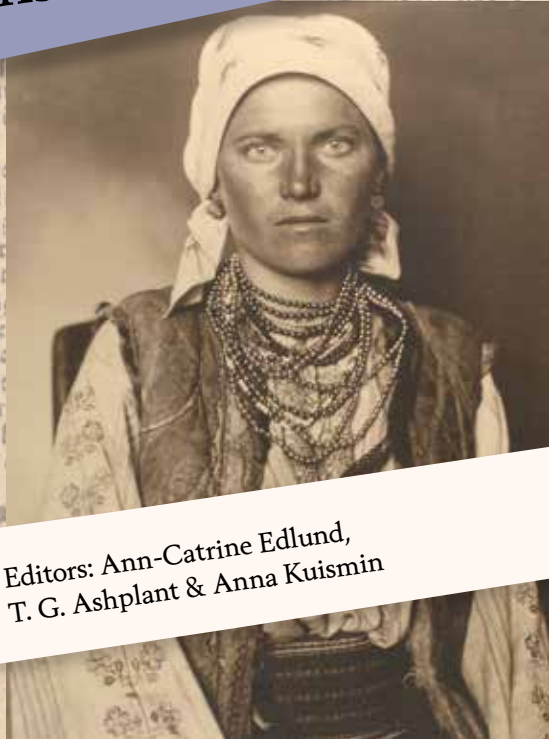




Reading and Writing from Below

Exploring the Margins of Modernity



Editors: Ann-Catrine Edlund,
T. G. Ashplant & Anna Kuismin

Handlönarne Joh. Åskull, Carl
Korsbått och Son, Handlonden Edlund från
— Kdpmannen Wång från Kdpenhamn, bor på Ma...

Ann-Catrine Edlund, T. G. Ashplant, Anna Kuismin (eds.)

Reading and Writing from Below

Exploring the Margins of Modernity

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Preface

The articles in this volume are based on papers given at *Reading and Writing from Below: Exploring the Margins of Modernity*, a conference held at the Finnish Literature Society and the University of Helsinki from 20 to 22 August, 2014. The main organiser of the conference, which brought together 77 scholars from 15 countries, was the Nordic research project *Reading and Writing from Below: Toward a New Social History of Literacy in the Nordic Sphere during the Long Nineteenth Century* (NORDCORP, 2011–2014). The project was steered by Taru Nordlund and Anna Kuismin from the University of Helsinki, M. J. Driscoll from the University of Copenhagen, Ann-Catrine Edlund from Umeå University and Davíð Ólafsson from University of Iceland.

The conference in Helsinki was the third international conference of the Nordic project. The first one was held at Umeå University in 2012, hosted and organised by the Nordic literacy-network *Vernacular Literacies* [Vardagligt skriftbruk]. The proceeding were published in *Vernacular Literacies – Past, Present and Future* (edited by Ann-Catrine Edlund, Lars-Erik Edlund and Susanne Haugen, Umeå University, 2014). The second conference, *The Agents and Artefacts of Vernacular Literacy Practices in Late Pre-modern Europe*, was organised with Lena Rohrbach at the Nordeuropa-Institut, Humboldt Universität zu Berlin. One of the results of the Nordic project was the collection of articles *White Field, Black Seeds: Nordic Literacy Practices in the Long Nineteenth Century*, edited by Anna Kuismin & M. J. Driscoll (Finnish Literature Society, 2013).

Reading and Writing from Below: Exploring the Margins of Modernity is also the title of this volume, co-edited with Anna Kuismin and T. G. Ashplant. 'Modernity' here is understood to have come into being any time from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries, depending on the context. By 'literacy' is meant not just the ability to read and write but rather the totality of the processes and practices involved in the production, dissemination and reception of written texts; while the perspective 'from below' indicates that the focus is on non-privileged people, their experiences and points of view. The volume includes sixteen articles in four sections focusing on different aspects of the processes and practices of literacy: Writing Competence – Difficulties, Prejudices and Motives; Genres and Literacy Practices; Orality and Literacy; Literacy and Agency. Disciplines that the authors represent include history, ethnology, linguistics, literature and information studies.

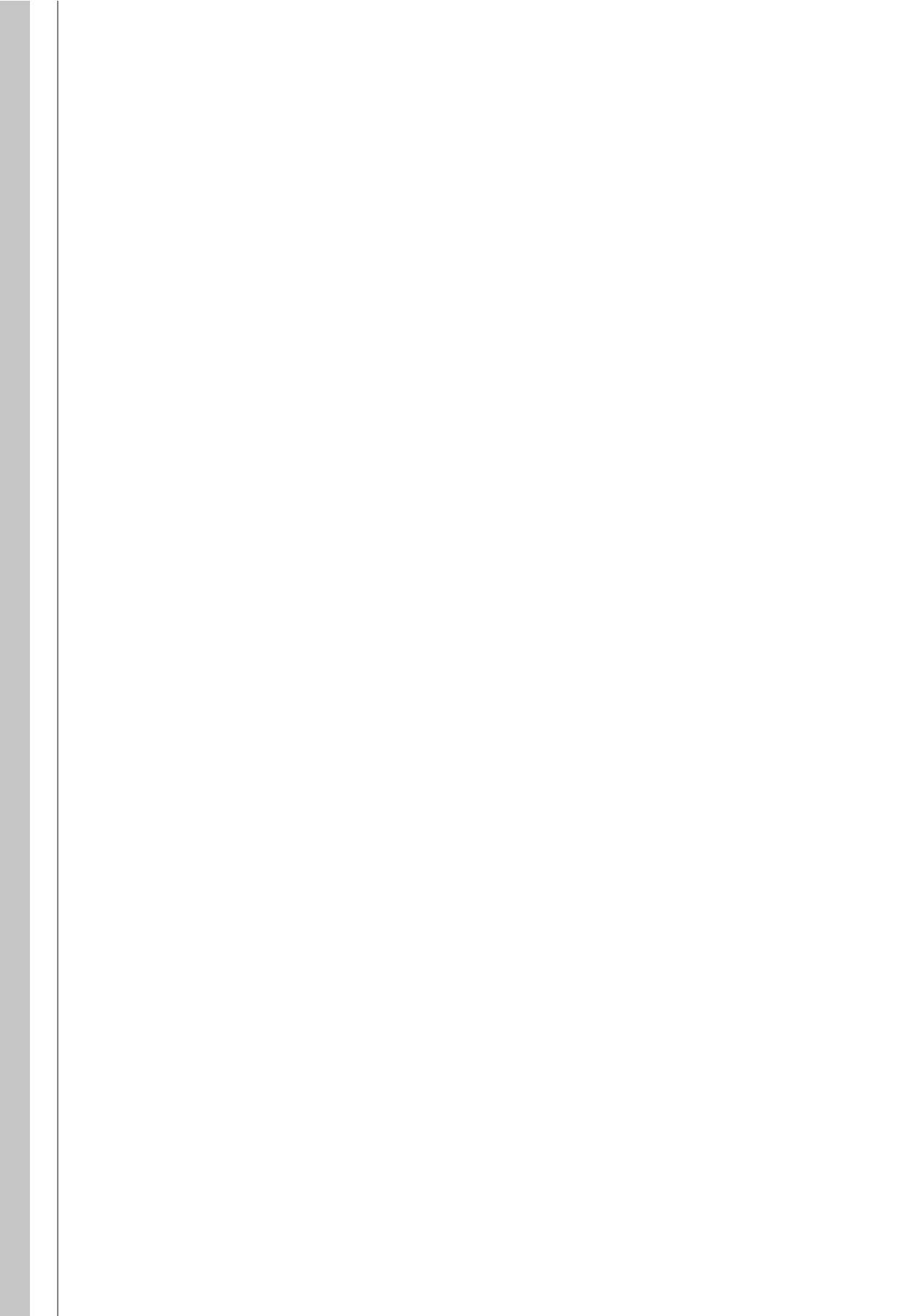
The articles have been peer-reviewed. The editors wish to thank the referees and the members of the editorial board: Olle Josephson, University of

Stockholm, Loftur Guttormsson, Iceland University, Martyn Lyons, UNSW Australia, and Wim Vandenbussche, Vrije University Brussels. Thanks are also due to the Royal Skytteen Society and Magnus Bergvalls stiftelse who have provided financial support for the publication.

Ann-Catrine Edlund
Editor-in-chief

Writing Competence

Difficulties, Prejudices and Motives



ANNA KUISMIN

Ploughing with the Pen

Metapoetic Elements in Finnish Nineteenth-Century Peasant Poetry

ABSTRACT. For Finnish nineteenth-century peasant poets, writing was a new technology, the implications of which manifest themselves in several ways in their texts. For example, learning to write is depicted in autobiographical poems, and there are recurring motifs and formulas referring to the act and implements of writing. Apologies for poor writing and the lack in poetic skills are explicitly expressed, and the metaphor ‘ploughing with the pen’ appears in many texts. In this article, metapoetic references are set in the material and ideological contexts in which the peasant poets practised their craft. The purpose is to illuminate the ways the metapoetic elements reflect the ruptures of the cultural situation in which the self-taught authors found themselves in a semi-literate society: new audiences were met and social boundaries were shaken. Vernacular literacy practices of the peasant poets met the demands of dominant and institutional literacies in a society involved in the processes of nation building.

KEYWORDS: nineteenth-century Finland, peasant poets, metapoetic elements, vernacular literacy, nation building, literary history

Introduction

“Marked by or making reference to its own artificiality or contrivance”, *self-reflexivity* is applied to literary works that openly reflect upon their own processes of artful composition. Both this term and *metapoetry* – “poetry about poetry, especially self-conscious poems that pun on objects or items associated with writing or creating poetry”¹ – connote erudition or bookishness, which seem a far cry from the world of Finnish nineteenth-century peasant poets who lived in a semi-literate environment, owned few books and did not always write their texts down. However, self-reflexivity comes in many forms in their texts: there are metapoetic topics, metaphors and formulas² as well as intertextual references. For example, authors deal with the act, implements and conditions of writing as well as their poetic skills, juxtaposing them with those of the learned classes. I argue that the metapoetic elements in many ways reflect the situation in which peasant poets found themselves – new audiences were met, and social boundaries were shaken.

Until the early nineteenth century, Finland had been a part of the Swedish kingdom. Secondary schooling was conducted in Swedish, the language of the minority, and the skill of writing was not considered necessary for the masses. As Laura Stark writes, “lack of full literacy among the common people created a vast informational divide between them and members of the clergy, landed gentry, and aristocracy nearly all of whom were functionally literate in the Swedish language” (Stark 2014:263). In 1809, following Sweden’s defeat in the war against Russia, Finland became an autonomous Grand Duchy of the Russian Empire. The rise of Finnish nationalism was fostered by the fear that annexation would ultimately mean the Russification of the country. This threat could be met only by national unity, which was to be created by Finnish-language culture. The idea of a common language, spoken by the majority of the population, was in line with nineteenth-century European nationalism, influenced by Hegelian and Herderian ideas. Gathering folk poetry was one of the first steps in the process of creating Finnish literature. Besides meeting people who could recite traditional lore, folklore collectors met individuals who created poems of their own. For the Finnish-minded educated people – some of whom spoke Swedish as their mother tongue – peasant poetry was a phenomenon met with warm approval; its existence strengthened the view that Finnish-language literature was in the making and that the popular enlightenment had advocates among the common people themselves. In 1834 Elias Lönnrot suggested that the

¹ Merriam-Webster dictionary.

² *Formula* refers to “units containing similar lexical, semantic, and syntactic elements of ten used for similar purposes” (Kallio 2011:394).

newly founded Finnish Literature Society should pay attention to contemporary 'Natural Poets' (Laurila 1956:127–129, 198). The most promising ones were invited to become members of the society, and Lönnrot published their texts in his journal *Mehiläinen* in the late 1830s (Lönnrot 1990). In 1845 three poets – Olli Kymäläinen, Pietari Makkonen and Antti Puhakka – were invited to Helsinki. On the way to the capital they met J. L. Runeberg, the most well-known poet writing in Swedish. Speeches were made, toasts were raised in their honour, and the visit to Helsinki was reported in newspapers (Sihvo 1975:55).

Peasant poet, even though far from satisfactory, is a translation used here of *talonpoikaisrunoilija* or *rahvaan runoniekka*, the terms that have been used to signify unschooled farmers, crofters, rural craftsmen and other lower-class people who were known for their talent of composing poems. *Talonpoika* means a land-owning farmer, but the prefix *talonpoikais-* refers to the peasant environment in general, and *runoilija* means a poet. *Rahvas* signifies “common people”, while *runoniekka* connotes an amateur poet, someone with the knack of churning out verses. Their texts cover an array of topics. For example, there are poems about accidents, wars and curious incidents as well as eulogies, mock songs and texts written for didactic purposes or to commemorate the building of a church. Some poets were known in their home area, while others gained fame outside their local circles, as their texts were published in newspapers or as broadsheets. The phenomenon covers the long nineteenth century. There is ample material stored at the archives of the Finnish Literature Society, and collections of poems have been published posthumously by scholars, families or local history associations.

Peasant poets were almost exclusively men. Anna Reetta Korhonen (1809–1893) wrote a eulogy for her famous father, one of the best-known of peasant poets, as well as hymns. On the whole, non-elite women wrote religious rather than secular poetry (Kuismin 2014). The number of fully literate non-elite women was smaller than that of men, and the skill of writing was adopted by the well-to-do before the poor. A peasant who owned his land or practised a craft was much more likely to write than the daughter of a crofter or a maid. As industrialisation and urbanisation came late in Finland, one cannot really talk about working-class writing in Finland until the late nineteenth century.

Interface of Orality and Literacy

In research, peasant poetry has fallen between two stools. Apart from Vih-tori Laurila's seminal study *Suomen rahvaan runoniekat sääty-yhteiskunnan aikana* (“Finnish Peasant Poets during the Era of the Estate Society”) published in 1956, literary scholars have not been interested in peasant poetry

because of its meagre literary value. For example, Kai Laitinen and George C. Schoolfield viewed peasant poets in a somewhat condescending manner:

[...] the fascinating phenomenon of *talonpoikaisrunoilijat* (“peasant poets”), self-taught men (and some women) who used rhymed folk-song style or rhymeless runometer³ to comment on events and figures of the time or gave their readers moral precepts. Their motifs were taken not only from their immediate vicinity but from more distant horizons: they might pillory a local officials or pastors or offer praise to the emperor [...]. A sign of cultural awareness lies in the pleas for an expansion of the use (and the power) of the Finnish language. More homely subjects were the pleasures, or dangers, of coffee, tobacco, and liquor. The practice had existed since the seventeenth century, but – simultaneously with the popular-literary enthusiasms of the first Turku romantics and then the national-romantic movement stemming from Helsinki – these poets had their heyday in the first half of the nineteenth century. [...] Actually, there seem to have been more than a hundred “bards” active at one time or another in this home-spun art. [...] Whatever may be said about the technical qualities of the peasant poets’ “labor” (which they took seriously, calling it “plowing with the pen”), it is a remarkable example of a demotic and democratic literary tradition [...] (Laitinen & Schoolfield 1998:56–57.)

Peasant poets have not figured in folklore studies either, because scholars have preferred to concentrate on ‘authentic’ (oral) folk poetry, learned from earlier generations. The introduction to *Finnish Folk Poetry: Epic* reveals the attitude concerning the inauthenticity of peasant poetry:

An imitative popular style of poetry (*rahvaanrunous*), however, survived into the twentieth century and was frequently used, for example, in broadside publications. Ephemeral in content and lacking the spontaneity and artistic quality of authentic Kalevala poetry, it owes its survival largely to the printing press. Most poets had an imperfect command of metre and their application of other prosodic and stylistic devices was generally stiff and contrived. (Kuusi, Bosley & Branch 1977:69.)

Instead of seeking faults in peasant poetry, it is more fruitful to pay attention to the social and cultural context in which the authors practised their craft, a semi-literate society that became increasingly permeated by writing. The case of Paavo Korhonen (1775–1840) illustrates the changes that were starting to take place in the early nineteenth century. In 1801, a collection of Korhonen’s wedding songs was published in Vaasa. In his preface,

³ Laitinen & Schoolfield refer here to trochaic tetrameter used in traditional oral poetry, so-called Kalevala metre.

the anonymous editor explains that he had written down the singer's words. The tone indicates the fact that publishing an unschooled man's creations was an extraordinary thing:

These songs, written down in the simple form in which they came out their creator's mouth, are presented to you, to be sung at Festivities. They are not sketched by the pen of a learned man nor adapted for music: a peasant's unadulterated brain has thought them out. A gay and good-natured mind, he has sung them from his memory for the pleasure and amusement of his friends. But one of his listeners and friends who knew how to write, started to put the singer's words down, and following the advice of his superiors took them to the printers. (Korhonen 2001:136–137.)

Korhonen knew how to write at the time, but he did not always jot down his songs, often improvised on the spot. In 1820 he wrote a poem to express the joy that the newly founded newspaper *Turun Wiikko-Sanomia* had brought him: he had learned about the rotation of the Earth, its continents and exotic animals as well as receiving news from different parts of Finland (Korhonen 2001:230).⁴ Apart from widening his perspective on the world, the newspaper provided him with an opportunity to reach new audiences. Among other things, common people realised that writing could expand the individual's ability to communicate across space and time through participating in broader forums of discussion and debate, to save time and money in everyday life, and to challenge the arbitrary use of power by local elites (Stark 2014:276). Many topics in peasant poetry were similar to those addressed by self-taught rural correspondents of newspapers.

