

Narrating Place and Perspective: Frederick Delius and Ibsen's *Paa vidderne*

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Abstract

Frederick Delius' two settings of Ibsen's poem *Paa Vidderne* (On the Heights) are early compositions; they have received relatively little attention from scholars and have rarely been performed. They are however interesting to consider in relation both to the ideology explored in the poem, and to the landscape in which they are set. Delius had both personal experience of and a deeply held affection for this landscape. Considering the expression of locale in these compositions as experience of place and of subjective perspective adds to the understanding of landscape as both a generic and specific entity, and the role(s) it plays in Delius' musical narrations. The article offers a detailed musicological reading of the two compositions, revealing the symbolic and phenomenological aspects of experience of place that are encoded in the music.

Keywords

Frederick Delius, *Paa Vidderne*, landscape, music in literature, place in literature

Nu er jeg stålsat, jeg følger det bud,
der byder i højden at vandre!
Mit lavlandsliv har jeg levet ud;
heroppe på vidden er frihed og Gud,
dernede famler de andre.
(*Paa vidderne* IX, Ibsen 1899: 356)

(Now I am steeled, I embrace the command
That dictates but a life up above.
My life in the valley I've left behind;
Up here on the heights there is freedom and God,
Down below all others are stumbling.)¹

Henrik Ibsen's *Paa vidderne*² is an epically structured poem in nine parts that narrates the 'I's withdrawal into a mountain-scape, leaving behind village and mother and girl. As the seasons pass through their annual cycle the narrator gradually hardens himself until he has no desire, indeed no possibility of returning to life 'below', and in the last stanza (above), he declares himself finally freed of any yearnings for valley life, its conventions and its compromises. As the unnamed hunter from the south who has occasionally visited him to help him find this new perspective makes his last appearance, the 'I' now dismisses his teacher too:

Nej, nu er jeg mand for at hjælpe mig selv,
men tak for din gode mening;
det flommer ej længer i årens elv,
og jeg tror jeg mærker i bringens hvælv
alleslags tegn til forstening.
(Ibsen 1899: 355)

(No, now I have learnt how to help myself
But thanks all the same for the thought.
The blood flows no longer in my river of life
And I think I discern in the crypt of my heart
All kinds of signs of entombment.)

An allegorical reading of the solitary mountain existence as the conditions for artistic integrity is close at hand, but Ibsen followed this poem with *Terje Vigen* (1862) where it is precisely in compromises made with and around others that the tensions any such interaction brings are resolved, a tension which *Paa vidderne* flees from rather than tackles, and it remains ultimately impossible to say whether *Paa vidderne* is to be read as an endorsement and acceptance of such separateness and isolation, or a critique of the same (see Ystad 1991; Northam 1986).

Between 1888 and 1892, the English-born composer Frederick Delius, recently returned from Florida and at that point studying in Leipzig and living in Paris, twice set *Paa vidderne* to music. The first setting was a melodrama with the complete text spoken above an orchestral accompaniment (1888), and the second a symphonic poem without any textual presence (1890-92). He was never to hear the first setting: it was not performed until the Norwegian broadcasting company NRK recorded it and subsequently broadcast it with accompanying footage of Norwegian landscape scenes in 1981. The second became the first composition of his to be publicly performed, under Ivor Holter in a concert in Oslo (then Kristiania) in 1891.³ Though the settings differ in their musical format, they both contain expressions and ideas that can be traced through to later compositions, in particularly those that relate in some way to the Norwegian mountainscape. It is these expressions and ideas, and how they approach, interpret and comment on the mountains and the various ideologies woven around them, that are the main focus of this article.

Delius in Norway

Delius had first come across Norway in 1882, on his way home from a business trip to Sweden on which his wool-merchant father had sent him, and he seems to have fallen instantly in love with both the country and its landscape. Five years later he returned for his first proper hike among the mountains, a primary focus and location for his Norwegian affections from this point on. His diary from this trip (transcribed and published as Appendix III in Carley, 1983) gives an indication

of itinerary, routes and experiences, and as he explored 'Hardanger Vidde' and stayed in hotels 'crammed with English people' (July 22nd; Carley 1983: 386), Delius seems to have joined the by then established crowd of foreign visitors that had been, and who still were very much part of, the on-going 'discovery' of Norway and its mountains.

Delius' response to the landscape in his 1887 diary echoes many of the travel accounts of the period, combining an appreciation of the culture in which it exists based primarily on novelty and exoticism, with a relationship to the landscape itself dominated by a poetic gaze. Delius records one of the nights as:

Night glorious – full moon. To the left the glowing of the already set sun, to the right the black rocks of the fjord casting immense shadows. The whole scene never to be forgotten. I never remember a scene so beautiful in light & shade. This is what I came to see in Norway. (Aug 3rd, 1887, at Dale; Carley 1983: 389)

These views seem in themselves to correspond to much of what Delius was seeking from the landscape, but he relates physical experiences and cultural encounters with no less enthusiasm (he managed, for example, to get himself invited to a local wedding on his first day there, and made extensive notes on various customs he witnessed). As he describes his first proper ascent he lists the physiological features of the mountain alongside his own physical experience of them, an experience that involves both sight and sensation. He narrates both his ascent and descent, moving effortlessly between descriptions of the landscape and the effect it has on him, and between stating concrete reality and poetic elaboration. It is worth quoting at length:

Weather now very cloudy & the high mountains all hidden by mist. I have to cross the Ulvenaase, more than 3300 ft high, & prepare for rather a wet time. Excessively steep, & after the last *gaard* is passed, scenery becomes more weird & rough. The view down towards Etne is magnificent. The sun for a moment flashes a few rays over the long valley. I, from amongst the

clouds, look now on almost a fairylike scene – the light & shade effects I never saw before, but only for a few minutes, & then all is again black & misty, & I am getting wet through, with a cold wind sweeping down the mountain. At last I am at the top. Oh! how cold and bleak. A sheep now & again runs away, frightened. Now I descend, dripping wet & in a short time come, so to speak, out of the clouds, & have a magnificent view of Skånevik fjord, all coloured deep blue, for the sun is shining there. In a few moments I have come from winter to summer – the contrast is admirable. I pass a lovely little *foss*, and then a *gaard* or 2, & at length Skånevik begins. Lovely little place, on the slope towards the fjord, beautifully cultivated *gaards* in number, & here & there a *Saeter* in sight – high up amongst the hills to the right. (20th July 1887; Carley 1983: 385-386)

This emphasis on the Norwegian mountain-scape as an experience that was both physical and psychological was not unique to Delius. The so called discovery of these ‘northern Alps’ by both foreign and domestic tourists and travellers had been underway since the end of the eighteenth century, and the significance and reverence gradually afforded the mountain areas (both in concrete terms and in a metaphorical sense) was constructed by a many-layered conglomerate of (European) Romantic re-evaluation of Nature in general and mountains in particular, scientific advances (and a desire for these), and artistic emphasis. It was also a period in which Norway worried about and worked towards a unified national community and a self-definition which would help demarcate it from its historically (and to some extent still) dominating neighbours. As would happen in Sweden later in the century and at the beginning of the next, discovery of the landscape as a national resource and something with which to achieve national specificity gradually moved the rhetoric around the landscape and the practical approaches to it into a realm of extensive significance. The very early establishment of a tourist organisation is one example of this, and the extract below from the year book of 1869 of Den norske turistforening (the Norwegian Tourist Association) reveals a similar emphasis to the one we find in Delius’ diary on the

landscape as being both a physical sensation (resulting in physical and mental well-being) and an object to gaze at:

Det vidtlöftige Alpelandskab omkring Söerne Bygdin, Gjende of Tyen har allerede længe været et Sted, hvor Turisterne have søgt hen for at indsuge den rene Fjeldluft. Det bliver dem en Lidenskab, hvis Tillfredsstillelse lønner dem for al Möie, at vandra om blandt Snefonnerne og de rislende klare Bække, at mætte sitt Öie ved Fjernsynet fra de höie Tinder, at føle sin ubundne Frihed paa de store Vidder og paa samme Tid sin Lidenhed ved Siden af den imponerende Natur. (Den norske Turistforening 1869: 72)

(The expansive Alp landscape around the lakes Bygdin, Gjende and Tyen has already long been a place where the tourists have come to breathe the clean mountain air. [...] It has become a persistent yearning in them [...] to walk among the snowy mountain sides and the burbling clear streams, to feast their eye on the view from the high peaks, to feel their unbound freedom on the vast vidder and at the same time their smallness next to all this imposing Nature.)

Apart from the Romanticising of the landscape this type of text represents, it also reveals a strong emphasis on 'sensing' the landscape: the yearning is for being within it, seeing it and experiencing it. As such it relates to a phenomenological approach to landscapes, one that, as Rose and Wylie define it, is primarily interested in 'the relationship between seer and seen itself; a relationship that is understood as involved, practical and engaged' (Rose & Wylie, 2011: 222); that is, one that expects an interpretation of any landscape to depend on direct experience of it. Experiences, and resulting interpretations and approaches, can however even within this framework contain significant variants, depending on what kind of involvement, according to whose practise, and engagement to what aim. As Delius extends his experiences of the mountain-scape of Norway his own approach and relationship with the landscape also evolves.

Two years after his hike in Hardanger, Delius returned for his second immersion in this mountain-scape. The years in between had been spent mainly in Leipzig and its Conservatory, where Delius seems to have made less of its formal training (he never since acknowledged any debt to either his teachers or his studies) and more of the friendships and contacts he made while there. Having already acquired several close friends among the Leipzig circle of Norwegian musicians and composers during his first year, during his second year there he was introduced to and became friends with Edvard Grieg. As he returned to Norway in 1889, he did so with much more extensive knowledge of both the country itself and its culture (and cultural rhetoric) than two years previously, and in the company not of other foreign visitors but with Grieg and Christian Sinding (Norwegian composer, 1856-1941, friend of both Grieg and Delius, see Rugstad 1998), men who thought of the landscape as 'theirs', and in Grieg's case had both extensive experience of the mountains and deeply felt emotional connections to the landscape. The landscape in focus had also shifted – the well-travelled plateaus of Hardangervidda had become the wilder, higher and more challenging mountain-scape of Jotunheimen, then already well underway to being the most revered and rhetorically significant character in the cultural and national narrative created around Norway's mountains (see for example Nyquist 1977, Messel 2008).

In Delius' diary from this second trip (Appendix V, Carley 1983) there is also a change of approach. The long, poetic descriptions of his experiences in 1887 have been reduced to bare details of places, modes of transport and people involved, and shorter summaries of activities undertaken. Compared to the first ascent in 1887, rendered above over nearly two hundred words, the walks and ascents here only earn brief descriptions: 'Grand march on a vidder' or 'Took a walk at night in the hills. Got very wet.' (in Carley 1983: 398, dates probably 29 July & 6 Aug 1891).

