The Pious, the Obstinate, and the Fickle

Common Readers in 19th-century Norway

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Abstract

In this thesis, I explore the many forms of the practices of reading among common readers in 19th-century Norway. I will argue that various forms of pious readings, which were all concentrated on affirming or obtaining salvation with different understandings of texts and reading dictating their logics, dominated the first half of the century. These readings were founded on different logics. While some readers believed that the words of their texts were intertwined with the world it described, and thereby read to shorten the distance to God, other readers sought to memorise religious texts to make them appear as spontaneous aphorisms revealing parts of the revelations to themselves and others. Both logics constructed and maintained various notions of authority, hierarchies, and performative aspects of reading. The dominance of pious reading was based on what functions the written and the spoken word served according to common readers. While the spoken word functioned as the vessel of news, practical information, and entertainment, the written word was limited to religious texts. This distribution of functions allowed for pious readers to be unaware of other understandings of the role of the written word.

As the century progressed, I argue that the balance of the written and the spoken word was disturbed by public libraries and the advent of mass print. Public libraries were founded and administered by different groups with varying interests but they were all united in a belief that texts could have positive effects on its readers. The libraries therefore became a tool for the expansion of the written word, aimed at the increasing numbers of common readers that encountered them. Parallel to the rise of public libraries, the conditions of print were changing. The bottlenecks that had halted production were opened up, allowing the volume of production to increase and the prices to fall. The gradual cheapening of print steadily increased the functions of the written word and magnified its importance through its proliferation.

The expansion of the importance of the written word precipitated varying responses from common readers. Obstinate readers refused to accept the changes, and adhered to their practices in spite of systematic and individual attempts at expanding their understanding of the written word. Other readers accepted the changing textual landscape and developed practices to make sense of the new texts. This was a process of gradual adaptation, aided by the texts' initial mimicking of the readers' existing practices. By the end of the century, a majority of common readers had turned fickle, disregarding the old boundaries of the written word and reading without any allegiances.

Preface

I would like to thank my two brilliant supervisors, Klaus Nathaus and Kim Christian Priemel. Their invaluable advice, criticism, corrections, and motivation has benefitted this thesis in more ways than I could have ever imagined. I truly could not have wished for better help. I would also like to thank LO for granting me LO's stipend for studies in labour history, and both UiO:Norden and Foreningen Norden for granting me their master thesis stipend for 2020.

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Introduction

A veil of strangeness concealed the reading practices of the "unenlightened" from the understanding of the educated elites in the 19th century. This veil was all but impenetrable for Eilert Sundt, the chairman of *Selskabet for Folkeoplysningens Fremme* (The Association for the Furthering of Enlightenment), when he stopped in the "dirty, intemperate, and superstitious" town of Leirdalen in 1857 or 1858.[1] Inspired by the brothers Grimm, Sundt was on the hunt for fairy tales and folk songs and asked inhabitants of Leirdalen if they would share their stories with him. To Sundt's great surprise and disappointment, the old woman he spoke to first refused to share the lore, stating that it would be "shameful" to talk of such things. Although the people of Leirdalen proved unwilling to give Sundt what he asked for, the educated collector of folklore presented them with a gift from his social world. He convinced them to establish a public library whose texts would "enlighten" its patrons, financially supported by the association he was the chairman of. A year or so later, Sundt received a letter from the parish priest of Leirdalen detailing what happened to the library he had left behind. The priest wrote that after a short while, the readers had become upset with the library, cancelling their subscription of *Folkevennen* (The People's Friend), the yearly magazine published by The Association for the Furthering of Enlightenment, and to which Sundt was a regular contributor. This symbolic action did not quell their discontent. One day, the villagers marched to the priest, announcing that they were going to destroy the library's copy of *Sange og Rim for det norske Folk* by Ole Vig. The priest tried to stop the angry congregation, suggesting that it would be a shame to ruin a perfectly good book. He urged them to consider sending the book back to the supplier, or even sell it in order to afford a different book. However, the villagers proved to be impenetrable to the priest's reasoning. They explained to him that in their view, selling of the book was a half-measure that went against the commandment of benevolence. The book's very existence was an affront to the divine, a challenge that had to be met. Eventually, they burned the book.

The book burners of Leirdalen were not an angry mob dictated by a blind rage. Their action was a calculated response to what they perceived as a challenge to their way of reading and its logic. Sundt and the parish priest considered the burning an act of ignorance and barbarism, but the people of Leirdalen gave Ole Vig's collection this treatment because they

[1] Eilert Sundt, 'Mere om overtro', *Folkevennen* 8 (1859): 455–61. My translation. Unless otherwise noted, subsequent translations are also mine.

had reasons of their own to do so. To understand why the readers saw the burning of *Sange og Rim* as act that answered to the commandment of benevolence, it is necessary cut through the veil of ignorance and seek answers to questions about their "strange" behaviour in the ways they related to texts. If books were not simply the gateway to enlightenment for the villagers of Leirdalen, if their availability in a library did not simply inspire commoners to read and understand them in the way Sundt expected them to do, what did those texts actually mean to them? How did common people approach texts, with what expectations, in which situations, with what kind of practices, and to what ends? Moreover, how did these approaches change over the course of the 19th century, from the time when only few texts were available to common people to the time when the abundance of print became a major challenge for common readers? These questions are the starting point for the following analysis of the common reader in 19th-century Norway.

Historiography

Norwegian historians have attempted to answer similar questions before, with different methods and varying results. There is a substantial historiography in the field of book history on commoners in Norway that has some relevance for this thesis. This field spans back to at least the 1930s with histories of publishing houses, censored books, libraries, and more. However, Jostein Fet's influential *Lesande Bønder* (1995) and *Skrivane bønder* (2003) marked a distinct shift in the field. His exhaustive source work, going through more than 16,000 administrations of estates from Sunnmøre, Rommsdal, Nordmøre, and Øvre Telemark, was meant as a contribution to the field of literacy research, which had largely based its investigation on records of institutions of education, but his findings and approach has been proved influential to historians of the book. Elisabeth Eide even named him "the role model for current Norwegian book history".[2] The title of *Lesande bønder* (reading farmers) may suggest that it is a historical study of reading, but Fet does little more than confirm the existence of books in the homes of commoners and the fact that the church believed they could read. He was not interested in the practice of reading, the how and why that are at the centre of the present analysis, but whether or not they read texts at all. A number of similar investigations by Lis Byberg, Gina Dahl, and Eide have followed Fet's methodology and leave the questions that drive this thesis unanswered.

[2] Elisabeth S. Eide, *Bøker i Norge: boksamlinger, leseselskap og bibliotek på 1800-tallet* (Oslo: Pax, 2013), 20.

While the history of books in Norway has thrived, histories of reading as a practice are few and far between. Two studies stand out, and they have been influential for the present thesis. Firstly, Trygve Riiser Gundersen has shed light on the reading practices of members of the Haugean movement, drawing on concepts from medievalists. Secondly, Arne Apelseth's doctoral thesis on commoners' (*allmue*) literacy between 1760 and the 1840s interprets changes in the writing and reading habits of commoners in light of the changing roles of oral and written "culture". Like the present thesis, he is interested in understanding the reading of the commoners on its own premise, searching for its underlying logic that seemed foreign to the intellectuals describing it. Both Gundersen and Apelseth shed light on parts of the population and period that the present thesis is interested in, leaving developments of the second half of the 19th century as well as the reading of other social groups such as the working classes open. Furthermore, Apelseth's thesis places great faith in the effects of the reformers' attempts to persuade commoners to change their understanding of the written and spoken word, which is an argument the present thesis will challenge. [3]

Outside of Norway, there is a much richer historiography of the reading of the non-elite readers from whom insights, terminology, and concepts might be borrowed. There have been two ways of engaging with this reading: from the perspective of the elites, and those of the readers in question. Engaging with the perspectives of the elites, historians have drawn on the insights of Michel Foucault to understand the goals and methods of the elites. Above all, they have understood the attempts at shaping the reading of reader as an example of what Foucault termed "discipline". Discipline aims at moulding the subjects' faculties and their ability to be a productive member of a society. This moulding is done through productive exertions of power, with "productive" here meaning that power is displayed through prescriptions and guidance as well as restrictions and prohibitions.[4] The power that undergirds discipline is not focused in any one place or individual, rather, it is something that happens everywhere and is traceable in every social interaction.[5] The dispersed nature of power is important for my thesis as it allows me to use smaller displays of discipline as a synecdoche for larger trends.

The most obvious examples of the use of reading as discipline have been in institutions with clear hierarchies. In Britain, historians have uncovered a firm belief within the penal

[3] See for example: Arne Apelseth, 'Den låge danninga: skriftmeistring, diskursintegrering og tekstlege deltakingsformer 1760-1840' (Bergen, Universitetet i Bergen, 2004), 109–12; Cf: Atle Døssland, 'I kvar si verd?: Eit prosjekt om norske embetsmenn og bønder 1660-1870', *Heimen* 58, no. 1 (2021): 8–33.
[4] Michel Foucault, *Seksualitetens historie: Viljen til viten*, trans. Espen Schaanning (Oslo: EXIL, 1999), 21; Michel Foucault, *Overvåkning og straff: Det moderne fengsels historie*, trans. Dag Østerberg (Oslo: Gyldendal Akademisk, 2014), 170..
[5] Foucault, *Seksualitetens historie*, 105.

system and the army that the control over the prisoners/soldiers reading material was vital in 'rehabilitating them or making them conform. This came both in the form of preventing the readers from obtaining "uninstructive" literature like novels, and prescription of suitable texts – often religious ones.[6] Among the administrators of the army's libraries, these concerns were balanced with the fear that if the soldiers were not given their favoured literature, they would spend their free time and money in immoral ways that would affect their productivity.[7] These tendencies can also be recognised in institutions where the hierarchies are less obvious. There was a persistent fear within the British middle-class that working-class and female readers would be negatively influenced by what was considered imprudent literature. This fear fuelled censorship against those texts, which was continued until the Chatterley trial 1959.[8] Several studies have also pointed towards policies behind the formation of libraries that were meant to influence common readers.[9] They have shown how these policies shaped the holdings of libraries, their reading rooms, systems of cataloguing, and the spatial aspects of the library itself. The insights of these studies have informed chapter two of this thesis in particular.

Michel de Certeau has championed attempts at connecting Foucault's notion of discipline with the perspective of readers, highlighting their agency.[10] He did this with two concepts: strategy and tactics. Strategy aims at discipline and represents efforts to influence the reader, while tactics are ways in which a person evades strategies that intersect with their everyday life.[11] Tactics are fluid and situational. In the case of reading, this means that once a reader manifests his or her conduct in writing, it cannot be considered a part of the tactics any longer, but has become a strategy. In a famous passage, de Certeau likens the reader to nomads,

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[6] Jenny Hartley, 'Reading in Gaul', in *A Return to the Common Reader: Print Culture and the Novel, 1850-1900*, ed. Adelene Buckland and Beth Palmer (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 94–95; Rosalind Crone, 'Attempts to (Re)Shape Common Reading Habits: Bible Reading on the Nineteenth-Century Convict Ship', in *A Return to the Common Reader: Print Culture and the Novel, 1850-1900*, ed. Adelene Buckland and Beth Palmer (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 105.

[7] Sharon Murphy, '"Quite Incapable of Appreciationg Books Written for Educated Readers": The Mid-Nineteenth-Century British Soldier', in *A Return to the Common Reader: Print Culture and the Novel, 1850-1900*, ed. Adelene Buckland and Beth Palmer (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 121–32. Double inverted commas missing in quote-in-title.

[8] Christopher Hilliard, '"Is It a Book That You Would Even Wish Your Wife or Your Servants to Read?" Obscenity Law and the Politics of Reading in Modern England', *The American Historical Review* 118, no. 3 (2013): 653–78.

[9] Martin Hewitt, 'Confronting the Modern City: The Manchester Free Public Library, 1850-80', *Urban History* 27, no. 1 (2000): 62–88; Kimberley Skelton, 'The Malleable Early Modern Reader: Display and Discipline in the Open Reading Room', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 73, no. 2 (2014): 183–203; Beth Palmer, '"A Journey Round the Bookshelves": Reading in the Royal Colonial Institute', in *A Return to the Common Reader: Print Culture and the Novel, 1850-1900*, ed. Adelene Buckland and Beth Palmer (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 133–50; Robert James, '"Literature Acknowledges No Boundaries": Book Reading and Social Class in Britain, c.1930–c.1945', *Journal of Social History* 51, no. 1 (2017): 80–100.

[10] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), xiv–xv.

[11] Ibid., xix.

poaching in the lands of meanings others have created, taking what they need and leaving the rest behind.[12]

In addition to tactics and strategies, de Certeau distinguishes between two parallel and simultaneous acts in what is commonly thought of as the single act of reading: deciphering and reading.[13] Deciphering is the basic act of making letters into words, a conversion of the intelligible into something understandable. This facilitates the second act, reading, the creation of a text's meaning. By distinguishing between the two, de Certeau uncouples the task of making the text understandable from the meaning the reader creates with it. Furthermore, he associates the creation of meaning with "cultural memory", an entity located outside the text, and reduces the role of deciphering to mere refinement, clarification, and corrections. De Certeau's concept of reading allows the following analysis to separate the meaning a reader creates from the strategy of the respective text.

The element of struggle that is central for de Certeau, accentuated by his metaphorical use of strategy and tactic, is not applicable to every use of text. In some cases, it is more helpful to consider reading as opportunistic. For these instances, the conceptual apparatus of Roger Charier will be of use. Chartier, who is influenced by de Certeau, has explored the influences that mediate the meaning created during readings.[14] These influences span from social categories such as class, to more specific ones such as paratexts and preliminaries.[15] These studies were done through his term of appropriation. This is similar to the notion of tactics, but Chartier does not imbue it with the same sense of the inevitability of conflict. When a person creates meaning with the help of an object they have not created, they "appropriate" that object. For example, Chartier's understands "popular culture" to be the lower class peoples' appropriation of a common culture – a meaning created based on the opportunistic usage of something available to many.[16] There is a vast amount of historical investigations of reading that have been inspired by Chartier's notion of appropriation. Both Elspeth Jajdelska's study of Samuel Pepys' reading practices, and Lisa Jardine and Anthony Grafton's study of Gabriel

[12] Ibid., 174.
[13] Ibid., 168.
[14] Roger Chartier, *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 1–25.
[15] Roger Chartier, *Forms and Meanings: Texts, Performances, and Audiences from Codex to Computer*, New Cultural Studies (Philadelphia, Pa: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 43–82; Roger Chartier, *The Author's Hand and the Printer's Mind*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Cambridge: Polity, 2014), 135–39.
[16] Chartier, *Forms and Meanings*, 83–98.

Harvey's reading of Livy demonstrate the fruitfulness of the approach.[17] Both show that the meaning these readers derive from the texts was not embedded in the texts themselves, but contingent on the practice, assumptions surrounding the texts, and the goal of the reading.

Whereas Chartier, de Certeau, or the historians inspired by Foucault are interested in the influences on reading that come from outside the texts, some historians have shown an interest in the potential of the texts themselves. In his study of the reading habits of the British working class, Jonathan Rose ascribes to "good books", i.e. the "classics" of literature, a particular effect on their readers: "['Good books'] brought aesthetic joy, political emancipation, and philosophical excitement to these ordinary readers."[18] The texts enlightened working-class readers and could help them reach the political spheres of the elites, or otherwise redirect the paths of their lives. This positive understanding of the "classics" of literature is contrasted with a distrust in both popular fiction and popular culture. Although Rose does not conclude definitively, he goes a long way in accusing popular culture of being the cause of "juvenile crime, racism, violence, male supremacy, consumer capitalism, not to mention bad taste."[19]

James Brophy agrees with Rose on the potential of certain text to elevate common readers into the reading culture of the elites. However, he locates this potential not just in the "classics". In his study of the popular reading material included in calendars in Rhineland in the early 19th century, he asserts that common readers were able to transcend their "intensive reading" with the help of popular reading material.[20] This extends Rolf Engelsing's "reading revolution" – a shift from an intensive reading of a few religious texts to the superficial reading of many texts – to other classes than Engelsing himself imagined partook in it.[21]

The literary scholar Janice Radway was also interested in the powers of the texts when she undertook her study of a community of female readers of romance novels in the small American town of Smithton in 1984. Radway established that the women's fondness for romances was contingent on social factors, "complexly tied to their daily routines, which are

[17] Elspeth Jajdelska, 'Pepys in the History of Reading', *The Historical Journal* 50, no. 3 (2007): 549–69; Lisa Jardine and Anthony Grafton, '"Studied for Action": How Gabriel Harvey Read His Livy', *Past & Present*, no. 129 (1990): 30–78.

[18] Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 2001), 4. Rose is vocal about the inspiration from Chartier, but the ghost of Richard Hoggart can be seen behind this notion of the effects of 'good books'. See: Ibid., 365–72. Cf. Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working-Class Life with Special Reference to Publications and Entertainments*, Penguin Social Sciences (London: Penguin, 1990).

[19] Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*, 367.

[20] James M. Brophy, 'The Common Reader in the Rhineland: The Calendar as Political Primer in the Early Nineteenth Century.', *Past and Present*, no. 185 (2004): 120.

[21] Rolf Engelsing, 'Die Perioden der Lesergeschichte in der Neuzeit', in *Zur Sozialgeschichte deutscher Mittel- und Unterschichten*, 2nd ed., vol. 4 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978), 112–54.

themselves a function of education, social role, and class position."[22] For these women, reading did not aim at displaying literary taste. Instead, they used romance novels as a source of escapism, a refuge where they cared for themselves in their otherwise busy and laborious daily routine. Reading in private, the women Radway studied were temporarily isolated from the obligations and expectations that followed from their family life. The structure of the romance novels were especially well suited to their needs, as they offered readers a "maternal concern and nurturance" that was lacking in their family relations.[23]

Romance novels functioned both as a temporary break from the women's social role and as emotional support. It is tempting then to think that they affirmed the patriarchal structures that necessitate such temporary breaks and emotional crutches, rendering the reading of romance novels a subtle form of discipline, but Radway insists on the possibility of emancipation. She points out that although both the women's need and interpretation of romance novels were affected by their social role, the effect of their reading on the social structures remains elusive. She does not deny the possibility that readers may have been disciplined by a product of the structures they were seeking refuge from, but she is careful not to deprive the readers of their agency. Both the practice of reading for self-care, and the ambivalence Radway places in the reading's effects, informs several analyses made in this thesis.

Concepts and theory

I have so far neglected to define who the common reader were, and what understanding of reading this analysis has based itself on. To start with the former, and as I have indicated through the rendition of the historical works on non-elite reading, the "non-elite" has not been defined by one concept. To avoid asserting either an autonomous of cultural fields or an absolute determining power of class, I have made use of Bourdieu's field theory and his notions of social, economic and cultural capital to define who the common readers were.[24]

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[22] Janice A. Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*, 2nd ed. (Chapel Hill, N. C: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 50; Bourdieu, who perhaps deserved to have been included, makes a similar argument. Many of his insights can be recognized in the other theories discussed. Peter D. Mcdonald, 'Implicit Structures and Explicit Interactions: Pierre Bourdieu and the History of the Book', *The Library* 19, no. 2 (1997): 105–21; Cf: Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993).

[23] Radway, *Reading the Romance*, 13–14, 138.

[24] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984); Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*; Mcdonald, 'Implicit Structures and Explicit Interactions'.

Both Gundersen and Apelseth demarcated the readers they studied based on the readers' social and economic capital, but this does not fit with the periodization of this analysis. The 19th century saw the numerical decline of the commoners as a class, as well as the rise of other classes such as the urban factory workers, miners, and navvies.[25] Selecting only one of these classes means neglecting connections, developments, and differences that are only visible if the classes are compared or treated as one. However, there are no social or economic grounds on which these classes can be united. Additionally, basing the definition of common readers on social and economic aspects alone runs the risk of making reading a product of the determining powers of class, something that cultural historians have demonstrated to be reductive.[26] It is here that the concept of cultural capital demonstrates its usefulness.

There existed a relational difference between elite and common readers that spans across multiple different social and economic classes. While common readers wrote nothing but the occasional letter or practical texts, the cultural elites were deeply concerned with the reading of common readers and wrote extensively on this throughout the century. This established a textual-relational distinction between common readers that were written about, but who were not expected, interested, or allowed to respond, and an elite that produced texts about common readers. Apart from making it possible to treat different social and economic classes together, it also makes it possible to differentiate between the members of these classes. Some commoners, miners, and factory workers were able to partake in the discussions that were being held in writing on common readers, which distinguishes their use of texts from the other, silent members. With this, I have defined common readers as the readers that lacked the social, economic, and cultural capital to be listened to and accepted by those classes that were at the top of these hierarchies.

Building on de Certeau and Chartier's conceptualisations of reading as a practice, this thesis takes reading to be a practice of creating meaning through the decoding of texts. In line with the aforementioned historians, the meaning created through this practice is not only contingent on the decoded texts. A number of influences, both known and unknown to the readers, guided their reading and what meaning the practice created. As well as the making use of the

[25] See: Gro Hagemann, *Det moderne gjennombrudd: 1870-1905*, vol. 9, Aschehougs norgeshistorie (Oslo: Aschehoug, 2005); Edvard Bull, *Arbeiderklassen blir til: 1850-1900*, vol. 1, Arbeiderbevegelsens historie i Norge (Oslo: Tiden, 1985).

[26] See: Geoff Eley, *A Crooked Line: From Cultural History to the History of Society* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005); Roger Chartier, *Cultural History: Between Practices and Representations* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988); William H. Sewell, *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

perspectives on reading that have been introduced through the discussion of the historiography on reading, other fields offer ways of understanding reading that illuminate aspects of it that would otherwise go unnoticed.

Performance theory offers ways of understanding the social interaction between readers and its impact on the creation of meaning. According to Erving Goffman, a performance is an individual's attempt to manage their intended and unintended impressions on relevant others.[27] This has been built upon into a theory that offers "a way of framing objects of study, viewing them as performances, thereby facilitating a new sort of thinking about them."[28] This theory is especially helpful in the examination of public readings which is always a performance, regardless of whether it is oral or silent. When a person reads aloud, he or she assigns herself the role of the performer, while listeners play their part as the audience. In this performance, the performer might use diction, sensitivity, gesticulations, perceived experience or knowledge of the text, digressions, or any other technique as means of managing his impressions on his listeners. An awareness of this agenda also illuminates the performative aspects of silent readings in public. A student reading Heidegger at a café might carry the fascial expression of an erudite when in fact the desperation of incomprehension is creeping in.

There are also performative aspects to reading in private. Firstly, reading in private might aid an individual in his or her attempt to project a specific personal front to themselves.[29] If a performer's vocabulary is exceptionally large and filled with idioms and referencing the "classics" of literature, this will project the front of a scholarly person. In this way, private readings can be seen as rehearsals to public performances, but also as a means of identity formation. Secondly, the mere promise of private reading can also be an important part of the setting of a performance – the objects and surroundings a performer uses to project a certain impression. In her study on book ownership and cultural identity in an American middle class that moved down the social ladder and among the *nouveau riches* in the 1920s, Megan Benton demonstrates that it was paramount for performers to manage their audience's assumption of reading habits.[30] They displayed a studied fondness of "good" books. To mimic this, the

[27] Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1959), 15.
[28] Simon Shepherd, *The Cambridge Introduction to Performance Theory* (Cambridge: University Press, 2016), x; There is no agreed upon definition of performance theory, but the one offered by Goffman, expanded upon by Shepherd and others, suits this project well. There are also other understandings of performance theory, which include the artistic aspects of a performance. See: Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory* (London: Routledge, 2003); Peter Kivy, *The Performance of Reading: An Essay in the Philosophy of Literature* (Malden, Mass: Blackwell, 2006).
[29] Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, 24.
[30] Megan Benton, '"Too Many Books": Book Ownership and Cultural Identity in the 1920s', *American Quarterly* 49, no. 2 (1997): 268–97. Benton does not draw on performance-theory directly, but the terminology is fitting.

nouveau riche would strut in borrowed plumes by buying libraries of books solely to project an erudite image. Benton's broad view includes the uses of books as material objects, which is a perspective that allows insights into important facets of common readers in 19th-century Norway too, as this thesis will show.

Although Rose, Brophy, and Radway all conceptualise reading as having specific powers, there are others more general ways of understanding the potential of texts. Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory (or ANT for short) offers a way of conceptualising the agency of texts as objects that lends the present understanding of reading further depth. Latour does not characterise ANT as theory, but as "more like the name of a pencil or a brush than the name of a specific shape to be drawn or painted."[31] However, it is hard to call the implications of this approach anything less than a theory as it implies a general description of how the world works.

Latour does not theories the particularities of texts specifically but he distinguishes between two types of transporters of meaning in the actor-network, intermediaries and mediators. Intermediators are mere deliberators of the information they receive, like a functioning computer receives an email and displays it correctly to the intended reader, while a mediator changes the meaning of the message. If the computer malfunctions and displays the e-mail in a different language or intertwined with another e-mail, the computer is no longer a passive intermediator, but an active mediator of the intended message. If texts are to be regarded as actors in ANT, it must be possible to characterise them as mediators. Surprisingly, Latour would probably see texts as intermediaries, as long as they are not malfunctioning. However, if we bring Chartier's notion of the form affecting the meaning of text into play, the computer must be said to change the meaning of the text, as the meaning of a text is always contingent on its forms.[32]

The importance of the distinction of texts as intermediaries or mediators becomes more apparent if Latour's notion of actor, action, and agency is examined. For Latour, an action like reading is not the product of a single actor. "An 'actor' […] is not the source of an action but the moving target of a vast array of entities swarming toward it".[33] Like Chartier, Latour accentuates the importance of influences outside the "actor" as important for the action but Latour affords these influences greater agency than Chartier. To Latour, the influences are as

[31] Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: University Press, 2005), 143.
[32] Imagine for instance reading the last e-mail you received in a selection of poetry, or consider how the presentation of *Tante Ulrikkes vei* as a book aids the interpretation of it as a literary story, and not a collection of e-mails between increasingly estranged friends. See: Zeshan Shakar, *Tante Ulrikkes vei* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 2017).
[33] Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 46.

much of an actor as the reader, "any *thing* that does modify a state of affairs by making a difference is an actor".[34] Keeping in mind that mediators are the transporters of meanings that change the meaning of a message, and therefore become actors themselves, the texts must be considered as actors in their own right. It makes a difference whether the text is a book on paining or the bible, even if the reader created the meaning. However, this does not mean that texts are as autonomous as their readers are. "There might exist many metaphysical shades between full causality and sheer inexistence."[35] The notion of texts as actors is of great importance to this thesis. As I will show, the changing nature of the texts, from their content to availability, was an actor in the shaping of the common reader's practices during the century.

Lastly, the ontological turn Latour helped inspire has also been of some influence for the method of this thesis. At its most basic, the ontological turn in an attempt to take the actors' explanations seriously, and to peruse the logics of these explanations as far as possible.[36] In the cases where common readers have left indications of their beliefs about texts or the nature of their reading, I have taken their beliefs seriously in an attempt to flush the logics behind these out from the veil of time that obscures them.

Sources and method

Reading is not an activity that leaves many traces of itself. In fact, it can be argued that any recorded instance of reading is an extraordinary instance of reading. Compounding the difficulties is the definition of common readers used. The readers who never write, but are written about will not have left an extensive record of their reading. The source material available is thereby mostly descriptions of the reading of common readers in different forms.

Direct descriptions of reading can be very detailed but are few and far between. In order to find these, I have utilised the online database of *Nasjonalbiblioteket* (the Norwegian national library) as it contains most printed works from the period in searchable condition. This has not been a perfect method. Although texts written in black letter are searchable, the search engine is not as well adjusted to these texts as texts in Latin letters. To compensate for this, I have incorporated the misinterpretations of the texts I have encountered (*læsimg* and *l3æsing* instead

[34] Ibid., 71.
[35] Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 78.
[36] Andrew Pickering, 'The Ontological Turn: Taking Different Worlds Seriously', *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice* 61, no. 2 (2017): 137–39; Cf: Martin Holbraad and Morten Axel Pedersen, *The Ontological Turn: An Anthropological Exposition*, New Departures in Anthropology (Cambridge: University Press, 2017).

of *læsning*) in my searches. However, I have not been able to find or predict all these misinterpretations and the sources printed in the first half of the century has been affected disproportionally as black letters were still the norm. This has had consequences for the descriptions of pious reading used in the thesis. Although I argue that the practice was most dominant in the first half of the century, many of the more detailed sources I have used to describe the reading stem from the latter half. This runs the risk of constructing anachronisms, but, as will be argued, the practice did not die out in the second half of the century, which makes the use less problematic.

As searches for "reading", "books", "texts", "papers" and other relevant keywords in all their grammatical iterations return thousands of hits distributed on hundreds of texts, it was necessary to make judgments in advance about which were the most fruitful. I have prioritised non-fiction and collections of oral stories told by common readers themselves, rather than works of fiction (although a select few of these have been included as well). The deepest insight into the reading habits of common people are provided by descriptions of reading that were either given orally or have been penned by people who had once been part of that group but had since ascended the social ladder and become a part of the reading elite. Both these types of descriptions have been handled with care. As the writers crossed the line from being written about, to writing themselves, they ceased to be common readers and their experiences must be interpreted as an account from the elite. However, these writers had a more intimate knowledge of the reading than others had, making their descriptions valuable. By this logic, descriptions of reading that originate from common readers can only exist as written by others. Concerning oral histories of common reading, the series *Arbeidsfolk forteller* (Workers' stories) edited by Edvard Bull, Aage Lunde, and Ingrid Semingsen, has been used as a source in this thesis. While these came out in the 1950s and 60s, and the storytellers were often children in the late 1800s with vague recollections and little understanding for the intricacies of the reading of their parents and grandparents, they still opened perspectives on earlier reading habits that older, contemporary sources could then substantiate.

Library records are the qualitatively and quantitative opposite of written descriptions of readings. Whereas descriptions of reading are rare and can go into great detail, the data from libraries are more superficial but relatively common. At the same time, these sources also have limitations. There is an insurmountable leap between a recorded loan and the borrower reading the text. There is also no guarantee that the text was read by the person who borrowed it. In addition, and as will be elaborated on in the thesis, the characteristics of the process of the borrowing of a texts, the selection of texts available, and the intentions of both the founders

and administrators of the library affect the loans on both an individual and statistical level. Lastly, not every library is suitable for this purpose. Some libraries were circulating, meaning that the members of the library were sent each text in the assortment in rotations. Lending and subscription libraries can also be problematic. Whereas public libraries mostly oriented themselves towards common readers, both subscription and lending libraries could be either reserved for the elites or open for common readers. I have only included the latter as the clientele of the former would at best need filtering before the data could be used. This process is so arduous that it has filled theses and books in itself. Despite these challenges, the data from several public libraries and a select number of subscription libraries has been used in this thesis to form an outline of shifting preferences during the century.

With the help of the historiography and theories presented, and through the notion of reading as a practice, I have examined these sources in multiple ways. I have searched for performative aspects that affected the reading, for emancipation, consolation, discipline, hierarchies, or acts of opposition. In addition, I have tried to pursue any material influences on the readings. Most of all, I have taken the readers' own explanations for their practices seriously whenever these were discernible. I have traced the arc of the act of reading as it has presented itself through the different sources and searched for the multiplicity of meanings a text could have to different common readers at different times, trying not to make assumptions on what is "really" going on.

Outline

The first chapter of the thesis delves into pious reading in order to explore its intricacies and uncover its underlying rationale. Pious reading was the dominant form of common reading in the first decades of the 19th century for people who still lived in a world that largely operated on the spoken word. The second chapter describes how the written word took over many functions of the spoken word after the first decades of the 19th century. This shift will be largely told through the attempts of the elites to reform the reading of common readers and explained largely in reference to changes in the provision and production of texts. The third chapter examines the new reading practices that emerged due to the rise of the written word. I will show that the new ways of reading contained elements of practices from the early 19th century and that though the number of functions the written word served had expanded, there was still a place for pious reading in the lives of common readers.

1. Reading in search of salvation

> ’Father, I intend to read’
> ‘That is wonderful my child, come and read this paper’
> ‘No! Papers I cannot read, I do not know these letters.’
> ‘Then what can you read?’
> ‘My catechism and my book of the gospels.’[37]

This fictitious dialogue from the very beginning of the primer *Attempts at a Reading-exercise book* hints at something essential to the reading practices of the 19th century – the reading of religious texts was different from the reading of other texts. In this period, pious reading followed its own logic. With a superficial gaze, it might seem like a collection of superstitions and self-contradictions but a closer look reveals that it was grounded in a deeper and coherent understanding of the role and purpose of texts. The following chapter explores the world of pious reading in order to disentangle the power struggles, performative aspects, and metaphysical presumptions that gave it meaning. However, before the pious reading of common readers can be explored, it is necessary to establish the extent of the reading of religious texts.