Naturally, there are comparable phenomena in other countries. For example, Brian Maidment's observations on working-class poets in Victorian Britain provide points of comparison: "the linguistic and formal self-consciousness [...] is the characteristic of writing by self-taught working men" (Maidment 1992:13). Finnish nineteenth-century peasant poets were in a similar situation – especially during the first six or seven decades of the nineteenth-century – as their peers in eighteenth-century England and Germany – they had read "the Bible, religious poetry, folksongs, and a sometimes adventitious sampling of the poetry of their contemporaries" (Prandi 2008:25).⁵ The number of books published in Finnish was small during the

⁴ *Turun Wiikko-Sanomia* was the second Finnish-language newspaper. The first one, *Suomenkieliset Tieto-Sanommat*, was published in 1776.

⁵ "Analogous to their marginal economical position, self-taught poets also inhabit the periphery geographically and culturally. Many come from areas traditionally poor and at some distance from the cultural centers" (Prandi 2008:34).

first six decades of the nineteenth century, and “high” culture was outside the reach of those who could not read Swedish. However, one has to keep in mind that self-taught writers of a young nation were in a somewhat different situation compared with their peers living in countries with established literary institutions and traditions. The poets studied by Julie D. Prandi had at least some elementary schooling (Prandi 2008:23–24), while their Finnish peers were almost entirely self-educated, and the dividing line between the uneducated and the *literati* did not lie in the command of Latin and Greek, as in the literary cultures studied by Prandi (Prandi 2008:25–26, 44).

Inspired by the New Literacy Studies, I regard writing as a social practice. Activities involved in producing, disseminating and consuming peasant poetry can be seen to belong to *vernacular literacy practices* that are not regulated by the formal rules and procedures of dominant social institutions and have their origins in every-day life (Barton & Hamilton 1998:247). For example, poems of mockery belong to the category of vernacular literacy practices. They were sometimes written on demand.⁶ Contrary to vernacular literacies, *dominant literacies* are characterised by their formalisation and standardisation, and access to knowledge is controlled by experts and teachers (Barton & Hamilton 1998:252). My analysis of the metapoetic elements in peasant poetry will show that the heightened self-reflexivity is linked to the situation in which vernacular literacy practices of the peasant poets met the demands of dominant and institutional literacies in a society involved in the processes of nation building.

From Singing to Writing

Writing was a new technology for Finnish peasant poets, providing several challenges.⁷ From the 17th century on, the Lutheran church had taken care of teaching people to read, but writing was not considered necessary for everyone. The idea that schooling would wean children away from manual labour was often shared by both the clergy and many common people themselves: the ability to read the Scriptures was considered sufficient (Kuismin 2012:5).

⁶ There is a story in which a group of people from a neighbouring parish came to Paavo Korhonen’s house and asked him to compose a poem about their pastor’s misdemeanors. Korhonen did what was asked. The poem was written down, to enhance the oral distribution of the text (Korhonen 2001:299–300).

⁷ “Yet writing (and especially alphabetic writing) is a technology, calling for the use of tools and other equipment: styli or brushes or pens, carefully prepared surfaces such as paper, animal skins, strips of wood, as well as inks or paints, and much more” (Ong 2002: 80–81). On the writing culture of ordinary people see Lyons 2013; on practical difficulties Liljewall 2012:46–48.

Paavo Korhonen⁸ explains in his autobiographical poem that his parents had taught him the alphabet, but writing was something he had to grasp by himself:

My father taught me “i”
 My mother taught me “ä”
 Then I had to learn more
 by myself
 I started to write with a pen
 to scribble on paper
 in my spare time
 for even the others to look at [...] (Korhonen 2001:36.)⁹

Johan Ihalainen (1799–1856) points to his self-education in a text including the following explanation: “Here’s my life story written down in the words of a poem so that you will know how I came upon poetry and started to write”. Ihalainen was a tailor, but due to a crippling illness, he became a pauper, living on poor relief. He sent his poem to his patron Wolmar Schildt, a doctor from Jyväskylä, asking for pen and paper – his enemies, angered by his mocking poems, had destroyed his writing implements. Ihalainen explains that he had learned to write without help from others:

No one has taught me
 those who knew the writing skill
 I myself started to try
 to think how to do that work
 As a young boy
 I took a pen in my nails [...] (Ihalainen 1962:25.)¹⁰

Metapoetic elements often appear at the beginning or at the end of poems, which is a common feature in oral poetry, too. According to Lotte Tarkka, “in the opening and closing formulae, the singers tend to draw attention to the communicative nature of the performance (the singer’s voice, the listeners, speaking, and listening), the song’s profusion and traditionality

⁸ When analysing the texts, I use the name of the author to indicate the ‘I’ or the speaker of the poem, for the sake of brevity.

⁹ Translations are my own. They are literal and do not reveal the use of alliteration, a stylistic feature common in peasant poetry.

¹⁰ Naturally, the information in the poems cannot be necessarily taken at face value. In this instance, Korhonen was probably taught by Reverend Gabriel Krogerus (Korhonen 2001:23). In autobiographical prose texts unschooled writers often mention people who acted as their tutors, but there are also authors who claim that they learned to write by using the model alphabet. (See Kuismin 2013b:103).

(learning and transmitting tradition, the origin of the song), and the ephemeral nature of the song (the song's beginning and its end, the singer's death)" (Tarkka 2013:129). Paavo Tuovinen (1769–1827) started a poem by using the two-singer convention of oral poetry. In Tuovinen's poem a singer asks his fellow to snatch a quill from a rooster and soot from the grate, and let the Finnish language be heard aloud on paper (Grotenfelt 1889:185–186). In addition to starting a poem by referring to the act of singing – or in lieu of it – the act of writing is mentioned. The following example is from Pietari Makkonen (1786–1851):

To pass the time
I shall sing a little song
I sing to entertain children
I shall paint a whole board

I write with my pen
what I think
I say it with my mouth
for everyone to listen to. (Pakarinen 2006:146.)

At the end of another poem Makkonen remarks that a lot more could be said, but as the time is up, he will stop his pen (Pakarinen 2006:30). One of the ways to end a text is to reveal one's name: "The person who expressed his wish / is the one who wrote this text / showing his humbleness / little Pentti Lyytinen" (Lyytinen & Korhonen 1961:149). In oral poetry the signature enabled listeners to evaluate the reliability of the text (Tarkka 2013:300).

Pen, Plough and Peasant Poets

"Start ploughing, my pen / Start making furrows, my quill," begins a poem by Tahvo Taskinen (1819–1877). *Kynällä kyntäminen* ("ploughing with the pen") is one of the recurring metapoetic metaphors in peasant poetry (Kukkonen 1975:7). It originates from the realisation that furrows made by a plough resemble lines of writing on paper. The metaphor is not a new one nor confined to peasant poets or Finland: its oldest known version is in the so-called Veronese Riddle – "apparently half-Italian, half-Latin, written on the margin of a parchment, on the Verona Orational, probably in the 8th or early 9th century, by a Catholic monk from Verona: 'In front of him (he) led oxen / White fields (he) ploughed / A white plough (he) held / A black seed (he) sowed.'"¹¹ Ploughing and sowing also appear in Finnish riddles, collected

¹¹ 'Se pareba boves / alba pratalia araba / albo versorio teneba / negro semen seminaba.'
Translated by Michael Gilleland. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Veronese_Riddle.

from oral tradition: “white field” points to paper, “black seeds” to ink, and “ploughing/sowing” to the act of writing.

Kynällä kyntäminen gains power from alliteration, the stylistic device in which words, having the same first sound, occur close together. Like *kyn-tää* (“to plough”), *kylvää* (“to sow”) alliterates with *kynä* (“pen”). In Johan Ihalainen’s autobiographical poem, quoted above, there is one more alliterative word, *kynsi*, used as a synecdoche: “Otin kynän kynsihini” (“I took a pen in my nails”). The plough, used in farming in preparation for sowing seed or planting, was naturally a familiar tool for writing peasants. In his autobiographical poem Niilo Savolainen (1824–1913) mentions that he was around thirty years old when he started writing. Having worked in the fields, his hands had become so clumsy that his pen moved like a plough (Savolainen 1890:40). Paavo Korhonen describes the situation in which he found himself after a week of ploughing and digging:

I had to plough,
 steer the plough,
 for the whole week
 Meanwhile, my pen dried up
 it became wider
 like the top of the plough [...]

I had to dig a ditch,
 my ink became mud,
 it didn’t flow from the pen. (Korhonen 2001:336–337.)

Korhonen also writes that his shoulder, elbow and wrist had become so stiff that he could not hold the pen properly; his hand was so heavy that the pen tore up the paper. Paavo Tuovinen (1769–1827), farmer and blacksmith, writes about painful fingers and cramps (Grotenfelt 1889:186). Antti Karhu (1844–1926) imagines that his reader will see how his hand, clumsy after hard work, has shaken so that ink has been spilled on paper. Karhu explains that he had composed his poem in his mind while ploughing and jotted it down during his lunch break “with the ploughman’s palm” (Karhu 2002:51). These examples illustrate the fact that writing which requires fine mechanical skills was not easy for a person used to heavy physical labour. The need these authors felt to emphasise this point highlights the changing situation: a new audience, people belonging to the learned classes, had started to emerge. By drawing attention to the physical work and its effects on the act of writing peasant poets distinguished themselves from the “gentlemen” who did not have to toil in the fields and wrote only in their spare time. In his poem praising the fruits of ploughmen’s labour, Matti Taipale (1825–

1868) remarks that it is easy for a gentleman to roll a pen on paper, while the peasant's work is hard and sweaty. He criticised the way ploughmen are looked down upon by their superiors: they are regarded as unmannered and clumsy and even compared with pigs and oxen. Paavo Korhonen pointed out that writing did not provide a livelihood for a ploughman as it did for civil servants and the clergy:

Honey is in the wrong place
if it's in the mouth of a Finn [Finnish speaker],
the pen is the wrong way round
in the hands of ploughmen.

The pen does not bring us livelihood
it brings food to other men
those who have been to school
secretaries live by the pen
pastors are paid by using it [...]. (Korhonen 2001:174.)

There were other obstacles that the *kynällä kyntäjät* ("ploughmen of the pen") faced, namely the demands posed by topics, styles and other aspects of the art of poetry. A humble and self-depreciating tone is evident in many texts. Isak Hirvonen (1838–1907) joins his idiosyncratic verb for writing (*kynätä* "to pen") with *kyhätä* ("create hastily and with a poor quality") in his effort to praise the Emperor, and mentions that his window is small and vision narrow (Hirvonen 1980:36). The rhetoric of humility – an ancient convention, sometimes present in oral poetry, too – appears in many poems by Pentti Lyytinen (1783–1871), especially when he is writing for his superiors. Referring to the lack of inspiration, Lyytinen joins *kynä* with *kynttilä* (candle) in his remark that his pen lacks candles. Elias Niemelä (1847–1910) is not able to write about "poetic" themes: "Those who have gone to school, they can sing about these topics: what the clouds say, what the sky sings" (Niemelä 2010:64). Juho Storck (b. 1867) laments the state of his poetic skills in the following manner:

Why don't I understand more
why can't I sing about broader topics
why is my poetic skill so bad
why is my word so lacking? (Kukkonen 1975:7–8.)

Why this self-disparagement? The explanation points to the changes in poets' audiences, internalised from contacts with learned people or from reading printed poetry. Paavo Korhonen remarks in one of his poems that he has to end his text because he cannot produce a song that could be compared

with the famous clocks of Könni (Korhonen 2001:248–249). This refers to the “Poem on the art of poetry” (probably written by a learned man and published in *Turun Wiikko-Sanomia* in 1821), containing instructions on the use of the metre in poetry, in which the legendary clockmaker Könni is presented as a model for a poet.¹² Korhonen had also read Lönnrot’s advice for the Peasant Poets from *Mehiläinen* (see e.g. Lönnrot 1990:67–68, 102–103). According to Julie D. Prandi, the fear of the critic’s scorn is a recurring feature in the texts of the English and German eighteenth-century self-taught poets (Prandi 2008:93).

Attack is often the best form of defence. Pietari Väänänen (1764–1846) ends a poem by remarking that the reader who has gone to “all the schools” should compose a better poem than this one (Laurila 1956:106). Lyytinen uses the same device: if there are faults in his poem, those with more learning should set them right (Lyytinen & Korhonen 1961:76, 90). Humility can be feigned to hide pride in one’s efforts at writing: ‘In spite of these difficulties, I am able to write poems.’¹³ Paavo Korhonen sometimes begins a poem in a self-confident and joyful manner. In the following case, he reminds his audience of the permanence of writing and flaunts his own abilities:

Now it’s time for a carved feather,
for a split plume!
Pen dipped in ink,
creates a memorial,
for those to know
who come after us. (Korhonen 2001:66.)

From the Language Question to Literary History

According to the famous claim by Walter Ong, writing can heighten and transform consciousness (Ong 2002:81). An example of this is found in Paavo Korhonen’s poem “Puustaaveista” (“On letters”). At the beginning of the poem the author remarks that he was as old as sixty when he started to think about the meanings of letters. The poem lists associations evoked by

¹² The image of a clockmaker – “clock smith” in Finnish – brings to mind the concept of the *poeta faber*, maker of poems (cf. *poeta doctus*, erudite poet). In the Finnish oral poetry database SKVR the words for “song-smith” occur in 54 texts. *Virrenseppä* is used to indicate the performer of the song, another singer or the author of the poem. I should like to thank Tuomas M. S. Lehtonen and Jukka Saarinen for providing this information.

¹³ Cf. an extract of a poem by Henry F. Lott, published in *The People’s Journal* in 1848: “Why, wordlings, I’m as proud to wield the axe, / As I am happy I can guide the pen / To frame a sonnet – and return again / To a day’s toil, that would disjoint the necks / Of half your dandy poets [...]” (quoted in Maidment 1992: 215).

the alphabet. According to Korhonen, B, C and D are foreign in the ears of those who have not gone to school, and the letters Q, X and Z do not belong to Finnish. Besides taking part in the discussion on the orthography of Finnish, Korhonen's text points to the class division reflected in language.

One of the recurring topics in peasant poetry is the plight of the Finnish language. The majority of the population spoke Finnish as their mother tongue, but Swedish was used in higher education, the legal system and administration. The rise of the Finnish-language press encouraged non-elite people to demand rights in using their mother tongue. When *Turun Wiikko-Sanomia* started to appear in 1820, Paavo Tuovinen wrote two poems on the language question (Grotenfelt 1889:185–188). In 1845 a chapbook called *Neljä runoa suomen kielestä* ("Four Poems on the Finnish Language") was published by the Savo-Karelian Fraternity and sold cheaply along with a reader intended for the common people. Antti Puhakka (1816–1893) composed as many as twenty-six poems on the topic. The best known of them, "Jussi's Trip to the Courthouse", is a satire about greedy scribes who skin the common man of his money and bureaucrats who refuse to read documents written in Finnish (Puhakka 1845). Newspapers were happy to publish "language poems", alongside other texts advocating the Finnish cause. In this way, peasant poets were politically useful (cf. Stark 2014:276–277).

The unrest in Europe in 1848 made the Russian authorities anxious about Finnish nationalist tendencies. One of the measures was the statute that forbade publications in Finnish, other than those with religious or economic content. It was felt to be a serious threat to the attempts of the Fennomans – those advocating the rights of the Finnish language – to disseminate their ideas to the common people. It was a blow to Peasant Poets too. As Kirsti Salmi-Niklander has shown, Antti Puhakka's poem "Lintujen neuvonta" ("Advice to the birds") is an allegory easily decoded. Russia is referred to in the last stanza of the poem: the little birds – university students drawing attention to their pro-Finnish activities – should hold their tongue, is the message ("If those long-beards / hear you brawl / they will think / that we are teaching you to sing"). The poem shows that the Language Statute hit the common people, writing only in Finnish, much harder than the students who could publish in Swedish (Salmi-Niklander, manuscript).

The interest in improving the status of Finnish naturally sprang from the poets' practical experiences, but the sentiment was fostered in their contacts with the educated people advocating the cause of Finnish. Antti Jeremias Makkonen (1799–1872) depicts a peasant poet who meets a folklore collector at a marketplace. At first the poet is shy to recite his creations, but is moved to tears as the gentleman talks about the low status of Finnish, having no place in courts and schools (Pakarinen 2006:55). There are other

examples revealing the emotional impact that the promotion of their mother tongue had on peasant poets. Paavo Korhonen depicts Finnish as a baby who might never break free from his swaddling clothes, learn to walk and sit at the same table with great, powerful languages (Korhonen 2001:238). A helpless child is a powerful image attracting pity and sympathy. In a poem by Pentti Lyytinen Finnish is depicted as a beautiful but poor peasant girl who has to wait for suitors. Reflecting the 1845 visit to Helsinki, Pietari Makonen writes that the [Finnish Literature] Society starts teaching the beggar-girl: she is washed with white soap, flowers are pinned to her chest and she is dressed in the best linen. She is courted by the gentlemen of Helsinki.

In a poem by Jaakko Räikkönen (1830–1882) “Who has done it all”, written several decades later, a child called Finland represents Finnish culture at large. The text starts from admiration for the progress that has taken place in the country. If Paavo Korhonen were alive, writes Räikkönen, he would be astonished. A railway has been built and Finland has her own currency; there are Finnish-language schools and teachers’ seminaries and literature complete with plays. Then comes a list of the people who have participated in the clothing and feeding of Finland, starting from Mikael Agricola, the creator of the first ABC-book and translator of the New Testament. Räikkönen names the benefactors who have given Finland his gloves, belt, fur coat, shoes, cloak and hat. Kymäläinen, Lyytinen and Korhonen appear at the end of the list: they have provided food for the child. Räikkönen’s poem presents peasant poets as equal participants in the process of creating Finnish-language culture. There is no apologetic sentiment in this poem: the author regards his peers as active agents, and naturally the same concerns himself, too. Even though one can detect frustration and even bitterness in the texts of peasant poets, there was also a sense of a common goal.

