

Niels W. Gade's „Agnete og Havmanden“

*Additional source material and a new hypothesis concerning its origin (Part II: realizing opus 3 – from concert overture to symphony and dramatic poem)**

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In part I of this article (see *Dansk Årbog for Musikforskning* XXI, p. 45-47) I briefly described some newly-discovered orchestral sketches to Niels W. Gade's *Agnete og Havmanden* overture and consequently challenged the previously accepted theory that Gade's *Jugendträume* overture is the musical result of *Agnete og Havmanden*.¹ I will now continue, in part II, by tracing the evolution of *Agnete og Havmanden* from concert overture to five-movement symphony and dramatic poem.

Gade's first mention of „Agnete og Havmanden“ occurs in a letter to A.P. Berggreen dated September 24, 1838:

Nu har jeg altsaa lagt Haand paa Værket og givet det Form af Ouverture. Jeg har tænkt mig Agnetes Længsel ved Strandbredden efter en hende ubekjendt Gjenstand som Hovedmomentet i dette Stykke. Som to hinanden modstridende Principper optræder Havmandens Elskovsklage og hendes egen Samvittigheds Røst (idet hun ved at elske Havmanden tror at begaa noget Ondt.) Denne Kamp mellem et Godt og Ondt udgjør Middelpunktet, indtil hun mod Slutningen overgiver sig paa Naade og Unaade i Havmandens Favn.²

As the above *Agnete og Havmanden* program reveals, Gade intended to divide his overture into three sections: primary part, midpoint and closing section. The primary part of the overture is described as „Agnete's yearning by the sea after an unknown object“. This undoubtedly refers to the opening measures of the 1838 sketches (music example 1). Note the depiction of the waves in the lower strings (cello) and the use of an impassioned a-minor clarinet solo for the portrayal of Agnete's yearning. After this opening section Gade records two opposing themes

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1. This theory was originally presented in Finn Matthiassen's „Niels W. Gade og troldtøjet“ *Festskrift Søren Sørensen*, Copenhagen: Dan Fog, 1990, p. 73-74.

2. Complete letter transcribed in C. Skou, *Andreas Peter Berggreen*, Copenhagen 1895, p. 55-58.

– the Merman’s lamentation of love (music example 2), and the voice of Agnete’s conscience (music example 3). While the Merman is characterized by a trombone, Agnete is again represented by the clarinet. The overture’s midpoint represents Agnete’s moral struggle between good and evil (music example 4). Finally Gade describes the closing section of the overture as Agnete’s unconditional surrender into the Merman’s embrace (music example 5). Unfortunately the sketches abruptly end at this point – it appears that several pages may be missing. Gade’s use of two different ink colors indicates that he worked on the sketches more than once. Nonetheless, the lack of any other musical sources suggests that he soon set the project aside.³

In October 1839, a little more than one year after the letter to Berggreen, Gade recorded in his composition diary a second program based on *Agnete og Havmanden* (see table 1).⁴

TABLE 1: PROGRAM FOR AGNETE OG HAVMANDEN AS FOUND IN GADE’S COMPOSITION DIARY (NB: /// = CROSSED-OUT TEXT).

Octbr:

1839

Agnete og Havmanden (A ///)⁵

Sinfonie.

1.) Agnetes Længsel ved Havet. (Moderato) ♩ A

2.) Havfruernes Sang. (Fis moll Andante med Chor af

Fruentimmerstemmer.) „Agnete. Agnete kom!“ ///

///⁶(3 Chor: forskellige.) (/ /// / /// / /// / ///)⁷

(Fis Dur – .)

3.) Agnetes Bryllup. (Scherzo E Dur. 3/4.)

4.) Vuggevis. (C Dur Moderato eller Andantino.)

(Clarinet solo.) afbrydes af

Choral: Hvo ikkun lader Herren raade⁸ – eller I Jesu.