Getting an overview over what texts common readers were reading during the early parts of the 19th century is challenging. They did not leave bibliographies of their reading behind, and there were no systematic attempts by science, state or market actors at producing comprehensive data about reading habits at the time. Historians have therefore made inferences based on the records of ownership of books that were left by the administrations of estates and the traces found in reports from bishops’ and priests’ visitations or in the “registries of souls” (*sjeleregisteret*, an investigation of the congregation). Jostein Fet initiated this approach, which has formed the basis for many subsequent investigations.[38] It is built on a premises that most, if not all, the owners of books had a sufficient degree of literacy to use of them in this way and that owners actually read the books they owned. These assumptions are dubious as they assume both that literacy is something that can be graded on a scale and that books were exclusively used for reading in the sense that texts are deciphered for their literal meaning. I will return to

[37] Morten Hallager, *Forsøg til en Læse-Øvelse-Bog, hvoraf Børn kunde lære at kjende alle Slags danske og latinske Bogstaver, samt tillige at læse rigtig og forstaaelig, indeholdende: forskjellige Materier til deres Forstands Oplysnin g og Hjerters Forbedring*, 8. forøg. og forbedr. Opl. (Kjøbenhavn: Rangel?, 1807).
[38] For another indication of his influence, see: Geir Hjorthol and Atle Døssland, eds., *Lesande og skrivande bønder: foredrag frå eit symposium* (Volda: Høgskulen i Volda, 2005).

these challenges later on. For now, it suffices to say that regardless of their shortcomings, records of ownership are the best available sources to what texts common readers preferred from what was available.

Using these sources reveals that religious literature dominated the bookshelves of common readers. Through a comprehensive investigation of 16,287 administrations of estates in Western Norway as well as Øvre Telemark, Fet concludes that religious texts made up between 92.8 and 97.3 per cent of the owned books that were registered between 1690 and 1839, with secular literature comprising the rest.[39] There are no reasons to believe that the numbers would be radically different in most other parts of the country, barring modern-day Troms and Finnmark. Accentuating the dominance of religious texts, the few secular works that were registered seems to have entered the statistics only during the last two decades of the investigated period.[40] Book historians of Norway have largely accepted this as a general trend in Norwegian book ownership and reading habits. They have also supported it with other, less extensive, studies.[41]

However, there are three types of works that seem to be underrepresented in these statistics, namely chapbooks, broadside ballads and almanacs.[42] These were produced and sold in such numbers that one would, in accordance with the doctrine of "publish or perish", reasonably believe that they were widely distributed among the population. There are good explanations why they have been left out of the available sources. Bishops and priests had little interest in what the literary preferences of the common readers were outside of religious texts. Administrations of estates did not list these texts as copies had either fallen apart because of their use or were handed down without being considered property.[43] While this does cast some doubt over the extent of the dominance of religious texts, it does not render invalid the general assumption. Indeed, there are other indications that religious literature was the most popular genre in the early 19th century. There are very few descriptions of pious reading during this time but next to none of secular reading. This might indicate the relative frequency of the two

[39] Jostein Fet, *Lesande bønder: litterær kultur i norske allmugesamfunn før 1840* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1995), 133.
[40] Ibid., 93, 297.
[41] Eide, *Bøker i Norge*, 27–45; Lis Byberg, *Biskopen, bøndene og bøkene: leseselskapene i Kristiansands stift 1798-1804*, HiO-rapport 15 (Oslo: Høgskolen i Oslo, 1998); Oddvar Johan Jensen, '"... laere deres Børn selv, ligesom de vare laerte..." Sjeleregisteret som kilde til allmuens kunnskapsnivå før opprettelsen av allmueskolen', *Heimen* 32 (1995): 85–90.
[42] Apelseth, 'Den låge danninga', 439, 460; Arne Apelseth, 'Tvang til skrift og vilje til tekst: lesehistoria som problemfelt', *Årbok for norsk utdanningshistorie* 24 (2007): 148–57; Fet, *Lesande bønder*, 80; Jostein Fet, 'Utfordringar og svar: Streiftog gjennom eit forskningsfelt', in *Lesande og skrivande bønder: foredrag frå eit symposium*, ed. Geir Hjorthol and Atle Døssland (Volda: Høgskulen i Volda, 2005), 21–23.
[43] Eide, *Bøker i Norge*, 147.

types of reading, but it might also suggest that pious reading attracted more attention from the observers that left records of reading.

Regardless of the prevalence of secular reading in the first half of the 19th century, there is a good reason to focus on pious reading exclusively in this chapter. The pious reading of common readers was a diverse set of practices, as they adapted to context, text, and reader. Some of these practices were connected to each other through shared assumptions and beliefs, others existed independently of, or parallel to, the others. However, the pious reading practices were united by a concern with salvation. Common readers read their religious texts with intent of affirming, gaining insight into, or experiencing salvation. This distinguishes pious reading from all other readings, and warrants a chapter dedicated to its complexities. Following the logic of Latour, the texts were themselves an actor in this process. Religious texts were the only texts for these practices.

The first part of this chapter will explore the hierarchies and authorities that shaped the household reading of religious texts and the entanglement of signifier and referent that dictated which authorities common readers adhered to. In the second part, other reading rituals, peculiarities, and self-imposed hierarchies will be explained as products of this same entanglement. Then, the reading of the Haugeans will be explored, to indicate that other understandings of texts co-existed among common readers. The difference between the Haugeans and other common readers, evident in their material practices, will then be explored in the subsequent section. Lastly, the boundaries of pious reading will be discussed.

Hierarchies and entanglement: Household reading

One of the most regulated, ritualistic, and best-documented scenes for pious readings were within the confines of the household. The occasion of this reading could be manifold. It could function as a substitute for going to church on the days this was impossible, it could be done as an addition to the sermon that members of the household had heard in church, or on occasion of one of the religious holidays or the days of observance. For many *husmenn*, it was the only possibility to partake in religious ceremonies in a regular week, as many farm owners left work for their *husmenn* on Sundays while they themselves went to church.[44]

Regardless of the occasion, the reading usually followed the same general pattern. The male head of the household would do the reading, which could be from a book of homilies, the

[44] Ingrid Semmingsen, *Husmannsminner*, Arbeidsfolk forteller (Oslo: Tiden, 1960), 206.

bible, or any other religious text, while the rest of the family stood by and listened. This would often be supplemented with the singing of psalms, which the senior women of the household could lead. The participants were not restricted to the immediate family of the reader; often the whole household was included. Maids, *husmenn*, or any other person belonging to the household could participate. The boundaries of this reading were of paramount interest to the church that feared for its monopoly of doctrine, and the state that suspiciously regarded all social settings as potential venues for uprisings. These authoritarian interests tried to formalise the practice through laws, especially with the edict on conventicles (*konventikkelplakaten*). This act by royal prerogative from 1741 – enjoined in 1799 – stated that the patriarch of a household was not allowed to invite guests for a reading of the bible, religious teaching, or singing of psalms with his family unless the parish priest had allowed it.[45]

In the final instance, however, the church and state could not effectively regulate reading outside their confines. Some of these readings created dissenting understandings of what faith should be and how salvation was achieved in the authoritative opinion. Sometimes, this happened by accident, as the Haugean preacher Harkel Johnsen Myhrebøe found out. Myhrebøe reports that he met an old farmer who was convinced that every person had three souls after he had read in Reusius' collection of sermons the sentence that "When God receives one soul, the devil gets two."[46] When Myhrebøe explained his own interpretation – that Reusius was lamenting that for every soul that was saved there were two that were damned – the man was happy to abandon his own reading, as he was less than thrilled about the prospect of losing two thirds of his souls to the devil.

At other times, diversions from the doctrine were more self-conscious and persistent. In these cases, readers were not prepared to give in to what the elites determined as right or wrong and even defied authority. The best example for this is the widespread reading and usage of *Prestepina* (literally: The priest tormenter).[47] The book is a collection of questions and answers about faith, and prophesies about the future, which some readers used to challenge their local priests with – hence the nickname. It was so widespread and popular that verses from it were used for decorative wall carvings in cottages and farms throughout the country.[48] Common readers' defence of their own interpretations can also be seen in their preferences of

[45] Linda Haukland, 'Hans Nielsen Hauge: A Catalyst of Literacy in Norway', *Scandinavian Journal of History* 39, no. 5 (2014): 544.
[46] Harkel Johnsen Myhrebøe, *Oplevelser og Erindringer: mest fra en femtiaarig Lægmandsvirksomhed for Guds Rige* (Kristiania: H.J. Myhrebøe, 1882), 21.
[47] Fet, *Lesande bønder*, 151–54.
[48] Kristofer Visted, *Vor gamle bondekultur*, 2nd ed. (Kristiania: Cappelen, 1923), 68.

certain religious texts and the debates about their relative merits. Bishop Anton Bang remembered that the fishermen of his childhood would sometimes debate which collection of sermons was the best. The choice was usually between Müller's and Brochmand's collections, with most readers preferring the former as it was understood to be taking the side of commoners.[49] Beneath this debate was the awareness that some texts were better for the common readers while others benefited the elite. Common readers showed a willingness to speak up for the texts that served their interests. Their choices confounded Bang, who found the language in them to be "very long-winded and by the standards of our time not generally accessible in its complicated meditations." However, the bishop also recognised that this language "broke through into their everyday life and expressed the moods and feelings that are in the heart of these people."[50]

Reading that questioned the church's doctrine can be traced back to the 18th century in Norway. When bishop Ole Irgens was conducting his visitation to the Bergen diocese in 1788, he was asked by two farmers whether there were any new inventions in the faith, if any parts of the *Catechism* were to be changed, or if anything from their old faith really could be untrue.[51] Presumably, these questions were motivated by the introduction of new psalm books, rationalist teaching, or similar alterations made by the church, as the bishop did not dismiss them as blasphemy. The local priest who was accompanying Irgens explained with dismay that the farmers had formed their own interpretations of the faith through what he called misunderstandings of the figurative language of their religious texts. In his view, the farmers' conversations with other readers in market towns or seafarers had added to their confusion. They evidently held onto these beliefs in defiance of their priest and believed them sound enough to address open questions to the bishop. This defiance was not unique in a European context. The Italian miller, Menocchio, studied by Carlo Ginzburg in his groundbreaking book, defied the church and the inquisition to propagate his own interpretations of the religious texts in the years between 1584 and 1599.[52]

Not all common readers were interested in renewing their faith through reading. Some were fighting to preserve their old paths to salvation as the position of the church shifted. During Bang's tenure as a priest in Gran parish, he was tasked with the introduction of the new, rationalist, collection of psalms compiled by Magnus Brostrup Landstad at the expense of the

[49] Anton Christian Bang, *Erindringer* (Kristiania: Gyldendalske Boghandel, 1909), 30.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Apelseth, 'Den låge danninga', 40.
[52] Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013).

Evangelical-Christian collection that had been used by local laypeople. Bang threw himself into the work, but he was met with resistance from the churchgoers of the parish who were less than pleased with the proposed replacement. At one point, he was handed a signed letter from thirty farmers and *husmenn* that complained about the consequences of the replacement of their psalm book. If Bang and his compatriots ruled that the Evangelical-Christian psalm book could not save them now, they feared, then their forefathers, who had trusted and used it all their lives, were no longer saved. In fact, in the eyes of the concerned authors of the complaint, this meant that their souls would be condemned, an unacceptable proposition.[53]

The altercation between Bang and the fearful and angry churchgoers, as well as the other conflicts of interpretations, show that texts were inextricably tied to hierarchies. In turn, that meant that they could be used to challenge these structures. Behind the descriptions of an "outdated" and a "rational" or "improved" psalm book stood a hierarchy in which the church and its local emissaries – the priests – had the power to define the correct faith while the readers were meant to accept the doctrine. At the same time, it is clear that the readers do not unreservedly trust the priest with absolute knowledge of their faith despite the discrepancy in access to religious texts. In fact, the readers that confronted Bang named him a "reader priest" as an insult.[54] This suggests that to some common readers, the texts had greater authority than their priests did. How this authority was established and why it eclipsed the priests' doctrine in the eyes of some must be explained by a deeper connection between the texts and the understanding of divinity within them. Behind this connection, dictating its logic and giving its expressions meaning, was a radically different understanding of what texts were, and what they could do.

In order to understand the logic that dictated the pious reading of the aggrieved churchgoers Bang encountered, a detour by way of the language of Norwegian fishermen is required. In the 19th century, the vocabulary of Norwegian fishers impressed outside observers with its seemingly endless number of synonyms for tools, people, and catch. It was supposedly so intricate that outsiders could have a hard time understanding what an everyday conversation between two fishermen was about. Some fishermen left clues as to why this mislabelling practice was so widespread and important; "on the sea, nothing could be labelled by its actual name if one was to have any luck".[55] For example, when an Atlantic halibut was on the hook or in the fishing net – a notoriously difficult, but very profitable fish to catch – any mentions

[53] Bang, *Erindringer*, 169–70.
[54] Ibid., 164.
[55] Svale Solheim, *Nemningsfordomar ved fiske* (Oslo: Dybwad, 1940), 4.

of its real name was considered hazardous to the chances of bringing it in. If the halibut heard its real name, it would be scared off and leave the fisher without a catch. Fishermen would therefore refer to it as "her", "the madam", "the old lady", "the tree with the thing in its end", "the parable", "the trust", "the princess", and so on.[56] The fishermen were also wary of mentioning anything that reminded them of home, like pigs, cows, farms, or relatives. They were even cautious of mentioning what was inside the boat. If there were more than one person on board, these would not call each other by their names. Instead, they would use "man", "you", or similarly anonymous identifiers.[57] Although the selection of periphrases varied between regions, the linguistic practice as such could be found in numerous fishing villages throughout Norway, making it a national phenomenon. Svale Solheim also found the practice in the old Norse settlements in the Shetland Islands, Scotland, the Faroe Islands, the Hebrides, and the Orkney Islands, suggesting that the roots of the practice were older than the 19th century.[58]

In an attempt to explain the fishermen's florid style of speaking, Narve Fulsås explored their understanding of the relationship between the natural world and the words describing it. He asserts that one has to histories the present distinction between man and world as well as the difference between words (signifiers) and the things they denote (referent).[59] From that perspective, it becomes apparent that rather than understanding themselves as distinctly separate from the world they inhabited, the fishermen were immersed in their world. They were not disinterested spectators of their surroundings; they were "anxiously present" in a world of things they were exposed to without any means of controlling them.[60] This "heightened" presence left no room for a middle position between the subject and the world, a space that Fulsås believes – along with the structuralists – to be inhabited by words in most people's minds.[61] All this mean that the speaking of words was not a description of the world, but an agent of change in it. For the fishermen, "words, things, and ideas become entangled in each other."[62] Rather than being a window to the world, words were a part of the world, embroiled in it.

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[56] Ibid., 30–35. Why so many of these names were gendered is not known, but seeing as there are few physical similarities to women, the desire to 'catch it' might have been the underlying connection.
[57] Narve Fulsås, *Havet, døden og vêret: kulturell modernisering i kyst-Noreg 1850-1950* (Oslo: Samlaget, 2003), 17–20.
[58] Solheim, *Nemningsfordomar ved fiske*, v.
[59] Fulsås, *Havet, døden og vêret*, 31–36.
[60] For the anxious presence in the world, see: Martin Heidegger, *Væren og tid*, trans. Lars Holm-Hansen, Bokklubbens kulturbibliotek (Oslo: Bokklubben, 2007).
[61] See: Michael Lane, 'Introduction', in *Structuralism: A Reader*, ed. Michael Lane (London: Cape, 1970), 11–42; Edith Kurzweil, *The Age of Structuralism: From Levi-Strauss to Foucault* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1996); James Williams, *Understanding Poststructuralism* (Chesham: Acumen, 2005).
[62] Fulsås, *Havet, døden og vêret*, 32.

If common readers of the 19th century saw signifiers and referents as entangled, the naming of things was not a one-sided affair, but established a "magical" relationship. In Fulsås' words "By using a label, we can call upon, conjure up, seek out – like when we call upon someone by using their name, or like how we in religious occasions make divinity present between us by using specific words, or vice versa: that divinity calls upon us through its words."[63] By uttering the labels and names of things, a person was calling upon the associated and entangled signifier. This meant that the naming of evils could bring about evil, which gave rise to the aversion of calling the devil by his name and Fishermen would instead talk about "old Erik", "old Sjur", "the ugly man", or "the man from the other side".[64] This could also be used to the benefit of the fishermen. An island that marked the boundary between open seas and the sheltered waters of Bodø was called Landego – which directly translates to good land – as a way of trying to make the spot safer than it was.[65] As Fulsås himself indicated, this has consequences for the naming of God, literally making him present in congregations that met in his name.

For common readers reading religious texts, this presented them with an opportunity. They could use reading to establish a connection between themselves and divinity. By reading the words of their texts about God or his powers aloud, they called upon God, and all the compassion, consolation, rage, protection, or knowledge he could hold. In other words, the reading of a prayer, adjuration, passage from the bible, or psalm could lend the readers the help of divinity, or at least making God present in the moment. These powers could be put to good use by the readers who understood how to utilise them. They shielding them from sickness, enemies, dangerous oceans, treacherous friends, dark magic, tied knots, and could even stop arterial bleeding.[66] By reading their holy texts, common readers called upon or borrowed the powers of God. Although no descriptions of pious reading practices are exhaustive enough to confirm or disprove whether such a "magical" relationship existed, observers like Henrik Wergeland certainly made a connection between the reading practices of the common reader and their "superstitions".[67]

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[63] Ibid., 33.
[64] Solheim, *Nemningsfordomar ved fiske*, 97.
[65] There are examples from philosophy of similar attempts to entangle the signifier and referent. See Gadamer's term of *Das Sicheinschwingen von Welt und Seele* in: Hans-Georg Gadamer, 'Die Natur der Sache und die Sprache der Dinge', in *Kleine Schriften: 1 : Philosophie : Hermeneutik* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1967), 67; Dag T. Andersson, *Tingenes taushet, tingenes tale* (Oslo: Solum, 2001), 128–272.
[66] Ørnulf Hodne, *Mystikk og magi i norsk folketro* (Oslo: Cappelen Damm faktum, 2011), 110, 183; Fulsås, *Havet, døden og vêret*, 18; Bang, *Erindringer*, 31.
[67] Henrik Wergeland, 'For Almuen: Første hefte', in *Henrik Wergelands skrifter*, ed. Leiv Amundsen and Didrik Arup Seip, Folkeutg., vol. 1 (Oslo: Cappelen, 1958), 271.

This understanding of reading may explain the tenacity with which some common readers fought for their preferred texts and interpretations. For them, more was at stake than just the cost of acquiring new texts. The underlying religious patterns, which blended the teachings of the church with the entangled signifier and referent, created bonds to specific texts that were used for pious readings. The authenticity and legitimacy of these bonds needed to be protected beyond the life of the readers who had established them. If a priest told a person that their forefathers had read the "wrong" texts, these ancestors had also called upon the "wrong" God. Any alteration to the chain that brought them closer to salvation could do irreparable damage to their own salvation, and that of any other who had trusted its validity. As Bishop Peder Hansen complained, describing his own attempt to introduce a new psalm book to Kristiansand diocese, "People believe, that one wants to change their faith, if one attempts to discard their old psalm book".[68] The path their forefathers had trusted was as much at stake as their own.

Death, diction, and women: Performative aspects of pious reading

The entanglement of signifier and referent not only explain the conflict about doctrinal authority and the selection of religious texts, but also lies at the core of another important instance of reading that occurred at the occasion of a common reader's death. This reading was often done in the form of a *Sognebud*, a ritual that was very similar to the Catholics' last rite (the difference being it was not a sacrament). In this ritual, the local priest gave the dying his or her last communion and read from the bible or said a prayer. This reading was a recurring theme in the artistic depictions of the life of commoners and was painted by both Adolph Tidemand and Knud Bergslien (figure 1 and 2). Notably, in both these paintings, at least one of the family members surrounding the dying is either reading or keeping a book at the ready. In Bergslien's painting, the wife of the dying man seems to be reading silently from a book with folded hands while the Priest conducts the last rites. In Tidemand's *Sognebud*, both the son and the wife of the dying have books close by, already open on their selected page and ready to be read. This reading, the one being done by and for common readers, is only hinted at in these paintings. Its importance and meaning is best described in the cases where no priest was present.

[68] Peder Hansen, *Archiv for Skolevæsenets og Oplysnings Udbredelse i Christiansands Stift. 2det Bind, Archiv for Skolevæsenets og Oplysnings Udbredelse i Christiansands Stift*, vol. 2 (Kiøbenhavn: ulsen, 1803), 75.

The Norwegian writer and miner Johan Falkberget was one of the many who upheld the importance of the practice of reading at the deathbed and returned to this topic throughout his authorship. The sustained interest in this practice might have stemmed from when he was 14 years old and witnessed the passing of his grandfather, Jamt-Jo, a lifelong miner:

> The old giant was lying with his hands folded – the faithful and industrious fists which had lifted tens of thousands of long tons [skippund] of ore, quartz, gangue, in pits and drifts. He lay there and read his psalm of confirmation with a pale mouth: […] And so Jamt-Jo closed his eyes and passed away. [My uncle] bowed down over his dying father and tried to shout the confession to him while his sister, Gunhild Johnsdatter, fell to her knees by his bed. The shouts did not get through. He was already on the other side.[69]

The timing of the reading, just as the person is about to pass away seems to have been significant for Falkberget, as it is emphasised in many of his fictionalisations of the same moment.

> The daughter Inge sat by the bed, reading the prayer for the sick and dying from the psalm book: […]. The words froze in terror on her lips. Tears made what was written dim to see. The old man looked up, everyone went quiet, and his chapped eyes went searching around the cottage. 'Inge, are you there?' 'Yes, father.' 'You have to read some more. It's all so dark now.' […] 'Will you be saved, father?' 'Yes, you know, I've had faith in the Lord's words.'[70]

The moment of death, as it gets dark, is the moment the old man needs the reading. The intention of it seems to be to affirm the old man's salvation in the exact moment he passes on, possibly making the journey to the "other side" clearer.

The importance placed on the timing of the reading suggests several things about the meanings invested in the practise. Firstly, it reveals that the words' power is restricted to the living. When Jamt-Jo died, his son tried to shout the words to him to ensure that he heard them as he slipped away. This means that the hearing of the words was as important as the fact that they were read aloud. If the person did not hear the words, their power would be wasted. The power of the words also seems to have been very fragile. Their reception had to happen at the moment of death. Bearing in mind the suggested entanglement of signifier and referent, the timing might have something to do with one connection replacing another. When the common

[69] Kaare Granøyen Rogstad, 'Johan Falkberget som kristen og medmenneske', in *Johan Falkeberget*, 2nd ed., Fjell-folk: Årbok for rørostraktene fra Røros museums- og historielag (Røros: Røros museums- og historielag, 1991), 10.
[70] Johan Falkberget, *Svarte fjelde: fortælling* (Kristiania: Aass, 1907), 7–8.

readers read their texts and called upon God, they expected that both they and the dying were pulled towards divinity. Leaving behind the dying in the proximity to god, in the blessed words and before the Almighty, might have seemed the best way to ensure or affirm that they were saved.

Lastly, it seems to have been important that someone other than the dying read out the text. Even though Falkberget's father reads the psalm of his confession aloud to himself and all those present, his son still goes to great lengths to try to reach his father with his own reading. Equally, Inge's psalm is recognised by both her dying father and the other people attending his deathbed as the appropriate reading for the occasion. This suggests that the death of a person was – as well as many other things – a performance in which texts played a crucial role. Mediating between god, the living, and the soon to be dead, texts were the vessels of the last salvation, symbolically being delivered by the people that the moribund helped carry into the world. The words themselves could not save anyone; it was their performance by readers that ensured their validity. This underscores that the practice of reading was as important as the words themselves.

A more esoteric detail of common readers' reading also seems to gain meaning once the world and its words are brought closer together. Outside observers picked up on the intonation and emphasis some common readers made in their oral reading of religious texts. When the future bishop Anton Bang was still a young boy in Helgeland, he once listened to the patriarch of his neighbouring farm read a particularly stirring section of Müller's collection of sermons to his audience during a household devotional. The preacher took heaven, earth, and the stars as witnesses that he was showing the listener the correct path to a good life and salvation. "[The section from Müller's book of sermons] was read in a lengthy, singing voice like so: '*Him-mel… og Jord … og Ste-ne-ne på … Him-me-len … skulle … væ-re mine… Ven-ner*' and so on."[71] What Bang was emphasising does not translate all that well to English, but according to him, the father was accentuating every syllabus, pausing frequently to add drama and solemnity to his reading. Bang was not impressed with this rendition, stating that the father was edifying his household "in a catholic fashion, an unreflective, religious mood."[72]

Bang's disapproval of the performer and his "peculiar" reading was echoed in other descriptions of it. Writing about the way common readers at his time read, the secretary and

[71] "Heav-en … and Earth … and The Sto-nes in … The Sk-y … should … b-e my … Frie-nds." Bang, *Erindringer*, 31.
[72] Ibid.

editor of The People's Friend, Ole Vig, was trying to educate them in what he deemed the proper way of reading orally in the presence of others. His concern was that the reader should mimic the spoken voice and not exaggerate his dictation. "The more the reading resembles the human speech, the better it is."[73] This advice suggests that Vig encountered the opposite style, and both the fact that he takes liberty to correct it and his childhood as a *husmann* may indicate that this alleged exaggeration was a trait of common readers' practice. Falkberget, who seems to have been familiar with the excessive diction of some common readers when they were reading religious texts, confirms this claim. In *Lisbet paa Jarnfjeld*, he describes a man who screams out in terror "as if he was reading from the collection of psalms", clearly marking that as a particular kind of oral reading.[74] Later on in the same book, he depicts a man reading from a crudely printed psalm book in a particularly slow and loud voice.[75]

Again, the reciprocity between the reader on one side and the entangled signifier and referent during pious readings on the other side offers an explanation. As common readers were reading their texts, the connection that was established between reader and sign/signifier went both ways. Just like fishermen avoided naming bad or evil things when out at sea in order to avoid calamity, common readers who were calling upon God may have chosen to do so with a "peculiar" diction to add another layer of deference. As the distance between the reader and God shortened, the attention they paid to the performative aspects of their reading became greater. Enunciating religious texts in an "unnatural" way would then be a part of the performance. This concern with appearances can be seen during other reading of religious texts as well, like common readers showing reverence for the source of a prayer being read at a funeral by covering their face with a hat.[76]

The importance of diction for common readers, be it to secure the salvation of the dying or in other settings, shows that oral readings of religious texts need to be understood as performances. The performance setting gave readers opportunities to display piousness, be it through seemingly exaggerated enunciation, bodily gestures such as covering their face, or the gender of the reader. In addition to that, "props" like the quality of the book as well as the selection of texts were part of the performance. However, the performance setting also had consequences for the role of women in the reading of religious texts.

[73] Ole Vig, 'Lidt om Bøger og Læsning', *Folkevennen* 1 (1852): 40.
[74] Johan Falkberget, *Lisbet paa Jarnfjeld* (Kristiania: Aschehoug, 1915), 51.
[75] Ibid., 225–27.
[76] Hodne, *Mystikk og magi i norsk folketro*, 93.

The male head of the household was seen as the natural reader for the family. He is the reader in most, if not all, literary descriptions of this reading that are available and can also be seen that role in some of the few artistic depictions of family sermons. Adolph Tidemand and Bengt Nordenberg, two of the most famous representatives of Norwegian romantic nationalism, depicted household reading in their paintings *Far leser høyt* (see: figure 3), and *De ensomme gamle: Husandakt* (figure 4). In *De ensomme gamle*, an elderly couple is seated at a table, surrounded by finely made cupboards, mirrors, and clocks that reveal that they are not poor *husmenn*. The male head of the household is reading to what seems to be his wife, who sits with her hands in her lap, wearing a look of loneliness reserved for elderly people. The subtitle of *Husandakt*, devotional, suggests that this arrangement was more routine than a singular event. Tidemand links this reading to the nation by draping the couple in the *bunad*, the national costume of Norway.

In *Far leser høyt*, the patriarch sits by a table near a window and reads aloud from an unknown text to the eight other members present. Three other men, either *husmenn* or part of the family, can be seen hunched in their chairs or standing behind the household head with devout faces, which suggests that they listen to the rendering of a religious text. There are two women in the painting, one nursing an infant and the other with a young girl and boy leaning on her legs, listening attentively. Lastly, an older girl sits nearest the audience, basked in light from the window, accentuating her feminine hair and dress, while listening with her hands in her lap. Femininity and motherhood are emphasised in both the women and the older girl. This is either an expression of the artist's normative view on women's conduct during household reading or a representation of the importance Nordenberg perceived it to have among the readers. Nordenberg also links the hierarchy of the reading in this household to the hierarchies of society. On the wall, just behind the nursing woman is a portrait of the reigning king in the Swedish-Norwegian union, Oscar I, juxtaposing the patriarch of the household with the one of the states.

The father's position as head of the family was not the only reason for his authority in the reading of religious texts. Undoubtedly, it was also based on his sex. "The weekends father was home, he always read 'the texts' and sat by the table where we were allowed to sit too. […] If father was not home, mom did it. When I came far enough, I was allowed to read in her place, but she led the singing."[77] The competency or seniority of the mother was not taken into account in this oral testimony from this *husmann*. Although she kept some control of the

[77] Semmingsen, *Husmannsminner*, 135.

reading through her leading the singing, the son's sex gave him the coveted position of reader of "the text". The exception made for singing is also significant as it suggests a differentiated understanding of female participation when it came to the performance of songs in contrast to readings. There are also some recorded instances of women taking the initiative to sing psalms with men present. Eilert Sundt recounts such a case, where five girls and three boys started singing psalms in a boat on their way home from church, prompted by the girls who initiated the singing. There is nothing in the way Sundt recounts the story that suggests that this was unusual.[78] Perhaps the collective nature of singsong exceeded the hierarchies of reading. As the singing was done in communion, following a fixed melody, and with plenty of men participating, the room for deviation was smaller, which could have eased the worries of the men.

There is no reason to think that women had insufficient literacy skills to lead the reading of religious texts. In reports from bishops' visitations, the reading abilities of women were judged as nearly equal to that of men by the middle of the 18th century. By the beginning of the next century, the gap between the sexes was all but non-existent.[79] The church had no interest in denying women the ability to read, quite the contrary. The pietists were set on giving everyone the tools to make a personal connection to God, not just men. They were however interested in restricting it, as female religious leaders were not a part of their plan to personalise the connection to God. Literacy is a skill that requires some practice in order to maintain it; there are stories of common readers losing their reading abilities due to negligence.[80] If women were able to maintain their literacy but were denied the opportunity to read in the household, it is more than probable that they resorted to private reading. The instances of women common readers reading religious texts presented in this chapter supports this conclusion, with almost all being private readings. The nature of private reading also offers a possible explanation to the disparity of recorded readings between men and women. If women were largely restricted to private occasions, their reading would have been less visible, and therefore less likely to be observed. In addition, if women could lead the singing, then one sort of public reading was available to them which could help maintain their literacy skills.

[78] Eilert Sundt, *Paa Havet: fjerde Aars-Beretning om Forlis i Trømsø Bispedømme, for Aaret 1864* (Kristiania: P. T. Mallings Bogtrykkeri, 1865), 74–77. According to Sundt, they were, unfortunately, thrown out of their boat when a sudden gust of wind took them by surprise. Three of the girls drowned.
[79] Lis Byberg, 'På Sporet Av 1700-Tallets Lesere', in *Bokhistorie*, ed. Tore Rem (Oslo: Gyldendal, 2003), 98; Fet, *Lesande bønder*, 36–37.
[80] Mona Renate Ringvej, *Marcus Thrane: forbrytelse og straff* (Oslo: Pax, 2014), 75.