Ploughmen of the Pen: from Vernacular to Institutional Literacy Practices

“The act of writing was an intense and ambiguous experience for popular autobiographers and others for whom writing was not a ‘normal’ cultural practice or expectation” (Amelang 1998:48). This observation on early modern artisan writers in Europe is true in the case of Finnish nineteenth-century peasant poets, too. The analysis of metapoetic elements illuminates the external and internal conditions of penmanship and their challenges for peasant poets. Mastering the fine mechanical skill of writing was not easy for those used to heavy physical labour. The possibilities of having at least some of their texts published brought self-taught writers new types of audiences: internalised demands concerning poetic topics and styles can be seen in the rhetoric of humility and in the self-disparagement recurring

in the texts. On the other hand, one can sense pride in the texts – in spite of all the difficulties, the poets practised their craft and composed poems on important topics. Jaakko Räikkönen’s poem in which peasant poets are presented as active and equal partners in the creation of Finnish literature can be seen as a manifestation of growing self-esteem.

The skill of writing enabled peasant poets to maintain or create contacts that crossed class divisions as well as engage in cultural practices in an era when Finnish-language literary institutions were developed. The nation building project in which peasant poets took part had loosened class social boundaries, but the “ploughmen of the pen” were deeply aware of the barriers between themselves and the “gentlemen”, even though they had espoused many of the goals of nation building ideology. On the other hand, a kind of a group identity was formed among the peasant poets, which must have had an empowering effect on them. For example, Lyytinen and Puhakka exchanged letters, and peasant poets wrote eulogies for their deceased peers (Kuismin 2013a:210).

Writing poems to be sung or distributed locally can be seen as an instance of *vernacular literacy*. This kind of activity naturally continued in local communities well into the twentieth century. When peasant poets became published, they entered the field of dominant literacy, facing the rules set by editors of newspapers and magazines. The division between dominant and institutional literacies is never clear cut, and it was a blurred one in the era when Standard Finnish and Finnish-language literacy practices were developed. Peasant poets were in a different situation at the beginning of the nineteenth century, when Finnish literature was almost non-existent, while at the end of the century there were professional writers, publishing houses and a growing reading public.

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ILKKA MÄKINEN

“The world will be turned upside down, when even the maids are taught to write”

Prejudices Against Teaching All People to Write in Nineteenth Century Finland

ABSTRACT. The question of teaching writing to the common people became a topic of public discussion in Finland during the first half of the nineteenth century. The discussion also brought to light a number of prejudices concerning the diffusion of the ability to write. Using newspaper articles and other sources the article identifies these prejudices, which appeared both in the educated and lower classes, and their historical context both in Finland and Europe. Themes identified are, e.g., obscurantism and fear of superficial education, the reluctance of the Lutheran church in Finland to endorse teaching the knowledge of writing to the common people, the religious sensitivities concerning Sunday as proper time for teaching writing, the fear of a new kind of publicity that was a result of a more widespread knowledge of writing, fear in the peasant community that children who learn writing become strangers to the traditions of their parents, as well as some gender issues related to the knowledge of writing.

KEYWORDS: knowledge of writing, cultural history, obscurantism, Lutheran church, Sunday schools, newspaper debates, Finland, nineteenth century, gender

Introduction

The ability to read printed text was considered a religious and civic duty of the Finns since the seventeenth century, but the question of teaching writing to the common people became a topic of public discussion in Finland first during the nineteenth century. The discussion also brought to light a number of prejudices and opposition concerning the diffusion of the ability to write. I aim in this article to investigate how these prejudices were formulated and what was their historical context in Finland and Europe. The principal questions to answer are: why was there not a universal desire to teach the common people to write, and why was the peasantry reluctant to learn writing when it was possible. Many of the arguments found in the Finnish sources are known from other parts of Europe as well (e.g., Houston 1988:107-115; Thomas 1986:118), but there are some features in the discussion that can best be explained referring to the specific Finnish historical context.

The basis of the knowledge of reading in Sweden, to which the modern state of Finland belonged until the year 1809, was in the Church Law of 1686. It demanded that parents teach their children the basic articles of belief and that chaplains or cantors take care of teaching the children to "read in the Book" (Kircko-laki ja ordningi 1686, Ch. 24, Par. 11). In practice, the responsibility to teach the children to read was placed on the parents, but parish priests monitored the results holding annual examinations in the villages and recording each person's ability to read. There was no elementary school system in Finland until the latter part of the nineteenth century. Knowledge of writing was not mentioned in the law, and was not recorded by the priests. Thus, reading and writing were in Finland considered separate competencies as far as popular education was concerned. The situation was different in Central and Western Europe, where the knowledge of reading and writing in general emerged hand in hand along with the mass schooling systems in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

By the end of the eighteenth century the majority of adult Finns were compelled to know how to read printed text, or at least to struggle somehow through the basic articles of belief, often learning the texts by heart. According to estimates only 5% of the male population knew how to write at the beginning of the nineteenth century (Tommila 1988:115). The language situation in Finland adds some special features to the general picture. The language of the administration, formal education and higher culture was Swedish until the latter part of the nineteenth century, although the great majority of the people spoke Finnish. On the other hand, there was no markedly greater eagerness to learn to write among the Swedish speaking rural population either (Peltonen 1992:93-94). The heart of the matter was the class distinction between the educated and the uneducated classes, not

languages as such, although the neglected position of the Finnish language was a fact.

Research on the development of the knowledge of writing in Finland has until recent years been scarce. Pirkko Leino-Kaukiainen (2007) has gathered evidence concerning the nineteenth century. Laura Stark (2014) has in a recent article stressed the importance of newspapers as source for the history of literacy. I share this conviction, and have used newspapers as my principal source in this article and its earlier Finnish-language version (Mäkinen 2007). Using newspapers as source has been made easy by the Digital Collections of the Finnish National library. All Finnish newspapers from the years 1771–1910 have been digitized. I made searches in the newspaper collection using suitable keywords in Finnish and Swedish as well as short phrases that might have been used in the discourse on writing. Additional sources have been obtained from journals and books of the period as well as from the historical literature.

Obscurantism and Fear of Half-Education

Before the French Revolution, ideas of enlightenment were gradually leading towards more widespread popular education, where the teaching of writing was seen as a natural part of literacy without being in any way controversial. After Napoleon an ultra-conservative counter-movement originated in France that wanted to limit popular education to a minimum. When popular education was reorganized, reading and writing were regarded as separate activities. Reading was linked to the adoption of religious truths and to devotion, whereas writing was considered a worldly skill. Since the goal was to secure the hegemony of the secular power by grounding it on religious truths and on a belief in authority, it was logical to value teaching of reading as primary. The readers receive truths, and do not develop and transmit their own thoughts, as writers can easily do (Furet & Ozouf 1982:65, 112–114). It was feared that if common people received too much education they would no longer be content with their own sphere of life and duties (Williams 1961:135). Even in Finland at the beginning of the nineteenth century there were those who thought that it was best to keep the people ignorant of dangerous things. We can call this kind of thinking obscurantism. In the nineteenth century it often appeared as the fear of superficial education, known in German as *Halb-Bildung*, in Swedish as *halvbildning* (Runeby 1995).

Many romantic thinkers were against more widespread popular education, because they feared that the common people would lose their original unspoiled nature. This view was defended by the Finnish professor J. G. Linsén (1785–1848) in an article titled "On popular enlightenment" ("Om folkupplysning") in the journal *Mnemosyne* in 1820. Linsén's opinions fol-

lowed the counter-enlightenment line that wanted to keep the peasants in their innocent and non-analytic state, a view that was ascribed to Rousseau. According to Linsén it was dangerous to give the peasants more education than what was needed for learning the basics of Christianity. Too much superficial knowledge would damage their natural intelligence and understanding, they would start to feel uncomfortable in their own surroundings, the purity of their manners and simplicity would be lost. According to Linsén, “every unspoiled peasant despises worldly books.” Linsén was a paradoxical thinker, because despite his ultra-conservatism he wished that the Finnish language were more used for literary purposes. *Borgå Tidning* reported in 1843 that the Greek Orthodox “old believers” in Russian Karelia tried to keep their children out of elementary schools, because they wanted to protect them from the moral debasement so common among the “half-educated”. And this debasement was thought to start especially from the knowledge of writing. Even this article included a reference to Rousseau (*Borgå Tidning*, Aug. 16, 1843).

The fear of half-education was widespread even in Sweden, the source of many ideas adopted in Finland. In Sweden a phrase was often repeated in this context: “Drick djupt, men läppja icke!” (Drink to the bottom or don’t taste at all) (Warburg 1904:164). However, the tide turned earlier in Sweden than in Finland, because there the elementary school system was established already in 1842. It took a further two decades before it became a reality in Finland.

Stalling the Russian Influence

After Finland had become an internally autonomous grand duchy in the Russian Empire in 1809, the educational system of the Swedish era continued under the new regime. Still, a reorganization of schools and popular education had to be considered in the new situation. At the same time the South Eastern part of the country, the so-called Old Finland that had been attached to Russia already during the eighteenth century, was again (1812) united with the rest of the country. During the Russian period popular education and schools in this region had been organized according to Russian legislation. It was now necessary to decide how the educational institutions and practices in Old Finland would be harmonized with the system in the rest of the country.

The schools and popular education in Old Finland had been reformed during the reigns of Catherine the Great and Alexander I. The reforms included the founding of parish schools with teaching writing as part of their curriculum. The secular authorities were responsible for the administration of the schools. Stationary elementary schools were founded in many parish-

es in Old Finland. The teachers, civil servants and church authorities in Old Finland adopted a school conception that self-evidently included teaching writing to the common people. In the western part of the Grand Duchy, where the traditions of the Swedish era were continued, popular education was based on ambulatory schools, with an emphasis on home instruction and other conservative educational principles that did not include teaching writing for the people (Tiimonen 2001:145–159).

A commission was appointed in 1814 to organize the Finnish school system. Even if popular education was secondary on the agenda of the commission, the statements it received from educational and clerical institutions as well as its internal discussions produced a fair number of proposals concerning popular education, where the differences between the western and the eastern educational traditions were clearly discernible. A majority of the proposals from Old Finland included teaching the knowledge of writing as an element of popular education, whereas in the proposals stemming from the west this was an exception (Tiimonen 2001:176–230). However, the commission did not progress in its work and was substituted by a new one in 1825.

Initially, the new commission included stationary parish schools as well as writing in its proposals. This was in line with the wishes of the government, but because of opposition from the Turku Bishop's Council the commission backed down and omitted the creation of stationary schools in rural areas in favour of ambulatory schools in its final report in 1829. Thus there would be no teaching of writing in the rural areas where the majority of the population lived. The aim of the Turku Bishop's Council was to restrain too rapid changes in the tightening political atmosphere of the late 1820s, when the conservative Emperor Nicholas I tried to prevent revolutionary ideas from infiltrating the empire. According to Tiimonen the Bishop's Council wanted to prevent the spreading of the educational policy applied in Old Finland to the rest of the country (Tiimonen 2001:237–238). The primary reason behind this obstructive policy was the fear that under the disguise of a more ambitious educational policy the Russian language could get a firmer foothold in Finland and that popular education in general would be placed under the control of the Russian government, which was against the spirit of Finnish autonomy. Obstructing the imperial school reform was compatible with the interests of the Finnish administrative and clerical elite, but this could not be expressed publicly. Financial reasons were used as the final argument for postponing the reforms in Finland (Tiimonen 2001:240).

The policy of the church changed after the Crimean War (1853–1856). Archbishop Edvard Bergenheim rallied during the last months of the war behind the intensification of popular education, thus anticipating the new

Emperor Alexander the Second's reform plan for the Grand Duchy including strong support for the elementary school system. The young progressive priests who until then had struggled with their reluctant superiors over questions of popular education welcomed the backing of the archbishop (Mäkinen 1997:294–300).

Teaching Writing on Sundays

Many historians believe that it was just the clergy that “mostly obstructed popular education while they thought that writing was useless for the common people” (Laurila 1956:139; Peltonen 1992:93–95). Knowledge of writing was tied to class and profession (Vannebo 1984:184; Lindmark 1994:94–95). According to Häggman, “the history of literacy in Finland has in the first place been studied by church historians and they have, of course, emphasized the importance and the positive contribution of the church and the clergy as teachers of literacy.” (Häggman 2007:220). The clergy was, however, not a uniform block, but it included groups both for and against the teaching of writing.

A difficult question was, what was the right time for peasants to learn to write or use their already acquired skill. The division of time into work and free time was not yet clearly defined for the rural population in the nineteenth century. Therefore it was difficult to find times that could legitimately be used for secular reading and writing. The only time that seemed available for these activities was Sunday afternoon. Sunday morning was reserved for the church service or if the church was too far away, for reading the Bible. For more liberal priests Sunday afternoon was not such a big problem. Sunday afternoons seemed suitable for writing and reading, an excellent occupation during those hours when people otherwise would have been idle. But for the pietists Sunday afternoons were problematic. From the 1830s many priests disappointed with the rationalism of the enlightenment and the liberal way of life of the upper classes began to join the pietistic movement that initially was led by laymen (Ylikangas 1984). Many pietistic priests were opposed to wider knowledge of writing among the common people. Their arguments resembled the romantic views cited above.

Sunday afternoons were a problem in England, too. A lively debate was waged in England in the nineteenth century on the hallowing of the Sabbath. Because writing was considered a worldly skill, teaching it on Sundays was regarded as improper. Local Sunday schools wanted to have writing in their curriculum, because the pupils and their parents wished it. An attempt by the Methodist leaders of Bolton in 1834 to end teaching of writing on Sundays led to a demonstrative walkout of nearly a thousand pupils and teachers and the founding of a rival school. The dispute was part of an inter-

nal struggle for control of Wesleyan Methodism, when the national Methodist church tried to get local Sunday schools under its control. In the spirit of Sabbatarianism, all denominations gradually stopped teaching writing in their Sunday schools. Chances for learning to write were opened up on working day evenings, which was difficult for lower-class children, because their working hours were long (Laqueur 1976:124–146; Wigley 1980:82–83).

Finnish priests admired the way the British venerated the Sabbath, which was also often mentioned in the Finnish press (Mäkinen 2000:121–122). Sunday afternoons became a topic of discussion even in Finland in the 1840s. There was a difference between the urban and rural Sunday schools. Regular Sunday schools were founded in Finnish towns to enable the working class and artisan youth to get a basic knowledge in reading, writing, arithmetic and religion. Teaching writing was a natural part of the urban Sunday schools, especially when teaching was organized following the Bell-Lancaster method, where teaching reading was intimately connected to writing (Somerkivi 1952).

In the rural Sunday schools, however, the secular educational goals and religious motives competed more overtly with each other. The pioneer of the Finnish Sunday schools was the pietistic priest J. F. Bergh (1795–1866), who as chaplain of Nurmijärvi in the southern part of the country started in the 1830s to organize Sunday schools using unsalaried laymen as teachers. Teaching writing was, however, not conducted in the Sunday schools founded by Bergh. According to him, the Sunday school was more like a devotional meeting or a divine service and was meant to have a religious importance for the teachers as well. He tried to promote knowledge of writing by distributing cheap notebooks for keeping a record of the poor relief in the parish. These notebooks included on the last pages models for “written small letters and capitals for those who want to learn to read written text and write” (Sinnemäki 1942: 43–54, 62).

After moving to Jaakkima in Eastern Finland Bergh participated in 1855 in a regional clerical meeting in Sortavala, where one of the matters discussed was the proper organization of the Sunday school so that Sunday would not become a working day. It was stated that even exercises in mechanical ability to read, learning the letters and spelling on Sundays was doubtful, because the Sabbath should be used for studying the word of God. However, since there were no other schools, and as more harmful ways to spend the Sundays, such as drinking, loitering and playing cards, were threatening, it was suitable to teach reading, as long as the Christian character of the Sunday school was kept in mind. Teaching writing was not mentioned in the discussion, apparently because it sounded all too incompatible with the Sabbath.

August Cygnaeus, a nationally minded priest, learned about Sunday schools while he was serving in his first clerical post in Nurmijärvi, but unlike Bergh he immediately sought maximum publicity for the innovation by publishing a newspaper article on Sunday schools in 1846. He included without hesitation teaching writing in the curriculum of the Sunday school. For nationalist students and young priests promoting the Finnish language, Sunday schools became for a period an educational alternative, but more professional pedagogical thinkers thought that they were a detour on the way towards a proper elementary school system (Mäkinen 1991). In the clerical meeting of the Kuopio deanery in 1860 the list of the subjects to be taught in the Sunday schools included reading, hymn singing and basics of Christianity. The meeting, however, emphasized that “other useful things, such as arithmetic and writing, would best be taught in the parish school” (*Kuopion Hippakunnan Sanomia*, Aug. 18, 1860). Teaching writing in Finnish Sunday schools was thus a somewhat delicate matter. The problem was gradually resolved by the founding of the national elementary school system during the latter part of the nineteenth century.

