

The Danish poet Holger Drachmann in Marlotte

In her book, M.C. Roesch-Lalance mentions the visit paid by the Dane Drachmann, the *Victor Hugo of the North*, to Armand Point in Marlotte.¹ We present here a few additional details, which will be the subject of a more in-depth article in a future issue of the Bulletin des Amis de Bourron-Marlotte.

Poet, playwright, painter, and journalist, Holger Drachmann is one of the most popular Danish poets, even though much of his work is now forgotten. He was born on October 9, 1846, in Copenhagen to a surgeon in the Danish navy. He died on January 14, 1908, and is buried in Skagen, a famous artists' colony in northern Jutland.

At the age of 20, Drachmann enrolled at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen, where he studied under Wilhelm Marstrand, a student of Eckersberg, and the marine painter C.F. Sørensen. He then spent a large part of his studies on the Danish island of Bornholm, where he drew inspiration from the sea and ships. It was also there that he met his first wife.



Back from fishing by Holger Drachmann, 1902 - Drachmanns Hus, Skagen Denmark

Although painting was a secondary activity for Drachmann, as writing provided his income, it should not be assumed that it was merely a hobby. In fact, around 1880, his second wife noted: "He painted a great deal and never went out without his sketchbook. Painting was a true passion for him, and we never went for a walk without him 'painting.' His favorite subject was the raging sea and the fierce storm."

Drachmann in Marlotte

It wasn't painting that brought Drachmann to Marlotte, but literature. However, it's interesting to place this visit within the broader context of the artist's life. Towards the end of the 1890s, Drachmann, while still with his second wife and their four children, fell in love with a Norwegian cabaret folk singer, Bokken Lasson, sister of Oda, wife of the painter Christian Krohg², and a painter herself. During a trip the couple took to New York in 1898, Drachmann met Soffi Lasson, 27 years his junior and another of Bokken's sisters. In 1900, Bokken and Drachmann returned to Denmark, just as Soffi, who dreamed of becoming a painter, had been accepted to study with Armand Point at



Self portrait by Armand Point, 1882

¹ *Si les maisons racontaient ... Dans l'intimité de la communauté artistique de Bourron-Marlotte* by M-C. Roesch-Lalance, 3rd edition, 2023

² Christian Krohg (1852-1925) - Norwegian painter, illustrator, writer and journalist. He was one of the Scandinavian artists who stayed in Grez-sur-Loing.

his home in Marlotte. It was there that Drachmann met her again and spent several months with Armand Point, working together to translate into French Drachmann's four-act drama, *Vølund Smed*, which recounts the mythological story of Vølund the smith. At that time, Borghild Arnesen, a Norwegian painter and goldsmith, happened to be Armand Point's student and lover. She co-authored this translation, which was published in various issues of the journal *La Plume*.³ As the letter below, written in Marlotte to his publisher, shows, Drachmann was very optimistic about the ongoing translation work and the opportunities it was creating. The two men are already trying to identify a theatre where the play could be performed, in Paris or Brussels, an objective which will not be achieved.

To Jacob Hegel.

*At Mr. Armand Point's
Marlotte (Seine-et-Marne)
France
March 12, 1901*

Dear friend Jakob,

This week, my friend Armand Point was in Paris and read half of Vølund to his literary friends. It was a very moving experience. Since the time of Victor Hugo—they say—such poetry has not been heard in France.

The Minister of Religious Affairs, the Minister of Public Instruction and Fine Arts (a long title) wishes to see me—and this threatens to lead to a banquet given by the young French poets gathered around La Plume.

Articles are being written about me—people are coming here on a pilgrimage—in five or six weeks, Armand and I hope to have finished the translation; then we will look for a theater in Paris—and also in Brussels—and, in short, I am working tirelessly to compete with Bjørnson and Ibsen in the market of "world renown." This might interest you – as well as Nansen – and probably Politiken too...

Yours faithfully,

Holger Drachmann.

The great Danish poet once again expresses his satisfaction with and admiration for Armand Point in a poem written in January 1901, the first two stanzas of which are translated below⁴:

*In dreams, I return to Fontainebleau,
to the village close by the woods:
there, my friend and his loyal band are at work,
on the fringes of society and the law.*

³ *La Plume* is a French literary and artistic review founded in April 1889. *Vølund the blacksmith* was published in it in issues 280 of December 15, 1900, 282 of January 15, 1901, 283 of February 1, 1901, 285 of March 1, 1901, 287 of April 1, 1901, 291 of June 1, 1901, and 294 of July 15, 1901.

⁴ We are thankful to Dr. Terkel Svava Olsen for translating several original documents relevant to this article.

*One work is completed, another is born
beneath ardent, burning gazes:
France was humiliated, wounded, and weary,
but Armand Point, he was not!*

Soon thereafter, it appears that the relationship between Armand Point and Soffi Lasson deteriorated, if we are to believe Georg Brandes's⁵ words in a letter written to Drachmann in 1906: *At your friend Armand Point's, I attended a grand reception with many beautiful people and celebrities. But, placing the utmost importance on preserving Madame Soffi's goodwill, and not wishing to offend her in any way, I will say no more about Armand Point.*

After finalizing their respective divorces, Holger and Soffi married in 1903.



Holger et Soffi Drachmann par S. Kroyer, 1903

⁵ Georg Brandes (1842-1927), a Danish writer who exerted a great influence on Scandinavian literature in the 1870s and beyond.