Women's ability to read was above all evident in their role as tutors of literacy to their children. Mothers were the foremost teachers of reading for their children, whereas there is almost no evidence to suggest that fathers did the same. This was partially down to practical reasons. While the father often worked outside the farm to supplement the family's income, the tasks most often performed by the wife made it possible to teach reading at the same time. Adoph Tidemand captured this in his *Moderens undervisning* from 1856 (see: figure 5). Here, a mother seems to be testing one of her daughters in her knowledge of a book, possibly Pontoppidan's *Explanation*, while nursing an infant.[81] Behind the mother stands another young daughter with needlework in her hand, the purse for the yarn lying on the ground beside the mother, suggesting that the other daughter is holding it while her mother takes care of her younger sibling. As in *De ensomme gamle*, symbols of the nation are present in the clothing of the readers and listeners, suggesting that Tidemand wanted to portray this setting as a national institution. In fact, this scene was probably very common throughout the country. There are stories of mother teaching while they were spinning, preparing the family meals, washing clothes, or taking care of the children.[82]

It is difficult to overstate the importance of the literacy instruction young common readers received in the household. Many children were schooled so well by their parents that they could read before they started attending their formal education, a trend that included children of smallholders and landlords. Literacy skills were generally deemed important for children throughout the century.[83] While the household was entrusted this responsibility, they also had to bear the blame if a child was unable to learn how to read. When the daughter of a respected local man in Volda was unable to read, he was given the blame for this, and not the administrators and teachers at the public school his daughter attended.[84] Before the state

[81] Pontoppidan's book was probably one of the most read texts among common readers in the 19th century as it was required reading for the readers' confirmation. The title was often shortened to *Forklaring* or simply dubbed Pontoppidan's. See: Henrik Horstbøll, 'Læsning til salighed, oplysning og velfærd: Om Pontoppidan, pietisme og lærebøger i Danmark og Norge i 17- og 1800-tallet', *Fortid og nutid* 49, no. 2 (June 2003): 83–108; Erik Pontoppidan, *Sandhed til Gudfrygtighed, udi en eenfoldig og efter Muelighed kort dog tilstrækkelig Forklaring over Sa. Dr. Morten Luthers liden Catechismo: Indeholdende alt det, som den, der vil blive salig har behov at vide og gjøre* (Christiansand: O.P. Moe, 1817).

[82] Thrond S. Haukenæs, *Livsskildring, eller Fødebygd, slegt og selvbiografi* (Bergen: I kommission hos C. Floor, 1889), 236–38; Semmingsen, *Husmannsminner*, 216.

[83] Thrond S. Haukenæs, *Barndomshjemmet: erindringer og skildringer* (Bergen: C. Floor, 1890), 49; Alf Mostue, *Slik var hverdagen: arbeidsfolk forteller fra husmannskår, anleggstid og kriseår*, ed. Kari Moen, Jostein Nerbøvik, and Hallgrim Høydal (Oslo: NKS-forlaget, 1988), 22; Semmingsen, *Husmannsminner*, 211.

[84] Per Aarviknes, *Frå eit langt liv: folkeminne, segn og soge : helsingsskrift* (Volda: Volda bygdeboknemnd, 1975), 134.

gradually took over the education of children, the household was paramount in teaching literacy and was therefore also held responsible for shortcomings.[85]

The practical explanation for why women most often were the preferred teacher of reading skills to children, does not exclude the possibility that ideological reasons played a part as well. The division of labour that supported gendered teaching responsibilities was itself a product of understandings of what kind of work was considered suitable for men and for women. Women's abilities to secure work outside the household was also severely restricted by the gendered hiring practices and the notions governing them. This division of labour was changing in the 19th century, with greater female participation in work outside the household, but the system had more in common with the preceding century during the first decades than the end of it.[86] Whatever the reason, the responsibility entrusted to the women stood in stark contrast to their passive role during the household devotionals.

The role of women in pious reading was not a question of competency, but a part of the performance. Just as diction was seen as an integral part of the performance, so was the observance of a hierarchy the readers (at least the men) accepted. The discrimination was visible in most parts of Norwegian society. Girls were not given the same education when it came to writing. They were not granted access to the early public libraries.[87] The state and church also played an important part in this discrimination. The edict on conventicles banned all women from speaking in congregations, and Erik Pontoppidan wrote in the *Explanation* that it was the housefather's responsibility to make sure that the household lead a pious life, not the mother's.[88] The anger in the responses some readers had to their children not displaying the proper reverence during the readings also suggests that the audience of the performance played a crucial role.[89] With other words, it was important that the women accepted their designated role in order for the reader and those who listened to show the proper deference to God.

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[85] For a French description of the process of the state acquiring a larger part in the lives of children at the expense of the household, see: Antoine Prost, 'Public and Private Spheres in France', in *A History of Private Life: 5 : Riddles of Identity in Modern Times*, ed. Antoine Prost and Gérard Vincent, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, vol. 5 (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1991), 1–144.

[86] Hilde Sandvik, 'Tidligmoderne tid i Norge: 1500-1800', in *Med kjønnsperspektiv på norsk historie: fra vikingtid til 2000-årsskiftet*, ed. Ida Blom and Sølvi Sogner, 2nd ed. (Oslo: Cappelen akademisk forlag, 2005), 103–56; Gro Hagemann, 'De stummes leir? 1800-1900', in *Med kjønnsperspektiv på norsk historie: fra vikingtid til 2000-årsskiftet*, ed. Ida Blom and Sølvi Sogner, 2nd ed. (Oslo: Cappelen akademisk forlag, 2005), 157–254.

[87] Jostein Fet, *Skrivande bønder: skriftkultur på Nord-Vestlandet 1600-1850* (Oslo: Samlaget, 2003), 38–39; Byberg, *Biskopen, bøndene og bøkene*, 83–84.

[88] Fet, 'Utfordringar og svar: Streiftog gjennom eit forskningsfelt', 20; Steinar Supphellen, *Konventikkelplakatens historie 1741-1842*, Rostra books (Trondheim: Tapir Academic Press, 2012), 11–14.

[89] Semmingsen, *Husmannsminner*, 48–49; Bang, *Erindringer*, 70–71.

Texts and memories: Haugean reading practices

Alongside the common readers who sought to establish connections with divinity through their reading, there was a group of readers who had other goals in mind – the Haugeans. Nicknamed "the readers" in the 19th century, they placed a great emphasis on texts as an essential component of the personal connection to God, as well as a different understanding of the text's role in this world. Neither Hauge nor his most influential preachers saw the texts as a connector to divinity. Rather, the texts were themselves parts of the revelation – messages from God.[90] As Hauge himself put it, "The whole Holy Scripture is woven together like a chain when it is explained correctly, and everything concerning our bliss is clear, and it contains many prophecies that hold light and spiritual revelations."[91] To live a blessed life, it was important to live *through* and not only *with* these fragments, letting them guide the reader's frame of mind and conduct of life. This differentiates them slightly from the other common readers. The Haugeans did not use the texts as much as they let themselves be guided by them. They gained access to parts of the revelation with their texts, not the Almighty.

The practice of living through the holy texts can be recognised in some of the many revival stories told by converted Haugeans. The case of Ole T. Svanøen is a good example of this. During a time of great personal religious doubt and turmoil – having been kept awake for many previous nights by fears, dreams, and thoughts of eternal damnation – Svanøen was absolved in tears while working on his father's fields. As he was sowing and weeping, a psalm from the bible suddenly came to him, without any form of outside initiation: "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy." He felt as if these words had not come from himself, but had been spoken to him by God. With this simple message, that his sorrows were not in vain, he felt absolved of all the sins that were weighing him down, revealing to him the path to salvation.[92] This was a life lived through texts, with the textual fragments representing not only a connection to the Almighty, but being a part of revelation itself.

Svanøen's spontaneous reading is also notable in the way that he did not need the text's physical form to enact the reading. The recitation came purely from memory and seemingly struck as lightning. Svanøen accentuates this, writing that the words "came" to him without any initiation from himself. This is of course self-stylisation. Svanøen's story is a way for him

[90] Haukland, 'Hans Nielsen Hauge: A Catalyst of Literacy in Norway', 543.
[91] Hans N. H. Ording, ed., *Hans Nielsen Hauges skrifter*, vol. 1 (Oslo: Andaktsbokselskapet, 1947), 151, translation found in; Haukland, 'Hans Nielsen Hauge: A Catalyst of Literacy in Norway', 543.
[92] Hans N. H. Ording, ed., *Hans Nielsen Hauges skrifter*, vol. 6 (Oslo: Andaktsbokselskapet, 1952), 183–85. The translation of the bible verse is based on the King James Version, Psalm 126:5.

to demonstrate his affinity for the movement. It might therefore seem purely as a calculated performance, if it even happened at all. However, historian Trygve Riiser Gundersen has argued that this episode, regardless of Svanøen's intentions, was also based on a reading practice that facilitated such usages of religious texts and made Svanøen's account plausible to contemporaries. In Gundersen's opinion, Medievalists have suggested the perfect framework for understanding such readings, the *memoria* tradition.[93] There are four central points to this thesis. Firstly, the text was regarded as a mere vessel to hold the words yet to be memorised and of lesser value than memory. Secondly, texts were memorised as fragments rather than as a coherent whole. They were therefore available to the reader as loose aphorisms, which made them available for short, spontaneous, readings whenever the reader was inspired to do so. Thirdly, memorisation was the goal of all readings. A text was only truly read when it was memorised. Lastly, the recalling of textual fragments was a creative act, not simply a recitation.[94] These bite-sized pieces of the revelation could arise in different contexts, giving both the situations and the fragments new meanings to the readers. This reconfiguration and transferal of the texts – from the coherent text on paper over aphorisms into the memory of readers – combined with the belief that texts were a part of the revelation constituted a focus on living through text rather than with it, expanding the meaning of their reading and extent of the practice. This through-living could sometimes be disruptive or even invasive in the everyday life of the Haugean. Some followers of Hauge were unable to contain their desire to read or sing aloud certain fragments, regardless of whether it was a suitable occasion or not.[95]

Gundersen relates an instance which exemplifies all the different elements of the *memoria* tradition as well as how the textual fragments could serve as a part of the revelation. In 1799, there was a meeting between Hauge and the aging local legend Nils Olsson Langedal – "Strong Niels". His exploits were fabled at the time. In his prime, he had supposedly lifted a boulder of 600 kg and moved slabs of granite that otherwise required six men. However, by the time of his meeting with Hauge, he was an elderly man and his strength had withered with time. They met at a crowded farm where Hauge was holding a meeting for anyone who would come. At one point, amid the songs, readings, and communal prayers, Hauge spotted Strong Niels, made his way across the room towards him, laid a hand upon the old giant's head and

[93] Trygve Riiser Gundersen, 'Memory and Meaning: The Haugean Revival (1796-1804) and Its Place in the History of Reading', in *Religious Reading in the Lutheran North: Studies in Early Modern Scandinavian Book Culture*, ed. Charlotte Appel and Morten Fink-Jensen (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), 178–86.
[94] See: Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, 2nd ed., vol. 70, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature (Cambridge: University Press, 2008).
[95] Myhrebøe, *Oplevelser og Erindringer*, 51.

proclaimed "O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever. He craves not the power of the horse, nor the strength of man." For a moment, everything was quiet. Then, Strong Niels burst into tears.[96] Hauge's declamation, which is a composite from both the bible and Luther's *Catechism*, made it clear to Strong Niels that though his physical powers had diminished, God craved only his faith.[97] This reading was done without the material text, came from memory, and it was of fragments from different sources that were combined to create a new meaning. Lastly, the reaction of Strong Niels suggests that the sum of the reading's parts had been experienced as profound revelation.

The *memoria* reading practice lends itself easily to the type of performance Hauge's reading to Strong Niels was. The combination of the fragments Hauge performed, creating a new and numinous meaning, tailored to the predicament of the aging giant, was powerful to the audience in the farm and to Strong Niels himself as they were "in the know" of what was transpiring before them. Strong Niels displayed this "knowingness" by his emotional reaction to the reading.[98] A competent reader, like Hauge, could use the array of textual fragments he or she had memorised and adapt them to the needs of the performance at hand. If this was done quickly and smoothly, it probably seemed to the audience like the fragments spontaneously arose in the reader. In some ways, they did spontaneously arise, but were also precipitated by a practice that prepared the reader for these performances.

Memoria demanded iterative reading. To be able to memorise the texts to a degree where they were available to a speaker for spontaneous utterances, the Haugeans had to read their texts exhaustively. Their practice has therefore sometimes been characterised as "intensive reading" – referencing Rolf Engelsing's term – but there are better ways of understanding their reading.[99] The Haugeans were not necessarily limited to reading a few works as Engelsing supposes. Many Haugeans were in fact avid producers of texts, both in the form of letters and religious texts, and those texts expanded the number of texts they read drastically. In addition, the reading was not treated as an appendage to life, but a way of living. As Engelsing's theory of intensive reading is a poor characterisation of these elements of the Haugeans' reading, I suggest – with the help of Paul Griffith's understanding of religious

[96] Gundersen, 'Memory and Meaning', 159–60; Halldor Sandvin, 'Spor etter Hans Nielsen Hauge: Stader, personer og hendingar', in *Hans Nielsen Hauge og Telemark*, 2nd ed. (Notodden: Haugekomitéen i Telemark, 1999), 30.
[97] Psalms 106:1 (KJV); Martin Luther, *Dr. M. Luthers liden (eller mindre) Catechismus med Børnelærdoms Visitats i Almindelighed: saa og om enfoldigt Skriftemaal, samt nogle nyttige Spørgsmaal efter Dr. M. L. rette Mening, samt Sententser af Guds Ord, til Troens Bestyrkelse for de Enfoldige* (Christiania: Lehmann, 1800), 32.
[98] For 'knowingness' as a term, see: Peter Bailey, 'Conspiracies of Meaning: Music-Hall and the Knowingness of Popular Culture', *Past & Present*, no. 144 (1994): 138–70.
[99] Engelsing, 'Die Perioden der Lesergeschichte in der Neuzeit'; Gundersen, 'Memory and Meaning', 187.

reading – that Haugean readers be seen as "lovers" of their texts. They read "with a tensile attentiveness that wishes to linger, to prolong, to savor [sic], and has no interest at all in the quick orgasm of consumption."[100] Like a couple newly in love, the Haugeans attempted to amalgamate their partner and their life. Although the reading was "intensive" in its iterative element, "intensive reading" does not do the practice justice.

Women had a very different role in the Haugean movement than in other sections of Norwegian society, which had consequences for their reading practices. Sara Ousten from Tolga exemplifies that men and women had a more egalitarian relation when it came to public reading than the common readers described earlier. Ousten had, on her own initiative, started to lead prayer meetings which raised questions among her fellow believers about the suitableness of women in this role. These doubters approached Hauge for his opinion on the matter, who, after inquiring about her knowledge of the faith and abilities, saw no problem in her leading the prayers.[101] This is not to say that all parts of the movement, and all its members, had the same outlook on women readers. In fact, it is more than likely that considerably more conservative elements existed within the movement. Some historians have also put the progressiveness of Hauge's own views in doubt.[102] However, even after Hauge's imprisonment and death, parts of the movement had women acting as public readers, even as groups emigrated to other countries.[103] This suggests that larger part of the movement than just Hauge held this more positive view towards women reading religious texts publically.

The role of women highlights the subversive nature of the movement and its reading practices. By creating their own, personal paths to revelation, the Haugeans undermined the importance of the local priests specifically and the church more generally. The Haugean inclusion of women in public readings of religious texts was part of its larger rebellion against the edict on conventicles from 1741, which also regulated how many people could partake in a household devotional and what could be written about priests.[104] Their way to use text was in itself an attack on ecclesiastical authority. If it was possible for the reader to memorise textual fragments, and through the spontaneous recital of these gain access to the path to salvation on their own, the role of the priest as a spiritual guide was diminished. These attacks

[100] Paul J. Griffiths, *Religious Reading: The Place of Reading in the Practice of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), ix.
[101] H. G. Heggtveit, *Den norske Kirke i det nittende Aarhundrede: et Bidrag til dens Historie. B. 1: Haugianismens Tid : første Halvdel, 1796-1820* (Christiania: Cammermeyer, 1905), 229.
[102] Ida Blom and Sølvi Sogner, eds., *Med kjønnsperspektiv på norsk historie: fra vikingtid til 2000-årsskiftet*, 2nd ed. (Oslo: Cappelen akademisk forlag, 2005), 149.
[103] Olav Golf, *Vekkerrøst fra kvinner i Hans Nielsen Hauges fotspor* (Oslo: Kolofon, 2006), 64–76.
[104] Ibid., 9.

on the authority of church and its hierarchy eventually landed Hauge in prison, after he was convicted of breaching the edict on conventicles.

Although the same commitment to memorise texts was not common outside the Haugean movement, traces of this practice can be found elsewhere. A woman who identified herself as "working-class" grew up in the 1880s and 90s on a farm near Gressvik with a library consisting of collections of sermons for home use, the bible, some collections of psalms, devotional literature, and Pontoppidan's *Explanation* remembered that her mother knew the latter by heart.[105] That would mean that this woman had memorised a text of between 160 and 200 pages. According to Gundersen, the reading for memorisation was encouraged by the church and schools, which had made use of the written forms of the texts as a support in the process of memorisation.[106] Unwittingly, this produced common readers who became susceptible to the Haugeans. For example, Strong Niels was not known to be a convinced Haugean before his meeting with Hauge (nor is it known if he became one after that meeting), but his reaction to the fragments recited to him suggests that he recognised them and was aware of where they came from.

In addition to memorisation, the Haugeans and other readers outside the movement shared another practice – reading as consolation. The Haugeans were well versed in this, as their reading practices facilitated the spontaneous appearance of texts that could alleviate their suffering, like Svanøen's reading in the field. However, they were not alone in this. Bishop Anton Bang saw similar reading for the purpose of consolation being performed by the fishermen of Helgeland, an area where the Haugeans never gained a foothold.

> I have often been witness to strong men, exhausted and dead tired from the toil and drudgery, recite these lines from *Sjymain'n* with tears in their eyes: 'They are blissfully certain / those who are assured / that their bread was honestly deserved / and a calm life led. / In the time we must float here / in commotion, storm, and battle, / where we from fear and danger / never are safe.'[107]

Sjymain'n reminded the tired men that though their walk of life was hard and often led them right to the edge of catastrophe, their resilience and honesty was not overlooked by the entity

[105] Edvard Bull, *Fra sagbruk og høvleri*, Arbeidsfolk forteller (Oslo: Tiden, 1955), 110.
[106] Transcribed description of Stange reading society, in Statsarkivet i Hamar (SAH), *Ole Gjestvangs samling*, ARK-095/I/Ia/L0003/0011; Gundersen, 'Memory and Meaning', 174–78.
[107] Bang, *Erindringer*, 30.

that drew the final accounts of their lives. This resonance may explain why the book kept its popularity among the fishers of Helgeland long into the 20th century.[108]

The reading of texts to remedy a specific suffering was a less spontaneous, but in many ways similar form of reading for consolation. The emotional suffering could come from everyday occurrences, like loved ones leaving for a long trip or frustration over spoiled food. At other times, it could be on the account of more existential dread.[109] For example, in her final years, an old widow did little else than read and sing psalms by herself from Thomas Kingo's psalm book, as she had done many times with her departed husband.[110] This was, perhaps, to alleviate both the loss of her husband and the acknowledgement that her time was coming to pass as well. In all the recorded instances of this practice that I have found, it was religious literature that was being read for consolation, posing the question whether there was something about these texts in particular that helped alleviate their readers' suffering, or if any alternatives could exist for persons of faith.

Texts as objects: Material practices

The use of religious texts was not confined to just the reading of it. The material object the texts inhabited also played a significant role in both practices and performances related to the beliefs that governed the reading practices. Contrary to the *reading* practices of the common reader, a range of uses of physical texts did not require literacy skills. To distinguish them from reading, I call them *material* practices.

Of these, protective material practice seems to have been especially common. Sivert Aarflot, Thrond Haukenæs, and Eilert Sundt all recorded different protective material practices, spanning most of the century. Aarflot found that religious texts were being placed in the cradles of infants, in sickbeds, and on the body of the recently departed while they were still in their deathbed or in their coffins.[111] In the 1850s, Sundt remarked upon similar uses of religious texts. Books of psalms were held close to unbaptised children to protect them on their spiritually treacherous journey to their baptism.[112] The author and collector of folklore, Thrond

[108] Hans Nerhus, *Sjymain'n: en krønike om en kostelig og kuriøs gammel bok : Helgelendingen Johan Hannssøn Heitmans bønne- og oppbyggelsesbok for sjømenn som på 1700-tallet ble både bestseller og populær bruksbok* (Oslo: Grøndahl, 1941).
[109] C. Andersen, *Tropstadnissen: Original Fortælling grundet paa en virkelig Tildragelse* (Kristiania: Andersens Forlag, 1873), 25 and 34.
[110] Semmingsen, *Husmannsminner*, 124.
[111] Maurits Aarflot, *Sivert Aarflot og hans samtid* (Volda: Aarflots prenteverks Forlag, 1951), 27.
[112] Sundt, 'Mere om overtro', 452, 467.

Haukenæs, was not a stranger to any of these practices.[113] He recounts the story of a shopkeeper who piled books on top of each other, covering the walls of the room he was dying in, in order to protect himself from both the cold and the devil. He also reports that families placed religious texts in the cradle of their children to protect them from *huldra*, the mischievous wood nymph. Still other readers he met put books of psalms in their beds to protect the whole house against evil spirits.[114]

Material practices called upon the same powers as reading but were more easily executed. This becomes apparent when the material practices relating to death and illness are compared with the reading practices that were performed in the same occasions. Whereas the reading for a dying person seems to have called upon both fleeting and fragile powers, reflected in the importance placed on the timing of the reading. This emphasis is not as pronounced when it came to material practices. The texts could be placed in the beds of the sick, dead, or dying as a constant protection, not contingent on being performed at any specific time.

In some instance, material practices depended on the words that the textual object contained. When Thrond Haukenæs' father tried to "imprint" the stories of the bible onto his children, he borrowed an illustrated bible from another farm for this purpose. The bible, which was sent by mail, had been in the possession of the owner's family for hundreds of years and was bound in calf leather.[115] Both the quality of the bible and the fact that it came with the postal service reveal that this family was quite wealthy. However, their use of the religious book was congruent to the practices of common readers described here. When it was time to teach his children, the father would take the seat of honour at the table and explain the meaning of the illustrations to his children, who stood around him with bare heads listening "with the greatest attention, reverence, and piety." The bible also contained illustrations of the devil, portraying him in all his horrors. These made a lasting impression on Haukenæs and made the powers of the book seem more ambiguous to him. The book was to be both respected and feared, quite literally. "When I cried or was impatient, [my parents and siblings] would say that the bible bound in calf leather would come for me. During the nights, I did not even dare to move, I was so afraid of it." The bible would not have had this effect on Haukenæs without the illustration of the devil, tying the powers of the text to its content. The multitude of possible

[113] Haukenæs, *Livsskildring, eller Fødebygd, slegt og selvbiografi*, 60; Thrond S. Haukenæs, *Hardanger og Søndhordaland: Natur, folkeliv og folketro, Natur, Folkeliv og Folketro i Hardanger*, vol. 8, Natur, Folkeliv og Folketro i Hardanger: belyst ved Natur- og Folkelivsskildringer, Eventyr, Sagn, Fortællinger osv. fra ældre og nyere tid (Bergen: N. Nilssens Bogtrykkeri, 1894), 161, 80.
[114] Hodne, *Mystikk og magi i norsk folketro*, 42, 67, 86–88.
[115] Haukenæs, *Livsskildring, eller Fødebygd, slegt og selvbiografi*, 238–39.

connections contained in the texts also made it possible for the physical object to offer more things than just protection against evils. The bible was sure to have contained images of saints and angels too, but as the devil made the biggest impression, it remained an ominous object to Haukenæs.

How direct this relationship was, why it could exist, and the nature of it is not entirely clear, but an illuminating parallel can be sought out in what Michel Foucault thought laid the basis for knowledge in the early modern period. Foucault details a time when similarities were the basis of knowledge, constituting an episteme. These similarities came in different forms, stretching across a range of different styles and types of similarities. According to Foucault, the four dominant types of similarities were *convenientia*, emulation, analogy, and sympathy.[116] *Convenientia* was the relationship that existed between adjacent things, such as the soul and the body. When one thing is close to another, the movements, influences, passions, and characteristics of that thing are transmitted to its adjoining thing. Emulation afforded imitation and connectedness across vast distances. Foucault does not offer an example of an emulation, but letters and number are perhaps a good illustration. All the versions of the phonetic symbol for R have the same capabilities, regardless of whether they are strung together, in the same text, or even in the same language. Analogies made a person the centre of a network of an endless number of possible connections, and sympathy could create relations between seemingly incongruent entities at any time. Put together, the chain of connectedness in *convenientia*, emulation's ability to bridge distances, the connectedness of analogy, and flexibility of sympathy carve out a room for a connection between texts and the material objects that contained them. The texts and their material form could have been seen as adjacent, emulating each other, or being an analogy of each other. In such an epistemic context, the transferal of the powers of the texts to the material was within reason. Since the texts as physical objects contained thousands of possible connections, their applications were probably more versatile than any one single passage. This would explain why they could be used for both the protection of infants and the recently deceased, one ensuring the physical protection of the defenceless, and the other affirming the salvation of the departed.

However, the powers evoked by the material practices did not always or completely overlap with the beliefs tied to the reading of the respective text. There were material practices that either had no basis in the reading or contradicted them. For example, while some common

[116] Michel Foucault, *Tingenes orden: en arkeologisk undersøkelse av vitenskapene om mennesket*, trans. Knut Ove Eliassen (Oslo: Spartacus, 2006), 41–76; The translation of the terminology comes from: Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Routledge, 2002), 19–28.

readers heard trolls sing psalms, other readers believed that "supernatural" creatures, such as pixies, could not touch their religious books.[117] This reveals that neither material practices reading were based on one holistic, coherent set of beliefs. Reading and material practices formed a diverse repertoire from which users of religious texts chose and utilised some, incorporating them in their lives. Many common readers could, for reasons of incognizance or incomprehension, only resort to a few of the practices described here, which worked against an overall coherence. As a result, the practices of some common readers were inconsistent with those of others, and sometimes their own practices contradicted each other.

While texts as material objects, material practices, and reading did not determine each other or were reducible to another, it seems that common readers sought to combine them to ensure effectiveness. For sailors and fishermen reading to protect themselves from the treacherous ocean, the physical texts might have made the promise of protection more tangible. This would explain why so many sailors, captains, and ship passengers chose to bring texts along with them on their journeys, long and short, rather than rely on their memory of the texts.[118]

The very existence of material practices puts into question the notion that common readers who did not know their texts by heart were failing to achieve the heights of Haugean ideals. Suggesting that the goal of pietistic piety was to read in a way that the texts became superfluous, Riiser Gundersen neglects the enormous importance the text as an object had for many common readers of the period.[119] For them, the physical manifestation of a text was not something to overcome, but an object that afforded them material practices and might contribute to the effectiveness of their reading.

Ambiguous boundaries: Black Books and the written word

To some readers, the powers of pious reading were not restricted to the sanctioned religious texts. These readers ventured into the obscure realm of mythical books. *Svarteboka* (The Black Book) was described at the turn to the 19th century as "a book of secrets, which makes great miracles possible through its reading, yes, even the conjuring or repelling of the devil", and

[117] Transcribed interviews, in Vestfoldarkivet (VEMU), *Intervjuer Våle og Ramnes*, A-1829/Sa-12, 3-26; Andersen, *Tropstadnissen*, 14–15.
[118] See: insurance claims with enclosed descriptions of property lost during shipwrecks, in VEMU, *Tønsberg sjømannsforening assuransekasse*, VFA-A-1115/R/Rb/L0001-L0003.
[119] Gundersen, 'Memory and Meaning', 177.

said to have power equal to the holy texts.[120] What specific powers the book had, who could mobilise them, and whether it was a source for good or evil, these questions were contested, and the answers depended on the readers and their stories.

Some common readers claimed that a reader of the Black Book had to be trained to be able to harness its powers. This knowledge could supposedly be acquired at special schools in Wittenberg, a sign of the beliefs' genealogy in the reformation. In a fairy tale from Auerdal, a man by the name of Jørgen Vinter was said to have been a student at one of these schools, where he was introduced to the powers of the Black Book.[121] In the tale, he used these powers to conjure up the devil and make him do things like lift heavy rocks or deepen and widen the entrance fairway to the local harbour.[122] On the ferry that took the congregation to church, Vinter sat by himself and "make conversation with the devil, like he was another person". At church, he helped the devil taking notes of all the attendants who did not show enough respect for the word of God that was being read. According to the fairy tale, it was Vinter's training in Wittenberg that enabled him to do all this. When he died, a neighbouring farmer who lacked the thorough training Vinter had undergone inherited the book. In contrast to Vinter, the new owner used the book only sparingly, either from fear of not being able to contain its powers or because he could not unleash its full potential.

According to contemporary stories, the Black Book could also be used for both good and trivial matters. A parable told to Thrond Haukenæs by readers he met on one of his travels features a man from Østbygden who kept a copy of the book in order to retrieve stolen things. One day, his son lost an awl between the walls of the house and a pile of firewood outside their home. Thinking it was stolen, the man called upon the thief to return it by reading in his copy of the Black Book. Driven by the book's power, his son climbed into the woodwork where he was sure to be mauled by the wood chippings and sharp edges. The father noticed it in time, managed to call off the spell, and saved his son.[123] In other stories Haukenæs heard, the book could make soldiers invulnerable in war and heal both axe cuts to the foot and blinding splinters in the eye.[124] In these stories, all that was required was that a knowledgeable man read the right passage from the book. The powers of the book would deliver the rest.

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[120] Laurents Hallager, *Norsk Ordsamling, eller Prøve af norske Ord og Talemaader. Tilligemed Et Anhang indeholdende endeel Viser, som ere skrevne i det norske Bondesprog, Auresamlingen* (Kjøbenhavn: Sebastian Popp, 1802), 124.
[121] J. E. Nielsen, ed., *Søgnir fraa Hallingdal, Auresamlingen* (Christiania: Det norske Samlaget, 1868), 57; Haukenæs, *Hardanger og Søndhordaland*, 8:73–88.
[122] Haukenæs, *Hardanger og Søndhordaland*, 8:117–20.
[123] Thrond S. Haukenæs, *Reiseskildringer fra Norges natur og folkeliv. 2: Telemarken* (Bergen: C. Floor, 1892), 99–100.
[124] Haukenæs, *Hardanger og Søndhordaland*, 8:183–84.

The stories of readings and other uses of the Black Book often come in the form of fairy tales or parables. While it is certain that the Black Book existed, it is sometimes difficult to determine whether the stories around it are based on actual beliefs about the Black Book or not.[125] However, there are descriptions of the respect some common readers had for the Black Book that stem from other sources that support the claims. Oscar Tybbing, the sole physician in a small town, wrote in a biography about his encounter with the beliefs surrounding the book. One time, he was called by a family of *husmenn* to aid with a young child that had been bitten by a snake. When Tybbing arrived and learned that the parents had first called a "wise woman" who was versed in the arts of the Black Book, he tried to prove the book's ineffectiveness by reading sections from it. However, rather than convincing the attending a group, he frightened them and he was left unsure of the effects of his demonstration.[126] This description suggests that the stories of the Black Book's powers, and the competency needed to use it reflected beliefs among common readers. The fact that the legends regarding readings of Black Books were a scene of the construction of virtues and moral, does not necessarily mean that common readers did believe in the power of the Black Book.[127] However, the subtexts of these stories become more important, and something that must me taken into account.

Whether this knowledge was respected or adopted by the local priests was also a source of contention. Throughout the 18th century, priests were often isolated from the congregation they serviced. Whereas in the 16th and 17th centuries their children had often married the wealthiest local farmers, this custom became less common in the following centuries.[128] During the time of Danish absolute monarchy, the priests also became a part of the legitimisation of the monarch's unlimited power, tying them to the state rather than the local population and the common readers among them.[129] Perhaps as an expression of dissatisfaction with the priests'

[125] Black Book, in Aust-Agder museum og arkiv avd. Kuben (AAKS), *Larsen, Arne Sandøen*, PA-1295/Y/L0001/0003

[126] Oscar Tybring, *Smaahistorier og Erindringer* (Kristiania: Albert Cammermeyer, 1890), 112–18.

[127] This problem is related to the one many scholars of the 16th century face on whether to take the stories of their sources to be true or explain them as an expression of something else. See for example: Stuart Clark, 'French Historians and Early Modern Popular Culture', *Past & Present* 100, no. 1 (1 August 1983): 62–99; Erling Sandmo, *Tid for historie: en bok om historiske spørsmål* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2015), 200–208; The problem is also related to the debate surrounding the ontological turn. For an introduction, see: Holbraad and Pedersen, *The Ontological Turn*.

[128] Øystein Rian, *Embetsstanden i dansketida*, Utsyn & innsikt (Oslo: Samlaget, 2003), 49.