Fear of Publicity

The diffusion of writing skills among the common people caused changes in the division between the intimate and the public spheres. An example of this is a story in the newspaper *Savo* in 1881 of the prejudices concerning popular education, even including the teaching of writing skills. It is a dramatized reminiscence of an event that happened 35 years earlier, in the 1840s, when a school for poor girls was planned in Kuopio, a small town in eastern Finland. Of course, the factual contents of the reminiscence may be doubtful, but at least it describes the clichés concerning prejudices against the teaching of writing. When teaching writing was suggested as a subject in the school’s curriculum, “then the old ladies became really angry. Mrs F. uttered: ‘Hah, hah, what on earth have we to hear now, I myself must scrub my pots and pans, my maids are only reading novels and writing. If my husband happens to drop a note on the floor, the cleaning woman stays reading it and I must wait for her a while. And if one sends a letter to her friend, one must not forget to close it with a seal, otherwise the maids will read it’” (*Savo*, May 17, 1881). Both the Swedish language and the knowledge of writing had been for the gentry a reliable “firewall”, behind which they could speak and communicate in peace. Now it was breaking down as far as writing was concerned.

Concerning the wider public sphere the change was seen in “the letters from the countryside” sent by local correspondents with which first *Suometar* and then other Finnish-language newspapers started to fill their pages from the 1840s (Stark 2014). Now there were eyes and ears even in remote

parishes that could bring into public view things that hitherto had safely been confined to a smaller circle. In 1864 a debate was conducted in two small country newspapers inspired by a letter from a peasant. The debate revealed a variety of prejudices of the educated people against peasants who knew how to write. Even the blurring boundaries of the public and intimate spheres became evident.

A peasant began the polemics in the newspaper *Tapio* in April 1864. Already the title of the text was challenging: "Is there any use for the peasant from his knowledge of writing?" The writer relates that he was taking a number of letters to the parish minister to be put in the mailbag that was used for carrying the letters from the parish to the post office. Then the minister had said: "one should not write so often, because it is a waste of time and of writing materials", to which another priest added that "it is not necessary at all for the peasants to send mail, and for that matter even to know how to write." This led the author to discuss attitudes towards peasants who could write. Other villagers had even ridiculed him because of the minister's words, and said that they were happy that they did not know how to write (*Tapio*, April 16, 1864).

The editor of the paper where the debate took place himself participated in the discussion by criticizing the priests for their old-fashioned attitudes. This editor, Antti Manninen, was himself a remarkable man, who through energetic self-education had risen to the position of headmaster of a farm school, writer and newspaper editor. He had some years earlier published a book *Taito ja Toimi* (Skill and Work, 1856), where he had devoted a whole chapter to the benefits of the knowledge of writing, using largely the same arguments that Antero Warelius had presented in an article in 1851 (*Sanomia Turusta*, March 4, April 1, 1851). Warelius (1821–1904) was, like Manninen, a man from lowly origins who became a priest and a promoter of the Finnish language.

Even if the minister's name was not mentioned in the original polemic he identified himself and sent a reply (*Tapio*, May 14, 1864). The debate led to further exchanges of words, which are too long to quote here. The most important part of the debate was the minister's attitude towards peasants who wrote. The minister asserted that he had nothing against the fact that peasants could write, but nevertheless he used quite a lot of energy to show that it could be harmful if a peasant wrote too much, because it could take up too much of his time. A peasant was so unused to writing that it could take him many years before he could learn to write as speedily as a gentleman, whose proper work writing was. Furthermore the minister expressed other prejudices about peasants who wrote and laid down conditions under which writing by them could be acceptable:

[...] the peasant does not live by sitting all day with a pencil in his hand, especially when he is not so accustomed to writing as speedily as it is necessary that it doesn't take too much time. [...] It is as well quite certain that a peasant, who really works in the fields, cannot get his living from the idle gossip that he puts in the newspapers. [...] any fool can understand that nobody can in two or three years learn to write too swiftly. [...] [The minister] meant by his criticism: one should not spend so much time in that kind of work, well knowing that there was much more necessary work in the house to be done [...]. (*Tapio* May 14, 1864)

The minister continued in the same vein by connecting the much despised half-education with a love of publicity that apparently followed the learning of writing:

[...] these half-gentlemen do not need much to lose their temper and on the spot publish that they have been criticized in their craft. [...] The real reason for F-k H-n to publish his writing is nothing else than that his honour has been hurt; that we can guess and conjure from his wretched lament what others, who cannot write, have said about him. [...] I cannot understand that a peasant cannot plough and cultivate his land without knowing how to write. But, what a wonder, our forefathers have been able to live well without writing skills. And experience and observation have shown that where peasants have started to use their writing ability for things other than where it is really necessary, they have become poor. (*Tapio* May 14, 1864)

In his last reply the minister wrote some words about the new division between the intimate and the public sphere. When previously it was possible for educated people to speak what crossed their mind without risk of the words spreading further, they were now compelled to be more cautious, because anything that they were saying might end up on the pages of a newspaper sent by a peasant who could write (*Päivätär*, July 31, 1864).

Fear of Abandoning One's Class

A common fear among the peasants was that young people who learned writing would give up the traditional way of life of their class (Houston 1988:114). There had been cases when young men had left the peasant community to attend schools, which meant a departure from familiar surroundings. Such persons became full members of the educated classes. This was rather rare and it was not feared so much. "Half-gentlemen" who had acquired the knowledge of writing but had stayed home, however, were present all the time, but it was not any longer sure that they totally shared the worldview of their surrounding community.

This meant that even texts that recommended the acquisition of writing skills had to be furnished with affirmations that the knowledge of writing did not bring with it the danger of abandoning one's class. In 1851, the newspaper *Maamiehen Ystävä* told an encouraging story of a young man, who had profited from knowing how to write. After the success story the reader was reminded that "here we must, in order to prevent a wrong impression, mention that, even if he knows how to write, he still remains a real peasant and avoids all gentlemen's as well as clowns' manners, and remains an industrious and decent working man" (*Maamiehen Ystävä*, July 12, 1851).

The leading Finnish-language newspaper *Suometar* published in 1858 a dialogue, where a villager and a farmer were discussing the role of education in the life of common people. The lavish life and haughty manners of the gentry gave wrong models for peasants, and again the knowledge of writing was seen as a triggering feature:

It is even worse with those peasants living like gentlemen! As you said, they can write however incompletely, but when the other peasants lack this useful skill altogether, this meagre knowledge has given them the false impression that they can regard themselves as so much better than their class comrades and therefore they think that they are above the ordinary toils, and thus don't want to work, and then they become idle good-for-nothings, and this is what most of the penmen in our and neighbouring parishes are. (*Suometar*, April 30, 1858)

The great confusion was that mere knowledge of writing and counting was regarded as the feature that divided the gentry from the peasants. Already a decade earlier, the newspaper had suggested the simple solution that all peasants should learn how to write and count (*Suometar*, May 4, 1849). Warelius too concluded that there were too few peasants who could write and thus they became something special. When all could write, nobody could raise himself above the rest only because of this skill (*Sanomia Turusta*, March 18, 1851).

The fears felt by the peasants when faced with more widespread writing skills among their own number, especially among their children, cannot be waved aside nonchalantly. In a way the reluctance to adopt writing is understandable, because the rural people had already been living without knowing how to write for hundreds of years in a society that was based on the (hand)written word. Those who could not write were not totally without means of influence in such a society. There usually was a person available who could take care of the actual technical process of the production of text. Remaining without writing competence was sometimes deliberate. Those who could write would also become burdened with responsibilities that they did not wish to have. Nils-Erik Villstrand has called this the

“non-learning” (*icke-lärandet*) strategy (Villstrand 1996). The ability to write and the rhetorical forms attached to it were in a peasant culture considered a special craft, which there was no need for everyone to acquire.

Unfortunately, the non-learning strategy was no longer viable in the nineteenth century. When defending the learning of writing skills, Warelius wrote in his article in 1851 about the rapidly changing modern times: “In old times the knowledge of writing was not so important as today, because the toils of the peasant were not the same as today: One didn’t loan money, one didn’t go to court so often, there were not so many laws that you should know, all these things mean that you need the knowledge of writing.” The older generation would like to make things stay as they have always been, but it is not any more possible: “The human being must grow and multiply, that is the order of nature; if it doesn’t happen in useful arts, then we only make the useless arts multiply, something that you, good fathers, do not like, I suppose” (*Sanomia Turusta*, April 1, 1851).

Writing, Gender and Love Letters

Writing by hand has an intimate character – it is suitable for recording personal thoughts, but suitable even for erotic communication. It is not by chance that even serious texts propagating the importance of writing often mentioned its usefulness in communication between lovers. On the rare occasions when women were taken into consideration in the context of writing, they were almost without exception considered as writers of love letters. This was evident in the article about the girls’ school project mentioned earlier: “Mrs T. said [...]: ‘...the world will be turned upside down, when even the maids are taught to write, they won’t do anything else than sit with a pencil in their hand and write letters to each other and to their suitors’” (*Savo*, May 17, 1881).

The newspaper *Hämäläinen* published in 1861 an exceptional text titled “About the present state of the writing skills of our girls”, where a male writer spoke in a positive tone about women as writers. The author was delighted by the first steps in writing taken by women, even if the results left much to hope for, but even he thought that women used their writing skills only for entertainment and for romantic communication. Unfortunately, their love letters were confused and incomplete. He hoped that later they would use their skill for practical purposes in the management of the household. It is symptomatic that the patriarchal editor of the newspaper added to this text his own comment, where he recommended that writing would be even more important for boys and men (*Hämäläinen* June 21, 1861). (About women as participants in newspaper debates in the nineteenth century Finland, see Stark 2011.)

This was the normal order in which new skills would be adopted: first men who owned land, then other men, then farm hands, and only lastly women. Warelius took into consideration farm hands and recommended that they too would learn to write. With knowledge of writing they could control what they owed and what somebody else owed to them. It is interesting that Warelius combined here romantic relationships and the use of time: "If a farm hand wants to marry, then it is nice to send love letters to his beloved one, and not spend days courting far away, and suffer the loss of pay." Women are mentioned only in passing in the end: "It would be better, if more people could write, and if everybody over fifteen years knew how to write, men as well as women, we would live far better than now" (*Sanomia Turusta*, April 1, 1851).

Conclusion

To a certain degree we can say that there was not a single theme in the Finnish discussion that was completely unique for Finland. Still, in relative terms, similar fears seem not to have been so common in the Western parts of Europe. This can be explained by arguments that have been mentioned above: the history of literacy and popular education followed somewhat different paths in the west and in the north. The status of the Swedish as the language of the elites and Finnish as the language of the common people may be an auxiliary explanation, as well as the position of Finland between Sweden and Russia. The resistance of the common people to learning to write stemmed partly from the fact that Finland was much less urbanised in the nineteenth century than, for example, Denmark already was (Tommila 1988:115). If a person does not see concrete benefits in a new skill, one tends to be suspicious about it. In those Finnish regions, where sea-faring was an important means of livelihood, knowledge of writing was more widespread than deep in the country (Leino-Kaukiainen 2007:426).

In the course of the nineteenth century many of the statements opposing the teaching of writing appeared to contemporaries as hopelessly anachronistic as they do to us. It is revealing what the progressive pedagogical thinker O. H. Gripenberg (1788–1848) said about some ultra-conservative opinions on educational matters: "...one can say about this kind of statements that they have been lured forward by an excessive zeal to defend the old order" (*Finlands Allmänna Tidning*, Feb. 10, 1841). Reactionary arguments continued to flourish because their proponents believed that they appealed to the highest authorities in the country. Such persons rapidly changed their opinion when the new principles of the highest authorities became known (as after the Crimean War).

It became evident in the debates of the nineteenth century that oppos-

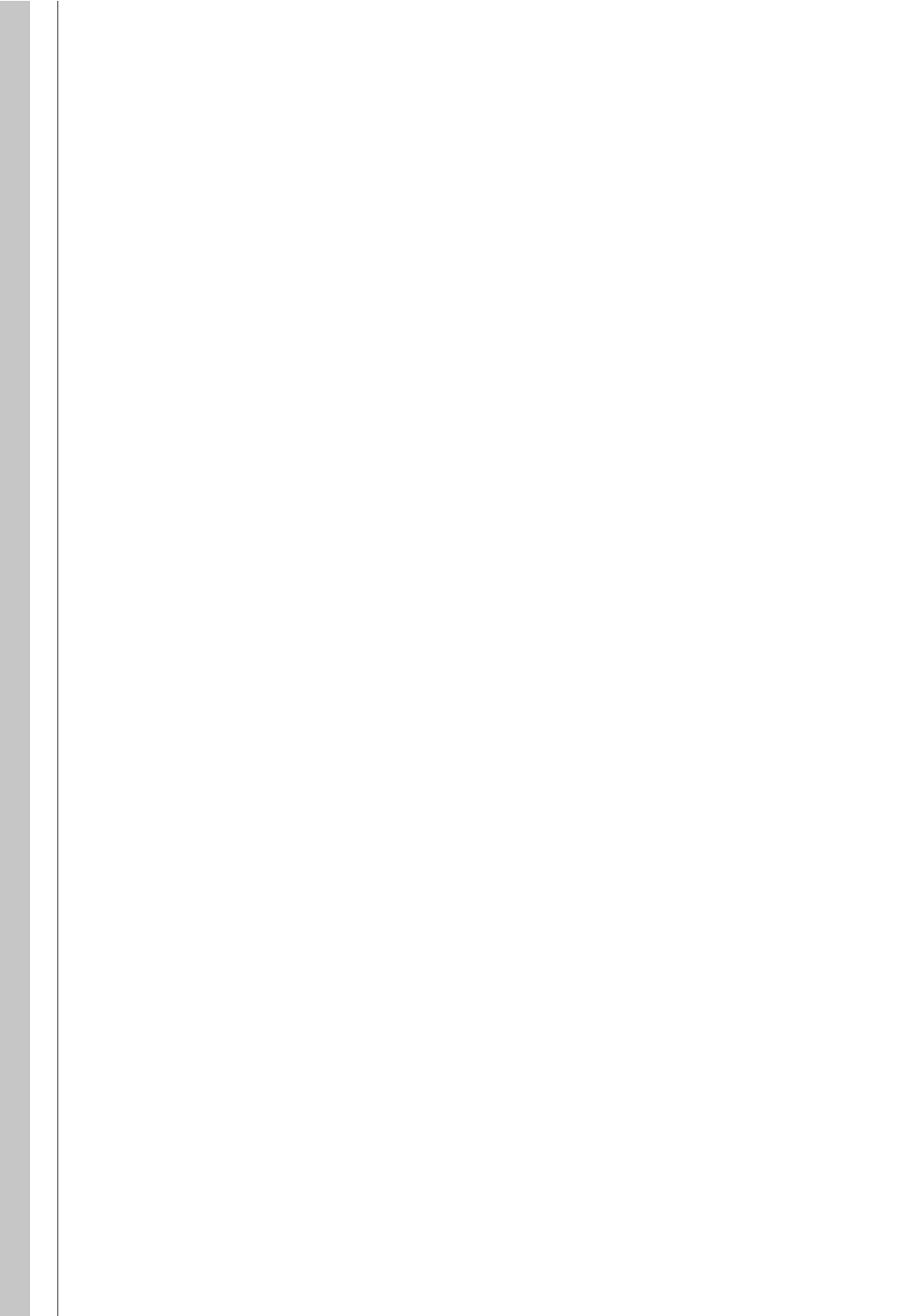
ing popular education and the elementary school showed not much more than bad taste, but to be against the universal ability to write was even worse. Practical steps forward did not come as quickly as many hoped and the change in the educational policies did not remove all suspicions based on group interests, stinginess and backwardness. A nation totally knowledgeable in the skill of writing was, after all, something completely new.

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LAURA STARK

Motives for Writing and Attitudes Regarding Writing Ability Among Rural Commoners in Finland 1840–1900

ABSTRACT. What obstacles faced self-educated Finnish-speakers with minimal formal schooling who wanted to write, and what motivated them to continue? What meanings did writing hold for those few commoners who learned the skill before the year 1900? In this article I concentrate on the meanings and experiences of writing as recollected and reported in the first-hand, written autobiographical narratives by mostly male rural inhabitants in 19th-century Finland. These experiences were shaped not only by the physical and economic conditions of rural life, but also by community members' attitudes and expectations.

KEYWORDS: writing, nineteenth century, countryside, community, education, Finland

Introduction

Over the past two decades, numerous texts written by nineteenth-century farmers, crofters, skilled artisans and labourers possessing little or no schooling have been uncovered in Finland, and recent research on their life stories, diaries, handwritten newspapers, petitions, hymns, etc. have greatly expanded our knowledge of the history of Finnish literacy.¹ In this article, rather than examining the documents produced by these early rural writers, I focus on their *acquisition of writing* as described in ten autobiographical texts. I use the term *commoner* here to refer to those individuals who had to perform physical labour for a living, either in agriculture or skilled craftsmanship. In Finland, this segment of society did not begin to receive schooling until the last decades of the nineteenth century, due in part to the socio-political dominance of Swedish elites and the Swedish language. The writers discussed here were among the first in their communities to learn to write. In this paper I ask: what obstacles did they face, and what motivated them to continue?

Although the Lutheran Church in Finland had required its parishioners to learn to read since the seventeenth century, in most cases this seems to have meant only being able to sound out words by rote. Many rural inhabitants could not read handwritten script, and others were unable to read print with any fluency or comprehension.² The church did not require the ability to write from its parishioners, and progress in acquiring this skill was thus fairly slow throughout the nineteenth century. As late as 1880, only thirteen per cent of Finns above the age of ten knew how to write (Leino-Kaukiainen 2007:426–430; Kuismin 2013:103). A major reason for this was that until the 1860s, there were very few purposes to which a monolingual Finnish-speaker could put his or her writing skills. Finland had been ruled by Russia since 1809, and although Finnish was the native language of nearly 60% of the urban population and nearly 90% of the rural population, Swedish remained the dominant language of both administration and education, as well as the only official language in Finland until 1863.