In August 1888, while discussing plans for their hike the following year, Delius wrote to Grieg of how glad he would be 'to set foot on Norwegian moorland again & to look over the wide distances' (Carley 1983: 23). The experience of the first hike enables a recollection and a developing personal relationship with the landscape in which it is

becoming less a framed and distanced object of a generic touristic gaze, and more of a physical presence with which to engage and from which to draw, and expect, bodily and sensory involvement. This physical engagement does however also take on psychological, and further ideological, dimensions. In June 1889, shortly before setting out, Delius wrote again to Grieg in anticipation that:

For months now our meeting in Glorious Norway has been my be all & end all. How I long once again to wipe all the dust & dirt from my feet, & to set foot on the fresh fragrant moorland! How splendid if we can live for a while in this hut & enjoy something of the uncivilized life. (Carley 1983: 41)

Julian Johnson identifies in Delius an interest in the 'distance between modern civilisation and the ideal of a society living in a pure, unspoilt relation with nature' (Johnson 2008: 3). It is an interest that seems to be present at the outset of Delius' engagement with the Norwegian mountains. In October 1888, while composing the first version of *Paa Vidderne* far away from Norway (in the seaside resort of St Malo), he writes for example (again to Grieg) that:

Streets & smoke distort our ideas. One must breathe pure air before one can think purely. I feel so well in mind and body when nature is beautiful. (Carley 1983: 25)

The reality of engaging with the Norwegian mountain-scape for Delius thus goes beyond seeing it just as a space or a place to objectify. The characteristics and possibilities the mountains contain evolve into representing more fundamental ideas around the role of landscape(s) and how we relate to them, specifically as oppositions to what constitutes and conditions 'civilised life'. The distance Delius sees between the conditions of modern civilisation and the clarity and purity of thought enabled by proximity to Nature could also be said to exist within the narrator's negotiations in Ibsen's poem between his 'free' mountain existence and the 'civilised' restricted life he leaves behind in the valley. These ideas are also to be found in the 'purer',

unconditional relationship with the mountain-scape which the 'I' seeks to achieve, in the attempt to recover what Johnson calls a 'lost or absent wholeness' (Johnson 2008: 3).

Place and Experience: The Melodrama

Delius' first setting of *Paa Vidderne*, the melodrama, was composed between Delius' two journeys into the mountainscape discussed above. The format of a melodrama, in which the poem is to be spoken to orchestral accompaniment, was at the time not entirely uncommon, but it is in itself probably a contributing factor to why Delius never pushed for either performance or publication. When Delius sent the finished manuscript to Grieg, the older composer told him it would never work, as he thought balance between the orchestra and the voice part would (in an era before amplification) be impossible to achieve. Delius himself seems to have had similar concerns (seen not least in a note he added in the manuscript for the orchestra to always try to balance the speaker), and his ambiguity is reflected in the comment he made to Grieg that he had written 'the whole thing so that I could easily write a voice part for it' (December 1888, in Carley 1983: 31). Although another version was never attempted, the comment indicates a close link between the orchestral accompaniment and the text. This is underlined further by the care which Delius evidently took in placing the words in the manuscript at precise moments to match the musical line and development.⁴

The melodrama was written the year after Delius' first proper experience of the Norwegian mountains and can be regarded as a response both to the physical impressions (now memorised and distant) and the ideological framing they contribute to in Ibsen's poem. It includes the complete nine stanzas of the poem; though it should be noted that Delius uses Louis Passarge's German translation rather than Ibsen's Norwegian original for his setting – Delius' fluency, or lack thereof, in Norwegian has never been fully established, but at this early stage of his Norwegian connections it would be fair to assume that he was more comfortable in German. This makes the melodrama primarily a reactive response to the text, shaped and placed by Delius'

own memories of its locale.

The opening of the melodrama is an upward figure of dotted quavers alternating between Eb- and Bb-major chords (the dominant of the initial key of Ab-major, and the dominant to Bb), which after one bar turns around and comes back down again (Figure 1a). The piece could in a sense thus be said to go nowhere in the those first two bars; instead they function mainly as an announcement of the narrator and the journey he is about to set out on, expressing the same energy and optimism with which he is imbued. The physical ‘shape’ of the music in these two bars, with the lead instruments climbing two octaves before coming back down, could also be seen to imitate the contours of a mountain. Their shape may lead us to a premature, and false, conclusion however: the narrator never does come back down. But as he sets out he is not aware of his fate, and these first two assertive bars therefore serve mainly to establish an initial mood and a locale for the narrative to unfold within. Throughout, the melodrama continues to be primarily concerned with relating the narrative progression as it unfolds, refraining from making any comments outside of what the ‘I’ encounters - physically, emotionally and spatially (though as the music accumulates its own ‘memories’ of those experiences it will later on be as capable as is the text of looking back and reminiscing).

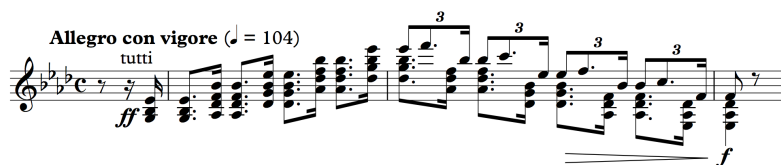


Figure 1a

‘Den Weg hinauf’

The first substantial theme of the melodrama comes in bar 24 (though a fragmented pre-echo of it can be heard already in bar 6) when the narrator sets out on the path that will take him up into the mountains, in the German translation rendered as ‘den Weg hinauf’ (‘the path upwards’) (Figure 1b). The theme is an eight-bar long slow, yearning

melody and although it to some extent imitates that physical shape of ascent and descent of the first two bars, more significant is the way the melodic material effects an emplacement for the poem and relates it to a specific locale. The theme is scored for solo viola in this first appearance and has in its essential form much in common with traditional folk melodies from Norway (rhythmic aspects, melodic scope, mood etc.). Such a sonority of a 'local' pastoralism, achieved through tonal and harmonic material as well as instrumentation is to return at various points throughout the melodrama. The theme is therefore not a single or isolated instance, but significant for understanding how the melodrama attempts to locate its narration.