3. Apparently unsatisfied with his progress on *Agnete og Havmanden*, Gade began working on a new overture, *Jugendträume*, in October 1838.
4. Composed of six pages and written between July 1839 and August 1841, this diary contains the programmatic origins of some of Gade’s most famous works: *The Echoes of Ossian* Overture (Op. 1), the c-minor Symphony (Op. 5) and the Piano Sonata in e-minor (Op. 28). Originally housed in the Royal Library, Copenhagen, this diary is now missing. Niels Martin Jensen, however, has kindly supplied me with a photocopy of the diary.
5. “moll” has been crossed out and an upper-case A has been written over the original lower-case a.
6. “til Dur” has been crossed out.
7. “I moll med violi & cello” has been crossed out.
8. Chorale text from *Evangelisk-kristelig Psalmbog, til Brug ved Kirke og Huus=Andacht*, Copenhagen: Carl Frid. Schubart, 1798, # 301, p. 167.

pp .Navn skal al vor Gjærning skee ⁹ – synges
MandfolkeChor ganske pianissimo –
(Dies irae, dies illa solvet saecula in favilla).

.....page break.....

All^o agitato og Recitativ (Clarinet solo.) –
Fortsættelse af Choralen –

xattacca

5. Finale. Agnetes Kirkegang og Død. (a moll)
(Og alle de smaa Billeder, de vendte sig omkring –
– C Dur. „O Herre Jesu tilgiv du min Synd“ –
– Og Altertavlen vendte sig og Alteret med den-
Og Alt med den -
Sig vendte, hvor hun Øiet
I Kirken vendte hen. –

—
da brast den Armes Hjerter,
da iisned hendes Blod. —)¹⁰
(?) Choral: A Dur. „Men du o Forsoner Kjære
Tilgiver hver angerfuld Synder —

Fine.

x 5.) Finale. —————

Havfruernes Sang (Fruent:) og Choralsan-
gen (Mandst:) kalder Agnete.

As shown in my transcription of the symphony's program, only the second, fourth and fifth movements were supplied with intricate outlines. Gade left a good deal of empty space after the headings for the first and third — undoubtedly planning to develop the programmatic details of these movements at a later date.

Unfortunately, no musical realization of the 1839 program exists. Nevertheless, a comparison between this program and the overture sketches from 1838 reveals several similarities: both works were originally conceived as being in the key of a-minor, both open with a depiction of Agnete's yearning by the sea and both represent Agnete with a clarinet solo.

Despite these similarities, however, the programs are noticeably different. Gade substantially expanded his original 1838 idea. In addition to changing the

9. Ibid., # 135, p. 81.

10. These seven lines come from Jens Baggesen's *Agnete fra Holmegaard* (1808).

composition's form to a five-movement symphony, Gade enlarged the program's plot and added texts borrowed from the Evangelist-Christian Psalmbook (1798) and Jens Baggesen's *Agnete fra Holmegaard* Ballad (1808). As a reading of *Agnete fra Holmegaard* reveals, Gade apparently utilized this text when forming the general layout of his 1839 program.¹¹

Baggesen's ballad begins with a restless Agnete staring into the sea. A beautiful Merman appears and begins to sing. He pledges his love to Agnete and asks her to join him below the waves. She accepts his proposal and eventually bears him two sons. All is well and Agnete is very happy until one day the sound of church bells interrupts her while she is singing a lullabye. Agnete becomes alarmed and suddenly feels compelled to visit her childhood church. The Merman allows her to go, but only on the condition that she return before daylight. Agnete hurries towards the church and upon entering the graveyard comes face to face with her mother. When the mother discovers where Agnete has been for the past two years she reminds Agnete of the husband and daughters she abandoned and tries to convince her to forget the Merman and his two sons. But Agnete is firm, she renounces her family and remains true to the Merman. She then enters the church. Everyone turns their back to her. Agnete looks down at the floor and to her horror discovers that the gravestone before her bears the name of her mother. The shock of this realization breaks Agnete's heart. She falls to the floor and dies. Now all her children, sons and daughters alike, long for their mother.