Prior to the 1860s, upward mobility was nearly impossible, and few persons ever left the social station to which they were born. Lack of full literacy among rural commoners created a vast informational divide between them and elites, nearly all of whom were functionally literate in the Swedish language (Stark 2006; Mäkinen 2007). Yet starting in the mid-nineteenth century, increasing numbers of commoners began to realize that the ability to

¹ Makkonen 2002; Salmi-Niklander 2006; Kauranen 2007, 2013; Kuismin & Driscoll 2013; Edlund et. al. 2014.

² Nordlund 2005; Leino-Kaukiainen 2007; Mäkinen 2007.

write represented an important form of social and cultural capital, and they were motivated to acquire this skill on their own.

Although the focus of this article is not autobiography per se but rather the recollected narratives and descriptions of learning to write expressed within autobiographical texts, from a methodological standpoint I interpret autobiographical writings *not* as direct reports of historical events, but as socially meaningful expressions influenced by memory processes and the cultural discourses available to the authors at the time of writing. Given that they were written by persons with skills not shared by everyone in their communities, autobiographies cannot necessarily be regarded as representative accounts of the thoughts and experiences of the majority of Finnish-speaking rural commoners. However, what lends authoritative weight to their testimonies of experiences of learning to write is the *immediacy* of informants' and writers' encounters with the external social, political and material conditions in which they lived; in other words, their *proximity* to their own social context in terms of chronological time, physical presence and participation in a linguistic community (see also Vincent 1981). They were *embedded in past social relations* as participants in ways that the present-day researcher can never be; their words carry a conviction regarding their experience and interpretation of reality which cannot necessarily be superseded by any external information available to the researcher. At the same time, I recognize that experience is always filtered and moulded by power relations as well as the limitations and plasticity of language (Scott 1991; Hastrup 1995).

For my analysis I have selected the autobiographical narratives of eight men and two women who were born between the years of 1827 and 1866 and learned to write in the period between the 1830s and 1870s.³ Of these writers, the four spent their childhood and youth in Southwestern Finland, three in the Uusimaa region in southern Finland, one in Eastern Finland, one in Häme district, one in Ostrobothnia and one in South Karelia. Unlike

³ My thanks go to Anna Kuismin for discovering and transliterating these texts and making them available to members of the research community. The texts written by Eskola, Häyhä, Leppänen, Päivärinta and Österberg are preserved in the Literary Archives of the Finnish Literature Society (henceforth FLS/KIA). Grönqvist's narrative is housed in the FLS Folklore Archives. Päivärinta's autobiography *Elämäni* ("My Life") appeared in 1877 (new edition 2002). Suutarla's autobiography was published in 1898 and Meriläinen's in 1927. Karl Jooseppi Koskinen published his life story at his own expense in 1886. Johan Robert Jousi's *Elämäkertomus* ("Life Story") can be found on the Internet. Päivärinta's second autobiography as well as Leppänen's, Grönqvist's, and Österberg's manuscripts have been published either whole or in part in the collection edited by Anna Makkonen, *Karheita kertomuksia. Itseoppineiden omaelämäkertoja: 1800-luvun Suomesta* (2002). Excerpts from Suutarla's autobiography can also be found from the same anthology.

the early autobiographers in Britain studied by Vincent (1981), Rose (2001) and Howard (2012), or in France and Germany by Maynes (1995), the persons examined here were not primarily from the working or skilled artisan classes but were instead from rural farming backgrounds. Finland in the second half of the nineteenth century lacked a significant urban industrial complex, and in fact according to economic indicators, the country never underwent an actual industrial period but transformed from an agrarian economy directly into a service-based economy over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Haapala 1989).

The ten writers are **Pietari Päivärinta** (1827–1913, born the son of a crofter, became a cantor and popular author; two separate autobiographies originally published in 1877 and 1902), **Zefanias Suutarla** (1834–1908, born the son of a smallholding farmer, became a farmhand and later wealthy farmer (*rusthollari*)⁴; autobiography published in 1898), **Johannes Häyhä** (1839–1913, born the only child of a large extended family, became a teacher, farmer, and writer, autobiography written in 1897), **Heikki Meriläinen** (1847–1939, born the son of a smallholding farmer, became a blacksmith, folklore collector and writer; autobiography published in 1927), **Johan Robert Jussberg** (later **Jousi**) (1848–1910, born the son of a smallholding farmer, became a railroad employee, autobiography written in 1902), **Karl Jooseppi Koskinen** (born circa 1848–1849 the child of a poor farmer, became a farmer himself; autobiography published 1886), **Alfred Leppänen** (1851–1908, born the son of a smallholding farmer, became a soldier and painter; autobiographical text written 1896), **Mathilda Grönqvist** (1862–1903, daughter of a poor itinerant widow, became the wife of a tailor and folklore collector; autobiographical text written presumably 1887), **Kalle Eskola** (1865–1938, son of a crofter, became a soldier and farm owner; autobiographical text written between 1888 and 1919) and **Maria Österberg** (1866–1936, sister of Grönqvist, autobiographical text written at the end of the 1890s).

Relying on the large number of documents written by Finnish commoners which have been found in archives, museums, attics, and basements, Anna Kuismin (2013) has identified 409 self-educated writers born between 1751 and 1880 in Finland, whom she has divided into the following six categories: (1) activists of revival movements and other religious writers, (2) social reformers, enlightenment enthusiasts and lay educators, (3) pillars of local communities including minor clerical officials and masters of wealthier farms, (4) local philosophers, (5) marginal figures such as eccentrics, social outcasts and prisoners, and (6) aspiring literary authors. Of the writers

⁴ A *rusthollari* or *rustitilallinen* was the owner of an agricultural estate under legal obligation to equip a cavalryman.

examined here, Maria Österberg's self-reflective, religiously-oriented autobiographical text best exemplifies Kuismin's first category, and Pietari Päivärinta and Heikki Meriläinen fit well into Kuismin's last category: they both became well-known authors. Häyhä, too, became well-known for his many ethnographic accounts published in monograph form. Eskola in his youth was an example of Kuismin's second category, while other writers (e.g. Jousi, Koskinen and Leppänen) seem to have used writing very little in their lives and thus are more difficult to categorize.

Learning to Write

Most of the writers examined here had received very little formal schooling. The first official public schools were founded in Finland in the late 1860s, which meant that literate rural commoners writing in the second half of the nineteenth century were almost entirely self-educated, having attained literacy outside formal institutions of learning (see also Howard 2012).⁵ Some writers attended only confirmation classes, whereas other attended several weeks of ambulatory school, or a semester of Sunday school, or even a year or two of primary school. Eskola, the youngest writer, attended public primary school for five years and received his certificate of graduation.

Even when schooling was available, parents were often reluctant for their children to attend. As Koskinen remarks regarding his hopes for an education: "My father refused just as I had anticipated, saying he was poor and didn't imagine that I was going to become a clergyman in any case" (Koskinen 1886:1). Mathilda Grönqvist too, who wrote of herself in the third person as Sofia, was prevented by her family's poverty from fulfilling her dream of continuing school, even though her teacher had considered her a promising pupil: "Sofia wept when she had to leave school, and envied the good fortune of those children with wealthier parents who could keep their children in school" (Makkonen 2002:281; FLS/KRA: Grönqvist).

Poverty appears to have been the primary reason for denying children schooling, since children needed warm clothes and shoes to attend school. Children in poor households were also required to perform labour at home, and schooling was often considered by parents to be unproductive and a waste of time (see Tuomaala 2004; Mikkola 2009). There is abundant evidence for the objective existence of chronic poverty in the nineteenth-century Finnish countryside, including reports from officials and district doctors, and letters to the editor sent to contemporary newspapers (Haatanen

⁵ The terms *commoner* and *common folk* are used in this study to refer to those individuals who had to perform physical labour for a living, either in agriculture or skilled craftsmanship.

1968; Karisto et. al. 1998:28–29). The autobiographers examined here frequently mentioned having suffered as children from hunger, lice, bare feet in winter, mere rags for clothing, and from backbreaking labour when they were in their teens.⁶

When rural commoners learned to write, they did so through one of two different processes: either vertical, top-down learning in which gentlefolk taught commoners, or horizontal learning in which commoners taught each other. Only Österberg seems to have taught herself how to write with no outside assistance. Clergymen were important in inspiring and teaching commoners to write: both Päivärinta and Häyhä were inspired to learn to write when they saw their local clergyman writing at the village catechism examination. Both boys later received instruction in writing from older boys who had learned to write in school or from the vicar's assistant. Vertical learning took place most often, however, in informal schools run by manor lords, military officers, vicar's assistants, Finnish secondary school graduates and unmarried gentlewomen, who taught the children of wealthy farmers or the manor's tenant farmers writing and arithmetic either at no charge or for a small fee (FLS/KIA: Häyhä p. 6; Makkonen 2002:184–185).

Horizontal teaching, by contrast, was more haphazard and depended on chance and opportunity. In 1873, at the age of 26, Meriläinen learned to write from his bride, who undertook to teach him so he could write letters to her while working as an itinerant blacksmith. At first, he was doubtful, but his future wife was persistent. Meriläinen began by copying the alphabet that his wife drew as a model, and after three hours of practice, he was able to write the well-known Finnish proverb: "Learning does not tip one into a ditch. Knowledge does not push a man off the road" ("Ei oppi ojahan kaada. Eikä tieto miestä tieltä työnnä"). This was the only instruction in writing that he received (Meriläinen 1927:61–62).

Leppänen began to learn to write while begging with his brothers in a nearby city which was most likely Pori on the west coast of Finland. When the brothers visited a bookshop, the shopkeeper noticed their interest in books and drew the letters of the alphabet in an exercise book which he then sold to the boys. The shopkeeper promised to give them the next exercise book for free if the brothers could fill the first one with practised letters. On their next visit, however, the boys received a printed ABC-primer from the shopkeeper. It was this book that introduced them to the art of penmanship. When the brothers left the city and returned home, the locals were amazed at the fact that "the L[eppäne]n boys can read and write like a

⁶ See Suutarla 1898; Osterberg in Makkonen 2002; Päivärinta 2002; Kauppinen in Makkonen 2002.

parson, each and every one” (Makkonen 2002:219). Soon the villagers began to send their children to the brothers to learn reading and writing.

At first, lessons were held for a few pupils in the sauna outbuilding. When more pupils showed up for “school”, it had to be moved to the village. The boys’ father (who apparently was unable to write) made himself the school’s director with the boys serving as “sub-directors”. According to Leppänen, the school operated for two years and then deteriorated due to the father’s excessively strict teaching methods. After this, the boys worked as tutors in return for food “and often the student learned everything the teacher knew and in those cases we received thanks from all quarters, first from our host and then from the parson and generally from all the parishioners” (Makkonen 2002: 220–221).

Writing was often learned over a long period of time due to the intermittent nature of school attendance. For example Kalle Eskola, among the youngest and best educated of all the autobiographers examined here, attended public primary school for two years (age 8–10), was absent for one year, returned for a year and was gone again for two years, before returning again for two years and receiving his school certificate at age sixteen (Makkonen 2002:185). Another difficulty faced by commoners in learning to write was the need for fine motor skills, which several writers experienced as agonizingly difficult to acquire. A third difficulty in learning to write was lack of physical infrastructure; this included both a lack of writing materials and a lack of space and time in which to concentrate on one’s writing (see also Howard 2012).

Many autobiographies describe how the possibility of learning to read and write arrived in the countryside before external conditions had become favorable for the maintenance of these skills. Paper and ink were expensive, and young would-be writers had to invent alternative means of writing if they wished to continue practising this skill. Such means included writing with sticks on smooth dirt or snow drifts while walking in their home locality (FLS/KIA: Päivärinta, Leppänen), as well as on walls, boards, and book covers (FLS/KIA: Österberg, see also Päivärinta 2002 [1877]:19). Häyhä, for example, decided to imitate the parson’s use of a quill and ink by mixing water with soot and attempting without success to make it flow when he dipped a rooster quill in it. He then turned to practising with a piece of charcoal on the walls and door of his cottage (FLS/KIA: Häyhä p. 5).

Young persons did not always have the time needed to write. Sons of small farms and crofts were expected to participate in endless physical labour, and the sons of skilled artisans could be expected to start working already at age five (Stark 2006:79–80). Adolescents who worked at home under the eye of a stern father had little time for other activities. The only

available opportunity was while herding cows, when a young writer might have the leisure to practice writing on a smooth piece of wood (FLS/KIA: Häyhä p. 6). Agricultural work also affected the fine motor skills of the hand. Eskola explained in his memoirs that in the rare moments he found time to practice writing after the grinding toil of working on his father's croft, the moment he took up his pen "then my poor young hand with its calloused palm, fatigued from the day's exertions, trembled and shook like an aspen leaf stirred by an autumn storm" (FLS/KIA: Eskola).

Lack of space and privacy was another problem mentioned by both Koskinen and Eskola:

Often my head ached terribly, for on top of everything else I was not given any peace in which to work, but instead other family members disturbed me constantly with their talking and their bustling around, since, you see, everyone lived and worked in the same room. On winter evenings my eyes stung from the terrible smoke that filled the room. (FLS/KIA: Eskola.)

Even as adults, Eskola, Koskinen and Päivärinta all told of having experienced these same difficulties. For example when Eskola tried to write invoices as the chairman of the municipal committee, he was soon forced to relinquish his post because "due to the lack of rooms [in our home], I had no separate office, and the children disturbed my writing with their noise" (FLS/KIA: Eskola).

Motives for writing

Even when there was sufficient time and opportunity for writing, prior to the 1860s there were very few purposes to which poor monolingual farmers and crofters, not to mention landless labourers, could put their writing skills. Wealthy farm masters and those men chosen by their peers to serve as sextons and church wardens could regularly use their writing skills when drawing up church account books, minutes of meetings, various contracts, and estate accounts. Even before the Finnish language gained official status alongside Swedish in 1863, these sorts of documents had begun to be written increasingly in the Finnish language (Leino-Kaukiainen 1989: 329–332; Kauranen 2013:41). Poorer members of the rural populace, by contrast, had difficulties in understanding what use writing in Finnish could be to them. As long as most official matters were handled in Swedish (or to a much lesser extent, in Russian), it was clear to Finnish-language commoners that writing could not represent social capital for them. Suutarla, referring to himself in the third person as "Wani", was an adolescent at the start of the 1850s, before local municipal governments had adopted Finnish for official

use. Suutarla told of having wondered what possible use writing could be to him:

He grew older [and] there grew in Wani a desire to learn and gain knowledge. His ability to write had developed to the point that it produced a somewhat legible handwriting. But to what purpose? Wani could find no answer to that. Writing could be of no practical use to a Finnish speaker, since – as it appeared then – not a single meagre document could be written in Finnish (Suutarla 1898:16).

A lack of upward mobility in the countryside did not prevent poor rural inhabitants from dreaming of improving their social status and escaping grinding labour and hunger. Päivärinta, Suutarla and Koskinen all wrote of having harboured such hopes (see Makkonen 2002:68–69), and each of them understood that being able to write fluently was a crucial step in reaching this goal. They needed only to look at the lives of the gentry to see what an important resource writing was for the elite members of society. In addition to writing and the Swedish language, arithmetic and knowledge of the law were also seen to be important tools needed to arm oneself against others' fraud and deception and to move closer to the real centres of power in the countryside: the social networks of the elite (see Suutarla 1898; Makkonen 2002:13–14; Stark 2006:74–78; Mäkinen 2007).

Kaisa Kauranen (2013:40–50) has grouped the motives of early self-educated writers in Finland into six categories: (1) economic and occupational motives; (2) religious motives; (3) the desire to influence community or society; (4) the need to correspond over distances through letter writing; (5) the desire for self-expression or to leave behind written traces of oneself; and (6) writing upon request to newspapers and various memory organizations such as the Finnish Literature Society or National Board of Antiquities. Although all of the authors of autobiographical texts examined here would belong in Kauranen's fifth category, many of them were also spurred on by other considerations. Kauranen's first category includes those who needed to write in the new jobs opening up for Finnish-speakers in the postal service, on the railroads, and in the army after the Finnish language received official status alongside Swedish in 1863. In 1871, Johan Robert Jousi decided to learn to write when he realized that he was the only permanent railroad employee of his acquaintance who did not have this skill (Jousi 1902 [2001]:14–15).

By the 1880s, some crofters' sons could use their writing skills for things that twenty years earlier would have been possible only for the sons of wealthy farmers. Due to his writing skills, young Eskola was chosen to carry out auctions and inheritance settlements, and was made secretary, librarian

and even chairman of the Youth Society of Jokioinen district, thus exemplifying Kauranen's third category of those who used their writing to influence their community or society. As is clear from her fourth category, another purpose to which writing was put was letter-writing to relatives and friends (see also Lyons 2007:18–20; Laitinen & Nordlund 2013; Halldórsdóttir 2014). As Finns became more mobile and wage-labour possibilities opened up in the cities, in logging work, on the railways, and overseas in North America, learning to write became essential (see Leino-Kaukiainen 2007:435). As one response to a folklore collection contest organized in 1971 makes clear, for men living far from home, an important motive for learning to write was maintaining contact with their loved ones (Jauhiainen & Holtari 1973:11–12).