Figure 1b

Apart from being generically recognisable as of folk-like character, the theme also has other connotations that relate it to this specific locale. We can find, for example, closely related characteristics in a main theme of an earlier composition that is also inspired by these mountain-scapes, 'Erinnerung an der Norwegischen Alpen' ('Reminiscences of the Norwegian Alps') by the Swedish composer Franz Berwald. This earlier orchestral tone poem was composed in Vienna by someone whose own experiences of (and therefore ability to remember) the Norwegian mountains was scant and in all likelihood at least fifteen years past. Yet its title, and some of its musical material, indicates a connection with, at the very least, an idea of a specific locale for both the composer and his audience to which this type of sonority is related. It is very unlikely that Delius would have heard this tone poem, so some type of transfer between them is therefore not suggested here. Rather, their shared musical expression, in both melodic shape, sonority and employment as central indicators of mood, illustrates the ability of

particular melodic (and harmonic) material to effect connotations with place, in this case the Norwegian mountains.

The localisation Delius seeks with the theme to 'Den Weg hinauf' is further underscored by some sketches he made in a notebook he carried on his hikes in 1887 and 1889, where tunes and fragments of similar melodic shape, structure and mood can be found. The first page of the notebook, dated 18 July 1887 (when Delius according to his diary was travelling between Stavanger and Sandeid), contains a fully harmonised notation of a tune of very similar character to 'den Weg hinauf'. Above it, indicating this and the four further notations that follow, Delius has written *Norske wiser* ('Norwegian songs'; see Figure 3). It seems difficult to be sure whether these are transcriptions of music that Delius had come across while on his hikes, or whether they are independent, made-up sketches (see Threlfall 1994: 122), but they relate to a specific locale through name and place of notation, as well as through modality and melodic-harmonic characteristics. Threlfall hears a 'parentage' of Grieg's op.17, *25 norske folkeviser og danse* (25 Norwegian Folksongs and Dances, 1869) in the first tune. Relating it to a composer with such established (if not necessarily simple) connections with a specific locale provides another possibility for underlining the relationship of the musical material with a defined culture and geographical specificity. Other sketches made in this notebook that explore similar musical characteristics (e.g. a melodic shape with a primary interval of a fourth, an upward motion and turning point on the octave, mood and tempo), have definite or suggested titles that relate to travels up into the mountains – e.g. 'Till fjeldet maa jeg flytte' (I Must Move to the Mountain), 'Til Saetern' (To the Mountain Dwelling) – and there is also a complete setting of another Ibsen poem ('Vuggesang', or Cradle Song, never published). Taken together they underline a clear connectivity between Delius' experience of 'being' in the mountain-scape, the various cultural and artistic expressions relating to that 'scape', and Delius' musical response(s).

Apart from the connotations of place the theme to 'den Weg hinauf' provides, the melodrama narrates a locale through a physicality in the music that expresses sensitised experiences. The theme discussed mimics a degree of ambivalence about the path taken, the effort

required to tread it (in the way the musical line ‘climbs’ section by section), and the melancholy over what is being left behind (expressed through sonority and mood). As we arrive at higher altitudes however, we also hear the flashes of sunlight when the view comes ‘out of the clouds’ (as Delius expressed it in his diary) and rewards the ascent. Twice in the first section Delius illustrates the joyous moments the narrator spends with his beloved (who accompanies him in the first stanza) with a luscious, long-lined sweeping theme that carries both narrator and listener ‘from winter to summer’ and where the ‘magnificent views’ seem to spread out before us. Later in Part I the music comes to a sudden halt on trembling strings as the narration hears a sound: ‘som det sang i haug, som elverfolk og nøk og draug indunder løvet lo’ (Ibsen 1899: 339) (a strange, unearthly laughter from deep within the shadows of the haunted forest, trans. Carley 2000). Further on in parts V and IX, when the narrator is watching life in the village from his mountain position, we ‘hear’ the village in church bells and a cuckoo imitation (though there is actually no cuckoo in the poem – Delius is making a non-textual comment here).

And in Part II, as the narrator, still not very far from the valley, and still hesitant, looks out over the landscape,⁵ he is again accompanied by the first theme, with all its references and connotations to the place of the narrative. Here the theme is however subtly tweaked, as Delius echoes the narrator’s journey towards independence in his own development of the musical material. As the narrator finally gains the courage and determination to strike out the music builds to a climactic moment: high, triumphant strings in repeated (linear) triplet figures over a horn figure that cascades up and down in dotted rhythms on intervals of fifths and eights, and which seems to rejoice with the narrator at his boldness and courage to take an independent path.

Horns

The horns play a significant role, both in the melodrama and beyond, particularly in how they relate to and evoke the sensations of place and space. The hunter who comes, from an unnamed ‘south’, to help the narrator understand both the conditions and the advantages of

solitary and uncompromising mountain-life, is announced in his first appearance in Part IV by an eight bar-long, evocative horn solo. Solitary, reverberating against only its own sonority, it seems to ring out in a vast, wide-open space – Delius' first (of what would be many) aural imitation and interpretation of the 'wide open spaces', or *vidder*, of the high mountain-landscape through this timbre. Here it connects with the presence the narrator encounters which will convince him of the folly and smallness of life as lived in the village below, and the supremacy of an existence in the higher spheres of the mountain-landscape. This narrative link enables us to hear in Delius' future employment of horns in various roles a continuous engagement with the landscape as both place, experience and condition. The horns also connect with this specific landscape through their links to rural herding traditions and their long use in art music to represent, imitate and comment on these (see for example Rosen 1995: 116-124 and Grimley 2001: 123-141). But Delius' use of horns goes beyond being merely a pastoral reference or imitation, and often functions instead as a dialogue between the music and the landscape, and as comment on the relationship between them.