[129] Birger Løvlie, 'Med kall fra Kongen', *Heimen* 58, no. 01 (2021): 91–108.

lacking foundation in the local community, some myths insisted that a good priest should know their Black Book and accredited it with the same importance as the sanctioned religious texts.[130]

Priests who accidentally let the wrong people read the Black Book by not guarding it properly is a *leitmotiv* in many local myths. One priest was said to have left his copy of the Black Book unattended in his chamber, and when a candidate for confirmation snuck into the room, he found and read "the sixth book of the Pentateuch" (there are only five) and promptly summoned the devil.[131] In another story, the dean of a parish district was to make a sermon, when he was overcome with a concern that his children were reading the book. He hastened home to find that they had released the devil just by reading the respective passage in the book.[132] This recurring theme could have been a way of expressing the misuse or disuse of the knowledge some priests had of the local variations of the faith and beliefs surrounding texts. By extension, the Black Book itself can be seen as a synecdoche for the negligence the priests showed for the culture and the faith of the common readers.

Beliefs about the power embedded in the Black Book was not restricted to its content. Like the sanctioned religious literature, there are some recorded instances of beliefs about powers imbedded in the physical form of the text. Considering the similarities the reading of the Black Book and religious texts had for many common readers, it is perhaps not surprising that there were tales of it having powers as an object. When the previously mentioned owner of a Black Book from Østbygden who nearly mauled his son tried to rid himself of the book, he found out that this was impossible. He first tried to burn the book by throwing it into a bonfire, but this treatment left no visible marks. Realising there was no use in trying to destroy it, he used it as a building block for a cottage. When the building was torn down in 1868, the man's descendants found the book in perfect shape and supposedly gave it to Eilert Sundt.[133] Like the evil it allegedly contained and the grievances it symbolised, the book was regarded to be indestructible.

The powers of the Black Book were also founded on the innate and mutual attraction of signifier and referent. As the powers of this connection was contingent on what the text referred to, the book contained the key to the devil and all that was evil, a potentiality, however, that could be harnessed by the initiated and put to good service. In this way, the use of the Black Book lay within the boundaries of the logic of pious reading.

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[130] Peter Christen Asbjørnsen, *Norske Huldreeventyr og Folkesagn. Anden Samling, Schweigaardsamlingen* (Christiania: C. A. Dybwad, 1848), 107.
[131] Hodne, *Mystikk og magi i norsk folketro*, 59.
[132] Haukenæs, *Hardanger og Søndhordaland*, 8:325.
[133] Haukenæs, *Reiseskildringer fra Norges natur og folkeliv. 2*, 100.

It is tempting to classify the Black Book as a magic object, moving within the same spheres of knowledge as religious texts but distinguished from them by its origin and use. This would undermine the notion of religious texts as being the only suitable texts for pious reading, which would undermine the notion that religious texts were the unique object of pious readings. However, "magical" and "religious" are contentious categories, influenced by the elite's understanding of who the common readers were. Moreover, it was also part of the elite's demarcation of themselves from the common readers.[134] With this in mind, it can be more productive to interpret these categories as part of a dynamic of power, of a wish to define something and someone as "inside" and other as the "outside". If common readers thought the Black Book existed, not as a magical object, but as similar object to the religious texts, this could have been indicative of their attempt to unite the teachings of the church with their own beliefs.

While some common readers transferred their pious reading practices to texts that were not regarded as religious, others restricted their readings to include nothing but their religious texts. In turn, that affected their engagement with other textual genres. In an essay on reading among commoners, Ole Vig stated that "most can spell their way through their textbooks for school, but half are often stuck when they come to any other book than the *Catechism*, 'The book of questions', and the psalm book".[135] These three texts were the ones most likely encountered in religious reading, owing to their proliferation. Even when they could read other sorts of texts, Vig found that they often chose not to, due to what Vig considered "peculiar opinions". More specifically, Vig thought the common readers believed that

> There in some way has to be something sacred about books – that they should always be of sacred content and so on. It still sometimes happens that a book on agricultural manners, fishing, or similar matters is put away with the words: 'No, there isn't much fear of God in this one.'[136]

Echoing the discouragement of Vig, Thrond Haukenæs discovered a whole community of readers bound by their religious reading when he travelled to Fyrisdal to sell copies of his latest book.

[134] A similar position about the demarcation of magic and religion can be found in: Hildred Geertz, 'An Anthropology of Religion and Magic, I', *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 6, no. 1 (1975): 71–89.
[135] The book of questions is most certainly Pontoppidan's *Explanation*. Vig, 'Lidt om Bøger og Læsning', 39.
[136] Ibid., 41.

> At the time of my arrival to Fyrisdal it was said to me that I would have little or no success on this trip; At the very least, I would not be selling any of my books as soulful pietism and religious bigotry had spread like a plague in the town. They told me that the majority of the population *could* not even read a book or a paper, unless it was religious.[137] (My emphasis)

The complaints about the reading preferences of common readers were not just the expression of the frustrations of secular elites, trying to explain why they could not sell their books among common readers. Church representatives observed the same phenomenon. When Bishop Jacob von der Lippe wrote his protocol of visitation from Nedstrand, he was also struck by the fact that there was no willingness to read anything "outside the religious texts."[138] It was also confirmed in texts approved by the church, like the fictitious dialogue between a father and his son who is unable to read anything but religious texts that was quoted at the onset of this chapter. The religious and secular elites were united in their astonishment over the fact that common readers exclusively engaged with a limited selection of religious texts even when they had a wider choice.

Whether this was because they did not want to read anything else or if they simply could not was debated. The disagreement might have been down to them encountering different readers. Haukenæs clearly thought that they could not read secular literature; Lippe thought it was a matter of will, while Vig seems undecided on that question. Whatever the reason, it seems likely that the unwillingness or inability of common readers to engage with secular texts was down to edges of the spoken word.

The tasks of everyday life was likely to have been split between the spoken and the written word for common readers.[139] While the written word seems to have been connected to pious reading – and thereby questions of faith and salvation – the spoken word was the vessel of secular tasks. The telling of stories, music, dance, and many other leisure time activities were not enjoyed through the written word. Equally, the infrastructure of the written word had not yet expanded enough so that the spreading of news, practical advice, and information regarding vacancies belonged to the written word. Lastly, the readers did not learn their trade by texts. It was practical knowledge, learned by listening to and working with those who already were versed in the arts of the trade, whether that was farming, mining, woodwork, or

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[137] Haukenæs, *Reiseskildringer fra Norges natur og folkeliv. 2*, 128.

[138] As quoted in: Svein Ivar Langhelle, 'Tok haugianarane det skrivne ordet i si makt? Religiøs kompetansebygging i Nord-Rogaland 1820-1850', in *Frå berg til bytes: soga om lesing : seminarrapport Utstein Kloster 2003* (Bokn: Haugaland akademi, 2004), 31.

[139] For an explanation of entertainment as a function of the spoken word, see: Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, 3rd ed. (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009).

carpentry. Quite simply, it is likely that there either was no demand for secular texts among common readers, or that they did not recognise the offers of enjoyment or practical information when they were presented through the written word. These readers were the pious readers of the 19th century, uninterested or perplexed by secular texts.

As pious readers restricted their reading based on function, and not on numbers, they were not restricted to the reading of a few texts, as long as they were all religious. Although most common readers did not have the money to acquire libraries, some did – and they did not abandon their practices. Haukenæs was once shown the cottage of an "old hermit" that was filled with nothing but religious literature, from Newton's explanation of the prophets to Danish collections of sermons.[140] He also tells of a wealthy farmer who bought a large number of religious texts from a book auction, but nothing else.[141] Although the access to other forms of texts would affect the reading practices of many common readers during the century, the change was by no means inevitable.

However, the readers' understanding of the written and spoken word did not have to remain static throughout their lives. Haukenæs, who wrote books and berated so many common readers for what he felt was ignorance and stupidity, was himself raised within many of the pious reading practices. His fear of the old calf leather bound bible his father borrowed to imprint the stories of Christianity in him and his siblings illustrates this. The functions of the written and spoken word were changing, and soon the dominance of religious texts among common readers would diminish.

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Both hierarchies and questions of authority permeated pious reading. The church and state worked tirelessly to restrict the arenas and forms the reading of religious texts took place. They were not only concerned with ensuring the salvation of common readers. Both the clergy and the state also tried to maintain their monopoly on doctrine, in order to dispel any resistance to their authority. However, to the readers, the clergy and state were not the only authorities in the minds of common readers, whose texts could be held in greater regard than any institution. This authority was grounded in what the readers believed their texts capable of. To many common readers, the logic of their pious reading was governed by an entanglement of signifier and referent. This entanglement meant that the words they spoke were not a simple description

[140] Thrond S. Haukenæs, *Reiseskildringer fra Norges natur og folkeliv. 1* (Bergen: C. Floor, 1890), 214–15.
[141] Ibid., 198–200.

of the world that surrounded them, but a part of it. The naming of things would put the reader in connection with that which had been called upon. This had consequences for their reading of religious texts. Whenever common readers read their religious texts, they were put in contact with divinity. The legitimacy of this connection was something the readers valued and defended from encroachments by the clergy and state.

The pious readings also had performative aspects to them. These aspects are apparent in the reading for the dying and household devotionals. Diction, the timing of the reading, the sex of the reader, and what was being read, were all props and devices that aided the readers' performances. The goal of this performance was for common readers to display what they though communicated their reverence for the divinity the texts put them in contact with. This performance had a negative impact on the role women were delegated during the readings of religious texts. Despite their competency as readers, women were not entrusted the coveted responsibility of reading the texts during household devotionals.

Parallel to these readers were the Haugeans, who, with their *memoria* practice, had different goals and logics dictating their reading. The Haugeans did not see the texts as a connection to God, but as a script that when read correctly would reveal the revelation to them. Their reading consisted of memorising their religious texts in order to make them available to themselves as loose aphorisms. These fragments could be combined to give the sum of the parts a new and greater meaning. This form of reading lent itself easily to performances in which the Haugean performer could make composites of the fragments they knew by heart in order to make an impact on his or her audience. As the Haugeans believed that the fragments revealed a part of the revelation, they attempted to let them guide the paths of their lives – trying to live through rather than with the texts, as other common readers did.

Another difference between the Haugeans and other common readers was the importance of the physical texts. While Haugeans sought to emancipate the texts from the physical form, other common readers had practices dedicated to the physical vessel of their texts. The material practices were often related to the protection of both the dead and living but this depended on texts and context. There were also texts that could be agents of ominous powers. While it the material practices were sometimes connected to the practices of reading the texts, the reading and material practices did not determine each other and were not reducible to one another.

The limits of pious reading were governed by what the readers understood to be religious texts, and what functions the written word had in their lives. To some readers, the Black Book was governed by the same logic that dictated their use of other religious texts.

They were read with the entanglement of signifier and referent in mind. As the Black Book had different referents than other religious texts, the readers could call upon other, more chaotic, forces by reading the Black Book. The "magical" elements of the Black Book seems to undermine the unique role religious texts had as the object of pious reading. However, the separation of the Black Book from "sanctioned" religious texts is a contentious one and does not seem to have been accepted by common readers.

Beyond the religious texts, the landscape seemed barren to common readers. To them, the written word was tied to their religious life and concerns of salvation. Beyond this, entertainment, news, their trade, and the other aspects of their life were functions of the spoken word. Among these pious readers, who were either uninterested or perplexed by anything other than religious texts, the demand for secular texts was low, which bewildered and exasperated the elites. However, the tides were changing, and as the century progressed, the number of functions of the written word would expand drastically.

2. The invasion of the written word

The pious reader was made extinct by the end of the 19th century, which saw a momentous expansion of the role of the written word in the lives of common readers. At the beginning of the century, the written word was for many people synonymous with religious texts. These texts were used both as material objects and as symbols to be deciphered, in practices that assumed the entanglement of signifier and referent, as the previous chapter has shown. By the last twenty years of the century, the written word played a much-expanded role in many facets of common people's lives, with texts being read for entertainment, political debates, practical information, and news. The written word claimed authority and took over many functions that had previously been fulfilled by the spoken word. With the abundance of texts came new uses, which the next chapter are going to study.

The present chapter bridges the two stages by following the gradual transformation from pious reading to the challenges of textual abundance. It focuses on public libraries as a concerted effort of elites at expanding the textual world of common people. These elites include the clergy, politicians, the middle class, plutocrats, and any other influential groups which had an interest in the reading of common readers. Both the characteristics of the process of borrowing books and the selection of texts available brought the readers in contact with texts they did not intend to read. As long as the readers were curious enough, or felt committed to the libraries in any way, the libraries' logistics ensured the rest. This was made possible and facilitated by the gradual cheapening of texts and the coming of mass media. Both processes increased the importance of the written word and its functions.

The records that exist of from the libraries portray a change in the preferred texts of the common readers throughout the century. Whereas they preferred religious texts to begin with, they opened up to secular texts, slowly and gradually. As the following chapter is going to show, this shift in preference does not simply stem from a changing demand, but owed to a considerable extent public libraries organised the procurement of texts. Initially, common readers gave in to the gentle pressure and insistence of the elites who wanted to guide them to "instructive" reading. However, by the end of the century, many common readers had ventured beyond what the elites had intended. By then, they were consuming texts that were never meant for them, supplied by the market. Implicit in this narrative is the notion that the texts could be actors in the readers' changing understanding of the functions of the written word, which is in accordance with Latour's notion of agency detailed in the introduction.

In the first part of this chapter, I will discuss the introduction of the first "public" libraries by the Norwegian clergy, the religious consideration that governed the libraries' founding, and how the logics of their operation affected what texts common readers were exposed to. The following section will address the secular public libraries that followed in the footsteps of their forerunners, but expanded the selection of texts available to ensure that the patrons came in contact with ever more functions of the written word. I will then turn to the gradual cheapening of print, which, by its proliferation, gradually increased the functions of the written word and magnified its importance.[142] Lastly, I will detail how the preferences of common readers ran away from those who attempted to influence them.

Emerging patterns: The introduction of public libraries

At the onset of the 19th century, an institution was introduced to Norway that would have drastic consequences for the role of the written word in the lives of common readers – the public libraries. The history of public libraries in Norway can be traced back to 1785, when the Deichman library in Christiania was founded and the royal Danish *Landhuusholdningsselskab* promised to financially support the establishment of public libraries in the countryside. However, it took decades for public libraries to become a permanent institution. Initially, the Deichman library had not been envisaged as a public library. It only became one after a steady decline had drained it of affluent readers by the 1820s. After that, common readers gradually appropriated it, so that this group made up the majority of patrons by the middle of 19th century.[143] The *Landhuusholdningsselskab's* offer met the response of at least nine individuals in Norway, among which was the rationalist priest Sivert Aarflot.[144] The library he established in Volda continued to be in use until it burned down in 1844 and was an instigator for his gradual entry into the world of publishing.[145] It is not known what happened to the other eight

[142] This thesis is not alone in making assertions about the transformative powers of the changes in the technologies of print. See: Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early-Modern Europe*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: University Press, 1979); Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early-Modern Europe*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: University Press, 1979).
[143] Nils Johan Ringdal, *By, bok og borger: Deichmanske bibliotek gjennom 200 år* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1985), 29–36.
[144] Arne Kildal, *Norske folkeboksamlinger: Fra leseselskapets tid til bibliotekreformen av 1902* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1949), 47–49.
[145] Aarflot, *Sivert Aarflot og hans samtid*, 43.

libraries, but they most likely fell out of use and disappeared without leaving any traces of their activities.

The attempts at reaching the common readers represented a new direction in the elite's discourse on the common reader. Clergymen like Aarflot as well as for the Danish funders, regarded libraries as a means to control the reading of commoners and even shape their reading habits. The primary object was to instil in them a more "rational" faith in accordance with the enlightenment thinkers that seems to have inspired them.[146] Religious authorities regarded the collections of sermons that were favoured by common readers as outdated or worse and sought to rectify this with their library selections.[147] In Aarflot's library, 40 of the 114 books on offer were on religious matters.[148] In addition, he often wrote about the need to do away with the "superstitions" of common readers in *Norsk Lanboeblad*, his annual publication with which he wanted to bring enlightenment his readers.[149] The condemnation of 'superstitions' was combined with attempts to introduce "enlightened" culture to the people, including instructive books. To the advocates for the early public libraries, common people did not have a culture that needed replacing. They thought they would be filling a vacuum with whatever they considered fitting.[150]

The initiatives of the Danish rationalist bishop of Kristiansand diocese, Peder Hansen, may illustrate the clergy's attempts to lead his parishioners to faith and enlightenment. Describing the sole institution of enlightenment in his parish, the schools, Hansen found the teachers incompetent and the buildings inadequate. With obvious symbolism, Hansen wrote in an article in his periodical that soot blackened the windows in the schools so that no light could enter the classroom.[151] To remedy this deficiency, Hansen not only set out to reform the schools, but also embarked on a new systematic and coordinated policy of founding lending

[146] The conceptualisations of enlightenment the Danish-Norwegian elites worked towards was similar to its French, German, and British precursors. For an introduction to these, see: Dorinda Outram, *The Enlightenment*, 3rd ed., New Approaches to European History (Cambridge: University Press, 2013); Roy Porter, *Enlightenment: Britain and the Creation of the Modern World* (London: Penguin Books, 2001); Sven-Eric Liedman, *Den moderne verdens idéhistorie: i skyggen av fremtiden*, trans. Lars Nygaard (Oslo: Dreyers forl, 2016); Jonathan I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750* (Oxford: University Press, 2001).
[147] Apelseth, 'Tvang til skrift og vilje til tekst', 139.
[148] Johan Leif Olaisen, 'Volda folkebibliotek 1797-1900: lokal kulturhistorisk sammenheng, organisasjon, økonomi, bokbestand og utlån' (Hovedoppgave, Universitetet i Trondheim, 1978), 32.
[149] Fet, *Lesande bønder*, 274–81.
[150] Juliane Engelhardt, *Borgerskab og fællesskab: de patriotiske selskaber i den danske helstat 1769-1814*, vol. 8, Tidlig moderne (København: Museum Tusculanum, 2010), 255. The project had many similarities with the *Bildung* tradition.
[151] Peder Hansen, *Archiv for Skolevæsenets og Oplysnings Udbredelse i Christiansands Stift. 1: Iste Bind*, ed. Peder Hansen, *Archiv for Skolevæsenets og Oplysnings Udbredelse i Christiansands Stift*, vol. 1 (Kiøbenhavn: D. Pulsen, 1800), 4.

libraries.[152] In the years between 1798 and 1804, Hansen had founded 39 lending libraries throughout the diocese. These had standardised rules, very similar holdings, and were visited by Hansen at least once. He also seems to have been a member of the libraries he created.[153] The selection of books available in Hansen's libraries reflects his rationalist intentions. Around 9 per cent of the books available were novels, with the rest being different types of "useful" texts – such as lessons in mathematics and morals – and religious texts.[154]

Not everyone was granted access to Hansen's libraries. The libraries were open to anyone who was willing and able to pay an annual fee of 24 shillings, the equivalent of the price for 3 kilos of meat or 24 kilos of potatoes. Clearly, this meant a serious investment to most readers.[155] Considering Hansen's own humble beginnings, it is this might not have been for lack of sympathy but as a means to keep the libraries financially afloat. In addition to this financial barrier, no men who were associated with vices, both in public and private, such as drunkenness, being quarrelsome, or regular fighting were granted access. In effect, the register of members lists the bishop, a manager of a storehouse, a school operator, unmarried soldiers, and several farmers of varying means, but no *husmenn*. They were constrained by either the censorship of price or the rules.[156] Women were also denied access, unless they inherited the membership from their departed husband. Hansen therefore did not have all common readers in mind when he advocated for his libraries, but groups that he presumably thought of as worthy of the effort.

For Moland parish lending library and reading community, one of the establishment Hansen founded, records of loans have been preserved.[157] Established in 1801 with help from the local priest, it was run along the same standard rules and held the same books as Hansen's other libraries, and might therefore serve as an indication of how the situation of other libraries. The record of loans show that religious literature was the most preferred genre, and fiction was the least popular. Of the 82 loans registered, 37 per cent were religious, 16 per cent were within mathematics and nature studies, 10 per cent were reading guides, 9 per cent were on manners,

[152] See: letters between Hansen and the parish priests in his diocese, in Statsarkivet i Kristiansand **(**SAK), Biskopen i Kristiansand, 1113-0001/G/Gf/L0001; Byberg, *Biskopen, bøndene og bøkene*, 49–50, 75.
[153] Moland leseselskaps protokoll, in Statsarkivet i Kongsberg (SAKO), *Fyresdal sokneprestkontor*, A-262/Y/Ya/L0001.
[154] Byberg, *Biskopen, bøndene og bøkene*, 119.
[155] Ibid., 81.
[156] Ibid., 103; For the censorship of price, see: William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 256.
[157] There are also records from the library he founded in Finnøy. Unfortunately, the covid-19 pandemic derailed several attempts at visiting the state archives in Hamar and Stavanger. I was therefore forced to wait for the digitalisation of the source material, which came to late to make use of both. See: Protocol of loans, in Statsarkivet i Stavanger (SAST), *Finnøy Leseselskap*, A-100635/A/L0001.

both practical literature and collections of stories made up 4 per cent. Additionally, 21 per cent of the loans were not identifiable. The by far most popular book was the translated German book *Almuens Lærer: En nyttig Læsning for Meenigemand i Dannemark og Norge* – a book that justified the state and church as a part of the fall of man from divine grace.[158] As 21 per cent of the loans and 36 per cent of the selection of books were not identifiable, assumptions must be made with care. However, compared to the prevalence or religious texts and pious reading at the time, one might expect religious literature to dominate. This discrepancy betrays that there were influences on the patrons' choices, which exposed them to other texts than what they might have intended to borrow.

The first influence was the libraries' holdings. It is difficult to say whether this is representative of the readers' preferences, or the books available. The protocol of loans and inventory does not reveal which texts were available at what time. The loans are registered, but not the returns. In addition, the documents show that the library did not hold duplicates, which means that popular books could be out on loan whenever other readers wanted them. This might have prompted readers who were not able to secure their favoured work to search for alternatives. As the membership fee was so steep, it is plausible that the readers were willing to settle for any other book that was available if their preferred one was out on loan. The opportunity to borrow a book would also most likely present itself just after the Sunday sermons, with the priest loaning out the books. This would have afforded the priest an opportunity to influence what books the readers borrowed. Readers were not afforded anonymity when they borrowed books, as the membership of the libraries was so small that the priest most likely knew all the members. Lastly, given that religious texts mattered as material objects, which I have shown in chapter one, readers may have approached the lending library with very different expectations than when handling their religious texts. All this assures that as long as readers were curious enough or felt some obligation to make use of the library, they would come in contact with unfamiliar texts. The texts that were available were mostly of a rationalist nature, propagating the interests of Hansen and other reformers. As they included, among other topics, works on animal husbandry, the upbringing of children, and medicine, they touched on many aspects of readers' lives, thus expanding the role of the written word to pious readers.[159]

[158] Fet, *Lesande bønder*, 265.
[159] Byberg, *Biskopen, bøndene og bøkene*, 172–78.

The second influence was the reading society that administered the library. During the members' meetings led by the priest, the readers were exposed to written word's roles. At these meetings, the priest held lectures on what he considered to be important subjects and proposed which texts should be read or acquired.[160] This is not to say that the priests attempted to secularise the readers. The texts that dealt with secular topics – like political and natural science, history, geography, or practical subjects – were informed by religious notions or placed their lessons within a religious cosmology.[161] Either way, the meetings presented the reader with an alternative view on what texts could and should be used for. Agriculture, animal husbandry, the curing of ailments, or other practical matters were said to belong to the domain of the texts. In other words, borrowing from libraries was just one way of using them, and the reading society was another, training people what and how to read – and membership of one came with the other. The society and the library was therefore a sort of two-for-the-price-of-one-offer readers could hardly refuse given the financial costs of joining the library. The society might also have served as a forum in which reader could discuss the texts they read and encouraging each other's explorations.

Most clergymen promoted the widening of the role of texts in the lives of common readers. However, given the fact that not all literature was considered enlightening and supportive of the true faith, some priests and bishops raised concerns that common readers were being led away from the reading of religious texts. The bishop of Trondheim was fearful that those who were not versed in the literary world would, when confronted with the opportunity, "neglect the repeated reading of the important books or their duties."[162] Others turned to drastic measures to ensure that common people did not engage with texts that undermined their faith. Thrond Haukenæs gives an example of this in a story of the public auctioning of a captain's estate. The late captain had owned books on religious matters that were openly critical toward Christianity. In order to protect readers' beliefs and to prevent any doubt or faithlessness from creeping into the congregation, the priest outbid everyone else at the auction. Having secured the most dangerous texts, he burnt them with the local community as an audience.[163]

The public libraries founded by the clergy established two trends that would continue throughout the century. To begin with, they were instruments of discipline. Through their

[160] Hansen, *Archiv for Skolevæsenets*, 1:110.
[161] Fet, *Lesande bønder*, 254.
[162] Kildal, *Norske folkeboksamlinger*, 111–12.
[163] Thrond S. Haukenæs, *Ungdomserindringer* (Bergen: C. Floor, 1892), 45.

holdings and their function as a meeting place, they served their founders and administrators to expand the role of the written word and shape their clientele in accordance to their ideals. At the same time, however, libraries created a moment of contingency as they confronted readers who were curious enough to use the library with other texts than those they had initially sought. Paradoxically, the lack of anonymity that came with the clergy's supervision may have acted as an incentive for readers to turn to unfamiliar books, if only to demonstrate that they were active patrons. Sure enough, any engagement with unfamiliar texts was limited to the holdings of the respective library and depended on the curiosity of readers, and membership was still relatively exclusive in the early 19th century, a far cry from including all common readers. However, the very principle of the lending library prepared the ground for exploratory reading.

Curiosity kills the cat: Common readers in public libraries

By the 1830s, public libraries had become prevalent enough that the initiators of Fron reading society appealed to their abundance as a way of attracting members.[164] By the 1840s, there were an estimated 200 to 250 public libraries in Norway, the number ever increasing.[165] Some of these were isolated libraries that did not belong to any concerted initiatives. As early as 1802, a reading society in Dypvåg dedicated itself solely to the acquirement of entertaining literature for its members, mostly fishermen and sailors.[166] However, the growth was to a considerable extent down to the concerted effort of *Selskapet for Norges vel*, a national association founded in 1809 by politicians, bishops, and plutocrats. They were not the first founders of secular libraries for common readers. The association affiliated and often stimulated the foundation of *Sogneselskaper* (parish societies) that were to act as local societies of enlightenment, often using public libraries to this end.[167] The financing and administration of these libraries was gradually taken over by the state from the 1850s.[168] The involvement of the parish societies marked the introduction of Norwegian actors outside the church who had an interest in common readers and the enlightenment reading was supposed to bring to the people. In some ways, the libraries founded by *Selskapet for Noges vel* build on the libraries clergymen like Sivert Aarflot and Peder Hansen had established. The libraries were still situated in churches and vicarages and were administered by priests.[169] However, the mission

[164] Various administrate documents, in SAH, *Fron Prestekontor*, PREST-078/Y/Ya/L0001.
[165] Kildal, *Norske folkeboksamlinger*, 101.
[166] Minute book, bylaws, and various other documents, in AAKS, *Dypvåg leseselskap*, PA-1902/A/L0001.
[167] Sigvald Hasund, 'Selskapet for Norges Vels arbeid for folkebibliotekssaka', *Bok og bibliotek* 3, no. 1 (1936).
[168] Kildal, *Norske folkeboksamlinger*, 33.
[169] Ibid., 171–72, 186.

of the new libraries was different from their predecessors. Whereas the clergy had limited the expansion of texts, the new libraries would not be as restrained. Both the holdings themselves and the rationale of libraries changed, with a further expansion of the role of the written word and whom they wanted to influence.

Having said that, the founders of the new libraries, among them Henrik Wergeland, Eilert Sundt, Ole Vig, and many other members of the middle and upper cultural and economic classes of Norwegian societies, were by no means a-religious. The thought of common readers turning away from God troubled most of them. After all, most of them were deeply Christian themselves, and the enlightenment project they envisioned was not a secular one, at least not until the end of the century. For example, when Ole Vig wrote of a "hollow enlightenment and abominable reading", it was that "which in the previous century originated with Voltaire and other infidels."[170] Similar to the clergy, the founders of the new libraries advocated for what they called a rationalisation of the faith. Eilert Sundt and his fellow writers in The People's Friend placed great hopes in the emerging public education and libraries to dispel any "superstitions" common readers had, and replace them with the "correct" faith.[171] As the state took over the responsibility for the libraries, the task of administrating them befell the department of the state church, an indication of the continued importance of the religious sides of the enlightenment. The priests were also kept as librarians until 1886.[172]

The concern with religious texts was also founded in other interests than religious ones. Amidst all his concern with enlightenment, Sundt was also worried that the reading of secular books would give common people a secular outlook, which would undermine his enlightenment project. If common readers started reading more than religious texts, Sundt feared, it could eradicate the special "Norwegian temperament and philosophy of life" that existed in them. This temperament had, Sundt continued, always ensured that commoners and the working class understood that "men of books" and "working men" should not lay claim to other walks of life than those they were born to do. He therefore placed great faith in the priests who were running the public libraries to promote religious texts and prevent uninstructive books from reaching the common reader.[173] Thee fear that the "wrong" kind of literature could lead ordinary people astray, combined with the fact that most public libraries continued to be

[170] Vig, 'Lidt om Bøger og Læsning', 44.
[171] Sundt, 'Mere om overtro', 447–48; Peter Tidemand Malling, *Beretning om Christianias Almueskolevæsen*, Tillægshefte til Folkevennen (Christiania: P. T. Mallings Bogtrykkeri, 1856), 17.
[172] Various letters and administrative documents, in Statsarkivet i Trondheim (SAT), *Ørskog sokneprestkontor*, A-1014/1/IV/IV1/L0001; Kildal, *Norske folkeboksamlinger*, 142.
[173] Eilert Sundt, 'Bereting om almuebibliotheker i Norge', *Folkevennen* 12 (1863): 67–69.

run by priests, all but assured that the public libraries of the period still limited the territory of the written word that common readers could explore.

Sundt's worry over the disintegration of the special "Norwegian temperament" that kept the "working men" from interfering with the work of his own social group is indicative of the limitations the elites embedded in their enlightenment project. The attempt to introduce what the elites deemed as proper reading was not meant to promote social mobility. On the contrary, it was not least an attempt to discipline common readers into accepting their position in society and not overstep their boundaries to challenge the elites. This concern can be traced back to the first initiatives for public libraries, which took inspiration from figures such as the Germany philosopher Moses Mendelssohn.[174] The enlightenment of the subject as a person (*Menschenaufklärung*) and as a citizen (*Bürgeraufklärung*) were two different processes. Whereas the first was universal, done without regard for the subject's standing, the second was adapted to the subject's social position and role.

By the middle of the century, *Menschenaufklärung* and *Bürgeraufklärung* had converged in a single notion of enlightenment informed by a faith in *Bildung*.[175] Ole Vig, Ivar Aasen, Eilert Sundt and many other social reformers believed that the reading of books would emancipate the readers from their ignorance and make them independent. However, this did not mean that the reformers aimed at elevating the social or political capital of the readers. On the contrary, the independence they hoped to instil would help common readers renounce all potentially upheaving movements on their own accord. The Haugean movement, the emerging labour movement, and even the Latter-day Saints would not receive support from citizens who understood and internalised their place in society.[176]

The object of passivizing common readers had support from the elites of a range of different hierarchies the readers were embroiled in. Sivert Aarflot feared for the position of the church if the readers acquired the mental capabilities to criticise in ways the clergy had to take seriously. He therefore tried to persuade the readers that "one does not judge the conduct of

[174] Engelhardt, *Borgerskab og fællesskab*, 8:259, 270–74.
[175] Merethe Roos, 'Marcus Thrane, demokratiet og 1850-tallets opplysningsvirksomhet', *Nytt Norsk Tidsskrift* 35, no. 02 (2018): 141–43; Merethe Roos, 'Lesing til dannelse: Folkeopplysningsmennenes forståelse av lesing og dannelse på 1850-tallet: Kontekstenes betydning for mening og det språklige uttrykk', *Teologisk tidsskrift* 5, no. 03 (2016): 208–25.
[176] Eilert Sundt, *Om Piperviken og Ruseløkbakken: undersøgelser om arbeidsklassens kår og sæder i Christiania*, Tidens tema 14 (Oslo: Tiden, 1968), 53; Roar Sanderud, *Fra P. A. Jensen til Nordahl Rolfsen: et skolehistorisk bilde, Barnebokinstituttet* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1951), 10; Kildal, *Norske folkeboksamlinger*, 46; Langhelle, 'Tok haugianarane det skrivne ordet i si makt? Religiøs kompetansebygging i Nord-Rogaland 1820-1850', 187; Ole Marius Hylland, *Folket og eliten: En studie av folkeopplysning som tekst i tidsskriftet Folkevennen*, vol. 153, Acta humaniora (Oslo: Universitetet i Oslo, 2002), 107.

authority or ones superiors, and one does not talk unseemly about them. Not even in the cases where they have made themselves deserving of such."[177] In the hierarchies of the armed forces, the fear of the subordinate reading, finding their situations untenable and thereby vying for better conditions worried the officers. This worry could lead officers in the navy to ridicule any junior rate sailors that displayed their reading in order to keep the reader from encouraging others.[178]

The elites considered it paramount that the readers were presented with the right texts if they were to become enlightened. "The reading of good books is one of the most useful and instructive pursuits for man as it can enlighten his mind, make his heart noble, and help him reap the fruits of past and present experiences."[179] These texts could be on the natural sciences, law, religious works (as discussed above), history, fiction, travelogues, and more.[180] Sometimes, a particular genre was linked to the cultivation of a specific desirable trait. In the teaching of patriotism, the reading of history was considered of particular value. Vig wrote that common readers already had developed a keen interest in history that "when it is more widely awakened and developed" could be "a splendid foundation on which to base bourgeois enlightenment and true patriotism."[181] What most of these texts and the ideas behind them had in common was a substantially broader understanding of what the written word could contain than the notions underlying the pious reading. These were the texts that filled the public libraries, and that common readers would come into contact with.

