaper *Politiken*, the day after Drachmann had died, one of the directors of his preferred publishing house Gyldendal commemorates the fact that only a few of his works could be considered bestsellers, but that most of his books were published in substantial print runs. According to this source Drachmann's most successful books were *Der var Engang* (22,000), *Sømandshistorier* (± 13,000), *Derovre fra Grænsen* (10,000), *Forskrevet* (10,000), and *Vølund Smed* (10,000).

39 Nielsen 2013, 32.

40 Drachmann 1887, 3-22.

41 Bang 2011, 614; Nielsen 2013, 37-43.

Skagen and has recently been thoroughly refurbished and is again accessible to the public.⁴²

Although Drachmann lived an extremely mobile life, he finally settled in Skagen, a relatively remote place, however, one that since the 1870s gradually changed from an obscure little fishing town to an artist colony. By the turn of the century the village had become a cherished seaside resort and a fashionable hotspot, where even the Danish royal family in 1914 acquired a summer residence, Klitgården. It was artists who initiated it all, attracted as they were to the simple lifestyle and the picturesque surroundings. Paradoxically, their presence also engendered a complete metamorphosis of the idyllic town through increased tourism and its popularity in general.

Among the many artists drawn to the town, Drachmann was one of the most interesting, though not simply because he lived there for such a long time. On the contrary, it was because he was instrumental in establishing the 'myth' of Skagen through his clever use of the town and its natural beauty as a recurring motif in both his literary and pictorial work. Furthermore, because of his own background as a painter and his friendships with the other artists, Drachmann himself was a much sought after model, often depicted in a clear Skagen *mise en scène*. Dozens of paintings, drawings, statues, and sketches were made of him during his lifetime and even following his death he was still able to enchant other artists.⁴³ Today, the local art museum in Skagen bears ample witness of this aspect of his life there. Drachmann's special status promoted the town and the town, for its part, sustains the author's fame and celebrity status by housing the first Scandinavian literary museum ever exclusively dedicated to a single author.⁴⁴ Also the fact that Drachmann's spectacular final resting place is situated in a grandiose burial mound in the sand dunes at the north side of the town ties Drachmann even tighter to Skagen.⁴⁵

One of the most fascinating artistic spin-offs following Drachmann's death actually deals with the occasion of his burial. The young painter

42 See <http://drachmannshus.dk>, last accessed 10 November 2015.

43 Drachmann has been painted and drawn by others innumerable times. Among the most famous of these portraits and full body depictions are paintings, drawings or lithographies by Edvard Munch (1902), numerous times by P.S. Krøyer (1876, 1902, 1903, 1908), N.V. Dorph (1891), Michael Anker (1894), Laurits Tuxen (1894), and Aksel Jørgensen (1911-1913). A funny anecdote is that immediately after Drachmann's death, when the painter Michael Ancher was commissioned an official portrait of Drachmann, a local 'stand-in' was apparently used who resembled the deceased. See Andersen 2002; Gregersen 2013, 180.

44 Bang 2011, 664-667.

45 Van der Liet 2001.

Figure 16 Postcard with Holger Drachmann's grave, without year

Private collection

Aksel Jørgensen, later professor at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen, painted a series of large canvasses in 1908, depicting various scenes from the naval transportation and subsequent procession over land that brought Drachmann's ashes from Copenhagen to the port of Frederikshavn and then on to their final resting place near Skagen.⁴⁶ On each of these paintings the artist has depicted, accompanying Drachmann's urn, the crowds of mourners and an abundance of flags and banners that filled the air.

Comparing these paintings with photographs taken at the time, it becomes evident that Jørgensen's series of oil paintings are highly documentary in nature. Their significance in the present context is firstly, that this impressive series of canvasses marks the pinnacle of Drachmann's celebrity status, for only a royal burial could possibly exceed the prestigious ceremonial valediction that was granted Drachmann. Secondly, Drachmann's lifelong commitment to the less privileged, especially those depending on the sea, was clearly widely appreciated, as can be seen from the number of trade-union banners and 'common people' escorting the procession.

⁴⁶ Andersen 2002, 30-32.