This can be exemplified by their role in the melodrama. One of the most frequent Delian musical figures, which Christopher Palmer has called one of his 'most easily recognisable fingerprints' (Palmer 1976: 36) and 'the Delian trademark par excellence' (55) is an upward triplet figure in quavers, often followed by a minim and a 'tail' of a last crotchet or quaver. The essentials of this figure (though with wide variation in tonal and to some extent rhythmic pattern), occur in abundance throughout Delius' compositions, and it appears, for the first time in the entire oeuvre, in bar 14 of the melodrama (Figure 1c). Palmer identifies this 'frequently pentatonic' triplet figuration as 'evidently folk-song derived' and 'a model which was undoubtedly Grieg' (Palmer 1976: 55),⁶ again underlining its connectedness with a specific locale. At the first presentation of this 'motif' in the melodrama, it is played by the pastoral-sounding cor anglais (English horn, of the oboe family), but it will recur in many shapes and uses by the entire orchestra, both here and in subsequent pieces. The horns are however assigned a prominent use of it in the melodrama as they repeatedly emerge

out of the orchestral texture to ‘announce’ it in two- or three part harmony. The frequent withdrawal of other textures in these instances seems to effect a domination of an extended and otherwise empty space, and the re-occurrences, together with the repetitions inherent in the figure itself, create echoes both within the phrase and across the melodrama (and beyond). The resonance with which the horns imbue the echoes evoke, again, vast spatial distances, and it is these cyclical echoes over wide open spaces that the melodrama leaves us with at its end. As the narrator declares his final conviction to give himself to the mountains, the horns dominate the final eighteen bars, first exclaiming in triumph-like fanfares before coming back to the triplet figure, repeating it, elongating it and in a *morendo* to *ppp* marking letting it slowly dissipate into the distance (Figure 1d).



Figure 1c



Figure 1d

Place and Perspective: The Symphonic Poem

Where the melodrama sets out together with the narrator to experience and evaluate the journey with him, the symphonic poem narrates that same journey from the perspective of where it ultimately takes us. In its more concentrated form (around fifteen minutes to the melodrama's forty) it hints at the aspects and characteristics of place,

but its narration is of a different type to the melodrama's. Originally labelled 'Concert overture', its subtitle presents it as 'after' Ibsen's poem. This 'after' (or 'nach' in the original German) might suggest a potentially less immediate relationship with the poem, but at closer reading it will become apparent that it has intimate connections both with the setting that preceded it and with subsequent compositions, and that it, together with these, forms an evolving dialogue with the poem, its aesthetics, and its ideologies.

The opening of the symphonic poem is a two-bar phrase which seems closely related both to the theme to 'den Weg hinauf' in the melodrama, and to a sketch made during the 1889 hike with Grieg and Sinding (Figure 2a). The notebook sketch is a full 97 bars long with partial orchestration but not named in any way beyond the date and the place ('August 1889. Leirungs Hytte, Jotunheim').⁷ Transferred with only marginal alteration to the opening of the symphonic poem, it simplifies the theme from the melodrama rhythmically but mirrors much of its melodic span and character. Its position gives it a more prominent role however, and rhythmically flattened and darkened, it seems a more solemn version, with a much lower sonority than in the melodrama, underscored and enhanced by the accompanying long tremolo in the timpani. The remark Thomas Bertonneau makes about the 'low grumbings' in cello and double bass in the opening of the later tone poem *Paris (Nocturne): Song of a Great City*, as conjuring not so much the city, but 'rather the Nietzschean "earth" beneath' (Bertonneau, n.d.: 4) might be applied to this opening passage too. The first two bars might be heard to 'emerge' from the landscape of its setting: in the inspiration carried through from Delius' own experience of it, and the simulated physicality of coming from deep within its foundations.⁸

The opening theme brings across some of the melancholy it expressed in the melodrama, but its 'unfinished' appearance (it ends on an upward phrase, without coming back down again and completing the arch) leaves the continuation open. With a secure tonality and steady rhythmical shape it might be taken for a statement of openness and possibilities to come, though the way it lets its last note 'hang' suspended also intimates a question. It thereby sets a

scene for exploration, for testing and for searching, while hinting at its own interpretation already in the opening bars.

The completion of the arch comes from the woodwind and brass chords that respond to the opening theme, and which for each response moves the tonality upwards while also increasing both speed and intensity so that, after only twelve bars, the piece lands in F#-major (having started in e-minor) and a forte marking. Here a new short figure (again a two-bar phrase) is played out by the lower strings and bassoons which resembles the one with which the melodrama opened: a muscular, energetic line which climbs nearly two octaves before turning around and coming back down (Figure 2b). The physical shape here too resembles a 'peak', but in this appearance it comes without the sunny, assured jollity it brought the melodrama. Rather, it seems to tangibly imitate the physical effort involved in an ascent as the lower ranged instruments reach for their higher registers with muscular intensity. As the string chords above them shift from F#-major on the 'way up', to e-minor on the way down, the passage seems to colour this particular reading of both poem and mountain experiences with shades of uncertainty and potential challenges.