However, not all libraries and reading societies were founded by bourgeois reformers, some came from more radical forces such as the Thranite movement but this made less of a difference than one might imagine. Thrane's *Arbeiderforeninger* were supposed to give workers, *husmenn*, and other members of the lower economic and cultural classes an opportunity to acquire literacy skills that would enable them to partake in the fight for the democratisation of Norwegian society.[182] Although this was a radically different political project, the *Arbeiderforeninger* functioned in many of the same ways as the public libraries of the bourgeois reformers. Both were tools for disciplining common readers to read new texts and expand the functions of the written word. There might have been disagreement as to what made for adequate, acceptable, or valuable reading between different groups, which ranged

[177] As quoted in: Fet, *Lesande bønder*, 267.
[178] C. J. Engelbrechtssen, *Fra Bak og Skands: Erindringer fra Sølivet* (Christiania: Askeland, 1882), 100–101.
[179] Letter from Kamstrup 5.6.1838, in Bergen Byarkiv (BBA), *Årstad kommune*, *Formannskapet*, A-0251/B/L0001.
[180] Kildal, *Norske folkeboksamlinger*, 280–81.
[181] Vig, 'Lidt om Bøger og Læsning', 45.
[182] Bull, *Arbeiderklassen blir til*, 1:19–71.

from the rationalist clergy to teachers and from bourgeois reformers and businessmen to social revolutionaries. Yet they all agreed that the written word had that potential and sought to employ it for their respective purposes. The disciplining function of institutions, which provided access to printed material, meant different desired outcomes to different people but were otherwise based on the same consensus.

Whereas Bishop Hansen excluded what he deemed morally suspect and less than well off readers from his lending library, the new initiators of public libraries aimed at including as many readers as possible among their patrons. The libraries were most often free of charge, and targeted both *husmenn*, navvies, fishers, sailors, domestic workers, and more.[183] In the spirit of this inclusiveness, six men from Bergen (presumably members of the local middle- and upper class) announced in 1846 that there was a need for a new public library in Bergen, as the existing reading societies were too expensive for commoners to affiliate to.[184] This initiative materialised in the opening of *Bergens Almuebibliothek* (Bergen public library) the same year. This was the first public library in the town where common readers did not have to pay for their membership, barring the library at Sankt Jørgens Hospital for "leprous" patients.[185] The library quickly became popular with a broad section of Bergen's inhabitants. During the first seven months of operation, the library had over 3,000 loans and it only grew more popular during its short existence that ended in 1851 when an outbreak of cholera and financial troubles closed it.

The founders' reflections on the usage of *Bergens Almuebibliothek* reveal the intentions behind their initiative. In their annual reports, the library's board expressed how content they were with readers who were "modest and unassuming" and treated the books with due care. Most surprising to them, readers of the "lower classes" were said to have abstained from the usual commotion that regularly occurred when large numbers of them came together.[186] This confirmed to them that the library kept patrons from drinking, gambling, and other vices. Bergen public library was not the only initiative to have this civilising ambition. The faith

[183] Sundt, 'Almuebiblioteker i Norge', 59.
[184] Gina Dahl, 'Internasjonal underholdning i Holbergs fødeby: Utlånsbiblioteker i Bergen ca. 1750-1850', in *Litterære verdensborgere: Transnasjonale perspektiver på norsk bokhistorie 1519-1850*, ed. Asta M.B. Bjørkøy et al., Nota bene 13 (Oslo: Nasjonalbiblioteket, 2019), 254–57. The primary sources for this library are in a few numbers of the newspaper *Bergens Stiftiender* which is only available in the archives of Bergens offentlige bibliotek. I attempted to visit Bergen on four different occasions, all cancelled by the pandemic, and the library did not respond to my requests for the sources to be digitalised.
[185] Protocol of loaned books, in BBA, *St. Jørgens Hospital*, A-0313/K/Kd/L0001; Lyder Sagen and Herman Foss, *Bergens Beskrivelse af L. Sagen, Overlærer ved Bergens Kathedralskole, Medlem af det Kongl. norske Videnskabernes Selskab, og H. Foss, Premier-Lieuten. i den Kgl. norske Artillerie-Brigade, Ridder af den K. D. Dannebrogsorden, Norske bøker 1519-1850* (Bergen: Chr. Dahl, R. S., 1824), 633–41.
[186] Dahl, 'Internasjonal underholdning i Holbergs fødeby: Utlånsbiblioteker i Bergen ca. 1750-1850', 255.

placed in the transformative powers of the "right" texts manifests itself clearly in prisons, where the prison chaplain encouraged inmates to conduct evening prayers voluntarily in communion with the assistance of religious texts, while at the same time trying to confiscate all secular texts. According to Gjest Baardsen – the infamous master thief – both of these initiatives led to himself and his fellow convicts telling on each other or staging readings in order to curry favour with the chaplain or reduce their punishment.[187]

Loan records of *Bergens Almuebibliothek* illustrate that readers borrowed books from a broad spectrum. The most popular texts were *Snorre Sagas* and Esaias Tegner's *Frithjofs Saga*, the novels of Frederick Marryat, *Skillingsmagazin* (a richly illustrated, multi-volume, collection of fictional and "real" stories, both large and small), travelogues, and all the other fiction the library owned. At the same time, titles from the classic religious literature (probably including the likes of Pontoppidan and Luther on account of their contemporary status), Jens Zetlitz' collection of songs, and older chapbooks such as *Octovian*, were still very popular, as they had been in the early parts of the century.[188] As a whole, common readers turned to new texts, while keeping old favourites. This raises the question whether the overall readership was divided into distinct groups where one borrowed religious books, while another preferred secular titles, or if readers where diverse in their selections. While a definitive answer to this question is impossible to give, the numbers suggest that curiosity was common among patrons. In 1848, there were over 500 patrons making a total of over 14,000 loans. These were distributed on 508 books, of which 30 were doublets. The high number of loans makes it likely that readers picked alternative books when they could not get hold of what they wanted. This would have brought readers in contact with works that propagated other notions of the role of the written word.

The records for the library in the parish of Haus, founded in in 1847 just outside Bergen, confirms the findings for *Bergens Almuebibliothek*.[189] The library held 219 books and had attracted a significant number of readers, so that alternative choices were highly probable. Without any descriptions on the operation of the library, its layout, or reports of lost books, it is impossible to know what external factors played a part in shaping the statistics of loans. However, the degree to which some books were borrowed compared to others suggests that these were more popular among the readers. As in Bergen, the most popular books were works

[187] Gjest Baardsen, *Gjest Baardsen Sogndalsfjærens levnetsløb*, 3. opl. (Christiania: Damm, 1877), 257–59. Baardsen's autobiography is said to be first of its kind written by a Norwegian.
[188] Dahl, 'Internasjonal underholdning i Holbergs fødeby: Utlånsbiblioteker i Bergen ca. 1750-1850', 255.
[189] Protocol of loaned books, in BBA, *Haus Prestegjelds Almuebibliotek*, A-1143/G/L0001.

on different subjects. They included books concerning religious life, works of history, and the *Skillingsmagazin* (seven editions in total). This suggests that the variety of interests represented in Bergen was present outside the city too.

According to Eilert Sundt, fiction, religious texts, and history seems to have been popular throughout the country by the 1860s. As ever more public libraries were founded across the country, Sundt became interested in their operations and the data they produced. In 1863, he published the results of an extensive questionnaire that had been returned by 115 of the over 300 public libraries that were now spread across the country.[190] The investigation gives an indication of what books were being read nationally. Sundt measures this not by how many times a book had been borrowed, but according to the total period of time books had been out on loan. This was done in order to avoid that the loans of readers who did not like their book, and promptly returned them, did not become a source of error in the equation.[191]

With the help of this method, he reveals a similarly broad assortment of interests as in Haus and Bergen.[192] The works out on loan for the longest time were a book on the history of Norway by S. Peterson, an undetermined number of magazines on the study of nature, Snorre Sturlason's sagas, collections of fairy tales from both the German brothers Grimm and the Norwegians Asbjørnsen and Moe, and five different works of religious nature. The list is not an indication of which works were the most popular. The method used distorts the statistics in favour of longer works and does not take the practical limitations on the borrowing and returning of books into account. In addition, and as Sundt himself recognises, the list is ultimately a representation of which books were most available to readers. However, when abstracted to the level of genre, it confirms the findings for Haus and Bergen, where both a growing interest in fairy tales, history, and magazines and a continued interest in religious texts could be observed. Thus the middle of the century can be regarded a transitional period for common readers throughout the country. The interest for religious literature was very much alive, while secular works, and especially fiction and history, were becoming more and more popular.

The Deichman library seems, at first sight, to complicate this picture somewhat. This library is probably the one that left the most extensive records of loans from the second half of the 19th century. The records suggests that history (43.3 per cent), followed by texts of "mixed

[190] Sundt, 'Almuebibliotheker i Norge', 44.
[191] Returning the books after having looked into them means that readers had formed an opinion on them, which one could say is a relevant use. Certainly more relevant than having a book at home and leaving it unopened for the duration of the loan. However, Sundt did not compute his data in any other way.
[192] Sundt, 'Almuebibliotheker i Norge', 62–63.

content" (24.5 per cent) and fiction (17.2 per cent) were the leading genres among the "other" readers in the same period as Sundt's investigation.[193] "Theology, ecclesiastical history, and missals" amounted to just 2.1 per cent of the loans. The apparent disinterest in the religious holdings was probably down to the academic nature of the works the library held and the fact that many of them were in foreign languages. The popularity of history was mostly down to one serialised work, *Archiv for Historie og Geographie* by Johan Christian Riise, which alone stood for 37.6 per cent of the total loans in 1861. Other multivolume works seems to have been the most popular among the texts of mixed content. The popularity of these multivolume works had its basis in the dynamics of borrowing at the library and its assortment, which sheds some light on the record of loans from this period.

Like most libraries at the time, the Deichman library did not hold duplicates of books, prioritising the diversity of the collection over its availability. There is also no way of telling which books were out on loan from the protocol, which worked in similar ways to the protocol in Moland, and not having the possibility of browsing in the library, the readers were often left with three alternatives. The first was connected to the peculiarities of the system of returning books at Deichman. The librarian announced which books had been returned before placing them on a table for everyone to browse. If a reader had no preconceived notion of what to read, the recent return on the table may have seemed more attractive than having to browse the catalogue. If no books on the table tempted the reader, he or she could ask the librarian for recommendations–as many readers seem to have done.[194] This provided an opportunity for the librarian to directly influence the selection and channel certain texts to certain readers. Lastly, some readers brought a list of books they would like to read, hoping that at least one of them was available. Traces of this practice are to be found in Anthon B. Nilsen's description of the library in a fictional autobiography he wrote under his pseudonym, Elias Kræmmer. "Grandfather had, like every one of us, brought his list of preferences and was reading it aloud [to the librarian] but was constantly met with 'out, out, out'. At last grandfather became annoyed, took his hat, and said: 'Well, now I wish it was you who was out.'"[195]

In order avoid returning empty-handed, and without the possibility of browsing the entirety of the books available, reaching for familiar works was a common way for readers to

[193] Linda Østbye, 'Utlånsvirksomhet på deichmanske bibliotek i 1860-årene: En undersøkelse' (Hovedoppgave, Oslo, Statens bibliotekshøgskule, 1983), 16–18, OsloMet.
[194] Vegard Skuseth Halvorsen, Lasse Jacobsen, and Ingrid Strande, 'Det deichmanske bibliotek i året 1886: Lånere og utlån' (Hovedoppgave, Oslo, Statens bibliotekshøgskule, 1983), 12, OsloMet.
[195] Elias Kræmmer, *Elias Kræmmer's oplevelser: korte romaner fra et langt liv* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1932), 134; Ringdal is certain that Kræmmer visited the library and that the story is based on the actual operation of the library. See: Ringdal, *By, bok og borger*, 58–59.

make a selection. Riise's *Archiv* counted 121 volumes in total and was therefore all but guaranteed to have been available to the readers in search of texts. This availability prompted Elias Kræmmer/Anthon B. Nilsen to name it his "saving anchor" whenever other books were out.[196] The work's high rank on the list of most borrowed items may thus not simply attest to its popularity, but owes to a combination of its availability and the readers' awareness of it. The next six popular works were also multi-volume works, affirming the practicality of the type of publication rather than the popularity of the work as such. The same was probably true for the texts of mixed content, which often came in multiple volumes.

The dynamics behind the statistics of loans at the Deichman library shows the importance of the characteristics of the process of the borrowing of texts and the selection of the library. Whereas Riise's *Archiv* dominated at Deichman, it was not among the most favoured titles at Haus, Bergen, or in Sundt's investigation. However, beyond the specific works, the data from Deichman suggest that history was a popular genre in Christiania as well, along with fiction, and other secular texts. The presence of the multi-volume *Skillingsmagazin* among the most popular works in both Haus and Bergen suggests that these might have been popular elsewhere too. Beyond Deichman, religious texts also seem to have been in high demand with readers. This did not necessarily reflect directly what content was favoured, but sheds light on what the men behind the library counters hoped their patrons would read.

Concerning the social reach of public libraries, it is important to note that they were not patronised by all readers by the 1860s. There were plenty of people who stayed away from them. The feedback the *Selskap for Norges Vels* received in the 1830s from the administrators of the libraries they founded complains about readers not having "enough culture", being intemperate, or not being sufficiently enlightened to appreciate what libraries had to offer.[197] Such laments suggest that a large number of common readers remained indifferent to the new libraries. When the state launched an inquiry in 1845 to determine whether to increase their support for the public libraries, officials found that the interest in them among many readers was low, which made them decide against allocating further resources for the support of the libraries.[198] In the 1860s, Eilert Sundt also found that many common readers were uninterested in the libraries. Total loans per book in the "rural" public libraries was only 1.78, not an impressive number considering that some of these libraries had probably been in operation for

[196] Kræmmer, *Elias Kræmmer's oplevelser*, 134.
[197] Hasund, 'Selskapet for Norges Vels arbeid', 285–87.
[198] Kildal, *Norske folkeboksamlinger*, 112.

some time.[199] While public libraries had extended their clientele, their elite promoters had not been able to influence everyone. That rapid expansion of readership and the reach of the written word required changes in the market for print, to which I will turn next.

The qualities of quantity: The cheapening of print

For a long time, price was a considerable impediment to the expansion of the written word. In the late in the late 18th century, six relatively wealthy merchants had to split the cost of a newspaper in order to afford it.[200] However, the gradual industrialisation of Norway brought down the costs of production. Between 1799 and 1813, six new paper mills were founded in the country, producing paper that was lower quality, but also much cheaper than previously possible.[201] The bottleneck in paper production was opened up; the volume of production increased. In the 1860s, the still relatively costly textile paper, made from linen, was abandoned for the even cheaper paper made of cellulose. The new process of making paper also enabled it to be delivered on large rolls, making their usage in printing easier.[202] Parallel to technological improvements in paper production, printing presses were undergoing significant changes. To begin with, manually operated printing presses made from wood served the needs of the Norwegian publishers. In 1820, an artisan in Christiania started producing these for the Norwegian market, creating a domestic supply of the printing presses, making them both cheaper and more widely available, which in turn allowed newcomers to enter the publishing industry. Wooden printing presses dominated the production of texts in the first half of the century. Beginning in the 1850s, first iron printing presses and then rotary presses were introduced. While they were more expensive, they increased the print runs enormously.[203]

The distribution of print was also made considerably cheaper during the 19th century. The first significant change was the exemption of some Norwegian newspapers and periodicals from postage in 1805, which brought down costs dramatically. However, this was not granted universally to all publications, and the regular postal service was therefore too expensive for most publishers to rely on. As the logistic infrastructure of Norway was gradually expanded and mechanised, an alternative to these services arose. The advent of steamship transport in 1827 and the development of railroads from the 1860s made it possible to transfer both

[199] Sundt, 'Almuebibliotheker i Norge', 46.
[200] Kjell Lars Berge et al., *En samfunnsmakt blir til: 1660-1880*, ed. Hans Fredrik Dahl, Nils E. Øy, and Idar Flo, vol. 1, Norsk presses historie: (1660-2010) (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2010), 149.
[201] Ibid., 1:100.
[202] Henrik Grue Bastiansen and Hans Fredrik Dahl, *Norsk mediehistorie* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2003), 215.
[203] Berge et al., *Norsk presses historie*, 1:212–13; Eide, *Bøker i Norge*, 51.

information and cargo over greater distances quickly and on time.[204] Against, this made the production and circulation of both newspapers and periodicals faster and cheaper. Steamships were a seasonal option. As the seas froe over, import, export, and mailing to places not covered by the railroad became arduous. However, the problems this caused for the transmitting of information were alleviated with the slow spread of telegraphs and, eventually, telephones, but it continued to be a problem for the transport of newspapers until icebreakers became common and the roads were improved.[205] As the network of reads was improved, the

The period also saw dramatic changes in the law concerned with printing and freedom of expression. At the beginning of the 19th century, in 1799, an ordinance on the freedom of print increased the punishment for printed texts that attacked the state or the crown. This placed a severe restriction on print, as the ordinance was used generously to imprison or expel anyone that came close to criticising whatever the crown saw as out of bounds.[206] The ordinance disappeared with the dissolution of the union with Denmark and the freedom of the press was included as paragraph 100 in the Norwegian constitutions. However, this did not mean that censorship was abolished. The requirement of royal privilege to print books fell only in 1839. Until then, it kept aspiring printers from entering the trade. In addition to this, the paragraph 100 placed severe restrictions on encouragements to break the law or any disrespect towards religion, the state, or public morals.[207] This paragraph was invoked sporadically throughout the century; its application to convict labour movement leader Marcus Thrane probably being the most prominent case.[208]

Authors, printers, and editors circumvented these restrictions by publishing their texts anonymously. The right to publish anonymously was considered by many participants in public debates to be a crucial part of the freedom of expression, as it shielded the source of a controversial statement against legal repercussions.[209] Sometimes, if the text criticised a person in power, the author would anonymise both himself and the object of criticism in order to escape persecution, leaving just enough clues for the reader to guess whom the text referred

[204] Berge et al., *Norsk presses historie*, 1:217–18.
[205] Henrik G. Bastiansen et al., *Parti, presse og publikum: 1880-1945*, vol. 2, Norsk presses historie: (1660-2010) : (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2010), 15; Bastiansen and Dahl, *Norsk mediehistorie*, 212–26.
[206] Øystein Rian, *Sensuren i Danmark-Norge: vilkårene for offentlige ytringer 1536-1814* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2014), 185–93.
[207] Anders Johansen, 'Landets beste menn', in *Allmenningen: Historien om norsk offentlighet*, ed. Jostein Gripsrud (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2017), 118–21.
[208] See: Arthur Thuesen, *Beslaglagte og supprimerte bøker vedrørende Norge* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1960).
[209] Martin Eide and Petter Larsen, '1840-1890: Det norske slagsmålsparadis', in *Allmenningen: Historien om norsk offentlighet*, ed. Jostein Gripsrud (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2017), 184–85.

to.[210] Even if this form of veiled public debate created a room for dissenting opinions, it was not open for everyone to voice it. Neither was it possible for everyone to understand. For common readers, socialising outside the inner circles of knowledge and elite sociability, these "winks" and clues were probably harder to understand. This created a censorship of "knowingness" for others than those "in the know" to understand whom – and thereby to a certain degree what – the debate was about.[211] Only with the reduction of censorship did criticism of public figures become more obvious and thus accessible to common people.

As the production, distribution, and legality of printing were changing, mass production of texts became possible. This had implications for the reading habits of common readers. To begin with, there was the expanding of the role of the almanac. The country's first publisher, Trygve Nielssøn, who quickly went out of business after legal troubles with the church, had published the first Norwegian almanac in Christiania already in 1643.[212] Nilssøn's almanac was succeeded by countless different foreign almanacs that were imported both legally and illegally, until in 1804 the regular printing and publishing of an almanac based on observations and calculations from Norway was taken up again. The new almanac came in two different editions based on calculations from Trondheim and Christiania. The University of Oslo was given the royal privilege of publishing a Norwegian almanac in 1814, taking over the responsibility from the University of Copenhagen, and while other almanacs were published alongside the "official" one, none had the longevity of the university's edition.

The 1814 edition of the University of Oslo's almanac was printed in 60,000 copies, with all the "unofficial" almanacs adding to an even larger, but unknown, total.[213] Its increasing popularity was helped by favourable arrangements for its distribution and a relatively low price of 16 shillings which, when adjusted for inflation, was the equivalent of about 2 shillings in 1801 or one twelfth of Moland's membership fee.[214] The influence of the almanacs made it a favoured media of many different types of information. An almanac could contain meditations

[210] Johansen, 'Landets beste menn', 144.
[211] For "knowingness", see: Peter Bailey, 'Conspiracies of Meaning: Music-Hall and the Knowingness of Popular Culture', *Past & Present* 144, no. 1 (1 August 1994): 138–70.
[212] W. P. Sommerfeldt, 'Fra Tygve Nielssøn til Emil Moestue', in *Den norske almanakk gjennom 300 år: 1644-1944*, ed. W. P. Sommerfeldt, vol. 6, Boken om bøker (Oslo: Universitetets almanakkforlag, 1944), 7–32.
[213] Ibid., 16–20.
[214] This is based on my calculations of the inflation with the help of: 'Priskalkulator', Norges Bank, 12 June 2014, https://www.norges-bank.no/tema/Statistikk/Priskalkulator/. 2 shillings was the value of 2 kilos of potatoes or ¼ kilo of meet in 1801, but it was bound to be worth more in terms of food in 1814 as the British blockade of Norway was still in effect. However, as the blockade was lifted and foodstuff became more readily available, the almanacs were sure to have become cheaper.

on morality, practical information on farming, or short stories that were to be read for enjoyment. During the Napoleonic wars, the almanac became a source of important practical information regarding nutrition and animal husbandry.[215] To some publishers, the philosophical, moral, or entertaining texts were so important that they published their almanacs without any other practical information concerning red-letter days, prices, exchanges of units of measurement, or astronomical predictions, expanding what the genre could be.[216] Medicine also enjoyed a privileged place in the "official" almanac from the University of Oslo. Following the 1861 edition, nearly every almanac contained a detailed description of how to perform artificial ventilation on a drowned person.

Mass print also came in the form of a new media. The first publication to fall into the category of a newspaper came with Denmark-Norway's involvement in the Napoleonic wars. The war had brought an urgent need for a media that could spreading information more regularly than the almanacs could, leading to the establishment of the first Norwegian newspapers in 1808. As the Danish-Norwegian realm was split after the war, with Norway entering a union with Sweden, a rapid increase in the number of different papers and magazines in circulation started. From the 1830s to the 1850s, the numbers of different newspapers and magazines doubled each decade until it stagnated in the 1860s. The growth in these twenty years seems to have been fuelled mostly by local papers, probably because the wooden printing presses were cheap and well suited for enterprises with low budgets and small print runs.[217] It was also in this period that newspapers became attainable to common readers, perhaps not daily or weekly, but to a degree no other print product apart from almanacs had been before. In the 1870s and 1880s, the number of news publications was on the rise again, with a "moderate" growth rate of 52 and 35 per cent during the respective decades.[218] Many papers came out in large print runs, especially in the last quarter of the century. In 1876, eight million papers were sent by post through the country, with about 80 papers being published regularly. By the end of the century, 54 million papers were being sent.[219] The newspaper business was volatile though; many papers folded after just a few weeks due to lack of sales or content.[220]

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[215] Kirsti Strøm Bull, 'Almanakken som folkebok', in *Almanakkens historie: en jubileumsbok*, ed. John Peter Collett (Oslo: Gyldendal, 2010), 78.
[216] Willum Stephanson, *Moralsk Almanak for Unge og Gamle, eller den Kunst at blive riig og lykkelig* (Trondhiem: W. Stephanson, 1803).
[217] Berge et al., *Norsk presses historie*, 1:214.
[218] Ibid., 1:277.
[219] Finn Erhard Johannessen, *Alltid underveis: Postverkets historie gjennom 350 år: 1647-1920*, vol. 1 (Oslo: Elanders Forlag, 1997), 262.
[220] Berge et al., *Norsk presses historie*, 1:371.

To begin with, the papers and magazines were apolitical in order to avoid censorship, but through a gradual process of leaps and adaptation, they were politicised. As the repressive ordinance of 1799 was replaced by paragraph 100 of the constitution, a cluster of polemic publications arose.[221] Due to the costliness of production and distribution, these came in small printing runs and were most likely read by the elites exclusively. The first paper that might have reached common readers frequently was the *Statsborgeren*, which specialised in criticising government officials and thereby gained entry into the homes of many common readers. This was printed in the octavo format, meaning it was made from one sheet of paper folded three times to make eight leaves. This made the paper cheap enough for common readers, though its anonymization probably made it difficult for many of them to grasp the depth of its journalistic critique.[222] In addition to newspapers, pamphlets on contentious political themes were sold in the streets of regional centres at a price that was affordable to a common readership. The potential that lay in the low price, the format and the critical attitude of papers like *Statsborgeren* came together and culminated when the Thrane movement started publishing *Arbeider-Foreningernes Blad* in 1848. This publication had 1,700 subscriptions and a print run of 6,000 at its zenith, with *husmenn* and the emerging working class as its target audience.[223] Even though the movement was quashed and the paper made redundant, *Arbeider-Foreningernes Blad* left a vacuum that was soon filled with successor newspapers.

The spread of newspapers and magazines meant that information that had been spread orally around 1800 became more and more often publicised in the written word in the course of the 19th century. Political debates, news of important national decisions, vacancies, local news, and more, were something that someone wrote down and printed, to be read silently or aloud for others to hear. The written word gained permanence, authority and reach, unimpeded by the fact that different texts stated different opinions. The "knowingness" of the papers like *Statsborgeren* also made it paramount to follow current events regularly in order to understand what the anonymised debates were about, cementing reading as a continuous activity. This continuum aided the speed with which ever-new functions of the written word could reach readers.

[221] Ibid., 1:205–73.
[222] Henrik Horstbøll, 'Formater, form og indhold: En boghistorisk indfaldsvinkel på læsningens historie', *Norsk tidsskrift for Bibliotekforskning* 6, no. 15 (2001): 32–48.
[223] Berge et al., *Norsk presses historie*, 1:250.

The rise of the written entertainment

As the role of texts in common people's lives expanded, it also came to include entertainment. This process does not seem to have been driven by the book industry alone, but happened in conjunction with the expansion of papers and magazines describe above. At the beginning of the century, papers and magazines would often include short fables to add variety to the content.[224] These short fables gradually fell out of fashion made way for serial novels, which became a regular feature of periodicals. The fact that until 1876, author's rights of ownership of their texts did not cover their inclusion as instalments in papers and magazines added to their appeal for publishers, who regarded them as cheap content. The serialised novel also motivated readers to keep buying the paper to be able to follow the whole story. In the 1870s, Charles Dickens' novels were translated and serialised for the papers as soon as they became available to their editors. The section of the paper dedicated to these serialised fictions was colloquially known as either "beneath the line" or "the cellar", as it was placed on the bottom of the page with a thickened line demarcating it from other content. This inclusion exposed increasing numbers of common readers to fiction through a medium that was becoming increasingly important in their everyday lives.

With the serialised novel, the publishers' attention to women readers grew. Editors and journalists at newspapers clearly thought that women were the principal readers of what was printed in "the cellar". This assumption becomes apparent in the following address to readers by a contributor to the section "beneath the line", which states that "I have heard it been alleged, that we men seldom or never read that which is written 'under the line'. We usually keep ourselves to the editorial articles, the political section, and the like."[225] "The cellar" was also a place where women were given an opportunity to both contribute and edit texts, something that was much less common in the rest of the papers.[226]

In addition to the emergence of newspapers as a popular medium, books became more widely available to common readers. Like papers, they became cheaper following the changes in the conditions of the production of paper, improved infrastructure, and clearance of legal restrictions. As a result, the number of different titles grew considerably over the course of the century. Whereas 599 works were published in the period between 1814 and 1823, this number rose by more than 50 per cent each decade until 1864-73, when 3,902 new works were

[224] Ibid., 1:317–58.
[225] Patrik, 'Snørliv: En Afhandling alene for Mænd og seet fra mandligt Synspunkt', *Dagbladet*, 19 September 1886.
[226] Berge et al., *Norsk presses historie*, 1:351–53.

published. Some thirty years later, 9,658 works were published – more than 16 times what it had been during the first decade of Norwegian independence.[227] Not all of these books were written by Norwegian authors. There was an increase in the translation and publication of foreign books throughout the century as well, which added substantially to the overall growth in titles.[228] In fact, by the end of the century, texts seems to have been the most expensive import product from Denmark. The value of this trade nearly doubled the value of the next imported commodity on the list in 1900.[229] As well as the increasing production and import of books, sales rose from 1850 until 1875, flattening out briefly during an economic recession before it continued to rise further.