Exemplifying Kauranen's sixth category of writing requested by elites, Johannes Häyhä, Heikki Meriläinen, Mathilda Grönqvist and Maria Österberg all used their writing skills to collect folklore, an activity in which rural inhabitants were encouraged by the Finnish Literature Society Folklore Archives (see Mikkola 2013; cf. Kikas 2014). Five years after Meriläinen learned to write, he happened to meet educated collector Jooseppi Mustakallio and promised to help him collect information about folk magic from the northern regions of Finland and across the Russian border. Häyhä's collection efforts were supported by the eminent folklorist Julius Krohn, with whom Häyhä had struck up a friendship while working as a tutor in the Finnish city of Vyborg.

Newspapers – including those written by hand – comprised perhaps the most important use to which ambitious commoners could put their new writing skills (see Salmi-Niklander 2006; Stark 2014). The rise of Finnish-language newspapers starting in the early 1860s played an important role in narrowing the gap between the elites and the common people both by conveying important information and providing a forum for the common people to engage in discussion through letters and local reports sent to the editor (Stark 2006:75, 77–78; Stark 2014). Suutarla and his friends scraped together enough money to subscribe jointly to the newspaper *Sanomia Turusta*, and Koskinen even borrowed money in order to join a “five-man subscription pool” for the newspaper *Uusi Suometar*. Many were not satisfied to merely read newspapers but also wanted to actively participate in the debates taking place within their pages. For example Kalle Eskola, who in the early 1880s edited a handwritten newspaper called “Nuorison ystävä” (Friend of the Youth)” at age sixteen or seventeen, also wrote 21 articles during the same period which were published in at least five different newspapers and periodicals.

Censure and Ridicule

Even when young people were motivated to write, their activities were often frowned upon by other rural inhabitants who worried that young persons who received too much education would give up traditional peasant ways, or refuse to do physical work and become “lazy” elites living at the expense of those forced to perform physical labour (Mikkola 2006; Mäkinen 2007:414, 416–417; see also Rose 2001; Howard 2012). For this reason, parents often did not want their children to learn to write. When Koskinen attended ambulatory school for two weeks, he lied to his parents, saying that the teacher had demanded that he learn to write, even though he himself was proud of his skill: “for I feared a scolding, since I had begun against my father’s wishes to write, which I considered such a noble skill that I had to show it to my parents, no matter what they might say” (Koskinen 1886:2). Häyhä’s diligence in collecting folklore led the people in his home district to laugh at him and say he was wasting his time and money. Häyhä recollects: “I didn’t pay any attention to them, but [...] my mother was of the same opinion as the others and said to me: ‘if I had known that you would become a writer of such nonsense, I would never have let you attend school’” (FLS/KIA: Häyhä p. 17).

Some rural elites, too, reacted with suspicion to commoners who had learned to write (Stark 2014). The public positions of trust which seventeen-year-old Eskola received due to his writing skills soon got him into trouble with the local gentry, when the curate and sexton of Jokioinen district opposed the founding of the youth society of which Eskola was chairman, saying that Eskola was too young for the post. Within a year, Eskola had been forced out of the position (FLS/KIA: Eskola). This was not the end of Eskola’s problems, however, for soon his Fennoman⁷-inspired correspondence letters to regional newspapers came to the attention of the manor lord who owned Eskola’s father’s croft: “in a violent temper, squeezing his walking stick,” the manor lord asked Eskola, “what business of yours are our affairs? When I travel there in the city, everyone asks me: what is going on in Jokioinen district? From now on you are not allowed to write, and if you do write, your parents will have to leave the croft.” (FLS/KIA: Eskola).

In this story from the 1880s, the manor lord reacted to the writing activities of a rural commoner in much the same way that other representatives of the elite had in the 1860s and 1870s. According to Ilkka Mäkinen

⁷ After the end of the Crimean War in 1856, censorship of the Finnish press eased, which allowed the Fennoman movement to emerge (Tommila 1988). The aims of this political movement were to seek greater official status for the Finnish language and to lift the language and culture of Finnish-speakers (the majority of whom were rural commoners) to the status of a national language and culture.

(2007:412–413), when writers from the lowest levels of society began to send their opinions to national and local newspapers, they did more than just broaden the scope of public discussion, they made the activities of the local elites subject to a new kind of surveillance, which the elites did not necessarily welcome. Previously,

both the Swedish language and the ability to write had been [...] the secure ‘firewall’ of the gentry, within which they could speak and communicate freely [...] But now there began to be eyes and ears in the countryside which brought to public attention those things which had previously remained secure within a small circle (Mäkinen 2007:412).

Embittered by his experience, and wanting to demonstrate his patriotism, Eskola decided to join the army and served three years in a sharpshooter battalion. He summed up his writing experiences by saying: “it is better if one who is young and of inferior status never starts writing to newspapers, for it arouses only envy and hatred in one’s superiors” (FLS/KIA: Eskola).

Individuals who wished to pursue their personal goals through reading and writing were often mocked by village youth, fellow workers, and household members. The village youth ridiculed for example Eskola, Koskinen, Päivärinta and Österberg because the latter wanted to remain at home reading and writing while the others gathered to dance or drink alcohol (Stark 2006:83–84; Makkonen 2002:319). In the culture of nineteenth-century rural commoners, a positive masculine identity was linked to drinking, fighting, smoking and the use of profanity. In the opinions of several writers, male labourers’ alcohol-centred culture made practising to read and write difficult or undesirable. For example Koskinen wrote that he had difficulty maintaining his reading and writing skills when he lived and worked as a farmhand with other male rural labourers: “I began to accustom myself to drinking and at the same time I began to feel myself estranged from reading and writing. Oh what a terrible mistake!” After having been a farmhand for some years, Koskinen’s reading ability was assessed by a parson at a catechism exam. He did poorly, and the ensuing conversation with the parson reported by Koskinen illustrates what must have been the plight of many farmhands in rural Finland, even those who, like him, had learned how to read as children:

“You, poor boy, have forgotten your reading, more’s the pity. You were a good reader and now you cannot read at all”, said the parson and looked at me grimly. “A farmhand doesn’t have any place in which to read or the time to do it”, I answered. “Don’t defend yourself with such excuses, there is enough time in every day to read if only you want to”, said the parson”. “Well where am I supposed to read, when the room where we farmhands live every day is the worst sort of marketplace, both work-

days and Sundays, so many nights I don't get a wink of sleep, much less any reading done," I said (Koskinen 1886:9).

Even when writing his autobiography prior to 1886, Koskinen still complained that he was hampered in his writing by the fact that he lived "among the sort of people who look down on reading and writing, consider it worthless and even mock it, and who in one way or another have disturbed or interrupted my attempts" (Koskinen 1886:12).

To understand why people who spent time reading and writing were mocked by others, it must be recognized that reading and writing largely took place in the mind of the individual. To the outside observer, it appeared that the reader or writer was doing nothing productive or interactive. Activities related to literacy represented a new 'turn' away from public roles played by people in collective labour, games, and rituals, toward an inner landscape, a new world of ideas that was not yet accessible to all. This is one reason why reading and writing were mocked by those left behind, who did not have access to the inner meanings of these activities and therefore could not understand them.

In the countryside prior to the 1860s, physical labour and participation in collective activities formed the core of a positive social identity for rural inhabitants. One could not, as several authors pointed out, carry out work on the farm and at the same time sit down to write. Hard work and industriousness were such important criteria of an honourable person that several of the authors examined here admitted that they would never have sat down to read or write in earnest if some disabling event or condition had not prevented them from undertaking physical labour. Häyhä was recognized at a young age to be a quick learner but was considered physically weak and unfit for hard labour, so lieutenant-colonel Rafael Tavast, who lived near Häyhä's home, offered to pay for his schooling. Päivärinta sat down to write his first autobiography (which was also his first book) only after he broke his leg and had to remain inactive while it healed (Makkonen 2002:87–88; FLS/KIA: Päivärinta). An infected blister kept Meriläinen in bed one summer when he would have otherwise been cutting his hay. While he was recovering, a Swedish-speaking, Fennomans-minded gentlewoman from Helsinki saw that Meriläinen was bored and asked him to write something about his own life. The result was so well received that he was encouraged by other members of the cultural elite to write a longer work, which resulted in his first novel *Korpelan Tapani* (Meriläinen 1927:76–79).

Despite the fact that full literacy among commoners was often ridiculed by others in the community, reading and writing could engender a sense of accomplishment and social worth. Once Jousi had learned to write

in his railway job, he immediately penned a proud letter to his parents – the first he had written them in his own hand (Jousi 1902 [2001]:15). Later in life, Koskinen began to work to improve his reading skills. He went again to the parson to have his reading assessed so that he could marry a serving maid working on a nearby croft. He read the passage from the New Testament selected for him clearly and fluently, and received the parson's praise. This gave him confidence, and he decided to learn once again the skill of writing he had forgotten, hoping that there would "be some use and glory" in such an undertaking. Koskinen asked a man he knew to write out the alphabet for him and help him in getting started (Koskinen 1886:11).

Conclusion

The increase in the number of rural Finnish commoners who mastered the skill of writing was one of the more significant social transformations of the nineteenth century, since writing enabled participation in the many public discussion forums which lie at the heart of democratic civil society. Yet for some writers examined here, the challenge was that they learned to write before the birth of an actual civil society. Even after they had overcome the challenges of learning to write, they still faced a lack of socially-approved situations in which they could use this newly acquired skill. By the 1870s and 1880s, Finnish-language newspapers, active local governments, civic organizations and voluntary movements had created an increasing number of arenas for practising and utilizing one's writing skills, but the transformation was slow, and writing did not have the same impact on all social groups. For poor farmers, tenant farmers, and landless members of the rural population, *opportunities for learning* to write arrived long before it was possible to put this skill to use in any personally advantageous sense, and their writing activities were often viewed as threatening or unsuitable to their station in life.

The narratives examined here suggest that the main problem encountered by low status, self-educated writers was that they were caught between the new possibilities of a modernizing Finland and older conservative attitudes. They saw that learning was a valuable resource for elites, and many members of the Fennomans elite worked hard to widen the circle of those who benefitted from writing to include landowning farmers, which gave new hope to people at all social levels. But for the rural poor, many practical obstacles remained. These included the necessity of performing physical labour in order to survive, under conditions which had remained unchanged for centuries. Negative attitudes within the community can be explained by the fact that writing by commoners challenged both the hegemony of the gentry and the traditional work-centred culture of the country-

side in which farmers and labourers defined themselves as industrious and honest in contrast to ‘lazy’ elites.

From this we can draw the conclusion that in nineteenth-century Finland, not all sectors of society (technological, economic and cultural) modernized at the same pace. Without practices and attitudes supporting the adoption of personal technologies such as writing, these technologies could not lead to changes in everyday life. The lack of mandatory mass education, a mentality which saw the rigid divisions among social estates as insurmountable, and the rudimentary level of agriculture which required a massive input of physical labour all hampered the activities of self-educated writers in the last half of the nineteenth century. The children of poor farmers, crofters and itinerant labourers were simply not able to benefit from the ability to write to the extent that it would have increased their social status, allowed them to escape physical labour, or prevented them from experiencing poverty later in life (see also Kauranen 2007). It took decades before the daily lives of the rural lower classes changed in any meaningful way. Only when the opportunity for long-term school attendance in the Finnish language increased in the countryside and a primary school diploma made it possible to receive jobs and public offices, did new venues for improving one’s social status open up in the countryside. Eventually the whole of Finnish society learned how to write, and in hindsight this outcome now appears inevitable. How much less certain the future must have looked to rural pioneers of writing 150 years ago.

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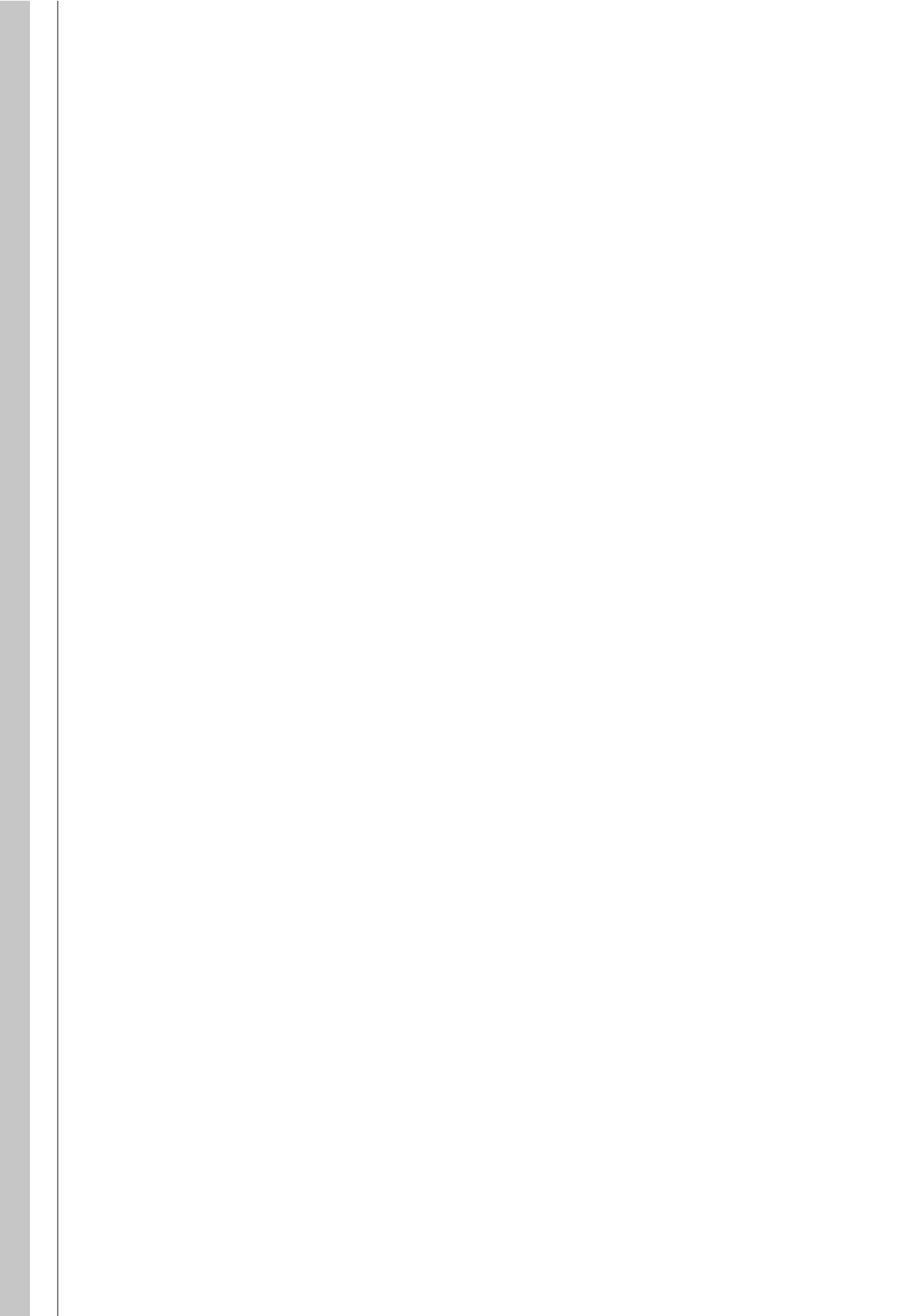
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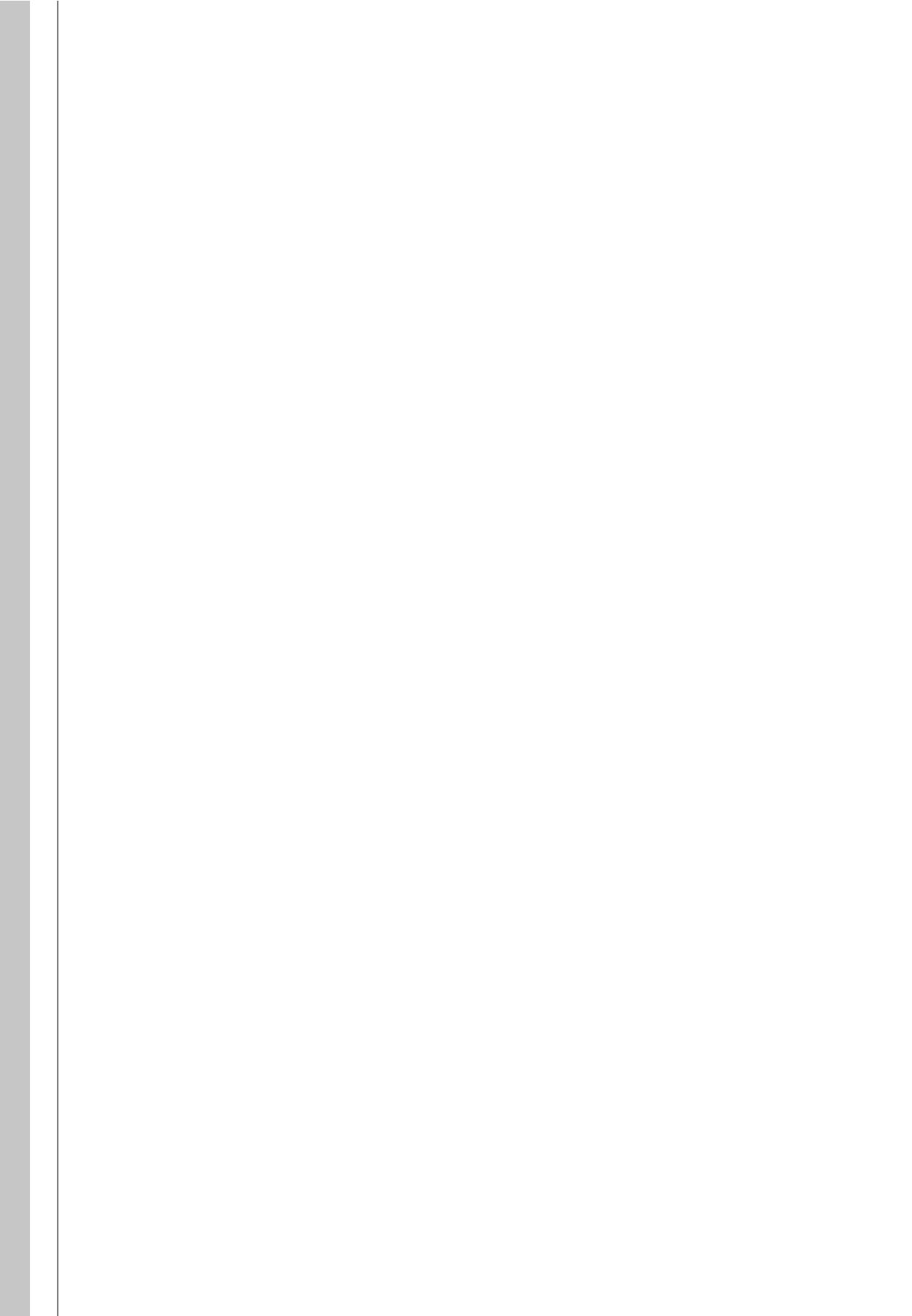
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Genres and Literacy Practices



T. G. ASHPLANT

The Oral, the Aural and the Written

Genre and Discourse in a British
Working-Class Life Narrative

ABSTRACT. In this article, I read George Hewins's *The Dillen* (1981), a life narrative based on oral history interviews, to examine what analysis of a single life story can reveal about: changing patterns of literacy, and the complex relations between the oral and the written, in the culture of British working-class life in the late nineteenth century; the dominant genres (oral and literate) employed in the author's pattern of daily life and visible in his retrospective narration; and the circulation of dominant discourses (such as imperialism) via canonical as well as popular texts in oral/performative as well as written media.