Figure 17 Painting by Aksel Jørgensen, *SS Kong Haakon arriving at Frederikshavn with Drachmann's urn on 26 January 1908, 1908*

Skagens Museum

The Drachmann 'Industry'

Drachmann had been one of the earliest pioneers of Skagen as the place to be, yet since his first encounter with the town in the seminal year 1871, he had only been there occasionally, spending most of his time elsewhere, including abroad.⁴⁷ Purchasing Villa Pax in 1902 was obviously an investment in view of retirement, although Drachmann and his third wife Soffi (nee Sophie Lasson) only occupied the house for a year or two before his death.⁴⁸

Clearly, Drachmann's celebrity status survived him, and when Skagen became an increasingly popular destination for holidaymakers in the first half of the twentieth century, the Drachmann House became a beloved tourist destination. The abundance of picture postcards that visitors sent home – often showing the poet and his wife in front of the house, sitting

⁴⁷ The famous storyteller, writer of fairy tales and international celebrity Hans Christian Andersen presumably was the first to 'discover' Skagen in 1859.

⁴⁸ Barrett 2010, 185.

Figure 18 Postcard of Drachmann and his wife Soffi in front of Villa Pax, produced by Einer Nielsen's Bookstore, Skagen, circa 1906

Private collection

Figure 19 Postcard of Drachmann at his desk, produced by Laurits Scheldes Bookstore, Skagen, circa 1906

Private collection

in their living room, or Drachmann at his desk in his studio – all bears witness to the popularity he attained. These postcards were produced by local booksellers and printers and sold at the increasing number of hotels in the town. It is difficult to determine to what extent tourists today send Drachmann postcards home from Skagen. However, one could surmise that the mere fact that they are still on offer suggests a continuing demand for them.⁴⁹

A striking feature of all the postcards representing Drachmann is that he is shown primarily as a celebrity rather than as a professional artist. Even on the picture portraying him sitting at his desk, he is not shown writing or painting, but merely in a pondering, idle pose, looking at (a curtained) window. This seems to correspond to the ‘photographic and painterly iconography in the years around 1900. The author was presented primarily as an interesting personality or as a celebrity, not as a man or woman of letters’.⁵⁰

Today Villa Pax is lost in time; a chronotope in the Bakhtinian sense or a heterotopia as Foucault might refer to it.⁵¹ From its beginnings as a home, it has become a *lieu de mémoire*, signalling, visualizing and concretizing a literary culture and a lifestyle from a bygone era, now preserved through the veneration of the individual who lived there as one of the last beacons of that culture. For over a century, the Drachmann House has been maintained, largely through private funding and the work of local enthusiasts, many of whom have spent much of their spare time to keep the house intact.

Despite the care of sponsors and volunteers, during the period of the 1930s, the house was poorly maintained, falling into disrepair and threatened with ruin. Yet one of the paradoxes of the history of the house is that it was one of the leading exponents of expressionism, Emil Bønnelycke – a representative of an aesthetics with little affinity to Drachmann’s work – who, in 1941, wrote a newspaper article in favour of the conservation of the house and its proper management as a museum. It was Bønnelycke’s plea that helped raise money and awareness towards the preservation of the house.⁵²

49 Of course these sales are incomparable with for example Virginia Woolf, whose portrait still seems to be the best-selling picture postcard at the gift shop at the National Portrait Gallery in London, but the fact that Drachmann postcards are still available, is notable. See Jaffe 2005, 170.

50 Schröder 2013, 169.

51 See Bakhtin 1981, 84–258; Augé 1995, 89–90.

52 Emil Bønnelycke’s column appeared in the newspaper *Berlingske Aftenavis* (1941) and is transcribed in Nielsen 2013, 157–158. See also Nielsen 2013, 43.

Figure 20 Statue of Holger Drachmann in Frederiksberg

Photograph by Henk van der Liet, 2015

Apart from Villa Pax, which became a museum in 1911 – three years after his death – many objects in public space have played a role in maintaining and continuing Drachmann's name and image. In numerous Danish towns and villages there are streets, roads, alleys, and squares named after him, for example, spatial memorial elements or imprints, signifying his fame.⁵³ Another type of memorial presence in public space encompasses material objects, busts, statues, plaques, and so on. Two plaques commemorating his place of birth can be found in the centre of Copenhagen, right on the main pedestrian street.⁵⁴ Another plaque, mounted on a massive rock at the harbour of Hornbæk – the home town of the heroic fisherman-lifeguard 'Store Bjørn' mentioned earlier – was unveiled in 1936 on the occasion of Drachmann's goth birthday.⁵⁵

These physical manifestations ensure that Drachmann's celebrity status remains both visible and tangible. The most impressive monument commemorating Drachmann, however, is surprisingly *not* in central Copenhagen, but situated in Frederiksberg, a borough of Copenhagen, near the Royal Frederiksberg Gardens. The fact that Frederiksberg rather than Copenhagen – Drachmann's birthplace and the city where he grew up – was selected for this purpose was an ambiguous choice.