Familiarity with Baggesen's text greatly aids in the task of deciphering the many enigmatic details of Gade's program. For example, in the fourth movement Gade interrupts Agnete's lullabye with a sacred chorale. This chorale, undoubtedly serving as a substitute for Baggesen's church bells, not only reminds Agnete of the life she abandoned but also expresses, through its text, the moral struggles of Agnete's conscience. Similar is Gade's employment of the *Dies Irae* theme as a means of foreshadowing the deaths of both Agnete and her mother.¹² Finally, the

11. The story of „Agnete og Havmanden“ exists in many versions. In its earliest ballad form (ca. 18th century) Agnete is portrayed as a selfish, rebellious girl who deserts her family and then callously abandons the Merman and his children. Contrary to this egocentric characterization, the Agnete of most 19th-century versions displays kind, loving feelings of familial loyalty. She is torn between her love for the Merman and her loyalty to God. Thus the predominating theme of most 19th-century versions is a tragic split between the Christian and the humane, between social and natural values. For further discussions concerning the history and evolution of „Agnete og Havmanden“ see: Thomas Bredsdorff, „Nogen skrev et sagn om 'Agnete og Havmanden', hvem, hvornår og hvorfor?“ *Fund og Forskning* XXX (1991): 67-80; Peter Meisling, *Agnetes Latter. En folkevisemonografi*, Copenhagen, 1988 and „De sympatiske Havmænd – En lille replik til Thomas Bredsdorff“, *Fund og Forskning* XXX (1991): 81-6; Iørn Piø, „DgFT 38, Agnete og Havmanden“, *Nye veje til Folkevisen*, Copenhagen: Gyldendal 1985, p. 140-148

12. I agree with Matthiassen's conclusion (p. 82) that Gade's employment of the *Dies Irae* was probably influenced by Berlioz's earlier employment of the theme in the fourth movement of *Symphonie fantastique*.

allegro agitato clarinet solo towards the end of the movement represents Agnete's distraught reaction to the chorale and sudden compulsion to visit her childhood church.

Gade's program for the final movement revolves around a quote from the ultimate scene in Baggesen's ballad:

Og alle de smaa Billeder,
de vendte sig omkring -

—
Og Altertavlen vendte sig
Og Alteret med den -
Alt med den
Sig vendte, hvor hun Øjet
I Kirken vendte hen.

—
Da brast den Armes Hjerter,
Da iisned hendes Blod.

As in the previous movement, Gade uses a chorale text to reflect the state of Agnete's conscience: „O Herre Jesu tilgiv du min Synd.“ The composer then records two options for the symphony's conclusion. The first reflects a message of Christian salvation and centers around the chorale „Men du o Forsoner Kjere tilgiver hver angerfuld Synder.“ In contrast to this, the second option reflects more closely the feeling of Baggesen's romantic text by using choirs of mermaids and humans to express the tragic longing caused by Agnete's death.

Several details in Gade's 1839 program, however, do not coincide with Baggesen's text. In his outline for the second movement Gade cites a „Chor af Fruentimmerstemmer“ who sing „Agnete. Agnete kom!“ as well as an additional three choirs described as „forskjellige.“ These vocal groups, not mentioned by Baggesen, are more than likely related to the four choirs who attempt to lure Agnete into the sea in the „Bølgernes Sang“ of H.C. Andersen's dramatic poem *Agnete og Havmanden* (1834). In addition Gade's third movement, „Agnetes Bryllup,“ is undoubtedly based upon the „Havmandens Bryllup“ of this same text. Here Andersen features Agnete's marriage to the Merman, an event excluded from Baggesen's *Agnete fra Holmegaard*.¹³

Gade's familiarity with Andersen's text is not surprising. The two men became friends towards the end of the 1830s and they collaborated on an „Agnete og Havmanden“ project in the early 1840s. This project, a dramatic poem in two acts, is based on an abridged version of Andersen's *Agnete og Havmanden* text and features a series of songs and melodrama composed by Gade (see table 2).

13. In addition to a more involved plot, Andersen's dramatic poem has a larger cast of characters than Baggesen's ballad.

TABLE 2: MUSICAL NUMBERS COMPOSED BY GADE FOR H.C. ANDERSEN'S DRAMATIC POEM *AGNETE OG HAVMANDEN*

Act I

1. Hemming's Song – „Der voxed' et Træ.“¹⁴
2. Choir of Mermaids – „Jeg veed et Slot.“
- Merman and Agnete – Melodrama (seduction scene).