The musical score for Figure 2a consists of four staves. The top staff is for Wind & Brass, with parts for Hns., Tbn., and Tuba. The second staff is for Timp. (Timpani). The third staff is for Strings, with a 'div.' (divisi) marking. The fourth staff is a combined staff for W.W. + Hns. (Woodwind and Horns). The score is in 2/4 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The Wind & Brass staff starts with a half note chord in the first bar, followed by a half rest in the second bar, and then a half note chord in the third bar. The Tbn. part has a half note chord in the first bar, a half rest in the second bar, and a half note chord in the third bar. The Tuba part has a half note chord in the first bar, a half rest in the second bar, and a half note chord in the third bar. The Timp. staff has a half note chord in the first bar, a half rest in the second bar, and a half note chord in the third bar. The Strings staff has a half note chord in the first bar, a half rest in the second bar, and a half note chord in the third bar. The W.W. + Hns. staff has a half note chord in the first bar, a half rest in the second bar, and a half note chord in the third bar.

Figure 2a



Figure 2b

After these two initial passages the music gradually gains momentum and intensity. A falling, often chromatic, 'slide' down in quavers is passed around the upper strings and woods (mostly), challenged simultaneously by phrases from brass and lower strings that move steadily upwards on 'marching' crotchet beats. The ascent is here clearly in progress, not least since all phrases gradually shift upwards harmonically, until the full orchestra arrives in bars 29-30 on a unified dotted rhythmical figure of triumphant and victorious character. This expression of assertiveness and triumph through a distinct dotted rhythm will return throughout the piece in different places, and is itself clearly borrowed from previous musical use to similar effect (compare for example the opening bars of Wagner's 'Here comes the bride' from *Lohengrin*).

But here this tutti passage functions more as a prelude, or pre-call, to the bars that follow. At bar 33, Delius climaxes the opening section with a 'con tutta forza' (with all force) triple forte in a chromatically falling, thrice-repeated figure of a crotchet followed by a dotted quaver to semi-quaver, concluding in a slow triplet before the pattern is repeated (Figure 2c). From the powerful 'summit', this two-bar figure perpetually repeats, forming a very convincing descent, until it disappears into the low registers and by 'smorzando e rallentando' gradually dissipates. The figure is heard again later on, when Delius effects an extensive repeat of the opening section, but more significantly, it also appears in the very last bars of the concluding section of the piece. Here, however, the downward motion is interrupted in its fourth bar, and instead the theme turns back up again, and stays there, just as Ibsen's narrator in his final conclusion decides to stay on the mountain.



Figure 2c

What makes this musical figure particularly interesting is the way Delius uses it in a later composition. A very close reincarnation can be found in what has been regarded as one of his most profound compositions and his 'grandest project' (Payne 2006: 164), *Mass of Life* (1904-05). In this Delius sets a selection of eleven passages from Nietzsche's *Also sprach Zarathustra* (1885) for full orchestra, four soloists and double choir, dividing the passages into two parts with an instrumental interlude separating them. One of the most explosive sections of the mass is the opening of Part II, in which Delius sets texts from the very last part of *Zarathustra* (Das Zeichen, 'The Sign'): 'Herauf du grosser Mittag!' (Rise thou great noon!).⁹ Here Zarathustra has reached the end of his travels and his conclusions: of the need for absolute individuality, of the damaging conditions of collectivity and life in villages and valleys, and of the futility of trying to teach others this truth. As he returns to the mountains from his (failed) descent into the village, he declares:

Mit seligen Nüstern atme ich wieder Berges-Freiheit! Erlöst ist endlich meine Nase vom Geruch alles Menschenwesens!

(With blessed nostrils do I again breathe mountain-freedom.
Freed at last is my nose from the smell of all human hubbub!)
(translation Common 2008)

In the *Mass*, when the double-chorus hurls out this resounding resolution, 'like a sudden storm at sea, [...] extolling the freedom of Man's prime of life' (Fenby 1996: 178) to markings of 'con elevazione e vigore' - a marking that appears at significant passages in both Ibsen settings - they do so to an orchestral return to the powerful chromatic

downwards figure from the symphonic poem.

As the narrator in Ibsen's poem watches in horror from afar as his mother's house burns down (Part VIII), the hunter who is with him shows him that by looking under his arched hand, he can see it from a different perspective, and despite his sorrow, he is able to reflect on what a beautiful light the flames create: 'det kan ikke nægtes, der var effekt / i den dobbelte natbelysning!' (Ibsen 1899: 353) (but I cannot deny that the contrast in lighting / had made a wonderful effect! *Paa vidderne*, Part VIII, trans. Carley 2000). This, according to Theodor Jorgenson, is the core of *Paa Vidderne*, that it considers 'only the need of seeing the world at a distance, from under the arched hand' (Jorgenson 1957: 40). It could be argued that it is around this issue of perspective that the symphonic poem engages most closely with Ibsen's text, clarified in the transfer of its most powerful musical expression to Delius' ideologically most profound and intensely charged statement.¹⁰

A further link between the Mass and Delius' engagement and relationship with the Norwegian mountains in his 'mountain-music' can be heard through the horns. The horns in the symphonic poem take on recurrent significant roles. They are the first to initiate the upwards 'marching' phrases in the first section discussed above. In the second section (though the symphonic poem is in one continuous moment and not technically divided into parts) the theme from the first two bars come back (with a slight alteration), and out of it grows related melodic phrases. During the flutes' first elaboration, a descending horn figure of four dry, accented and separated notes can be heard to punctuate the sweet breeziness of the flutes. Once the oboes later have established a shorter variant of the flute explorations into a theme of its own, it is immediately repeated, in forceful dynamics, by the horns. And as a declamatory, triumphant dotted rhythm emerges for the first time as a theme of its own (an upwards leap of a sixth leading to two extended triplets and three concluding accented beats) in the part that follows, its first introduction here too is given to the horns, and again firmly establishing theirs as a prominent and leading voice.