KEYWORDS: oral genre, working class, life narrative, music hall, folklore, literacy

In this chapter, I use a case study of a single British life narrative – George Hewins’s *The Dillen* – to examine what it reveals about: the complex relations between the oral and the written in a poor working-class community c.1900; the dominant genres (oral and literate) visible in the text; and the ways in which powerful national discourses (such as those of imperialism) circulated via oral/performative as well as written media (Hewins 1982a).¹

George Hewins was born in 1879 in Stratford-on-Avon, the illegitimate son of Emmie Hewins (1860–1916), a domestic servant, and an unknown father. He was brought up by his mother’s aunt, Caroline Cook (known as ‘Cal’), who kept a shop and a lodging house for the poor and elderly. Hewins attended the local church school in Stratford (1884–88), and then moved to nearby Leamington Spa where he lived with Cal’s daughter Nance for two years (1888–90). In 1890 he left school and held various boys’ jobs, before returning to Stratford in 1892 to live with his grandfather (Cal’s brother), a bricklayer; in the following year he moved back to Cal’s and began a seven-year apprenticeship with a local builder. During these years, he joined the Volunteers, as a part-time soldier in the Royal Warwickshire Regiment. Around 1898 he began courting Emily Bayliss (‘Emma’, 1882–1951).

Cal’s extreme shrewdness, indeed ruthlessness, in managing her businesses had meant that in childhood George had enjoyed some protection from the worst hardships of working-class life (9, 17, 22, 44, 68).² But when, at the age of twenty, he had to marry the now-pregnant Emma, he was sacked before he had completed his apprenticeship. Unable thereafter to find a regular or decently-paid job as a building worker, and fathering eight children during the next fifteen years, Hewins – working sometimes as a bricklayer, sometimes as a general labourer – lived with his wife and their growing family among the poorest in Edwardian England. A determined survivor, he came through these hard pre-war times, as well as two years as an officer’s servant in the First World War which ended in his being severely wounded on the Western Front. He returned home, after a year’s convalescence, a semi-invalid, damaged as both a worker (his leg torn open) and a man (his genitals mutilated). He lived on in Stratford until 1977, dying at the age of ninety-eight. In his last years, at George’s suggestion, his granddaughter-in-law Angela recorded some of the songs he often sang. During these recordings, it became apparent that he was also an accomplished sto-

¹ Page-references in both text and footnotes are to this edition (Hewins 1982a); all italics in quotations from it are in the original. *Dillen* is a local dialect term, meaning “smallest of the litter [...] also used for the last of the family, in which sense it can have the power of fondling, darling” (179).

² For the conditions of life of the working-class poor in this period, see Chinn 2006.

ry-teller. From these recordings, Angela Hewins constructed a life narrative covering George's life from his birth until the early 1920s.³

In working-class life in urban England c.1900, both the relationships between the oral and the written, and the uses of both manuscript and printed texts, were complex. Over the past twenty-five years, the New Literacy Studies have revealed the patterns of vernacular literacy practices in everyday life, distinct from – though in practice intertwined with – dominant (institutional and formal) literacies (Barton & Papen 2010:11–14). In parallel, research on historical patterns of literacy has undermined simple dichotomies between literate and illiterate, and highlighted the necessity of understanding the varied literacy competences of individuals within the settings of their family and community (Vincent 2003:352–3). This scholarship provides tools for interpreting some of the structural elements of Hewins's (oral) life narrative, and for locating his individual trajectory within the dominant and vernacular literacies of his milieu.

Oral Genres

The anthropologist Elizabeth Tonkin has argued for the necessity to move away from a supposedly rigid separation between oral (or pre-literate) and literate cultures, emphasising that oral communication continues to play a central role even within highly-literate societies (Tonkin 1993:13–4; cf. Barton & Papen 2010:14). She also stressed that, to interpret oral narratives, it was vital to understand *genre*, which for its audience “signals that a certain kind of interpretation is called for” (Tonkin 1993:2–3). Hewins was born into a ‘rough’ working-class community with a predominantly oral culture. Some elements of this culture were rural and traditional (Hewins 1982a:vii–viii). As a child, he eagerly learned songs and stories from roadsters, gypsies and army veterans staying at Cal's lodging-house. He commented, of the gypsy pea-pickers:

Their tales came straight from faery-land: strawberries big as taters, cider-apple country, fields upon fields o' lilies, all colours of the rainbow, as far as the eye could see, an army of wapses [wasps], each one fierce as a ferret, man traps, wading through peppermint 'till you stank o' nothin else!' (13)

³ Hewins's narrative is doubly co-constructed: as an initial series of oral interviews over three years (“he was a storyteller par excellence”, and “a narrator more than an interviewee”, Hewins 1982b:138, 139), and then in Angela's structuring of the printed narrative (“There was no chronological sequence. It was a tale lovingly pieced together afterwards like one of those ubiquitous peg rugs”, Hewins 1982a:178).

Some of this fairy-tale genre colours George's imagined account of his mother's seduction by his putative father, a member of the Volunteers, during the Whitsun holiday celebrations: her eyes "as blue as forgot-me-nots" contrasted with his "scarlet tunic".

They danced and they danced. They was still dancing when dusk starts to fall and, lo and behold! A balloon goes up, with magnesium lights, hovers for a minute and sails over the town. 'Ohhh!' went the crowds. Fireworks started to bust in the sky. 'Ohhh!' they went. And little coloured flares lit up the trees by the river. (2-3)

Hewins also learned traditional and soldiering songs from the various lodgers. "I listened well to the old chaps' songs and I picked them up" (45-6). Of the twenty-five songs (and one rhyme) quoted or mentioned in *The Dillen*, five are traditional in origin and another ("Mademoiselle from Armentières") is an old soldiers' song.

Another element of traditional popular culture visible in the text is a half-jocular, half-serious belief in witches and ghosts.⁴ Cal was a somewhat feared figure, who confronted a man with "a look as made folks say she rode up the fields a-nights, on a besom" (9).⁵ As an adolescent, George was happy to trick Cal's lodgers by playing on their fear of ghosts (46-7), but as an adult he was convinced that he had seen one. "I don't believe in magic, but I know I seed a ghost once, at Pebworth. They don't mean you no harm; only thing is, if you sees this sight it frightens you, petrifies you" (122).⁶

Traditional folklore, as well as contributing such specific narrative and thematic elements, also constitutes an important, if subordinate, generic compositional dimension in Hewins's story. The "key pattern" of its narrative structure could be defined as *survival* (making do, getting by) (Chanfrault-Duchet 1991:80). This is expressed through mundane episodes, based on the lessons Cal taught George, where he secures "pickins" (pickings: the

⁴ For the relationship between supposed superstition and literacy, see Vincent 1989:156-9.

⁵ Cf. "I seen nobody so discomfort folks as Cal, when she wanted" (44). This suggestion seems to have touched a raw nerve in George. His children were frightened of Cal. "The kiddies picked things up. They thought Cal was a witch in her long black frock and her black bonnet." When one of his daughters, who had made a mistake while running an errand for her, said: "'Er'll put a spell on me!'", "I turned on her. 'Don't let me ever,' I said, 'ever catch you sayin that again.' She was shocked. I never told them off, as a rule." (110). For an incident involving belief in witchcraft in one of the slum courts of central Stratford in 1867, see Fogg 1986:167.

⁶ The incident referred to occurred while he was lodging away from home on a building job. It troubled him sufficiently that he gave up the lodging and hired a bike to cycle to and from work daily (49-50).

fruits of taking any passing opportunity to snatch up money, food or goods) (17, 34, 132–3, 159). But occasionally this severely realistic narrative is interrupted by a generic shift, to fairy-tale vignettes featuring the discovery of hidden treasure. Cal's own practice (squirreling her takings away in different hiding places in her premises) had alerted George to such possibilities (109; cf. 112). Coming home from school one day, he heard there was free firewood available, and thought to make some pennies selling it. While picking up the wood, he noticed a guinea coin (which he slipped into his shoe) and an old decorated tin box containing a stone. The ensuing narrative unfolds a rising triplet of bounty. First, he sells the gold coin for its full value. Next, after he dodges the jeweller's initial attempt to swindle him out of the precious stone, Cal sells it for five guineas. George then keeps the tin box to play with; one day an American tourist sees him with it in the street, recognises its value ... and buys it from Cal for eighty pounds (20–21). Both Cal herself, and later the adult George, profited from other, less extreme, examples of such hidden treasure (44, 84, 122).

But much more prominent in the text is the urban and commercial genre of the music-hall, an increasingly dominant element of popular culture in Britain from the 1860s onwards (Kift 1996).⁷ Already in childhood, Hewins was an enthusiastic performer: "Singing was the only thing you might say I *enjoyed* at school". At the age of nine, after his day's work in a barber's shop in Leamington Spa, he was turning the handle for a troupe of Italian organ grinders (25–6). He and his schoolmates also revelled in the melodramas put on at the Theatre Royal: "We learnt them off by heart" (29). And when a minstrel troupe came to the town, the youngsters copied them, putting on their own minstrel show to earn halfpennies. George relished his success, and commented wistfully: "I could have gone on, if I'd had someone behind me" (29–30). The great majority of the songs in Hewins's text come directly from music hall (fourteen) or are wartime adaptations of such songs (five). Although Hewins and his friends will have absorbed music-hall culture primarily aurally and orally, through attending and later taking part in performances, it was also, as a market-oriented form of entertainment with the capacity for mass dissemination of its products, part of a commercial print world of song-sheets, posters and playbills.

⁷ Flora Thompson (1973:69; cf. 69–75, 501), writing of a north Oxfordshire village (not far from Stratford) in the 1880s, commented: "men and boys still sang the old country ballads and songs, as well as the latest music-hall successes. So, when a few songs were called for at the 'Wagon and Horses', the programme was apt to be a curious mixture of old and new."

Different Literacies

Alongside this rich oral culture, Hewins himself also had a full command of literacy. His headmaster in Leamington “used to make me take a class. I was well advanced, see, quick on the uptake; when I was ten I was specially commended by the Inspector.” Left in charge, however, Hewins was punished for accepting sweets from his classmates in return for not making them read (24). His ability enabled him to help both Cal (in her manipulations of her lodgers’ insurance policies: “she got me to read it out for her: the details – it might be a penny a week – what Society it was and that. Cal could neither read nor write but she could add up!” [15]) and his grandfather (in dealing with the orders he received for his building work: “We [George and his cousin] was handy for him like that, cos we could read.” [40]) George was part of a shift, over four generations, in patterns of literacy. His grandfather and great-aunt (born in the 1830s) had indirect access to literacy (through mediators).⁸ His mother (born 1860) had reading competence, and perhaps an enthusiasm which got her into trouble when (soon after George’s birth) she was working as a domestic servant.

Then what should she go and do but get caught with a couple o’ books she’d borrowed from the bookcase – she’d meant to put them back, afterwards – and a piece o’ ribbon to do up her hat. ‘We’s disposed to deal leniently wi you,’ they said, ‘on account of your recent trouble’ – that was me! – ‘So we’s only givin you fourteen days.’ They gave her a character and all: ‘Suspicious,’ they said, ‘she can read an write.’ (8)

Despite his competence, Hewins himself seems to have shared his fellow-pupils’ reluctance to read. He comments of Cal’s son-in-law Charlie, with whom he was then living: “He made you feel uncomfortable. He didn’t go to the public a-nights – he sat there reading! [...]. You could hear the clock ticking. Nance and me whispered and giggled; we couldn’t stand the quiet. Sometimes he read aloud if a bit took his fancy.” (26) It was an incident provoked by George’s talking while Charlie was trying to read which led to him being sent back to live with Cal (35). The only voluntary reading of his own which Hewins mentions is that “My pals and I used to stand under the lamp light *reading*, looking at the Sat’day *Sports Argus*” (56). In the next generation, the first job of George’s eldest son (born 1900) was as a printer’s boy (130), suggesting a greater familiarity and ease with the world of print than his father.

⁸ Cf. Cal’s husband, who was a clerk at the coal wharf: “he couldn’t read, but he chalked on the trucks who the coal was for.” (30). For the comparable pattern of literacy in rural workers of the same generation: Reay 1991.

The Ambiguous Power of the Written

Written texts often play a negative role within Hewins's narrative, sometimes serving to trap or betray working-class people.⁹ This is especially true of official texts. When the First World War broke out, Hewins – although thirty-five and a father of seven – was immediately called up because when a Volunteer he had signed a document indicating his willingness to serve if called upon (130, 132).¹⁰ Written words could also be used to denigrate, almost brand, the poor. The threat of being forced to enter the Workhouse loomed large in their lives in late nineteenth-century England, and it is a recurrent thread running throughout Hewins's narrative. A central traumatic scene in his life story follows the eviction of his neighbours the Rowe family by their landlord, Salt Brassington (who was also Librarian of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre).

Who should I see but Hilda Rowe and Violet. They'd had their hair chopped off, weared long holland pinnas with big red letters: STRATFORD-ON-AVON WORKHOUSE. [...] those red letters haunted me all day. [...] When I got home I told the missus but she said: 'It's to *distinguish* em.' 'Oo from?' 'From kiddies oo's Dad's workin! Ow would you like our George took for a pauper?' 'Teddy Rowe *was* workin' I said, 'till e went to the Infirmary.' He'd got T. B. They took you to the Infirmary to die. I was angry: 'There's no need for them red letters! The pauper kids is distinguished alright! You can spot em straight away – they's up against the wall watching the others play! They ain't playin – and when they marches out a-night the other kiddies is callin "Workhus brats!" after em. "Workhus brats!" They's *distinguished* alright! If I ever catches our George callin like that ...' (72)

Hewins avoided the Rowes' fate by offering his skills to the landlord to pay off his rent arrears. "I went to the Theatre and there was Salt Brassington sat at a desk with a pen in his hand. He didn't look up." After a deal had been agreed, "He smiled: 'I'm writin a book,' he said, 'on the cottages of England.'" The act of writing here figures the power differential between the landlord/librarian, pen in hand, and the worker who has to plead that he can "set my hand to *anythin*" (77).

⁹ As in his mother's book borrowing, cited above. George's putative father had sent a postcard to his mother to arrange a meeting to discuss her impending pregnancy, but in court he "was denying everything. No, he said, the postcard weren't in his hand; no, he said, improper intimacy never took place between them" (3, 6).

¹⁰ He must have been one of the only 7 % of officers and men who, by September 1913, had undertaken the Imperial Service obligation, committing themselves in advance to overseas service in the event of war. Beckett 1990:128–33; cf. Cunningham 1975:141, 148.

Efforts to circumvent the hidden pitfalls of official writing were made, sometimes successfully – Cal bribed a doctor for a medical note to save George from a birching (22), sometimes not.

They'd just started to give out old age pensions, but she didn't qualify. You had to be seventy – *seventy!* A friend of [Hewins's mother-in-law] tried to get it, altered her birth certificate from '6' to '7'. 'Course, she made a codge and modge of it. They found out, took her to court. 'You's lucky,' they said, 'we ain't sending you to goal on account of your health!' (116).¹¹

Conversely, official texts did not always succeed in imposing their intended authority; they might on occasion be successfully evaded or circumvented. After Hewins had been discharged from the army, crippled, in 1918, he received a letter from the Recruiting Office, demanding that he report to them. He recounts with both glee and deep anger his and Emma's successful rebuff of this erroneous demand (159–60).¹² On occasion, he quotes or refers to official documents in ways which work to subvert their authority: a police constable's "book o' rules" (11–2), the marriage register in which he and Emma (both bastards) gave false names for their fathers (60), the Army passes marked "PRIVATE HEWINS AND WIFE" which enable him to smuggle a succession of his officer's different women out of camp (135).