Act II

- 3a. Agnete's Lullabye – „Sol deroppe ganger under Lide.“
- 3b. Choir of Huntsmen – „Trara! Trara! Trara!“
4. Hemming – „Agnete var elsket.“¹⁵
5. Choir of Huntsmen – continuation of no. 3b.
- 6a. Repetition no. 4, but without orchestral introduction and coda.
- 6b. Choir in Church – „Barn Jesus, Brudgom fager og fiin.“
- 7a. The Fisherboy's Ballad – „Lærken synger sin Morgensang.“
- 7b. Choir in Church – continuation of no. 6b.
8. Merman and Agnete – Melodrama (Agnete's death).

I do not know when Andersen and Gade first began to collaborate on *Agnete og Havmanden*. A letter from Andersen shows that the project was well under way by the summer of 1842:

Bregentved den 17 Juli 1842

Kjære Ven!

Da jeg endnu ikke i Aviserne seer et eneste Ord om vor Jomfru „Agnete“, saa kommer hun nok ikke i Tjeneste i Sommer, den franske Greve¹⁶ har nok faaet hendes Plads. Det forekommer mig imidlertid bedst om vi tog os lidt af Jomfruen og derfor skriver jeg denne korte Epistel.

Vil de have det reenskrevne Manuscript, af Hr. Holst¹⁷ og da indsende dette til Direktionen, med et Par Ord at De har komponeret Musikken og vil nu fuldende en Ouverture til Stykket; vi ville altsaa rimeligvis erholde Svar fra Censoren ved Saisonens Begyndelse og Agnete kan da gives i September eller Oktober. De kan ogsaa bringe det til Conferentsraad Collin og tale med ham hvad Musikken angaar, jeg skal da skrive om Stykket. . . .¹⁸

14. Hemming is the mortal husband Agnete abandons when she goes to live with the Merman.
15. According to Niels Martin Jensen, *Den danske romance 1800-1850 og dens musikalske forudsætninger*, Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1964, p.169, this song's melody appears to be a variation in minor of the folk ballad „Agnete hun stander på højelofts bro“ (*Udvalgte danske Viser fra Middelalderen*, Abrahamson, Nyerup & Rahbek (eds.) Copenhagen, 1812-14, Vol. V, no. 50a)
16. Three-act comedy *Grev Létorières Proces* by Bayard and Dumanoir. Performed at the Royal Theater on July 1 and 8, 1842.
17. Wilhelm Holst played the role of the Merman in the premiere of *Agnete og Havmanden*. Agnete and Hemming were played by Fru Heiberg and Chr. Hansen.
18. The original letter is housed in The Royal Library, Copenhagen: Ny kgl. Saml. 1716.

Andersen was hoping for a premiere at the Royal Theater in September or October 1842. But *Agnete og Havmanden* did not appear until April 20, 1843. The autograph score for this performance contains musical emendations as well as performance indications. In its present state it opens with the song „Der voxed' et Træ.“¹⁹ A study of the manuscript's appearance reveals that the page numbering has been changed — pages 1-5 were originally numbered 4-8.

Upon first noticing these altered page numbers I naturally assumed that a song had been eliminated from the dramatic poem. But an examination of the prompt book used for the premiere soon revealed that „Der voxed' et Træ“ had always been conceived as the work's opening song.²⁰ Thus the altered page numbers must be due to the elimination of some other type of music.

A hint as to what this music might have been is revealed in Andersen's letter of July 17, 1842. After commenting on the unexpected delay of the *Agnete og Havmanden* premiere, Andersen asks Gade to write to the director of the theater explaining that he „vil fuldende en Ouverture til Stykket.“ But the final score contains no overture. Thus one is left with the question, could the altered page numbers in the *Agnete og Havmanden* score be evidence of Gade's failed attempt to compose an overture?²¹

Such a conclusion appears logical when we consider the evolution of *Agnete og Havmanden*. From the beginning Gade appears to have struggled with the task of creating a large programmatic composition. His first project, an overture, never progressed beyond preliminary sketches. In his second project, a symphony, Gade added choirs and texts as a means of facilitating the musical expression of the program, but to no avail. Finally, after abandoning all plans for a programmatic work, Gade resorted to writing the musical numbers to Andersen's dramatic poem. Andersen was hoping for a premiere in the summer of 1842, but his plans were delayed due to Gade's incomplete overture. When the dramatic poem finally did appear in April 1843, no overture was included. Like the other programmatic works, Gade's second *Agnete og Havmanden* overture never came to fruition.