In the Mass, there is one single passage that does not directly render any section from *Zarathustra*: an orchestral interlude Delius

inserted (at a late stage) between the first and the second part. This is not numbered as the other sections, but instead headed 'On the Mountains'. It consists of single horn lines, with on-stage horns being echoed by off-stage counterparts. These horns for the most part avoid third intervals, letting the more 'empty' intervals of fourths and fifths dominate their soundscape and thereby enhancing and evoking a sense of spaciousness that has before been seen to evoke vast empty vistas. Here again Delius' use of horns and their specific sonority connect aural and spatial, as the mountain-scape that was first explored in the earlier melodrama continues to be part of Delius' perspective. As these horn calls recede, they are directly followed by the choral exclamation of 'Herauf!', and the interlude thus enables us to hear the Mass as closely related to Delius' previous mountain music, and to his own experiences of the landscape as both place and perspective.

As the symphonic poem comes towards its end, it creates increasingly intense and climatic tutti passages which eventually resolve on one last rendition of the 'con tutta forza' figure. But the final voice, here as in the melodrama, goes to the horns and a three part harmonisation of the triplet figure phrase first heard in bar 14 of the earlier setting. In compelling contrast to the melodrama however, both horns and the rest of the orchestra are here in double forte, and the blazing tutti chords that ring out in response to the last horn figure and conclude the setting, function in their fullness and majesty only as a final endorsement of the horns' triumphant last declamation.

Conclusion

I have tried to express the joy and exhilaration one feels in the mountains, and also the loneliness and melancholy of the high solitudes, and the grandeur of the wide, far distances. (Delius, February 1920, in Carley 1988: 228n2)

Song of the High Hills (for orchestra, chorus, and tenor and soprano solo) from 1911, and to which Delius' quote above refers, is usually regarded as his most successful mountain music. The theme that first appeared in the melodrama and the sketches, and then in the

symphonic poem, appears here again in a new development. It comes as a vocal, wordless line by a tenor soloist, marked in the score as 'in the far distance'. Although its occurrence is delayed to a point much further into the piece than in the previous compositions, it nevertheless holds a centrality which makes the connection with the wide open spaces, the 'far distance' of the vidder of the high mountains of Norway, the main narrative. Lowe makes a direct link between the theme in the symphonic poem and in *Song of the High Hills*, describing it in the latter as 'transfigured' as '[it] weaves a gentle counter theme of climbing upwards towards the mystic a capella voices of the hills themselves.' (Lowe 1980: 178) She identifies the theme as having become 'in the interim [...] a Delius personal leit-motif with the possible added psychological connotation of human desire' (ibid.),¹¹ thus underlining the potential of this simple musical expression to carry meaning and ideology, here based on a multi-layered experience of and relationship with the mountain-scape.

Daniel Grimley, in using Henri Bergson's model of human perception¹² on Delius' *Song of the High Hills*, suggests that we might consider Delius' music as concerned 'not so much with a particular place, [e.g.] the Norwegian mountains, as with a state of mind – or, more accurately, the memory of being-in-place' (Grimley n.d.: 15). That various musical responses to the mountainscape contain an act of memorisation of both a physical landscape and a personal experience is an important recognition on Grimley's part. Delius, as so many others, composed all his mountain music away from the actual landscape itself, and the music is therefore inevitably conditioned by the distance (both geographical and temporal) from which the memorisation stems. But when Rachel Lowe suggests that Delius wrote his second setting of *Paa vidderne* in St Malo while 'dreaming nostalgically of the Jotunheim' (Lowe 1976: 177), then we have automatically equated distance and memory with nostalgic reproductions or responses, and allowed a more general nostalgia with which the mountainscape often became imbued to influence how we hear all musical expressions that relate to them. It could in fact be argued that there is very little in Delius' musical responses to the landscape that is nostalgically conditioned, at least in reference to actual place. This is where Grimley's analysis above is

useful – where there are shades of nostalgic tendencies or longings, they refer for Delius to the perspective which the mountainscape effects, to sensations and perceptions that it evokes, and to a perpetual desire to exist within this perspective. But Delius' music is in this sense also both directly connected to and conditioned by place, and, influenced by the personal experience thereof, also functions as embodiment of a physical space and locale.

Despite being a wholly convinced Nietzschean atheist, and despite being of German descent and having lived almost his entire adult life in France while constantly longing for Norway, Delius is buried by St Peter's church in Limpsfield, Surrey, at his own request. This seeming discrepancy points at a complexity within Delius' relationship with both places and geographies as well as a polarity between individuality and human connectivity (in many ways an uncompromising individualist, he let his friends choose the precise place of burial). This suggests multi-layered responses to all these issues both within himself, and consequently, in his artistic expressions. In Ibsen's *Paa vidderne* the temporal and spatial restrictions inherent in a winter spent in the mountains, where the struggle between 'humanity' and aesthetics takes place, very physically limits the choice of actions and influences the narrative progression (see Ystad 1991). In the same way that the landscape thus becomes an integral condition of the text, so too do Delius' settings of the poem make use of the physical experience of the landscape and the moods and sensations it evokes in order to narrate it. For Delius it seems the mountainscape of Norway held both a tangible experience of a specific landscape, a physical, bodily sense of being within this landscape, and a psychological dimension of a state of mind (real or perceived) that can separate civilisation and the 'uncivilised', the village from the *vidder*, the collective from the solitary. Johnson hears this choice between Nature and Civilisation expressed in Delius' music not by 'underlining the dissonance of separation, the pain of its absence' but rather by 'realising' the 'original plenitude [and] making it sound forth in his music as an image of what is otherwise absent' (Johnson 2008: 3-4). From the first narration of place and landscape as experience in the melodrama, to later compositions that continue an exploration of the landscape as perspectival locations of

the mind, and as tangible, physical and sonorous sensations, Delius' music both 'sounds forth' and inhabits the wide open spaces of the high mountains of Norway.