In the spring of 1924, plans to erect a statue for Drachmann lead to a fierce public debate. The people of Frederiksberg were aware of the link between Drachmann and their town, especially the many theatres near the Royal Frederiksberg Gardens. This area, with popular establishments, offering variety shows, music, and dance flourished from the 1880s well into the twentieth century. Drachmann had been a regular customer, specifically at a *café chantant*, which became known as 'Lorry' – a place with quite a reputation.⁵⁶ In 1887, a major public scandal emerged at the café. Drachmann met his new muse 'Edith', a young woman who would become his mistress for nearly a decade. Even more than a quarter of a century later,

53 For an overview, see the website, <http://danmarksadresser.dk>, last accessed 10 November 2015.

54 They are not easy to discern, but the plaques are on the facade of Amagertorv 9.

55 On 14 January 2008, a small crowd celebrated the centenary for Drachmann's death with a ceremony including the laying of a wreath at the monolith, a performance of some of Drachmann's songs, and a festive procession with torches. See <http://helsingoer.nu/m-Kalender.asp?KalenderID=4508&URLB=0&FirmaID=6693>, last accessed 10 November 2015.

56 On the same premises Feilberg in 1913 also opened a bar named after Drachmann, 'Drachmannkroen', which still exists today, albeit as part of a minute private theatre (Riddersalen). In 1915, Feilberg had put a minor, gypsum cast copy of a statue of Drachmann, made by the sculptor Hans Christian Holter (1890-1922), in front of 'Lorry' in order to promote his desire to raise a real statue in Drachmann's honour. See Graae 1929, 27-28, 61-63.

the disgrace was still very much on the minds of some morally indignant residents – including the mayor of Frederiksberg – and thus the plans for a monument commemorating Drachmann was met primarily with rebuffs.⁵⁷

The founder and proprietor of the establishment, F.L. 'Lorry' Feilberg, nevertheless, came up with a scheme to collect the necessary means himself. Thus in 1924, well after his own death, this man's dream, a larger than life-size bronze statue of one of his most memorable customers, was finally unveiled on 4 July 1924.⁵⁸ The size and splendour of the Drachmann-statue is comparable to similar monuments in the Copenhagen area for world-famous cultural personalities such as Hans Christian Andersen and Søren Kierkegaard, whilst it is far more impressive than for example the small and relatively hidden bust commemorating Georg Brandes at the busy square in Copenhagen that bears his name.

Conclusion: Appropriation in the 21st Century

Apart from Drachmann's House, which recently became part of the Skagen's Museum, there also exists an annual literary prize in the name of Drachmann. The so-called Drachmann Grant is awarded to a contemporary Danish author whose work in some way shares an affinity with the spirit of Drachmann's oeuvre. Despite the fact that only a few people today are familiar with Drachmann's work at all, the authors that have had the honour of receiving the grant clearly cherish the prize named after him. Their appreciation is not primarily due to the (modest) sum of money attached to the prize, but is rather the result of the prestige, the cultural and symbolic capital that it represents – another vivid token of Drachmann's enduring fame and status as a literary celebrity.⁵⁹ Even after the death of the author, Drachmann's oeuvre kept inspiring painters, writers, composers, and even filmmakers, but increasingly it was the name or the celebrity Drachmann, rather than the artist, that fuelled this interest.

⁵⁷ See Graae 1929, 63.

⁵⁸ And as a mere indication of the sustainability of Drachmann's fame: in 2013 – just a few blocks away from the statue – an exhibition was held at a local cultural centre in Frederiksberg, Møstings Hus, to commemorate the centenary of the opening of Drachmann-kroen, the restaurant and bar named after Holger Drachmann also owned by Feilberg. A nicely illustrated catalogue was produced for the occasion: *Drachmannkroen 100 år. Aksel Jørgensen og Lorry Feilberg*. See also <http://www.frederiksbergshistorie.dk/frederiksbergeren/drachmann>, last accessed 10 November 2015.