Andersen and Gade spent many months preparing for the premiere of *Agnete og Havmanden*. Despite these efforts the production itself was very short-lived —

19. The Royal Library: Music collection, C II 108.

20. The Royal Library: Manuscript Department, Royal Theater's Prompt Book collection no. 17. Although the prompt book's copyist has not yet been identified, both Andersen and Gade appear to have entered corrections. The text for *Agnete og Havmanden* was first submitted to the Royal Theater on September 2, 1842 (Annotated edition of H.C. Andersen, *Mit Livs Eventyr*, Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1951, Vol. II, p 100).

21. Although many would correctly argue that the inclusion of a full overture would require more space than the mere three pages missing from Gade's *Agnete og Havmanden* score — a short instrumental introduction could have been included in Gade's earliest version of the dramatic poem.

only two performances.²² According to the contemporary critic J.L. Heiberg, *Agnete og Havmanden* failed for various reasons:

At Sagen ikke er blevet bedre, men snarere værre ved det Udtog af Digtet, som man har transporteret umiddelbart fra Bogladen op paa Scenen, forstaaer sig af sig selv. Men herved maa erindres – hvad allerede offentlig er bemærket – at Forfatteren ikke af egen Drift har bestemt sig til at bringe sit Arbejde paa Scenen, men anmodet derom af en Skuespiller, som var i Forlegenhed med sin Sommerforestilling. Rigtignok havde det været bedre, om hans Tilbøielighed til at gjøre en Tjeneste ikke havde forledet ham til at opoffre sig selv, og om Componisten Hr. Gade ikke havde ødslet sin characteristiske, følelsesfulde Musik paa et Arbejde, hvorom det var saa let at forudsige, at det ikke kunde bære den.²³

Edvard Collin expressed a similar opinion about the dramatic poem in a letter to Andersen dated April 23, 1843. Like Heiberg, Collin appears to have found Gade's music the most redeemable part of the production:

Det falder altid i min Lod at skrive Dem til om de af Deres Arbejder, som De ingen Glæde har af. Dette er nu ogsaa Tilfældet med Agn[ete; den] gik første Gang i Torsdags d. 20de, . . . Baade Gottlieb og jeg havde hele Tiden Forudfølelsen af denne Skjebne; en forunderlig Kjølighed og Kjedsommelighed var udbredt over det Hele. Fru Heibergs Spil behagede vist Adskillige; mig og mange Andre mishagede det; Hansen var jevn, Holst meget god. Arrangementet maadeligt, i Slutningen endog fabelagtigt slet; Scenen hvor Fiskeren begraver Agnete og sætter et Kors, som han har liggende færdigt, var saa dumt arrangeret, at jeg hvert Øieblik ventede at høre Latteren fra den villige Pøbel. – Musiken var yndig og lader intet tilbage at ønske.²⁴

After the failure of *Agnete og Havmanden*, Andersen abandoned the project completely and relinquished all hopes of eventual publication.²⁵ Gade, on the other hand, maintained an interest in the work and eventually arranged six of its songs for voice and piano. This song set, entitled *Sange af Agnete og Havmanden*, *opus 3*, was dedicated to A.P. Berggreen and published in 1845 by C.C. Lose & Olsen (see table 3).

22. April 20 and May 2, 1843.

23. Johan Ludwig Heiberg, *Intelligensblade*, no. 30 (1843).

24. Cited from *H.C. Andersens brevveksling med Edvard og Henriette Collin*, Copenhagen: Levin & Munkgaards Forlag, 1933, Vol. 1, p. 339-40.