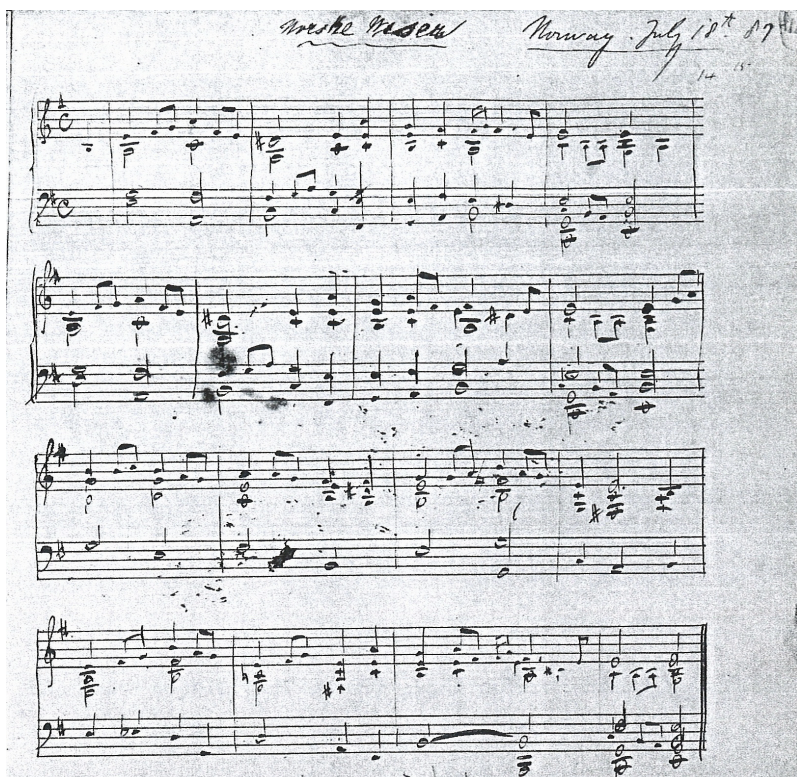


Figure 3: First page of Delius' grey notebook, which he carried on his 1887 and 1889 hikes in Norway. Published in Threlfall, 1994. With kind permission from The Delius Trust.

Endnotes

¹ All translations are my own unless otherwise stated, but with grateful acknowledgement of the translations of Lionel Carley, 'Frederick Delius in Norway,' CD-recording, Classico, 2000, and Theodore Jorgenson, *In the Mountain Wilderness*, 1957, pp.25-36.

² English translations of the title include 'On the heights' and 'In the mountain wilderness', none of which fully captures the very specific landscape invoked by the Norwegian *vidder*. Written 1859, published in *Dikter*, 1871 and later editions.

³ 1892 refers to the date of publishing; we do not know to what extent Delius made any substantial alterations after the first performance, if any.

⁴ See also Foreman, 2000 (CD-notes): 'Recent study by Robert Threlfall has established that Delius' [German] text fits the musical line, and during our recording session, conductor Douglas Bostock, a fluent German speaker, was able to confirm that throughout the score appears a melodic line (not necessarily the top line) which does indeed fit the scansion of the German text.'

⁵ In Delius' setting: 'Ein Blick hoch über Fjord und Tal'; original Norwegian: 'Et syn udover ås og fjord, udover furutop' (Part II). In Carley's translation (2000): 'Just one glance back, over the ridge, down across the pines, and over the fjord'.

⁶ See for example Grieg's *Symphonic Dance*, No.4., Op.64 (1896-97).

⁷ A hut by Lake Gjendin in the heart of the Jotunheimen area, lent them by professor Nicolaysen, a friend of Grieg's.

⁸ A very similar opening of a low, dark bass figure being answered by warmer and brighter upper strings and woodwinds in two-bar sections is employed by Wilhelm Peterson-Berger in his *Lapland Symphony* of 1913-17. Although the two pieces have no direct connection (Peterson-Berger would not have heard Delius' work), Peterson-Berger also composed around a landscape he knew from personal immersions, and the *Lapland Symphony* similarly deals with a mountainscape, here Swedish Lapland, and considers its place and role in the national narrative. Listen to Peterson-Berger, *Symphony No.3*, f-minor, 'Same-Åtnam. Lapland', first movement, or see further discussion in Lindskog 2011.

⁹ 'Only the ray of sunlight on his face finally wakes Zarathustra: the sun and the sky as images of the demand for self-overcoming and the advancement of life, and Zarathustra's continuing "work". This leaves Zarathustra desiring for what is elsewhere called the "Great Midday", the Dionysian new phase when feminine and masculine do not struggle against one another, or alternate cyclically, but form the mode of life whose beauty is overcoming.' (Burnham & Jesinghausen 2010: 181).

¹⁰ Delius' reading of and interest in Nietzsche seems, as far as can be established, to have begun around the time of the 1889 hike; Lowe suggests that it was in the Leirung hut that he came across his works for the first time (Lowe 1976: 176-177). This is a further link, if correct, between Delius' own experience of the mountainscape, the musical explorations around that experience, and the ideologies and approaches represented in Zarathustra.

¹¹ '[O]ne example occurring in the "Maud" song cycle of 1891 and another being the principal theme in the third movement, Allegro con moto, of the 1892 Sonata in B for violin and pianoforte' (Lowe 1980: 178).

¹² Bergson's model is essentially an attempt to understand the interactions between our sensations (fluid) and the 'objects' that evoke them (static) by seeing them as part of a revolving spiral which takes in and moves through perception, memory and experience. See Grimley (n.d.) for a discussion around these concepts and Bergson's essay 'Time and Free Will'.

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