Initially, fiction played a negligible part in the growth of book publishing, but its role increased with time. The "slow start" in the rise of fiction owed partially to the scepticism with which novels were regarded at the beginning of the century.[230] Before 1830, most published works were on politics, economy, law, religion, history, or geography.[231] During the 1820s, there was still less than ten new works of fiction published each year.[232] During the second half of the century, fiction became more frequent in the homes of common readers.[233] These new private libraries could be diverse, contain both fiction, bibles, Snorre's sagas, Pontoppidan's work on the natural sciences – "older and newer literature", side by side on the same bookshelf.[234] Eventually, the works of Anders Jæger, Amalie Skarm, Christian Krogh, Alexander Kielland, Jonas Lie, and other authors of fiction became bestsellers, reaching hundreds of thousands of readers throughout the country.[235]

The increased popularity of fiction was also driven by the invention of a new genre of novels that became popular from the late 1870s and onwards, namely "lowbrow" popular fiction.[236] These novels would later often be characterised pejoratively as *kiosklitteratur* (convenience store literature) or *triviallitteratur* (frivolous literature), names that speak to both

[227] Harald L. Tveterås, *Den norske bokhandels historie. B. 3: Bokens kulturhistorie : formet av forfattere, forleggere, bokhandlere og lesere : 1850-1900*, *Den norske bokhandels historie* (Oslo: J. W. Cappelens forlag, 1986), 79–80.
[228] Aina Nøding, 'Den siste mohikaner er ikke som før', in *Bokhistorie*, ed. Tore Rem (Oslo: Gyldendal, 2003), 211.
[229] Tveterås, *Den norske bokhandels historie. B. 3*, 83, 86–87.
[230] See: Marianne Egeland, '«De fleste Romaners Læsning er skadelig». Suhm, Sneedorff og romanen', *Edda* 108, no. 01 (2021): 8–21.
[231] Fet, *Lesande bønder*, 57.
[232] Berge et al., *Norsk presses historie*, 1:217.
[233] Eide, *Bøker i Norge*, 205–34.
[234] Haukenæs, *Reiseskildringer fra Norges natur og folkeliv. 2*, 107.
[235] Tveterås, *Den norske bokhandels historie. B. 3*, 118–25; Sigurd Heiestad, *Av folkelesningens saga* (Oslo: Halvorsen, 1946), 26.
[236] Heiestad, *Av folkelesningens saga*, 187–91.

the contemporary and prevailing notions on the literary preferences of common readers. Books of popular fiction came in paperback form, were cheaply produced, easy to take along, and were written by authors that are all but forgotten today despite sales figures that dwarfed the "great" authors of the day.[237] In the 1880s, some of these "pulp fiction" writers began to turn their attention to the living conditions of the urban common readers, including women.[238]

As the procurement of novels became both a more viable option and more popular among common readers, their very existence challenged what religious and bourgeois elites had in mind for them. Not all texts had been deemed suitable for the enlightenment and *Bildung* of the common reader, and novels had for a long time been seen as especially problematic. In the 1830s, some priests who ran public libraries returned the novels they received as donations rather than letting the members read them.[239] For some, public libraries were an instrument to keep novels that were allegedly "pornographic" or contained explicit descriptions of acts of love away from the readers, supplying them with "good books" instead. This was seen as especially important when it came to the women readers.[240] When "unseemly" novels became so popular regardless of the "good books" of the public libraries, members of the elites responded by trying to ban books that contained sexually explicit scenes or other elements they deemed improper.[241] These "unseemly" texts could range from *Krisiania-romanen,* a work of popular fiction, by Jon Flatabøe (which contained "coarse acts of love on public benches") to *Albertine* by Christian Krogh.[242] These tensions were not specific to Norway, of course. The cheapening of print broke the censorship of price throughout Europe and facilitated the providers of mass content to enter the market, in turn provoking reactions from those who saw themselves as defenders of "good" taste and "right" morals.[243] Whenever novels were deemed "good", it was because they had greater, morally just, goals that could change the reader for the better.[244] They were "good" despite of being novels, not because of it. Most novels within the genre of popular fiction were not seen to have any such pretentions, although there were

[237] Eide, *Bøker i Norge,* 283.
[238] Heiestad, *Av folkelesningens saga,* 121–22, 141; These works question the claim that there was no genre of 'working class literature' in Norway, as there was in Sweden and Denmark. Christian Berrenberg, 'Aus der Fabrik in die Literaturgeschichte?: Auf der Suche nach einer norwegischen Arbeiterliteratur', in *Milieus, Akteure, Medien: Zur Vielfalt literarischer Praktiken um 1900*, ed. Joachim Grage and Stephan Michael Schroder, vol. 2, 3 vols, Literarische Praktiken in Skandinavien (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2013), 191–208.
[239] Kildal, *Norske folkeboksamlinger*, 176–77.
[240] Ibid., 120–21.
[241] Heiestad, *Av folkelesningens saga*, 66.
[242] Thuesen, *Beslaglagte og supprimerte bøker vedrørende Norge*, 160–63.
[243] For an example, see: Hilliard, '"Is It a Book That You Would Even Wish Your Wife or Your Servants to Read?'
[244] Katherine Hanson and Judith Messick, *Skrams kamp for å skaffe seg forlag*, ed. Tore Rem, *Bokhistorie*, Fakkel (Oslo: Gyldendal, 2003), 147.

exceptions. When Karen Sundt – a widely read author of popular fiction – received a poet's pension from the state, the decision was defended by characterising her books as Christian and moral and her oeuvre as an exception to what was the rule in popular fiction.[245]

The rise of fiction left traces in the public libraries too. In Volda's public library, a large shift in preference happened during the 1870s. The library's history goes back to Sivert Aarflot's library, and its users had been subjected to various attempts at influencing their reading habits for decades. Until the 1870s, library patrons had kept their preference for religious texts, occasionally defending these against efforts to modernise or substitute them.[246] However, during the 1870s, novels went from making up about 10 per cent of the total loans at the Volda public library in the first half, to more than 30 in the second half – increasing further as time went on.[247] This gain was to the detriment of religious literature. A similar shift happened at the Deichman library but not at the cost of religious texts. Whereas history and texts of mixed content had led fiction as the most popular genres in the 1860s, fiction made up between 70 and 80 per cent of the loans by 1886.[248] Riises' *Archiv* was still popular, but had been supplanted by the weekly *Skillingsmagazin* that was published in volumes of multiple editions – making up about 9 per cent of the total loans from the library. Although novels were becoming increasingly popular, the multi-volume works kept being in demand, underscoring the fact that the logic of the lending library, with its limits to availability and easy accessibility of certain options, affected patrons' selections.

The shifts in preference was accompanied – and possibly caused, at least in part – by an influx of new readers in the libraries. Public libraries became more popular in general, and among poorer people in particular.[249] This is a reversal of the circumstances at the beginning of the century, when the poorest common readers were denied access by the likes of Bishop Hansen. The new readership caused problems for the administrations of some of the libraries where they did not adhere to the standards of propriety. At the Deichman library, the librarian allied himself with several trusted readers to keep the peace as kids made a sport of causing havoc in the library.[250] At board meetings of the library of *Kristiania arbeidersamfund*,

[245] Heiestad, *Av folkelesningens saga*, 54.
[246] Aarviknes, *Frå eit langt liv*, 78–79.
[247] Olaisen, 'Volda folkebibliotek 1797-1900', 90–93.
[248] Halvorsen, Jacobsen, and Strande, 'Det deichmanske bibliotek i året 1886', 16–23; Ringdal, *By, bok og borger*, 92–95.
[249] Halvorsen, Jacobsen, and Strande, 'Det deichmanske bibliotek i året 1886', 23–27.
[250] Ringdal, *By, bok og borger*, 90.

members frequently discussed how to best quell the "rowdy" readers that were causing commotion.[251]

Women were a driving force behind the trend of increased participation. From the 1860s, women's share of loans at Deichman library grew from borrowing 9 to 23 per cent in 1886.[252] A similar rise in the use of public libraries by women from the 1860s and onwards seems to have occurred on a national scale.[253] As shown in the previous chapter, women had been reading before this period. It is also likely that a substantial number of them had read the books their husbands or sons borrowed before they became registered patrons themselves. The shift was therefore mainly in how visible reading women became to the elites, and how concerned the latter became with women's literary interests. Other potentially "problematic" groups of readers, like children, for example, emerged during the last decades of the 19th century too. Two large reforms of public education in 1860 and 1889 were preceded by and intensified an interest in children as a distinct group of readers.[254] This had the effect of creating more school libraries and sections in the already existing public libraries dedicated to children.[255]

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The written word occupied a greatly expanded territory in the lives of ordinary people in the last third of the 19th century, if compared with the first third. The gradual rise of public libraries and their expansion to all parts of the country exposed common readers to vastly different conceptualisations of the role of the written word in their lives than those that underpinned their pious reading. The earliest libraries, which I hesitate to call "public" because of their restrictions to access, were founded and administered by members of the clergy, who ran them in order to discipline the faith of parishioners. Regardless of whether or not they were successful in this endeavour, they exposed their readers to different texts than those they were used to and established both direct and indirect ways of influencing their patrons. Fears of a secularisation meant that church libraries limited their offerings mostly to religious texts and

[251] Minute book, 23.1.1896, in Arbeiderbevegelsens arkiv og bibliotek (AAB), *Oslo arbeidersamfunn*, ARK-1113/Å/L0035.
Halvorsen, Jacobsen, and Strande, 'Det deichmanske bibliotek i året 1886', 20.
[252] Cf.: Østbye, 'Utlånsvirksomhet på deichmanske bibliotek', 17.
[253] Kildal, *Norske folkeboksamlinger*, 192.
[254] Anne Kristin Lande, 'Med barn som målgruppe: Nordahl Rolfsen - redaktør, lesebokforfatter og formidler', in *Bokhistorie. Bibliotekhistorie: en jubileumsantologi fra Norsk bok- og bibliotekhistorisk selskap*, ed. Tore Kr. Andersen, Øivind Berg, and Torbjørn Eng (Oslo: NBBS, 2019), 79–86.
[255] Ringdal, *By, bok og borger*, 158–63.

books whose secular content fit within the religious cosmos. As the secular elite took over the founding of the public libraries and expanded their reach, this changed gradually. Libraries held secular works from travelogues to books on animal husbandry to enlighten common readers, and their operators made great efforts to expose as many readers as possible to what they deemed as instructive texts. As long as those readers had a modicum of curiosity, or felt invested in the library in any way, the very process of procuring and lending texts made it likely that readers got into contact with other parts of the holdings than they had initially sought or even know about. An important point highlighted in this chapter is that the logistics of the lending library itself was a factor in introducing readers to texts unfamiliar to them, which exposed readers to other functions of the written word than those they had lived with.

Meanwhile, advances in both production technology and distribution made texts cheaper and more easily available, with almanacs, newspapers, and magazines flourishing. These changes had implications for the role of texts in social life. News, practical information, debates, and more issues became linked to the written word, which gained authority, permanence and reach, and tended to marginalise the spoken word. This either preceded or entailed the transition of entertainment from the spoken to the written word through the rise of fiction, in old and new forms. This shift is manifested both in the sales of fiction and their growing popularity in public libraries. The elites resisted a part of this expansion of the role of the written word, but having opened Pandora's box, they were not able to contain the selectiveness of common readers. They had also failed in their attempts to discipline the readers in to docile and respectful participants, and – as I will demonstrate in the next chapter – the practices that grew out of these new texts were not like the elites imagined. With this, the pious reader vanished, and the obstinate and fickle arose.

3. The challenge of abundance

For readers that had spent their lives immersed in the semiotically rich and materially poor reading culture of the first half of the 19th century, the transition to the material abundance of the second half could be a shock. One of those who experienced this was Bishop Anton Bang, the fisherman's son who grew up in Helgeland. The material circumstances of his upbringing were better than most common readers in the century, His forefathers were mostly well-off farmers and fishers with the addition of one of the founders of the national bank. Nevertheless, in the early years of his life, his textual upbringing was that of a most others. He grew up around and into pious reading practices and followed the same steps as most common readers had in learning these. He was "put into books" by his mother solely through the help of religious literature, learning Luther's *Catechism* and Saxtorp's extracts of Pontoppidan's *Explanation* by heart before he was eight years old.[256] He also followed the ordinary school run, acquiring both a fear of and awe for the theological competence of the parish priest who examined him for his confirmation. Discussions on literature and texts outside of this education were also limited to preferences in collections of sermons with Müller's and Brochmand's collections being the candidates – most opting for the former. Bang was seemingly content within these practices, not striving for anything more. This was until a wave in the ocean (and not a metaphorical one) altered his life forever.[257]

Searching for greener pastures, a bookseller by the name of M. Aurdal was relocating his entire business from Lillehammer to Tromsø. His travels had led him to Trondheim, by way of horse and carriage, and onwards from there with a ship filled with the books, both secular and religious, that were to make up his new shop. Just outside of Bang's family farm, near modern-day Bodø, a wave came crashing over the freeboard of the boat, soaking the books with seawater. Not wanting his livelihood to wrinkle up and lose all its value, Aurdal immediately headed for shore and hung his books to dry on Bangs' farm for a week. This was the scene of Bang's personal reinvention.

Bang was no stranger to the existence of secular texts, later reminiscing that the local fishermen would sometimes bring home books after their yearly delivery of fish to Bergen. His erudite parish priest had also made him aware of the existence of more religious books than the ones he had read. Nevertheless, the realisation that the startling number of books he saw hung

[256] Bang, *Erindringer*, 30–64.
[257] Ibid., 63.

up around his family farm dwarfed the few texts he had known to be in existence had a profound impact on him. Writing about the episode in his late sixties, he reflected upon the effects of this incident:

> With this peek into the world of books it hit me like lightning that I had to go further, whatever the cost may be, that this was the way I was born to walk, and the life that was worth living; and I still remember the fearful feeling that came upon me that I would be destroyed if I didn't reach this goal[258]

From that day on, his life revolved around attempts to absorb as much as possible of this world of books he was only allowed a brief look into. Week after week, year after year, he would go down to the beach in hope that another wave would relieve his pining and deliver him the glimpse he craved.

The story of Bang's textual "awakening" reads almost like a biblical story. After being gifted a glimpse into the right path for his life by a divine intervention (the wave), Bang devotes his life to fulfilling his pursuit of books, and advocates for the rights of all readers of all means to have the same access to texts that he was gifted.[259] Although he kept an interest for the culture of commoners throughout his life, he was also a representative of the elite that pushed for the written word to service ever new functions in the lives of common readers. However, this does not mean that Bang lied about the bewilderment, confusion, and reverberation he felt.

Although this story is extraordinary, the sentiments Bang expressed were by no means unique. Throughout the 19th century, readers responded in varying ways to the new elite discourses on reading and the changing material conditions for the circulation of books which presented themselves to the common readers in the form of new functions for the written word. For many, it was a disorienting and bewildering experience at first, but eventually they developed new practices to make sense of the changing textual landscape. This change did not result in a unified way of reading but in a spectrum of approaches to texts. Some of the new reading techniques found great acceptance, while others were vehemently rejected. Those who rejected the new texts were the ones that tried to protect the old distribution of functions between the written and spoken word, and prevent the undermining of religious texts as the most important purpose of the former. Those who welcomed the changes made the most of the opportunities the new landscape afforded them. In between these two poles, there existed an

[258] Ibid., 64.
[259] Anton Christian Bang, *Hans Nielsen Hauge og hans Samtid: en Monografie*, 2nd ed. (Christiania: Jacob Dybwad, 1874), 171.

infinite number of different ways the common readers bargained with these changes – incorporating them into their own practices or vice versa.

The first part of this chapter will explore the readers who refused to participate in the changing nature of the written word, in different ways and with different motivations. The following section will explore the reading of entertaining texts and the effects it had on the readers. Then, the politicisation of texts, and the communities that formed around the reading of political texts will be detailed. Lastly, the nature of the interplay between the new and old practices among those readers who sought the new roles of the written word will be discussed.

The revenge of the readers: Rejections and resistance

In 1860, P. A. Jensen published a new reading book for use in schools with backing from Ole Vig and the famed school reformer Hartvig Nissen. The book, *Læsebok for Folkeskolen og Folkehjemmet*, was a product of the many interests and goals the elites had for the spreading of new texts. It was supposed to prevent any future populist movements, such as the Haugians or Thranites, from gaining a foothold and give young common readers a taste of the education available to the middle class.[260] This meant dispelling with the highly regarded *Explanation* by Pontoppidan and introducing radically new, secular, subjects. The readers that accepted the new functions of the written word welcomed the change with open arms, positive to the egalitarian promises of the reformers. Others were not so satisfied. To them, this was an encroachment on the functions they thought the written word should serve in the lives of their children and themselves. Attempts at changing this was a declaration of war.

The reluctant parents' demands and actions against the introduction of the reading book reveal where their disagreement lay, and what solutions they thought fitting. Especially evident is the fear that the book would compromise the seriousness their religious reading practices required. That children would laugh in school was as offensive as the thought that they would do so in church. Some parents therefore demanded that "[the reading book] will be changed so that lies and that which leads to frivolity and laughter is redacted from the book."[261] If the Chinese Wall between the solemnity of pious reading and the merriment of entertainment through the spoken word was breached, there was no way back. Other parents wrote to the department of education in an attempt to change the book. Faced with the hierarchies of public

[260] Torill Steinfeld, 'Leseboka blir folkeeie', in *Norsk litteraturhistorie: Sakprosa fra 1750 til 1995. B. 1: 1750-1920* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1998), 475.
[261] Einar Molland, *Norges kirkehistorie i det 19.århundre*, vol. 1 (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1979), 204.

administration, they appealed to those they thought would sympathise with their concerns and asked the department to hire "good Christians" to remove that which was found hurtful to their children, underscoring the religious basis of their criticism.[262]

With the backlash being so great, Jensen was forced to make some changes to his book, but this did not quell the opposition who saw any attempts to remove Pontoppidan's *Explanation* as detrimental to their children's education.[263] With the position of the state being that the book would be substituted no matter what, the readers chose to reject the book altogether. Many school districts refused to place orders for the books and some communities even quit the state church *in toto* to prevent the book from reaching their children. As late as the early 1880s, more than twenty years after its introduction, there were still schools that refused to use the new reading book.[264]

It is not known whether the parents and communities that rejected Jensen's reading book belonged to any particular community, but a part of the Haugean movement stand out as particularly ejective. For these Haugean readers, a rejection of secular literature and the practices associated with them was a rejection of all that was evil and wrong in the world. Although they did not leave many detailed accounts of their beliefs or fears, there is one notable exception in the philologist Ivar Aasen. It is unclear whether he was ever a true Haugean but he admits to having been greatly influenced by the movement as a young man when it dominated the rural districts he spent his childhood years in. Here, he encountered aggressive Haugean influences that eventually shifted Aasen's own perspective on secular literature. Berating both himself and the movement in his later life, he writes of finding *Klims underjordiske reiser* by Holberg in a local bookshop, a rare book he deeply regrets not having read. At the time of the encounter, however, the very thought of reading the book had seemed revolting to him. In fact, he had thought the book to be both "misleading and harmful". He remembered he had "despised it myself and was aggrieved by the thought that it was being read by others."[265]

The fear and disgust Aasen felt towards *Klims underjordriske reiser* was shared by many Haugeans and must therefore be seen within the context of their *memoria* reading.[266] Primarily, it gives some indication of the perceived fragility of the memorised fragments, and

[262] Ibid., 1:285.
[263] Sanderud, *Fra P. A. Jensen til Nordahl Rolfsen*, 50.
[264] Ibid., 51.
[265] Ivar Aasen and Reidar Djupedal, *Brev og dagbøker. B. 1: Brev 1828-1861* (Oslo: Samlaget, 1957), 36.
[266] Langhelle, 'Tok haugianarane det skrivne ordet i si makt? Religiøs kompetansebygging i Nord-Rogaland 1820-1850'.

the perceived power of the inappropriate ones. It is doubtful that Haugeans were going to read secular literature in the same iterative fashion that they read their religious text. Still, it seems that to some Haugeans, any amount of reading of secular literature could interrupt the flow of the divine textual fragments or disturb the religious epiphanies that sometimes followed them. The fragments therefore had to be protected from any invasive or destructive outside influences. If Aasen experienced the text as an attack his faith, and a misguiding of all those unknowing of the right path to salvation, his grievances were perhaps justifiably.

The unease and fear of the effects of the new types of texts coming into circulation some Haugeans felt, seems to have been shared by other readers on religious grounds. When the folklorist Thrond Haukenæs was travelling through the country trying to sell his books and collecting material for new ones, he complained that he would often be confronted by "narrow-minded pietists" that expressed their dissatisfaction and concern with the effects of his works.[267] One such pietist went so far in attacking his books that he accused them of being both dangerous and obstructing the path to salvation.[268] Sometimes whole villages shared this sentiment. When Haukenæs visited Sunelven in 1888, the villagers' "pietistic way of thought" prevented them from making use of the local public library. One of the women Haukenæs talked to condemned secular texts as old as Holberg's comedies as "dangerous and unchristian reading". She also felt that the newly erected statue of Holberg in Bergen was a sign of the sinfulness of the elites. "It is the wise who will lead the world astray in the end."[269] The connection between the reader's religiosity and rejection of the textual expressions of the new role of the written word suggests that the Haugeans were not the only ones that felt that their pious reading was under threat.

Whereas some readers refused to participate in the institutions that propagated the new roles of the written word, like public libraries, others used these to their advantage. This small, almost negligible, act of resistance could be found in the moments when no librarian was looking – the stealing of books. There were good reasons to steal these books. As already argued, public libraries were shaping what their patrons were exposed to through the selection of texts available and the characteristics of the process of borrowing texts. Some readers revolted against this by stealing the books they needed or wanted. It is difficult to say how widespread this phenomenon was, but it seems to have been dependent on the library. While the Deichman library had problems both with rowdy visitors and large amounts of lost books,

[267] Haukenæs, *Reiseskildringer fra Norges natur og folkeliv. 2*, 133.
[268] Haukenæs, *Reiseskildringer fra Norges natur og folkeliv. 1*, 178–79.
[269] Ibid., 158.

the board of the library of Kristiania Arbeidersamfund was surprised over how little of their stock were lost, even though they also had problems with rowdy visitors.[270] Sometimes specific books were targeted, such as a translated version of a book by Martin Luther that was constantly being rebought by the reading society of Fron.[271] Book thieves are perhaps the greatest example of Michel de Certeau's analogy for readers as "poaching", stealing books in order to maintain their own practice at odds with those of the owners.[272]

Lastly, there are the book burners of Leirdalen that introduced this thesis. As a reminder, Eilert Sundt stopped for a short while in Leirdalen during one of his travels. He sought old folk songs and fairy tales, but his quest was unsuccessful as one of the older women deemed it "shameful" to talk of such things. To remedy the alcoholism and lack of enlightenment, Sundt convincing the villagers to found a new library that would receive books from the association he was the chairman of. In their indignation over this library, the readers destroyed *Sange og Rim for det norske Folk* by Ole Vig in front of the parish priest, who penned the tale to Sundt a year after he had been there.[273] Besides the knee-jerk aversion most feel about the burning of books, the most remarkable aspect of the story is the specificity of the destructive act. The angered readers did not burn down the entire library, just *Sange og Rim*. Sundt tried to explain this:

> As reason they plead that they believe it so, that only God's words shall be read. Why this indignation should befall this previously mentioned book is not said, but I have to think of the double circumstance, that the book contains one or two cheerful songs and that it "holds the old legends so dear".[274]

This observation, along with the other facts of the story that Sundt relates, supports three different explanations to the event. All of these give glimpses of different reasons common readers had to rebel against the new functions of the written word.

The first explanation is the one that Sundt himself suggests but does not seem to fully understand. The clue is in the mentioned reluctance one of the residents had shown in sharing any old folk songs of fairy tales with Sundt who lamented that they had stopped singing these now just as "the inherited folklore finally has come into honour among the people's cultured classes."[275] Whereas Sundt obviously saw this inclusion as something positive, the incident

[270] Minute book 9.10.1896, in AAB, ARK-1113/Å/L0035; Ringdal, *By, bok og borger*, 137.
[271] Minute book, in SAH, *Fron Prestekontor*, PREST-078/Y/Ya/L0001, 1-54.
[272] de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 174.
[273] Sundt, 'Mere om overtro', 455–61.
[274] Ibid., 459.
[275] Ibid., 460.

could have been a rebellion against this. As has been indicated previously, there was a great distance between common readers and the elites. Neither the priest, nor Sundt, were likely to have been considered an insider among the commoners in Leirdalen. When Sundt probed for the treasures of their local culture, the commoners of Leirdalen might have felt that "their" culture was being stolen, or worse, being replaced by that of the elite. In this context, the refusal to share the artefacts of their own culture and the eradication of attempts to replace it makes perfect sense.

Like the first one, Sundt suggests the second explanation without realising it fully. This is perhaps the most obvious explanation and is based on the readers' statement that "only God's words shall be read." This would make it similar to the obstinacy most commonly found with the Haugeans and "ecstatic pietists" but surpasses them in the destructiveness of the reaction. However, burning books as a religiously founded protest was not without precedent in the period, at least not in Scandinavia. In the 1840s, Erik Jansson formed a pietistic sect in Sweden, gradually breaking with the state church and anything else they interpreted as distractions from the words of God. This eventually led to two great book burnings in which the followers of Jansson tried to rid themselves of any texts threatening those of God.[276] That the people of Leirdalen were worried that non-religious literature was diluting the sacredness of their texts, and that they responded like the Janssonites, is not a stretch.

A third, and less obvious, interpretation of the incident is to understand it as an attack on Ole Vig's views specifically. Sundt writes that the first step in the rebellion was the cancellation of The People's Friend. He does not mention which volumes the people in Leirdalen received for their library, but contemporary public libraries often received several volumes at their founding.[277] This makes it possible that they received the 1852 volume to which Vig contributed with an essay on commoners and their reading practices. As described more comprehensively in chapter one of this thesis, Vig greatly distrusted the diction of the commoners in this essay. He also mocked the idea that all texts were somehow permeated with God. Both these conflicted with the pious reading, which seems to have been the dominant one in Leirdalen. This gives the act of burning Vig's book an additional layer of meaning. If they understood texts to be bound by its written form, as the pious reading practices sometimes required, burning this physical embodiment was the ultimate way of destroying its potency.

[276] Cecilia Wejryd, 'Läsarna som brände böcker: Erik Jansson och erikjansarna i 1840-talets Sverige' (Uppsala, Uppsala universitet, 2002), 231–33.
[277] See: protocol of books, in SAH, *Engerdal prestekontor*, PREST-048/O/Oa/L004.

Whether it was one of these reasons that instigated the anger, none of them, or something completely different, will remain unknown. However, if it was any of these reasons, the readers directly rejected the incursion of a different understanding of the tasks of the written word than the ones that formed the basis for their reading. Whether it was the writing down of something that, to them, belonged to the spoken word, the dilution of the sacredness of the written word, or the answer to an attack on their understanding of the written word it was the revenge of readers that did want their textual world to change. This demand for action changed them from pious to obstinate readers. They could no longer live in ignorance of the changing relationship of the spoken and the written word, they had to make a choice. While obstinate readers remained throughout the century, it was not the only form of reaction. Other readers embraced the changes, wholeheartedly or with reservations. Gradually, these were the responses that dominated among the common readers, leaving lasting imprints on the reading practices of the 19th century and beyond.

Performance and consolation: Entertainment through texts

The first non-religious texts to be accepted by common readers were of an entertaining sort and seems to have been an equal part of both the spoken and the written word. Both broadside ballads and chapbooks were established among common readers in the first two decades, although not to the same degree that religious texts seem to have been. There are no descriptions of the reading of these, and the texts were systematically ignored by both the elites of the time and historians of today.[278] However, the titles of the texts reveal that their authors had expectations about how the readers used the texts, which also made the expansion of the written word almost imperceptible. These titles would often be long, describe some of the content, and include an attempt to coax a common reader into buy it, or both.[279] A telling example of this genre of titles was the chapbook

> A remarkable letter, written by a traveling Jew from the past, in the times Christ walked around on our globe, in which he tells his master in the Netherlands about his heartfelt longing for home as well as the most important occurrences on his journey, and descriptions of his joy over having seen and spoken to the messiah compared to the complete collection of God's words. God willing, it will serve all who hears

[278] Siv Gøril Brandtzæg, 'Skillingsvisene i Norge 1550-1950: Historien Om et Forsømt Forskningsfelt', *Edda*, no. 2 (2018): 98.
[279] For an assortment of broadside ballads, see: Torunn Eriksen, 'Skillingsviser: En analyse av folkelige viser: Basert på samlinger av skillingstrykk fra Nord Norge' (Hovedoppgave, Tromsø, Universitetet i Tromsø, 1986).

and reads this, to hurry the serious purpose in them: to love God over all things. Based on an old manuscript.[280]

The first sentence reads like a brief summary one might give to precede a story in order to ensure that the listeners have not heard the tale before. The second and third lines are the selling points. Firstly, not only is this text about a Christian theme, but it will also help the readers and listeners renew their faith in God. If this did not suffice, the authenticity of the text was also marketed through its proclaimed inheritance from an "old manuscript".

The seemingly awkward form of the heading, when compared to "modern" ones, reveals that this genre of titles had different references dictating its aesthetic than purely literary ones. There loomed an oral tradition behind the titles, revealing itself sparingly. The most obvious sign of this is the reference to both listeners and readers, affirming that the author believed that the texts would be read orally with other people present. This was probably a well-founded inference. In fact, some historians have suggested that chapbooks and broadside ballads are recorded fragments of a culture of oral storytelling that was much bigger and independent of the circulation of its written forms.[281] The texts were simply an accessory to this culture rather than its bearers. The material embodiment of the text was also fleeting, falling prey to its inferior quality and frequent misuse, but the stories survived in the memories of the readers who heard, told, and spread the stories. They were voiced texts, texts composed for performances and contingent on its oral basis.[282] In this way, the texts kept the aspect of performance that was a part of the story-telling culture it mimicked.

The distribution of the melody for the broadside ballads accentuated its ties to the spoken word. Sometimes, the ballads were based on melodies that were specified in the texts and well known to the readers. However, sometimes a ballad came along that had a new melody, which required the reader to learn it if he or she was to sing it to a future audience. For the vendor, this was an opportunity to generate more revenue per sale. Arne Wichne, who

[280] *Et mærkværdigt Brev, skrevet fra en reisende Jøde i Fortiden, da Christus omvandrede her paa Jorden, i hvilket han underretter sin Mester i Nederlandene om sin inderlige Længsel, samt om de vigtigste Tildragelser paa hans Reiser, og skildrer sin Glæde over at have seet og talt med Messias, sammenlignet med det hele sammentagne Guds Ord. Gud give, det maatte tjene Alle, som høre og læse dette, til at tilskynde det alvorlige Forsæt i dem: at elske Gud over alle Ting. Efter et gammelt Manuskript* (Christiania: Frederik T. Steen, 1846).
[281] Gøril Brandtzæg, 'Skillingsvisene i Norge', 101–5; Ådel Gjøstein Blom, *Folkeviser i arbeidslivet: en analyse av visenes funksjon, Musikk* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1977), 266; Adam Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England, 1500-1700* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000).
[282] For a further exploration of voiced texts, see: John Miles Foley, 'Verbal Marketplaces and the Oral-Literate Continuum', in *Along the Oral-Written Continuum: Types of Texts, Relations and Their Implications*, ed. Else Mundal, Leidulf Melve, and Slavica Rankovic, vol. 20, Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 20–21.

acquired the privilege to sell texts to commoners in 1823, sold broadside ballads for two shillings, and for an additional two shillings, he would bring his customer to his back-office and teach them the melody.[283] Other sellers included this service in their price and were said to sing the ballads over the counter to the purchaser.[284] For those common readers who did not live close enough to bookshops or other places that sold broadside ballads, travelling salesmen delivered them new songs and, presumably, taught them the melodies. The personal nature of the learning of this essential component of the ballad tied them even closer to the spoken word. The full potential of the ballad was only unlocked if the readers partook in the spoken sharing of the melody, the opposite of the impersonal traits the written word could have. This makes the ballads a transmedia, incorporating elements of the written and spoken word into one and thereby a less controversial expansion of the written word.

Popular fiction both drew on the vast heritage of chapbooks and broadside ballads, and distinguished itself from it. Some of the same assumptions about the interests of the readers were still in play, most notably with regard to the editor's evaluation of the importance of the author. Neither broadside ballads nor chapbooks had the names of their authors displayed on their title page, a custom that seems to have been continued to a degree in the new popular fiction. Rudolf Muus, who was probably the most widely read author in Norway at one point – and still holds a claim to the title of being the most published author – wrote under at least 44 different pseudonyms.[285] This seems to have been common among the leading authors of popular fiction.[286] The author's name was not seen as a "brand" worth fronting. As with the chapbooks and broadside ballads, the title page was still an opportunity for the editor to attract the readers' interest. Although most books of popular fiction were not illustrated, almost all had illustrated front covers, as the more costly broadside ballads and chapbooks sometimes had.[287] However, in the titles, there is a notable difference between them. The long elucidatory titles that implied that the author expected their chapbooks or broadside ballads to be read aloud were gone. In fact, all references to the oral culture that surrounded the chapbooks and broadside ballads had disappeared, indicating that the editors' expectations about the reading practices of their consumers had changed dramatically.

[283] Fet, *Lesande bønder*, 55.
[284] Torunn Eriksen, *To skilling for en sang: folkelige viser i Nord-Norge : et utvalg skillingstrykk, Musikk* (Tromsø: Universitetsforlaget, 1981), viii.
[285] Hans P. S. Knudsen, *Folkeskribenten Rudolf Muus og hans forleggere* (Oslo: Bladkompaniet, 1995).
[286] Heiestad, *Av folkelesningens saga*, 30–31, 80, 95, 117–20, 130, 150, 156.
[287] Gøril Brandtzæg, 'Skillingsvisene i Norge', 101.

The expectation was to some extent justified. Some of the very few descriptions of the reading of popular fiction are of working class readers reading in private. A gendered picture of this reading was of construction workers that would read "pulp fiction" in their bunks after work while waiting for the cook to announce that dinner was ready, and maids that would read romances alone in the kitchen while their pots and pans simmered at the edges of their attention.[288] In addition to being entertaining reader, the texts could serve other purposes for the readers as well. These purposes id not contradict the reading as entertainment, but supplemented it and made the practice more diverse than what it might seem like at surface level. What might seem as two similar attempts to entertain oneself – reading romances in the kitchen and "pulp fiction" in a bunk – were actually two different entertaining readings.

The use of Janice Radway's theory of consoling reading illuminates some of the nuance of the female reading of romances. Although there has not been room in this thesis for an exploration of the patriarchal structures among the common readers, the discrimination of female public readers when it came to pious reading gives credence to an assumption that many of women lived within similar structures as the women of Smithton. A need for comforting reading practices would also explain the popularity of fiction novels in general and romance novels in particular among the female readers. Without any sources that detailed how the female readers felt about their reading, this assumption remains conjectural, but it does explain the particular fondness female readers had for romances and their use of private reading.