⁵⁹ Nielsen 2013, 44.

Nevertheless, there seem to be clear indications that Drachmann's literary oeuvre finally seems to be attracting renewed scholarly interest in the 21st century. As a result of the recent spatial turn in humanities, focus in literary studies is shifting from primarily diachronic analyses to including aspects such as 'space', 'mobility', and 'flux', thereby offering new methods to assess literature and literary culture. This paradigmatic change of perspective will also bring forth new readings of Drachmann's literary legacy, a welcome development not least because – as suggested in a recently published scholarly essay on Drachmann – he '*did* write many words, but there is pure gold between them'.⁶⁰

Today, the work of Drachmann seems to be going through a phase of public reappraisal: some of his plays are being performed again, the completely refurbished Drachmann Museum in Skagen reopened in 2013, and new books about his life and work are either being published or are in the making.⁶¹ All these initiatives fit in with contemporary modes of appropriation of the persona Drachmann, but now with the additional emphasis that they also include focus on his work.

Maybe the most convincing proof of Drachmann's uncontested celebrity status, though, is the fact that, more than a century after his death, he is still a cherished motif for other authors and caricaturists. The recently deceased author Klaus Rifbjerg, an extremely productive, versatile, and widely appreciated representative of modernism in contemporary Danish literature, was an admirer of Drachmann. This veneration was partly the result of Rifbjerg's affinity with Drachmann's poetic work, but definitely also because of his own nonconformism and Drachmannian ability to manage his own celebrity status and turn his persona – voluntarily – into a commodity. Since the beginning of his career, Rifbjerg, like no other contemporary modernist of his generation, understood the value of publicity to the successful promotion of his work.⁶² He not only employed this knowledge for his own benefit, but also to satirize, criticize, and debunk shallow, publicity-driven consumerism. It was precisely this ambivalent, double-edged attitude vis-à-vis his own celebrity status that the cartoonist Per Marquart Otzen in 2002 captured in a cartoon that accompanied a haiku by Rifbjerg in the newspaper *Information*.⁶³ The cartoon visualizes

60 Rosiek 2015, 104.

61 To mention just a few of the most prominent examples, see Nielsen 2013; Gregersen 2013; Hofman Hansen 2015.

62 Jørgensen 1995, 58–65.

63 *Information*, 6 July 2002.

Figure 21 Caricature by Per Marquart Otzen with a haiku by Klaus Rifbjerg, 2002

Danish Royal Library, Copenhagen

the kinship between Riffbjerg and Drachmann, giving a clear indication of how vivid the public image of Drachmann remained at the beginning of the 21st century. Moreover, Riffbjerg's haiku in the top right corner of the cartoon takes us a step further and testifies to his subtle – both respectful and ironic – appropriation of the work of the poet Drachmann, by rephrasing the old bard's quasi-national anthem the 'Midsummer Song'. Thus, Riffbjerg coalesces the 'celeb' and the text, mixing his own words with Drachmann's, thereby reinforcing the old bard's status as a celebrity *and* a vital part of collective Danish cultural memory and literary heritage. A funny coincidence is the fact that the composition of Otzen's caricature and Riffbjerg's haiku echoes earlier picture postcards with – at least in part – the same stanza of Drachmann's 'Midsummer Song' written across the image of an idyllic, stereotypical Danish, 'national' landscape.

A final contemporary example of the process of commodification of Drachmann is the fact that his name is associated with a specific bench in garden furniture. Judging from a random survey on the Internet, the Drachmann-bench is an iconic and prestigious model in outdoor furniture. It is unknown whether Drachmann himself owned a bench like this, but the design does not in any way resemble the public 'Drachmann-bench' in Marielundskov near the city of Kolding.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, for visitors of the Drachmann House today, it is precisely this type of bench that immediately catches the eye when one enters the premises.

Thus, the commodification of Drachmann as a celebrity has turned full circle. In a sense he has returned to a place he helped shape, this time not in the guise of a festive maritime bard, but merely as the name of a piece of patio furniture, which seems to be more famous than anything he produced as an artist during his lifetime. Drachmann remains a celebrity, but instead of in the realm of literature, it is in the world of garden furniture his name primarily lives on.

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⁶⁴ See https://da.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marielundsskoven#/media/File:Drachmanns_bench-Marielundsskoven_Forest_in_Kolding_Denmark_2009_25-05.jpg, last accessed 10 November 2015.

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