25. In a letter to Edvard Collin dated November 27, 1843 Andersen states: „Agnete er for evigt skrinlagt.“ Cited from *H.C. Andersens brevveksling med Edvard og Henriette Collin*, p. 347.

TABLE 3: SANGE AF AGNETE OG HAVMANDEN, OP. 3.

1. Song of Hemming the Minstrel
„Der voxed' et Træ“
2. Choir of Mermaids
„Jeg veed et Slot“
3. Agnete's Lullabye
„Sol deroppe ganger under Lide“
4. Choir of Huntsmen
„Trara! Trara! Trara!“
5. Ballad about Agnete and the Merman
„Agnete var elsket“
6. The Fisherboy's Ballad
„Lærken synger sin Morgensang“

Six years after the publication of *Sange af Agnete og Havmanden*, op. 3, Gade wrote a choral piece entitled *Agnete og Havfruerne*. This work, composed for soprano, women's choir and orchestra, contains revised versions of two songs from *Agnete og Havmanden* („Jeg ved et Slot“ and „Sol deroppe ganger under Lide“). Performed for the first time in 1858 by Copenhagen's Musikforeningen, *Agnete og Havfruerne* was later arranged for voice and piano and then published posthumously in 1891.²⁶

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Niels W. Gades „Agnete og Havmanden“: Weiteres Quellenmaterial und eine neue Theorie bezüglich der Entstehungsgeschichte des Werkes (Zweiter Teil: Die Verwirklichung von op. 3 von der Konzertouvertüre bis zur Symphonie und der dramatischen Dichtung)

Die Verfasserin unternimmt, die Entwicklung von *Agnete og Havmanden* von der Konzertouvertüre bis zur Symphonie und der dramatischen Dichtung bei Niels W. Gade zu verfolgen. Im besonderen werden Gades literarische Quellen, Jens Baggesens *Agnete fra Holmegaard* und Hans Christian Andersens *Agnete og Havmanden*, einer Untersuchung unterzogen. Es wird konkludiert, daß es Gade, obwohl er sich jahrelang für das Sujet „Agnete und der Wassergeist“ interessierte, nie gelang, ein programmatisches Orchesterstück über die Sage zu vollenden.

Deutsche Übersetzung: Jan Maegaard

26. Dan Fog, *Niels W. Gade – Katalog*, Copenhagen: Dan Fog, 1986, p. 12-13.

Septbr. 1838
Crotchenborg

Moderato

Agnete og Havmanden

Clar.

pp *mf*

Cello

Alt

Viol

dim *p*

Clar. solo

Fl.

dim. *f* *mf*

col. Viol: Cor:

Clar. solo

Viol.

Fag.

Cello

Clar. solo

Handwritten musical score for Ex. 2, first system. The score is in G major (one sharp) and 2/4 time. It features a piano accompaniment with a treble and bass staff. The piano part includes a 'con esph.' (con esp.) marking. The woodwind section includes a Flute (Fl.) with a 'dim.' (diminuendo) marking, a Clarinet (Clar.), and a Trombone (Tromb.). The string section includes Violoncelli (Vclli) and Trombe (Tromb.). The score is written in a cursive, handwritten style.

Ex. 2

Handwritten musical score for Ex. 3. The score is in G major (one sharp) and 2/4 time. It features a piano accompaniment with a treble and bass staff. The piano part includes a 'Cello' and 'C. Bar.' (Cello Baritone) section. The woodwind section includes a Clarinet (Clar.), a Trombone (Tromb.), and a Cor (Cor). The string section includes Violonci (Violonci). The score is written in a cursive, handwritten style. The piano part includes a 'Cello' and 'C. Bar.' section. The woodwind section includes a Clarinet (Clar.), a Trombone (Tromb.), and a Cor (Cor). The string section includes Violonci (Violonci). The score is written in a cursive, handwritten style.

Ex. 3

Fl. Ob.

agitato

dim

Trombe

Timp.

T

6/4

Ex. 4

Clar.

Viol 2da

Violone

Viol pmi divisi

plizz Tag

7

7

6

a -

Ex. 5