Comforting reading practices were not likely to have been limited to female reading. Male readers were probably in need of comforting and reassurance as well, but from different structures than the women. A colporteur remarked that the types of books that were most popular among the navvies and fishermen he sold to were works of popular fiction he sold. More specifically, "they liked to read about the poor young *husmann* that travelled to America to become rich."[289] These were workers that could plainly see the fruits of their labour – the railroads they built and fish they caught – being used to enrich others, while they themselves were poorly paid and fed. Reading about escapes from this oppressive economic system, both in terms of economic salvation and a physical escape to a country were the chances of economic independence seemed more realistic, might have been their form of escapism. Whereas Radway's readers sought the maternal love they otherwise needed, male common readers of Norway sought formulations of their own dreams.

[288] Edvard Bull, *Renhårig slusk*, Arbeidsfolk forteller (Oslo: Tiden, 1961), 58; Heiestad, *Av folkelesningens saga*, 48.
[289] Bull, *Renhårig slusk*, 149.

However, consoling reading was not without precedence. As outlined in chapter one, common readers also used religious texts to console themselves whenever this was needed, which indicated that the practice evolved with the changing functions of the written word. This is not to say that the replacement of religious texts with popular fiction was insignificant. The shift might indicate that the readers were facing new challenges, and were therefore in need of different texts. It might also indicate that the practices existed parallel to each other.

While private reading was becoming more common, there was also a role for oral reading throughout the century. One of the reasons for this popularity was economic. Books and subscriptions were still expensive for people who earned average salaries or wages, so that splitting the costs between more readers was often the only option to get hold of the reading material they desired. "The year Nansen's book on his polar exploration came out, most of the workers came together and bought it in instalments, and the Sundays they had a new instalment, they came together in a cottage and read aloud in turns."[290] Splitting the price of the texts between them and over a longer stretch of time. Sometimes, one reader would bear the costs alone to the benefit off all those present. A railroad worker tells that in the 1890s he "borrowed books from the library in Askim and paid, if I remember correctly, a krone per year."[291] These books were then read to his fellow workers in the evening. To some common readers, the communal aspect of oral reading was so desirable that it trumped economic considerations and made it preferable to its private variant. There seems to have been two reasons as to why common readers might have preferred to read their entertaining texts with others: the performance of the text and the shared emotions.

As with any type of performance, the feedback varied with both audience and performer; where some garnered applause, others attracted rotten fruit. A worker on a sawmill illustrated this dynamic. "Down in the sawmill, the plant held a paper, and they had an old geezer to read it aloud. He was like an authorised reader. Only, he wasn't all that good at reading, rather the opposite. But one time he read so awfully that the youth laughed at him, and then he never wanted to read again."[292] Just as important as the performer, was the audience. A worker in a copper mill told that during the winter nights, when little could be done except for staying inside, people got bored easily, and readers would congregate in an attempt to entertain themselves. "We got the best reader to read, he had to wait until the cottage was full

[290] Bull, *Fra sagbruk og høvleri*, 224.
[291] Aage Lunde, *Jernbaneminner*, Arbeidsfolk forteller (Oslo: Tiden, 1962), 54.
[292] Bull, *Fra sagbruk og høvleri*, 212–13.

before he started the reading, and no reader has had a more attentive audience."[293] In the same way that hunger is the best spice to any dish, boredom seems to have been the best warm-up act any reader could dream of.

Sometimes, the aims of a performer could be very different to the audience he had. During one of his many times in prison, the (in)famous thief Gjest Baardsen was hounded and mistreated by the prison guards to a degree he was not familiar with. He therefore began reading "good books" aloud to his fellow prisoners.[294] Although his fellow inmates were probably looking to be entertained by this reading, Baardsen had a different audience and goal in mind. The mimicking of the manners and behaviours of "respectable" citizens through reading eventually won over the sympathy of the superintendent in the prison who halted the violence conducted against Baardsen.

Above any other, one medium seems to have been the focal point of reading for shared emotions: letters. The second half of the 19th century witnessed an explosive increase in the writing and reading of letters, starting at 1 million letters sent in 1848, to 44 million in 1900.[295] This leap was not only a by-product of the expansion of both bureaucracy and private enterprises. Private correspondence represented the largest share of letters and increased its stake throughout the period. Many of these letters were from relative and friends who had moved to America in search of better lives. The letters seem to have been very influential in many of the cases where poor farmers decided to test their luck, being blamed for the abandonment of many smallholdings. It was not always the choice of either the writer or reader that the letters became the subject of public readings. As letters were written by hand, the reading of them was a different proposition to the reading of papers or books. Many common readers had only learned to read printed letters and were unable to decipher the gothic cursive. As a son in a family of *husmenn* reflected on in later life, "grandfather could not write or read handwriting but learned to read printed letters, so he read papers and books."[296] The lack of this skill was sometimes missed when it came to letters. "Mother could read handwriting and write her name but that was all. Father wanted dearly to write his [letters] by himself to his relatives and children in America but couldn't even write his name."[297] Those who wished to keep in contact with their dearest through letters despite this had to elicit the help of

[293] Bull, *Renhårig slusk*, 41.
[294] Baardsen, *Gjest Baardsen Sogndalsfjærens levnetsløb*, 239.
[295] Johannessen, *Alltid underveis*, 1:259–67.
[296] Semmingsen, *Husmannsminner*, 75.
[297] Ibid., 180.

intermediaries. One of these was Johan Falkberget who wrote that he often had to help some of his fellow miners with both the reading and writing of their letters.[298]

When the letters were read aloud, it could have an impact on all those who listened, not only the intended recipient. Fishermen and sailors would often be separated from their families for months, sometimes years, without having any way of contacting them besides letters.[299] Fishermen could be stuck in harbours or fisheries for days due to the bad weather giving them ample opportunity to both read and write letters. Postmen would sometimes be astounded by the productivity of these fishermen, the younger ones in particular, who could present them with seven or eight new letters for sending every day.[300] However, the most potent remedy for this homesickness seems to have been the reading of letters they received. Whenever they arrived, the seamen would group together and read the letters aloud in order to console each other.[301]

There are some similarities between the comforting reading that could be seen in private reading, described by sociologist Janice Radway, and the communal reading of texts in order to share the emotional experience. Especially with the reading of letters, the texts seem to have functioned as a remedy for a situation the readers were unable to change. Rather than dream about the possibility of escape, or feel the maternal love they lacked, the letters were an opportunity to imagine the presence of the people and the places the readers missed. As with the romances and popular fictions about emigration, the letter was ideally suited for this purpose with its personal nature and references to the specific places and people the readers missed.

In the few descriptions that exist of oral communal reading, women are conspicuously absent, even when their present is all but assured. During the readings of papers or serialised books in cottages, it is highly unlikely that the women were chased out or denied access, but the sources remain silent on their participation. This does not mean that they did not partake in oral reading, that their reading was wholly confined to the private kind. One of the very few sources pointing to the opposite can be found in a photograph from the end of the 19th century (see: figure 6). The picture was probably staged, but there is no reason to think that the photo does not depict something the photographer and participants thought of as realistic. The display

[298] Johannessen, *Alltid underveis*, 1:258.
[299] Nostalgia was considered a decease at the time. See: Karin Johannisson, *Nostalgia: en känslas historia*, Bonnier essä (Stockholm: Bonnier, 2001).
[300] Johannessen, *Alltid underveis*, 1:258.
[301] Birger Hall, *I de fremmede Havne: Erindringer fra Sømandsmissionen* (Kristiania: Grøndahl & Søns Bogtrykkeri, 1895), 115.

seems to include all the elements of a performative oral reading: a single reader – in what seems to be a break from work – addresses an attentive audience of three displaying different reactions to the performance.

The scene is significant in two ways. Firstly, it grounds claims that women probably performed public readings even though they are not captured in other sources. Secondly, the photo does not point to any reasons why female public reading should as neglected in the sources as it is. It does not depict the reading as a carnival-esque reversal of roles that would suggest that female public reading was uncommon.[302] Rather, the absence of female readers in the source material suggests a bias against it. If so, it stands in the tradition of the pious reading. More specifically, it seems similar to the emphasis placed on women being a passive reader of sermons whenever they were done in any sort of communal settings. The most striking examples of this were the times when young boys were given the responsibility of reading the sermons for the family instead of their mothers whenever the fathers were unavailable. This aversion against female participation in religious public readings might very well have been re-contextualised in the reading of secular literature for entertainment. It might also have been part of the entertaining reading of chapbooks and broadside ballads in the early parts of the century but too little is known about this reading to conclude in any way. Regardless of where this suppression of female readers came from, it accentuates that the hierarchies that surrounded readings in the first half of the century did not diminish as time went on.

Against the grain: Political texts and the politicisation of reading

As with the entertaining reading, the politicisation of the reading of common readers was a process of gradual adaptation. The spheres of political debates had been connected to the spoken word rather than the written, and communication was done through rituals and performances that were not contingent on texts. The first papers to reach the readers were therefore more appendages to the spoken word than the centre of the conversation. They were a vessel for the communicating of physical rituals that were the politics of the day, not a medium of participation.[303] This is not to say that politics was done exclusively through texts. The petitions to the king during the time of Danish rule was an opportunity for common readers

[302] See: Mikhail Bachtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).
[303] Trygve Riiser Gundersen, 'Det tidligmoderne kommunikasjonssamfunnet', *Nytt norsk tidsskrift* 26, no. 2 (2009): 125–40.

to express political demands through texts.[304] However, common readers did not take part in the debates in newspapers. They were still the "other" reader, the voiceless readers talked *about* but seldom *to* or *with*. Their political textual practices were therefore not usually centred on writing stirring pieces, but reading them, and, just as important, the communities that formed around the reading of them. The gradual inclusion of politics through text, in addition to the already existing politics through bodies, started with the Haugean movement and was intensified by the Thrane movement.

While the rejecting readers of the Haugean movement have already been detailed, there co-existed a large (perhaps larger) group of pragmatic readers.[305] These were known for their engagement in politics, as well as commerce, science and other areas that had become a part of the function of the written word. These Haugeans read newspapers in order to follow developments in both markets and governmental ordinances. They took part in public debates, and were avid writers and readers of letters concerning a wide range of topics.[306] This participation was not contradictory to their *memoria* reading, as the more sceptical Haugeans seem to have feared. In fact, some of the preachers that were the most vocal advocated for *memoria* reading were also thoroughly engaged in politics.

Unknowingly expanding upon the trend set by the Haugeans, the Thrane movement placed the political usage of texts as one of its central concerns. They were also more than willing to appropriate the political textual practices of the elites. As the movement stated in its petition to King Oscar I, they did not want to be an enemy of education, rather, they wanted to increase its scope to include all readers.[307] Above anything else, Thrane impressed upon the members of his organisation that texts could be a tool for their betterment, as long as they learned to use it correctly. The training for this was provided by the *Arbeiderforeninger*, the workers' unions, which provided thousands of people with new reading and writing practices, aimed at practical and political usage.[308] This ensured that many of the *husmenn* and workers

[304] For a comprehensive introduction to non-elite political engagement in Norway, see: Knut Dørum, *Frå undersått til medborgar: styreform og politisk kultur i Noreg 1660 til 1884* (Oslo: Samlaget, 2016).
[305] This divide within the Haugean movement between rejecting and pragmatic readers could explain the differing contemporary, and subsequent, opinions on whether the movement aided or hindered the 'enlightenment' of the common reader. See: Kildal, *Norske folkeboksamlinger*, 15, 75; Ivar Aasen, *Reise-Erindringer og Reise-Indberetninger 1842-1847* (Trondheim: Det kongelige norske videnskabers selskab, 1917), 58, 80.
[306] Gundersen, 'Memory and Meaning', 163; Berge et al., *Norsk presses historie*, 1:61.
[307] Various letters and administrative documents, in SAK, Thrane-bevegelsen, ARB/213/F/L0001; Marcus Thrane, *Petitionen fra 1850: Thrane-foreningenes bønnskrift til kongen* (Oslo: Arbeidernes Opplysningsforbund, 1957).
[308] Ringvej, *Marcus Thrane*, 72–76.

that participated in the unions were not wholly unprepared when political texts started circulating with increasing intensity in the second half of the 19th century.

It seems like broadside ballads were once again the vanguard of this change. As mentioned in chapter two, broadside ballads were among the first affordable political texts that common readers had access to and they could be distinctly political in their themes. They could treat the injustices that befell workers, fishers, or *husmenn*, or the greed of the men in power.[309] As the century progressed, broadside ballads could also be supportive of the workers in strikes or make calls for action on social reforms.[310] They were also actively used by the Thranite movement to mobilise support for their cause.[311] As with entertaining reading, the position of the ballads as an appendage to the spoken word might have made the transition of politics from the spoken to the written word less problematic for some readers.

Newspapers and magazines seem to have been the favoured media for political discourses among common readers, at the expense of other media. For example, explicitly political books do not seem to have been popular with common readers. In the books left in the archives from the library of *Kristiania Arbeidersamfund*, very few of the books on socialism, the labour movement, or published political speeches were ever opened.[312] Books on socialism, Marx, and translations of the speeches of foreign socialist leaders that came with unopened/uncut pages are unopened to this day. There were also very few loans of political books recorded in the library's register of loans, even though there were plenty of such books available.[313] The reasons for this particular connection to newspapers and magazines are difficult to discern but are probably grounded in the peculiarities of the market for reading material and the discourse on its usage that was discussed in chapter two. There were great economic incentives for political discourse in papers, as well as opportunities to make the legal repercussions minimal. In addition to this, there existed no great interest among most public libraries to include political literature in their holdings. Rather, such inclusions ran against the goal of making the readers politically passive.

There were two sorts of political uses of newspapers and magazines, the first was the politics of subscriptions to, and usage of, the texts, which is particularly evident in the cases where employers or landlords tried to enforce the reading of certain papers or prohibit the

[309] Eriksen, 'Skillingsviser', 117–30.
[310] Arnfinn Engen, *Vaagn op arbeider! tiden er nær: skillingsvisa i arbeidarkampen* (Oslo: Tiden, 1981), 11–12.
[311] Ibid., 14.
[312] Various book son socialism and the labour movement, in AAB, *Oslo arbeidersamfunn*, ARK-1113/Å/L0026-L0027.
[313] Protocol of loans, in AAB, *Oslo arbeidersamfunn*, ARK-1113/Å/L0035.

reception of others. These restrictions came in many forms. Sometimes, an employer would pay for a subscription of a paper tending towards the right, while paying young boys to clear away any left-leaning papers left behind by the workers.[314] At other times, employers would deduct pay from their workers to maintain a reading room filled with right-leaning papers.[315] The common reader employed different tactics to overcome these particular obstacles, and the general censorship of price that affected all common readers. They would band together in order to afford a subscription, sharing the paper between them or reading it aloud, hide the forbidden papers under their clothes while having an issue of the sanctioned paper visibly in their back-pocket, discuss the forbidden papers with hushed voices when no-one was there to interfere, or enter into reading societies organised by common readers.[316] These tactics became a way of strengthening communal bonds between the readers, demarcating themselves as a separate group from the elites. For some, the very act of reading literature that was deemed intolerable sparked an interest in the politics of reinforcing the rights of their own group against those of the elite.[317]

The unwillingness of administrators of public libraries to invest in political texts sometimes led the common readers to take the matter into their own hands. In both Stryn and Nordfjord, the parish priests were actively undermining any attempts by the commoners to get a hold of any texts the priests found too dangerous by exploiting their positions in the local public libraries.[318] Consequently, the unsatisfied readers formed their own reading societies, splitting the costs of the forbidden texts between them. This was probably not a unique story, as more and more reading societies and public libraries founded by common readers spread around the country. These reading societies played a pivotal role in the forming of how common readers read political texts.

The second political usage of newspapers and magazines was through the actual reading of them. In many ways, the common reader's reading of newspapers and magazines was similar to the elites' practices. By their own account, common readers would read their texts to enlighten themselves of what was happening in the news in order to discuss these events with their co-workers, families or friends.[319] However, the construction of this practice was not instantaneous. It came through a gradual transformation where identities and boundaries were

[314] Bull, *Fra sagbruk og høvleri*, 151.
[315] Edvard Bull, ed., *Fra papirindustrien*, Arbeidsfolk forteller (Oslo: Tiden, 1953), 118.
[316] Bull, *Renhårig slusk*, 281.
[317] Ibid., 291.
[318] Haukenæs, *Reiseskildringer fra Norges natur og folkeliv. 1*, 131–48.
[319] Mostue, *Slik var hverdagen*, 203; Bull, *Renhårig slusk*, 41; Bull, *Fra sagbruk og høvleri*, 201.

negotiated between readers in conflict and consensus. One of the many scenes of this sort of transformation was *Langvasgrends Læse- og Diskussionsklubb*, a reading and debating society for both men and women, formed in 1893.[320] Here, conflicts among the men and women, with the church, and with the dissenting members of the society, gradually shaped the members' reading of political through exclusions that clearly demarcated acceptable from unacceptable behaviour. The result was similar to the reading practices of elite readers. They behaved respectfully toward each other's reading, engaged in political discussions on the basis of the written word – with the notable difference that the society tended strongly towards left-wing politics – and kept the discussions of texts to one's respective gender. This led to the female members of the society to break out and found their own, separate reading society with their own meetings and discussions.

A unique form of reading that took place within the confines of reading societies was the reading of the club's handwritten papers. As in Finland, these papers were widespread in Norway and especially within the emerging labour movement. *Langvasgrend* was certainly part of this trend, with their own handwritten paper, *Lusen* (The Louse, perhaps a reference to its persistency), which had a formally elected board of editors stemming from the members. This paper offered its writers a way of exploring new voices, identities, and political positions, shaping their engagement with texts, and forging this relationship with older, strictly oral, practices of discussion.[321] For some writers, the writing opened them up to influences from very different people than the members of the club they were writing for.[322] However, the reading of the paper was just as consequential as its writing, and included many more of the members. At *Langvasgrend*, editions of the paper would be read aloud at meetings, facilitating a discussion on both the topics and views presented within the paper.[323] Political debates were perhaps started in the written word but were continued orally. For common readers, discussions brought the political practices of the elites into an already established framework that they were familiar with. Instead of constructing a "civil society" purely based in the fully literary world,

[320] Minute book, various dates, in AAB, *Langvasgrend læse- og diskussionsklub*, ARK-1316/A/L0001/0002.
[321] For a brilliant theoretical introduction to the transformative powers of hand-written newspapers, see: Kirsti Salmi-Niklander, 'Monologic, Dialogic, Collective: The Modes of Writing in Hand-Written Newspapers in 19th- and Early 20th-Century Finland', in *White Field, Black Seeds: Nordic Literacy Practices in the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. Anna Kuismin and Matthew J. Driscoll, Studia Fennica Litteraria 7 (Helsinki, Finland: Finnish Literature Society / SKS, 2013), 76–88, https://doi.org/10.21435/sflit.7.
[322] Christian Berrenberg, 'Die handgeschriebenen Zeitungen der norwegischen Arbeiterjugendvereinigungen: "eine weltgeschichtliche, philanthropische und psychologische Mission"', in *Literarische Praktiken in Skandinavien um 1900: Fallstudien*, ed. Joachim Grage and Stephan Michael Schröder, vol. 1, Literarische Praktiken in Skandinavien (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2012), 124.
[323] See: Minute book 27.12.1894, 18.9.1898, 27.1.1901, in AAB, *Langvasgrend læse- og diskussionsklub*, ARK-1316/A/L0001/0002.

it oscillated between the oral and written, placing each within a context the common readers understood and were able to partake in.[324]

The appropriation and adaption of the elite's reading of political texts was not limited to discussions of the texts. This wish by some common readers to align their practices with the bourgeoise literacy can be found in their rating of their own approach to texts. As a worker fron a copper mill told, "we usually subscribed to a paper – *Norske intelligensseddel* and *Varden* were in the wind back then […] Sometimes it happened that there were political disputes between us, but since the intelligence wasn't all that sharp on any of the sides, the subjects were soon outdated."[325] The goal of the reading of the paper was to mimic the conversational aspects of bourgeois political culture, and a failure to do so is framed in the terms of competency and innate ability. As well of their rating of their literacy, common readers that were members of reading societies and therefore engaged in the reading of political texts, were generally more positive toward the new form of education they were given. A surprisingly large number of the local farmers' sons in Nordfjord became students, something that contemporary sources directly linked to their participation in the reading societies their parents created.[326] In *Langvasgrend*, discussions on the institutions of education revealed a consensus that this was seen as a beneficiary factor the members' own development and culture.

The similarity between this reading, and the reading the elite's had of political texts makes it tempting to characterise the reading of newspapers and magazines as emancipating, as Jonathan Rose and James Brophy suggests it could be. To some extent, this seems plausible. Through their discussions and literary engagements, common readers formed political communities, which defended and furthered the interests of these communities in conflict with other groups, just as the elites had been doing. However, support of the politics of the elite was not embedded or innate in the practice. Common readers appropriated the practice, made it their own, and based their own politics on it. In addition, the appropriation of these practices lead to changes in them. The reading was done within the framework of both the spoken and written word, as the example of *Langvasgrend* illustrates. The appropriation made the written word an arena for resistance against the hierarchies the readers were embroiled in, which would only be more obvious to the movement as time went on.[327]

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[324] Berrenberg, 'Die handgeschriebenen Zeitungen der norwegischen Arbeiterjugendvereinigungen: "eine weltgeschichtliche, philanthropische und psychologische Mission"', 128–31.
[325] Bull, *Renhårig slusk*, 41.
[326] Haukenæs, *Reiseskildringer fra Norges natur og folkeliv. 1*, 148.
[327] Christian Berrenberg, *'Es ist deine Pflicht zu benutzen, was du weißt!': Literatur und literarische Praktiken in der norwegischen Arbeiterbewegung 1900-1931*, vol. 3, Literarische Praktiken in Skandinavien (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2014), 160–99.

However, in one regard, the common readers inherited aspects of the elite's practices. In most, if not all, of these stories of readings of political texts, there is once again one glaring absence that needs to be addressed: the women. Sometimes, this nonappearance is explainable, a product of the divided spheres of responsibility most families lived by. Fewer women worked in factories and mills in which many of these stories take place than did men.[328] Still, some women would have been in contact with the political initiatives and partaken in the reading of political texts that took place outside the confines of the male-dominated workplaces and yet they remain elusive. Traces of one explanation can be found in Langvasgrend. The conflicts between the sexes are not greatly detailed in the minute book they left behind, but it escalated to the point where the women formed a separate club to be able to meet without the men. There were also attempts to mandate the editorial staff of The Louse to have ample representation of women. This proposition was rejected by a narrow margin before the club elected an all-male staff.

Put together with the bias against female communal reading, a more structural problem seems to arise. Rather than a specific discrimination in the fields of politics or communal reading, the exclusion of female readers might be better understood as an effect of sources, as has been noticed by historians within other fields as well.[329] All the contemporary sources that go into any detail of performed reading acts stem from works produced or compiled by men. It is possible that these were exclusively interested in male reading, or did not take an interest in the reading of women. It so, a systematic repression of female readers has occurred in the source material, making studies of their reading even harder. To counteract the discrimination, women from the upper classes of Norwegian society had begun organising themselves in their own reading societies during the last decades of the century in order to further their position in the literary and social world that surrounded them.[330] However, the female common readers were kept from these due to the censorship of price.

[328] Blom and Sogner, *Med kjønnsperspektiv på norsk historie*, 183–85.
[329] Ida Bull, *De trondhjemske handelshusene på 1700-tallet: slekt, hushold og forretning*, Skriftserie fra historisk institutt (Trondheim: Norges teknisk-naturvitenskapelige universitet, 1998); Blom and Sogner, *Med kjønnsperspektiv på norsk historie*, 179.
[330] Katharina Müller, '"Die weibliche Lesevereinigung sollte jeder kennen": Literarische Praktiken, Netwerke und Sozialkapital in den weiblichen Lesevereinigungen in Skandinavien um 1900', in *Literarische Praktiken in Skandinavien um 1900: Fallstudien*, ed. Joachim Grage and Stephan Michael Schröder, vol. 1, 3 vols, Literarische Praktiken in Skandinavien (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2012), 37–65.

Something old, something new: The intermixing of practices

Common readers were usually not bound to one single practice. Rather, they were equipped with a selection of them, using the ones that fitted best for each text and situation. Pious and entertaining had their uses, as did the practices that engaged with political texts. This is not to say that everyone had the full repertoire of practices available to them. The practices were acquired by common readers through exposure and learning, not something one was born with. As the proliferation of these practices increased, the likelihood that a reader could utilise a larger assortment of them grew. This meant that an increasing number of readers were confronted with the problem of how they wanted to integrate their new practices.

Some readers either rejected all the new practices available or abandoned all the old. The rejecting readers have already been explicitly discussed through the examples of Leirdalen and more but the other has so far remained hidden. The clearest example of these are the likes of Bishop Bang. Having had his defining meeting with the bookseller and his books, there was no way back for him. He detested his fellow villagers and their reading, pining for friends that could help him develop his practices. As he grew older and discovered that his cousin was turning into a similarly minded reader "a friendship arose between us, that struck deeper and deeper roots."[331] They would stay up late and read the few texts they had aloud to each other, and in the periods of the year they were separated, they would write letters back and forth that were "childish" to begin with but that offered them "considerable practice in utilising the written language".[332] –

At the same time as Bang and his cousin's competency in their newly found practices grew, the distance to the old became greater. When they participated in the evening household devotional, their distance to the sanctity of the reading was obvious. When the young *husmann* of the household sang out of tune, they burst into laughter and were scolded by the patriarch for their lack of respect. Bang had left the reading practice of his childhood behind. Not because he had lost his faith in God, but because he could not reconcile it with his new forms of reading. Bang was not alone in this. In their descriptions of the pious household reading of their parents and grandparents, *husmenn* and members of the working class born in the last decades of the century seem increasingly estranged from the devotion demanded by their parents and grandparents.[333]

[331] Bang, *Erindringer*, 68.
[332] Ibid., 69.
[333] Semmingsen, *Husmannsminner*, 48–49.

Between the radical rejection of Leirdalen and the total estrangement of Bang, there were readers walking a middle ground, attempting to make the old and the new fit together, showing deference for both. These readers could be found everywhere, living side by side with the others without any conflicts.[334] Eilert Sundt found some of these readers in his investigation of Piperviken and Ruseløkbakken, the poorer quarters of Christiania.[335] Detailing the material conditions, familial relations, and sentiments of the working-class inhabitants of Piperviken and Ruseløkbakken, Sundt accidently uncovered an emerging parallel usage of different reading practices.

The state of text ownership among the families investigated point towards many the readers making use of the old religious reading practices. Sundt found that on average, each family owned between one and three different texts, with 83 per cent of these texts being books. Among the books, there were almost no secular works. This means that most of the families only owned two religious books, typically a new testament and a collection of psalms. Sundt did not believe these were read in any large degree, in fact, he believed most of the owners of these texts were illiterate. He postulated that the common readers thought that such texts should be a part of every Christian's home, regardless of whether they were read or not. Behind this explanation looms the religious reading practice, with its confidence in material objects and ability to dominate the reader's understanding of texts.

Further suggesting the prevalence of religious reading practices are the views on education. Of 270 families, only 32 were satisfied with the current amount of school days (two), the rest wanting between one and six days each week. The parents were asked in 1855, before the introduction of the highly controversial reading book for children by P. A. Jensen that shocked the nation's parents and redirected public education away from religion and towards a secular education. This means that the public schools in Christiania were still placing an overwhelming emphasis on the religious aspects of reading.[336] The continued support for this education suggests that not only was this acceptable for the parents, but it was in accordance with their understanding of education and reading.

At the same time, there are signs pointing towards other reading practices as well. Although religious books dominated the families' modest libraries, almost twenty per cent of the texts were papers or magazines of secular nature. Sundt did not collect the data for the statistics himself and remarked that the man responsible for this did not make it clear whether

[334] Haukenæs, *Reiseskildringer fra Norges natur og folkeliv. 1*, 236.
[335] Sundt, *Om Piperviken og Ruseløkbakken*.
[336] Malling, *Beretning om Christianias Almueskolevæsen*.

there was one edition of the paper in the household, or several. It is therefore possible that the number of papers and magazines available were much higher than the statistics say. The papers found represented the full spectrum of papers being produced at the time. There was the polemic, political paper *Arbeiderbladet*, the entertainment-focused *Skillingsmagazin*, and *Intelligenssedlene* that had combined news and works of literature in serialized format since the 1840s.[337] The prevalence of these papers and magazines confounded Sundt, who, as previously stated, thought most of the people he investigated were illiterate. He hypothesises that "Papers are for adult common people what spelling books are to children – they are useful reading exercises".[338] This explanation hints at a more probable reason, one relating to practices.

The papers and magazines found in the homes of the common readers suggests that they had more than religious reading practices available to them. With no description of the owners' reading, this might smell of baseless conjecture, but Sundt's comparison of the papers and magazines to spelling books lends the explanation some credence. As shown by his description of the rejecting reader of Leirdalen, the reading practices common readers employed to entertain themselves or to be political were much more familiar to Sundt than their religious reading practices. The employment of these could therefore easily be mistaken for the gradual learning of what Sundt thought was literacy – the reading practices of the elites. If so, more readers were a part of the reading of these texts than just their owners. Both the reading for fun and for politics could, and often did, take the form of communal, oral, readings. As with the colleagues of the railroad worker who paid for access to a local library so that he could read the texts aloud for everyone's entertainment, more than the owners of the texts will then have taken part in their readings.

The common readers of Piperviken and Ruseløkbakken clearly treated their reading practices as compatible but the nature of the interplay between them remains elusive. The interaction is probably contingent on the year of the investigation as well. The late 1850s is before the massive increase in circulation of papers and fiction books, as well as before the substantial fall in prices the intensified publication of texts produces. Sundt's insistence on the readers' illiteracy and their reading of papers as an advanced learning might suggest that the religious reading practices were dominant but that the vacuum of meaning left in secular texts was gradually being filled by other practices.

[337] Berge et al., *Norsk presses historie*, 1:341.
[338] Sundt, *Om Piperviken og Ruseløkbakken*, 52.

The nature of the co-existence of these practices seems to have been of a symbiotic nature – where the need for and limits of one practice ended, another began. The fishers of Helgeland that Bishop Bang heard read *Sjymain'n* to themselves (see: chapter one), among which he found no likeminded readers, would also read to entertain themselves whenever there was down time or they were wind-bound during fishing. Their pious reading was not suited for entertainment, and vice versa, but together they completed the needs of the readers.

The symbiotic relationship reading practices could have, is also evident with the pragmatic Haugeans. These were the Haugeans who were the early appropriators of political texts, before the Thrane movement made this practice a part of their movement. The engagement with this practice did not come at the cost of their enthusiasm for religious texts, or diminish their *memoria* capabilities. It was simply an addition to it. This openness to different reading practices can be rooted in two different understandings of texts. The first is an understanding of secular texts as a system of meanings that runs parallel to the religious one and therefore a *corpus* that poses no threat. The other is as something supplementary to the religious reading, possible even as a part of it. Such an understanding would impress upon the Haugians a strong incentive to participate in civil society, perhaps even invigorating their economic activities, as has been suggested by some historians, drawing parallels between the Haugians and Max Weber's proto-capitalist protestants.[339] Wherever it was rooted, it demonstrates that their new practices were used whenever the *memoria* reading practice fell short. It did not displace it or compete with it.

Even though common readers had different practices available, they could have favourites among them. These preferences were not as strong as with the rejecting readers, who refused to engage with other practices, but discernible enough to make a hierarchy. This phenomenon can be observed in Johan Falkberget's father, Mikkel Andreas Pedersen Lillebakken, whose engagement with politics and deep religiosity had a profound impact on Falkberget.[340]

> My father, the miner, told me during our walk to and from the *Sextus* mine about [Émile] Zola and [Victor] Hugo – about their struggle for a better and more just society. Father woke me early – politically and literary. Among the Norwegian authors, Bjørnson was his favourite. He just didn't like his "talking

[339] Nils Gilje, 'Haugebevegelsen og sekulariseringens dialektikk', in *Arv og utfordring: Menneske og samfunn i den kristne moraltradisjon*, ed. Svein Aage Christoffersen and Trygve Wyller (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1995), 220; Cf: Max Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie*, 9th ed., vol. 1 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1986), 17–206.

[340] Kristian Magnus Kommandantvold, *Johan Falkbergets bergmannsverden: mennesker, motiver og symboler.*, vol. 1 (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1971), 98 and 388.

> trees". He loathed all long and symbolic descriptions of nature. Father meant that books should be about people and their fate. He always added: "The bible is the book of books!"[341]

Lillebakken reading practices generated religious or political meanings in the texts he read. What meanings were created depended on what texts he was reading. He does not seem to have emphasised the religious aspects of Victor Hugo's authorship, and kept the bible separate – and in greater esteem – from what he thought was political literature. This did not leave a lot of room for the sections of Bjørnson's texts that emphasised literature as an object of entertainment. His preferences for religious and political meanings were not strong enough to derive the entertainment of meaning but left it no place in his reading. He knew perfectly well what these symbolic descriptions meant, and perhaps why others enjoyed them, but did not see the enjoyment in them. They were not unfamiliar, nor rejected, but not the ones he preferred.

However, although Lillebakken' preference for religious and political texts was pronounced, it was by no means shared by everybody. Most readers seem to have been like Bang's fishers and the worker of Pipervika and Ruseløkbakken. They were fickle readers with fluid allegiances and a wish to read whatever felt appropriate.

***

When faced with the expanding functions of the written word, common readers responded in different ways. Some readers rejected the new texts and defended their religious texts and pious reading from any dilutions of the sanctity of the written word. Their ways of resistance was manifold, ranging from refusal to participate to the stealing or burning of books. However, resistance was not the only path the readers opted for. They also formed new practices to engage with the new texts made available to them through the expansion of the written word.

The new functions of the written word were introduced to common readers through texts that were appendages to the practices that based themselves on the spoken word. The texts for entertainment were introduced through broadside ballads and chapbooks, both of which were closely tied to the spoken word. Similarly, the reading of political texts was introduced through broadside ballads, as well as newspapers that were vessels for the political practices that belonged to the spoken word. In both cases, the texts' affiliations to the spoken word might have eased the transition to the written word. As the written word became more invasive, and the practices of common readers developed, they still did not abandon the spoken word

[341] Johan Falkberget, *Verker 15: Vers fra Rugelsjøen: Bergstadens dikter* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1979), 176.

completely. Through oral readings and discussions, the new practices mediated between the spoken and written word, belonging to both.

The new and old practices were intermixed in various ways. Some readers could not find room for their old practices as the importance of the written word grew in their reading. To them, the devotion their parents, grandparents, or friends stressed in their pious reading was out of tune with their new forms of reading. For other readers, the appropriation of the new texts did not necessarily entail the abandonment of the old. The old and the new co-existed in their lives, serving different functions and needs, in symbiosis. This is not to say that the readers could have favourites among their practices. However, this was a preference, not a rejection. This demarcates them from the readers that refused to participate.

Conclusion

During the first decades of the 19th century, pious reading was the dominant form of reading among common readers in Norway. This was not a single, unified practice, but a collection of different practices with different bases and logics dictating them. However, all these practices were concerned with the question of how to assure the readers' salvation. This concern was present in many different situations and manifested in many ways. It could be in the form of a reading at someone's deathbed, during the household reading, or in the reading during more trivial tasks such as cooking. All these reading were permeated by performative aspects, notions of authority, and hierarchies that the reader maintained or constructed.

Pious readings were dictated by different logics. Some readers did not see their words as separate from the things they denoted, and therefore read with an entangled signifier and referent in mind**.** This entanglement connected the readers to divinity during readings, accentuating the need for the performance of what the readers understood to be the appropriate reverence. Common readers therefore adhered to a strictly gendered hierarchy, gave particular attention to their diction, and otherwise tailored their reading to God. At the same time, not all pious reading was contingent upon the entanglement of signifier and referent. To the Haugeans, the spontaneous reading of memorised fragments of religious texts could reveal the path to salvation. This formed the basis of a reading concerned with cultivating these fragments. The reading often came in the form of public performances that expected witnesses to know fragments from key texts by heart and performers to be able to combine these fragments in new, meaningful, ways. The dominance of pious reading among common readers, whichever form it took or meaning it had, was contingent upon a shared understanding of the functions and the relative limits of the written and the spoken word. For the pious readers, while the spoken word governed most functions of everyday life, the written word had authority in the religious sphere.

The gradual expansion of the written word through the increased production and dissemination of texts diversified the roles the written word had in the lives of common readers. Several forces drove this expansion. The most easily identifiable factor was the effort of elites to discipline common readers. To begin with, these efforts encompassed libraries that were established and administered by the clergy, who limited their ambitions to "rationalising" the faith of common readers. Their use established a trend that would last the century where libraries acted as an instrument of discipline, and both the holdings and the process of

borrowing books were factors in shaping what readers were able to attain. As long as the readers remained curious or felt an obligation to use the library, it was all but assured that the library would expose them to other texts, imbued with new notions of the written word, than those common readers were familiar with. As the secular elites took over the responsibility of founding and administering public libraries, other understandings of the written word began to inform the libraries' selection of texts. These texts were not only there to mould the faith of the readers, but to instil patriotism, rid the readers of superstitions, and ensure that they would stay politically docile and accept their position in society. These goals ensured that most libraries held texts whose imagined functions for the written word differed from what common readers wanted, just as libraries run by the clergy had done earlier.

Parallel to these attempts at shaping common readers, both technological advances and changes in the laws governing the production and distribution of print made mass production and dissemination of texts possible. Whereas common readers had been able to acquire a couple of religious texts in their lifetime at the beginning of the century, the transformation of print gradually made it possible to buy texts on a monthly, weekly, or even daily basis for all. This made it possible for the written word to occupy an ever more important role in the everyday life of readers. Suddenly, tasks that were not suited for the old role of texts, such as the spreading of news, practical information, and announcements of vacancies, became bound to the written word. This expansion of the written word also drew entertainment away from the improvised, spoken word into the scripted realm of the written word, spawning the new genre of popular fiction to meet the growing demand of common readers.

Common readers responded differently to the new texts that became available to them during the century. Obstinate readers refused to engage with new texts altogether, seeing them as incompatible with their pious reading of religious texts. These readers were in open rebellion of the written word, the new texts that served to fulfil its functions, and the elite who propagated this understanding. However, this kind of obstinacy against non-religious reading was a minority position. Most readers developed new forms of reading to accommodate the new roles of the written word. Some of these ways of reading were developed from elements of pious reading or the oral practices that had fulfilled the same functions as the new texts did. These new practices were therefore not completely new, but a continuation and development of what they knew. At times, like in the case of political texts, they followed more closely the preferred practices of the elites. In these instances, they used these forms of reading against those who had instilled the role of texts as political tools in them, forming new communities of shared interest in opposition to the elites. With these new practices, a fickle reader arose, who

combined the new, transformed, and old practices at their own leisure and according to their own needs. They felt no alliance to any one practice, as the obstinate did, but resorted to whichever practice aided their reading.

The findings presented in this thesis offer several new perspectives on the history of common readers in Norway. Using concepts from neighbouring disciplines and drawing on insights from reading studies beyond Norway, I have unveiled hierarchies, performative aspects, effects of specific genres, and logics that dictated the readings that have gone unnoticed in most histories of reading in Norway. These aspects have given peeks into the meaning the readers created with their texts, with the aim that these insights amount to a thickened description of common readers' practices.

I have also demonstrated the usefulness of combining the social classes that have formed the basis of previous investigations into a larger concept of common readers. This has allowed me to trace developments and lines of inquiry that cross social groups and ties the whole century together, which would have been difficult otherwise. The usefulness of this approach should have implications for historians seeking to go in similar directions.

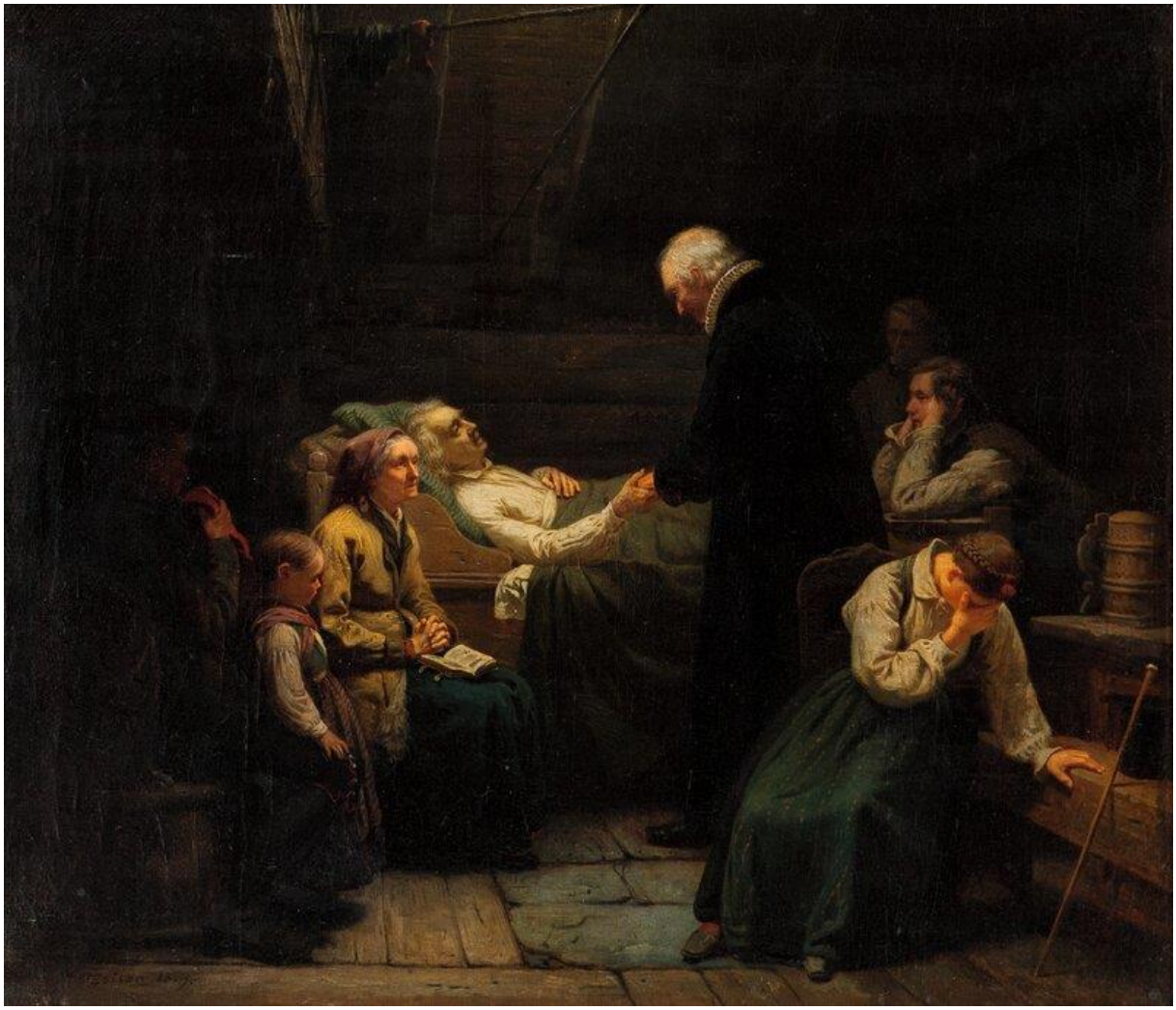
Lastly, I have offered an explanation to the shifting preferences of common readers that have been pointed out by many, but explained by few historians. I have argued that a new understanding of the abilities and domains of the written and spoken word caused this shift. Rather than placing this transformation at the beginning of the century as some historians have argued, among them Jostein Fet and Arne Apelseth, I propose that the transformation did not become entrenched until the last decades of the century. In addition, I have argued that the pious readings that dominated in the first decades retained much of its relevance to common readers and did not disappear with the dwindling importance of the spoken word.

The persistence of seemingly "irrational" approaches to the written word among common readers provokes questions about the social reach of "enlightenment" as a quintessential element of modernity. While historians have been careful to point to the supposedly high numbers of literacy as a factor in the industrialisation and democratisation in Norway and other European countries, the spectrum of different forms of reading represented in literacy makes the causality dubious. The obstinate readers who refused to partake in the new roles of the written word contributed as much to the factories, mills, and mines they worked in as their fickle comrades. In fact, the perseverance of these "irrationalities" questions the very opposition between modern and pre-modern. Clearly, the burning of books and similar practices from which this study started did not simply disappear with the spread of literacy and

the availability of print. They found niches in a world gradually colonised by the written word, where readers sought other things than enlightenment or entertainment from their texts. Underneath all the changes in *Bildung* and the print market, the present thesis has identified a continuous strand of reading practices that is not sufficiently understood when it is framed in the terms of "rationality", "emancipation", or even "taste". For readers to have united these practices with those which came as a direct consequence of modernity, the readers cannot have taken them to be incongruent. While the wheels of change carried them along, common readers remained transfixed by their texts, whatever they were.

Illustrations

Figure 1



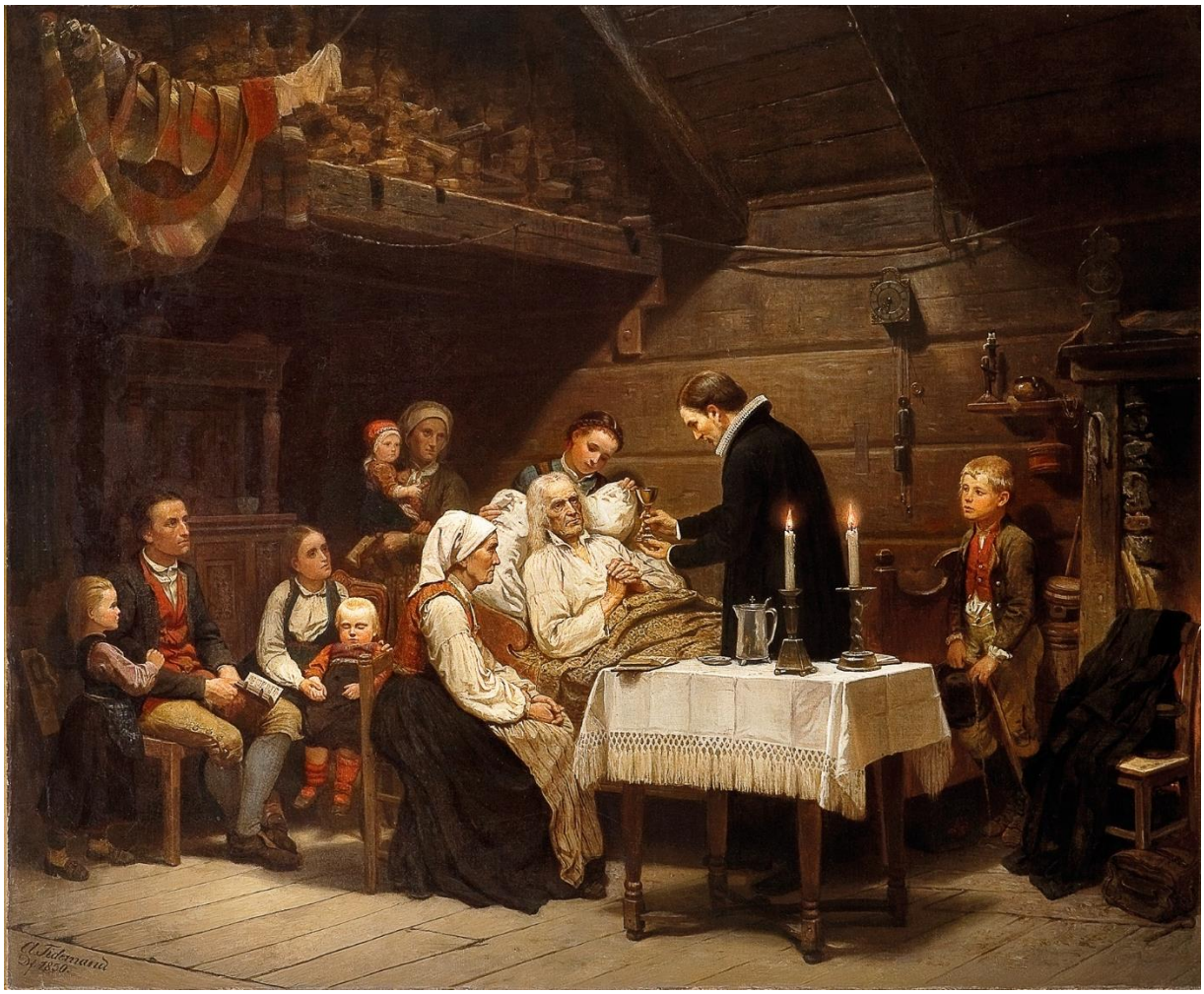
Bergslien, Knud

Sognebud 1859

Courtesy of: Grew Wedel Plass Auksjoner

https://gwpa.no/nb/lots/10535

Figure 2



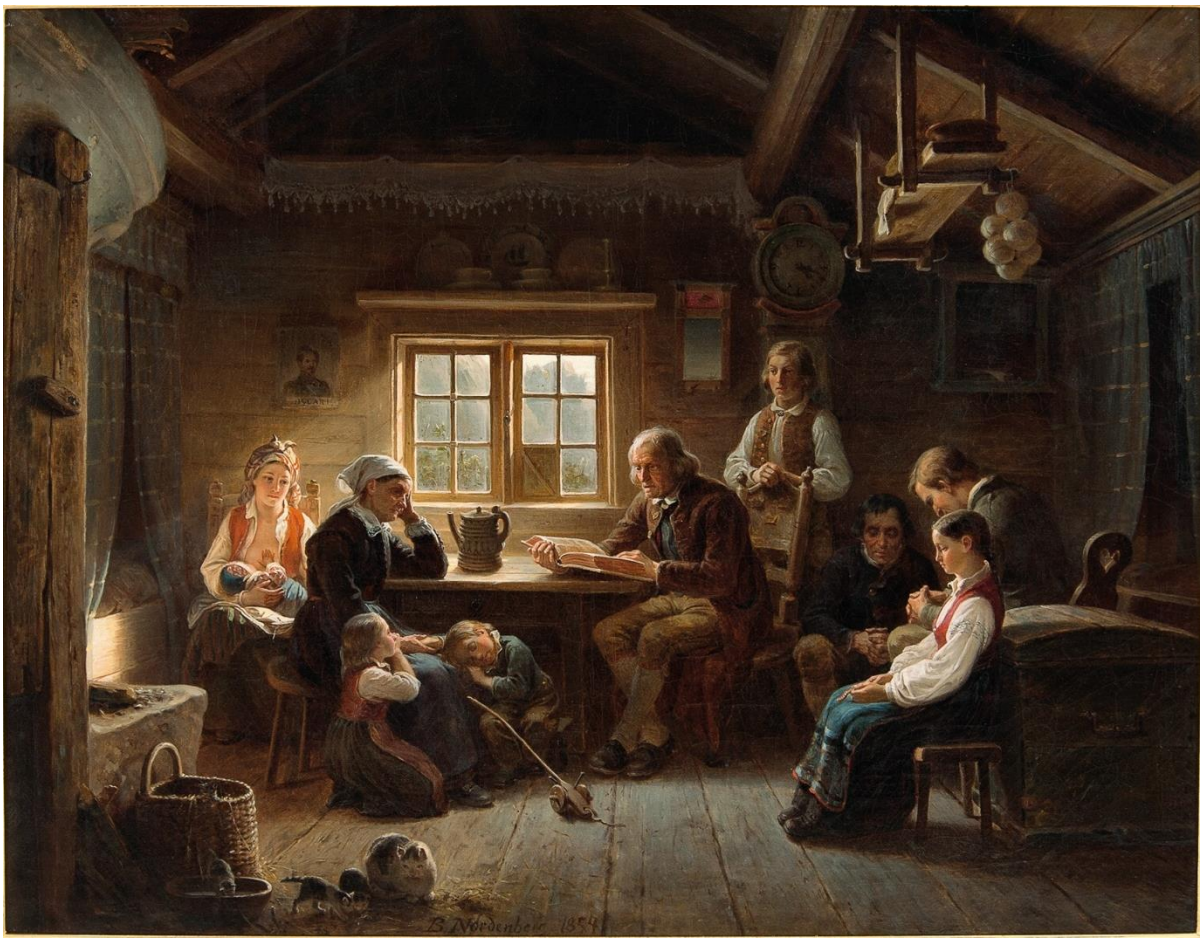
Tidemand, Adolph (1814-1876)

Sognebud I 1860

Courtesy of: Grew Wedel Plass Auksjoner

https://gwpa.no/nb/lots/9677

Figure 3



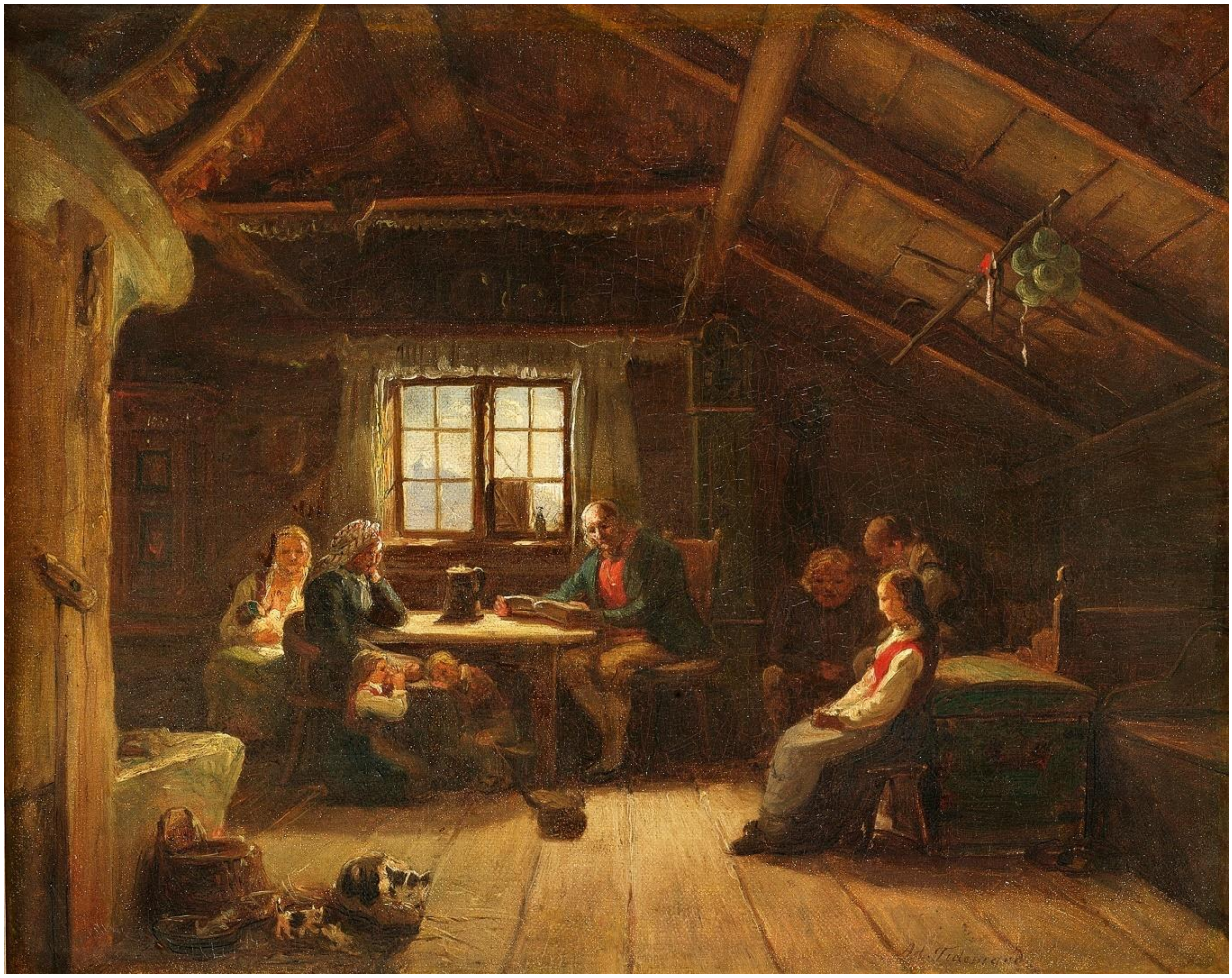
Nordenberg, Bengt (1822-1902)

Høytlesning 1854

Courtesy of: Grew Wedel Plass Auksjoner

https://gwpa.no/nb/lots/10546

There is also a version of the same painting that is signed by Ad. Tidemand (see the next page).



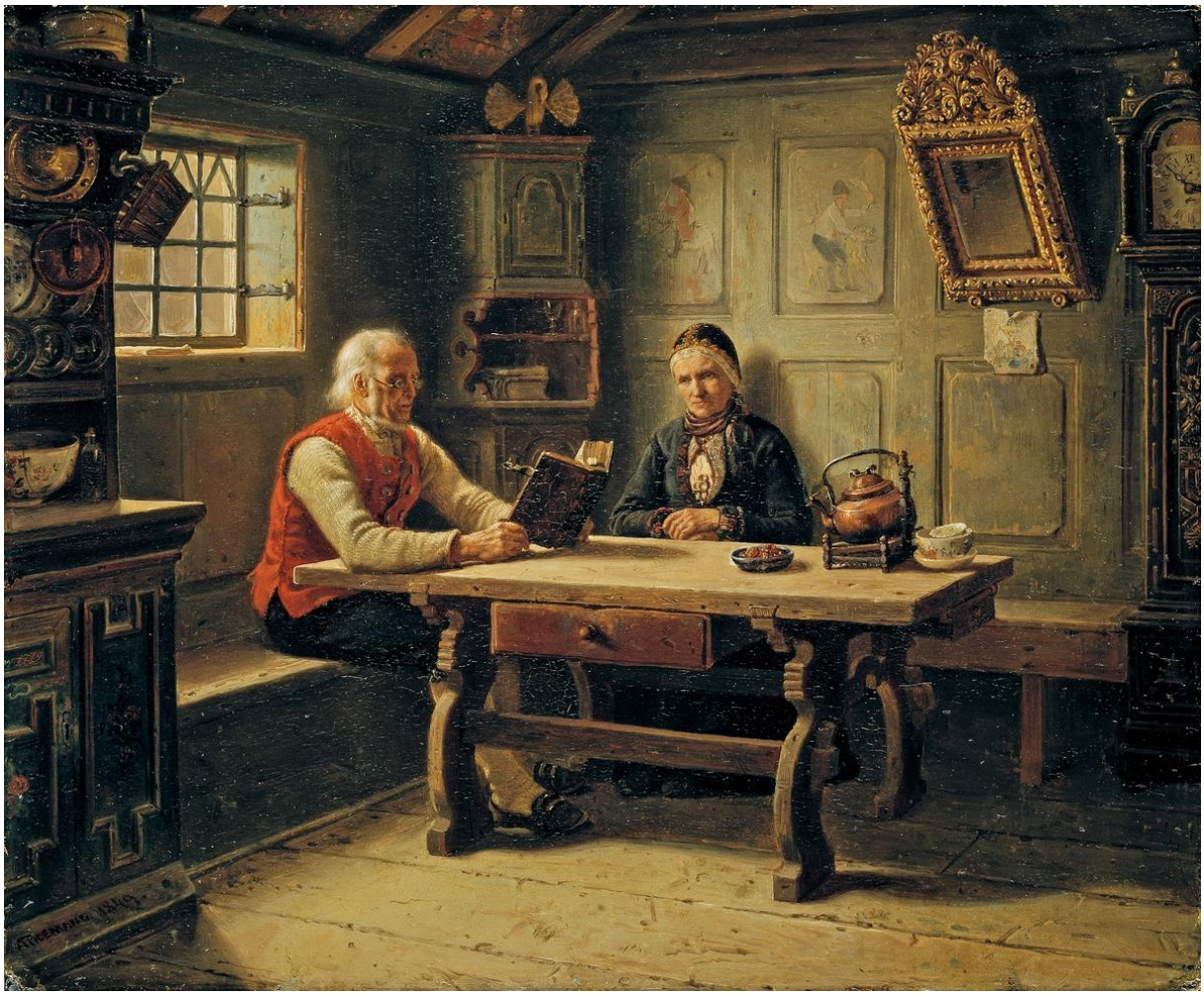
Tidemand, Adolph? (1814-1876)

Far leser høyt, unknown year.

Courtesy of: Grew Wedel Plass Auksjoner

https://gwpa.no/nb/lots/6894

Figure 4



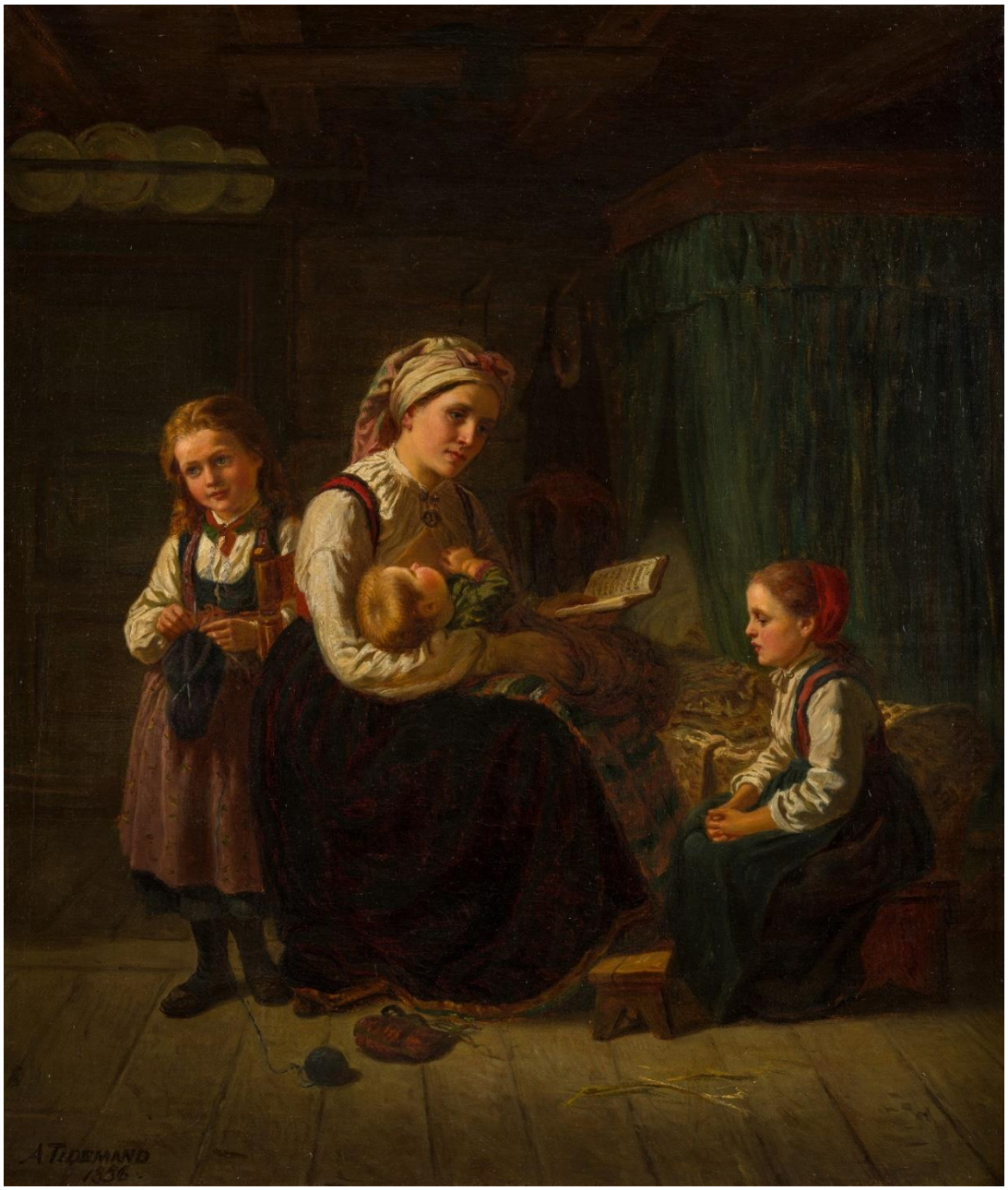
Tidemand, Adolph (1814-1876)

De ensomme gamle, (Husandakt), 1849

Courtesy of: Nasjonalmuseet for kunst, arkitektur og design

https://digitaltmuseum.no/011042443142/de-ensomme-gamle-husandakt-maleri

Figure 5



Tidemand, Adolph (1814-1876)

Moderens undervisning, 1856

Courtesy of: Grew Wedel Plass Auksjoner

https://gwpa.no/nb/lots/1309

Figure 6

Untitled (c. 1895 – 1900)

Courtesy of: Randsfjordmuseet/Hadeland Folkemuseum

https://digitaltmuseum.no/021018542390

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Et mærkværdigt Brev, skrevet fra en reisende Jøde i Fortiden, da Christus omvandrede her paa Jorden, i hvilket han underretter sin Mester i Nederlandene om sin inderlige Længsel, samt om de vigtigste Tildragelser paa hans Reiser, og skildrer sin Glæde over at have seet og talt med Messias, sammenlignet med det hele sammentagne Guds Ord. Gud give, det maatte tjene Alle, som høre og læse dette, til at tilskynde det alvorlige Forsæt i dem: at elske Gud over alle Ting. Efter et gammelt Manuskript. Christiania: Frederik T. Steen, 1846.

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