Non-official writing could also occasion pitfalls. The exchange of letters was important in organising some of Hewins's sexual adventures; a farmer's daughter on his postal round "used to write to herself so's I could deliver it. We had a cuddle in the passage. 'You needn't give us *that!*' she says. 'I wrote it – rip it up!'" (117). However, during the war another correspondence with an eager young woman fell into Emma's hands, and convicted George in her eyes where for once, so he claimed, he "never went but two yards with the wench" (139, 145, 153, 163). After the war, a former sergeant, who had helped him secure a better disability pension, drew him into collecting illegal betting slips, which nearly cost Hewins his job (173).¹³ One apparent exception to this negativity, where writing worked for a time in his favour, came during the war after one of his officers, Captain Edwards, was killed. His father wrote to Hewins:

'My son is dead!' And a ten bob note fell out! [...] There was pages of it! 'E thought a lot o'you,' he said, 'missed you when you went – the

¹¹ In practice, the attempted forgery would have required changing the date of birth, not the age.

¹² For analysis of how George and Emma responded, see Ashplant 1998:108.

¹³ Betting on horses away from a race course was illegal in Britain at this time.

company. If you writes back I'll send you another un,' said Captain Edwards' Dad. Writing never came easy to me, but I did. I writ back and told him what a nice chap Captain Edwards had been – well, it was true! – and got another ten bob.

But this benefit soon came to an end: “Then I got tired of answering. He never sent no more.” (159)

The Circulation of Discourses

So far, I have considered the oral and the written as distinct elements in the culture of working-class Stratford. However, from another perspective, they were intimately interconnected. Analysing this life narrative makes it possible to trace the modes by which one of the key dominant *discourses* of the period, imperialism, was circulated, entering the experiences and helping to shape the life choices of Stratford working men. It did so through a specific local inflection: that of “Shakespeare”, a term I use to designate – as well as a repertoire of dramatic texts and (theatrical and other) performances – both various ideological appropriations of and commentaries on the playwright and his writings, and a set of cultural institutions linking members of different social classes (personally, artistically, commercially and ideologically).¹⁴

Stratford-on-Avon at the end of the nineteenth century had a dual identity. It was a typical local market town, in a region (the English Midlands) then suffering significant agricultural depression (Fogg 1986:156–231). But it was also a growing tourist centre, based on the nascent Shakespeare heritage industry (Thomas 2012). It had a strongly paternalist public culture, and mostly returned Conservative MPs in national elections; it also experienced occasional populist/Conservative riots: attacking local pro-Boer sympathisers during the Boer War (1900); and opposing socialists (1908) and suffragettes (1913) (Browne 1981; 1986).

Although Hewins's life was led mostly within his own working-class community, he also came into contact – in what was a small town – with members of national and local elites.¹⁵ This happened in part via the influence, institutional as well as textual, of “Shakespeare” on the life of Stratford and its inhabitants. Figures of national significance involved in the promotion of “Shakespeare” included Charles Edward Flower (1830–1892), head of Flower & Sons, a major locally-based brewer (1863–88), and Mayor of Stratford (1878–80), who co-organised the Shakespeare Tercentenary celebrations (1864), and established, and largely funded, the Shakespeare Memorial Thea-

¹⁴ For the meanings of Shakespeare (as text, performance and cultural icon) in relation to Stratford and Hewins, see Hawkes 1986:ch. 1

¹⁵ Stratford's population in 1891 was 8,300.

tre (built 1879–83). Flower brought to the town the actor-manager Frank (later Sir Frank) Benson (1858–1939), founder and director of the Spring (from 1886) and Summer (from 1910) Festivals at the Theatre. Locally significant figures included the Rev. George Arbuthnot (1846–1922), Vicar (from 1879–1908) of Holy Trinity Church (where Shakespeare was baptised and buried); and William Salt Brassington (1859–1939), Librarian of the Memorial Theatre (1895–1914) (Reinarz 2004; Wearing 2004; *Who was Who* 2014a & 2014b).

Each of these men had an influence on Hewins in the course of his early life through encounters in which the material and the ideological, the textual and the performative, were intertwined. Flower was the local magistrate who determined the paternity suit and accompanying maintenance payment in favour of Emmie Hewins after George's birth.¹⁶ Arbuthnot was chaplain at the elementary school which Hewins attended: "Black George, we called him. Many a time he punched my ear-hole" (17).¹⁷ Brassington was the slum landlord of the Hewins and Rowe families, who raised their rent during a harsh winter (71–72).

The celebration of its hero which this nascent Shakespeare industry promoted linked local pride to imperial endeavour. Flower was one of the founders of the Stratford Volunteers; while Arbuthnot organised military drill at the school, and in a sermon preached at Holy Trinity during the Boer War celebrated Shakespeare's plays for their patriotic message.¹⁸ Benson, one of whose signature roles was as the king in *Henry V*, "consciously completed the identification of the play with the Imperial cause". He believed

¹⁶ Describing the court decision, Hewins imaginatively linked his own fate to a key step in the rise of the Shakespeare industry. "'Hmm' said the Mayor. He was busy laying plans for the opening of the new Theatre, just a few days hence, on Shakespeare's birthday. He'd given the land for it, and a lot o' money asides, and it was going to be a really posh occasion. All the toffs would be there – nobility! Stratford was going to get *tone*; it was the start of a new chapter. 'The defendant can pay three bob a week for the babby', he said, 'and all the costs!'" (7).

¹⁷ In 1889, a year after Hewins left the school in Stratford, it was one of fewer than 5 % of elementary schools teaching military drill: Penn 1999:36–37. For the context of attempts to encourage military drill in schools, see Penn 1999 *passim*; Heathorn 2000:192–198; Horn 1987.

¹⁸ Shakespeare "teaches history by poetry [...] the historical plays of Shakespeare teach us to be proud of our country when we see it, for example, in conflict with France, or watch how with a strong arm sedition and rebellion are put down" (Arbuthnot 1900:134–136). Brassington asserted that "we feel sure that no English home is worthy of the name where a copy of Shakespeare's works cannot be found. To us these mighty poems represent the embodiment of our national spirit. They show us the path of virtue, and how evil-doing carries with it its Nemesis: they teach us patriotism, the love of our fellow-men, and our love of Nature." *Picturesque Warwickshire* (1906), 73–74, cited in Hawkes 1986:14.

in “the quasi-mystical idealisation of British imperialism. Openly and avowedly cultivating the Stratford experience as the power-house of British cultural world domination, with Shakespeare as its justification and centre, he appears to have had some difficulty in distinguishing between himself as Henry and as leader of his company and their patriotic mission” (Bratton 1991:14).¹⁹

The patriotic invocation of Shakespeare, asserted in speech, print and performance by Arbuthnot, Brassington and Benson (and supported by Flower), helped bind together members of the Stratford elite, and supported their efforts to translate imperialist discourse into concrete action. Hewins mentions, as his explicit reasons for joining the Volunteers as an adolescent, recreation and attracting girls (though there were also occasional material benefits); and this fits the broader pattern of motivation for working men of similar background.²⁰ Nevertheless, the ground had been prepared when, as a young child at school, he had been drilled by a Volunteer Lieutenant – “It was drill, drill, drill. We paraded in four companies on the Vicar’s cricket field, [...] even the tiny tots, with staves for guns” (17); and his narrative also displays moments when he was caught up in patriotic fervour with a literary inflection.²¹ It was this initial commitment, later renewed when the Volunteers were restructured into the Territorials in 1908, which trapped Hewins into service in the First World War (130–2).

But, as well as encountering key figures in the Shakespeare industry, and becoming entangled in the imperial cause which they used the playwright to promote, Hewins also became familiar with these canonical texts themselves. In 1911, during a period of high unemployment, Emma (on Brassington’s recommendation) got a job as a dresser at the Theatre. Through this connection, George himself got some work as a “super” at the Theatre, taken on regularly at Benson’s specific request (123–126). He eagerly seized this

¹⁹ In 1910, Benson co-organised the Army Pageant, aiming to show “something ‘of the splendour and sweep of Britain’s wars’”. *The Book of the Army Pageant* 1910:15.

²⁰ When Hewins joined he became a drummer in the band which paraded regularly, watched by Emma and her friends (57, 88). Cunningham argues that “a desire for recreation was the prime motive which led working men to enrol” (1975:54; cf. 108–122). Hewins won a prize in a shooting competition (68), and once had a seaside camp with the Volunteers (133); for the appeal of such rewards, see Jackson 1999:136–138.

²¹ At a Volunteers’ dinner during the Boer War, “We all felt the same: we was ready to scrap with *anybody*, we could tackle *anything*!” Sir Arthur Hodgson, “a big churchman and High Steward of Stratford”, recited a notorious patriotic music-hall song “By jingo”, to which the Colonel replied with “‘a couple o’ lines by Rudyard Kipling as ‘ave just crossed me mind’: Fear God, honour the Queen, / Learn to shoot straight / An keep yourselves clean! Fine words! We clapped and shouted!” (68). Quoted are the closing lines of Kipling’s short story “The Incarnation of Krishna Mulvaney” (1889).

new opportunity to perform: "I was in my element" (124; cf. 123–126 *passim*). One of his suggestions for scene dressing, draping the dead Ophelia (whose bier he was carrying) with dripping duckweed from the river, contributed to the director's preferred use of a picturesque and highly detailed *mise en scène* (125).²² Through his (non-speaking) role, Hewins got to know the play in performance sufficiently to claim: "I know *Hamlet* by heart, without a book" (123). Hence it was not only the popular cultural form of music-hall songs, but also the epitome of literary high culture, which reached him in aural form.

Hewins introduces his claim to knowledge of *Hamlet* by quoting the lines: "Who builds stronger'n a mason, a shipwright or a carpenter? *A grave-maker!* The houses he makes last till Doomsday!" (123). This riddle was especially suitable for Hewins, who had helped build many houses in and around Stratford. But it also forms a bridge between high and popular culture: it could as well have come from a music-hall comedian's patter as from Shakespeare's play (*Hamlet*, V. i.51–60). In 1902, Sir Arthur Hodgson, squire of the nearby Clopton estate and Mayor of Stratford (1883–88), died. As befitting an honorary colonel of the 2nd battalion, Royal Warwickshire Regiment, his funeral procession was accompanied by a military procession, including the band of the Volunteers. In the accompanying downpour, Hewins was soaked, his uniform ruined. To cheer him up, his mother-in-law told him: "They shoved Sir Arthur in so fast on account o' the weather folks is saying e didn't 'ave a *Christian* berrin [burying]! After them stoppin ole Bill Hinton an all!" (88) Hinton, like the Rowes, had had to enter the Workhouse when Brassington raised his rent (72). Allowed out one day, he had drowned in the river.

We reckoned it could a-been an accident: the water was high and he'd used to potter about by the edge when he lived by us. The Vicar ummed and aahed, but the Bishop and the big Churchmen said it was self-murder, no doubt about it. No, they said, old Bill couldn't have a *Christian* burying. Well, serve Sir Arthur right! We had a good laugh over that! (88).

This vignette, which aims at a posthumous rectification of the inequality between Hodgson (owner of the seventeenth-century mansion Clopton House, and "staunch Anglican") and Hinton (inhabitant of slum dwelling and then Workhouse, supposed "self-murderer"), takes its form and its moral from the discussion between the two Clowns over the burial of another victim of drowning, Ophelia: "Will you ha' the truth on't? If this had not been a

²² His account of the effect fits Pete Orford's description (2011:144) of an earlier Stratford season as "typically Bensonian, with an emphasis on Victorian pictorialism and pageantry".

gentlewoman, she should have been buried out o' Christian burial." (*Hamlet*, V.i.23–25).²³

Hewins's narrative shows how a dominant discourse such as that of imperialism could circulate and work its effects. One specific embodiment, the promotion of "Shakespeare" through both oral and written media, gave it added force locally, helping to sustain the patriotic enthusiasm of the Volunteers. But Hewins could also appropriate these canonical texts in other ways. Knowledge of *Hamlet* was not simply a cause for pride, or a source of jokes; like the ethos and form of music-hall comedy (as I have argued elsewhere), Shakespeare's text also offered resources for framing and processing painful experiences of working-class life.²⁴

Conclusion

The culture of daily life in poorer working-class communities in Britain c.1900 was primarily oral. Texts, handwritten or printed, were often a source of problems or threats, to be negotiated or evaded; and only rarely a potentially valuable resource. Many of the older generations still handled tasks requiring literacy through mediators. This oral culture comprised a range of different genres, including rural folklore and urban music hall. The latter, though, combined an oral/aural dimension (attending and participating in performances of songs and comic sketches) with a literate infrastructure. Wider discourses, such as those of patriotism or imperialism, circulated through a variety of media and institutions. Set out in print formats ranging from political treatises through newspaper leaders to popular fiction, they also reached audiences (from school-children to worshippers and theatre-goers) through oral (and visual) performative means such as sermons, plays and pageants. Focus on a single life narrative such as that of George Hewins makes it possible to trace some of the complex interplay of these oral and literate genres: the uses which working people could make of them in both living and narrating their lives; and the various media through which powerful discourses (such as those of nation and empire), circulated here via the textual/performative matrix of "Shakespeare", impinged on and helped shape their daily activities. Hewins, as an experienced performer (singer, actor), acquired (aurally) and commanded (orally) a variety of gen-

²³ On Hodgson, see Waterson 1972 (quoted on his religion).

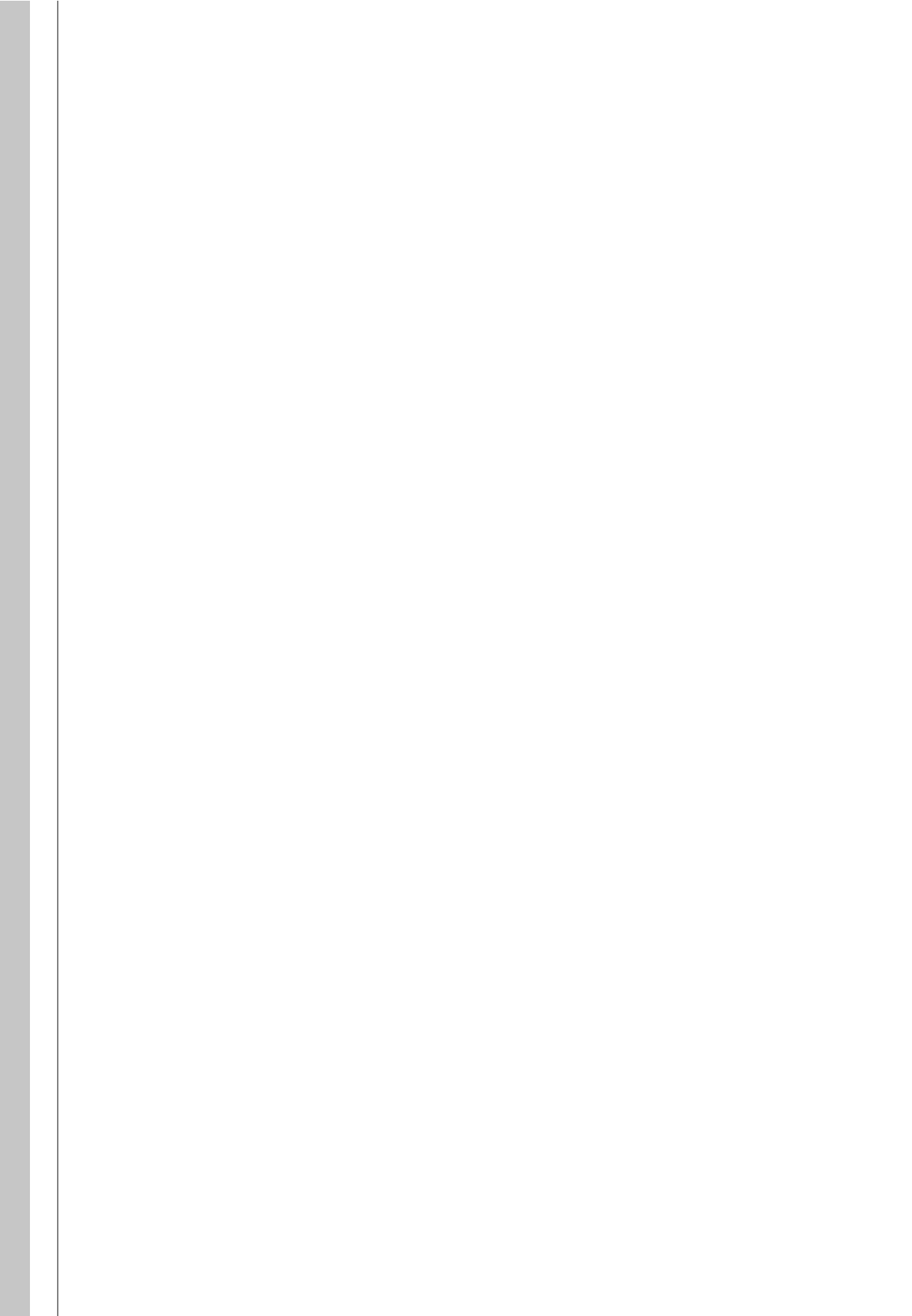
²⁴ On music-hall form as framing device, Ashplant 1998:104–105. The meaning of "Shakespeare", as cultural symbol and text, was contested in the nineteenth century, with radical hostility to elite and imperialist appropriations; see Taylor 2002, especially 369 (Warwickshire), 373–379 (Tercentenary).

res – traditional (folklore), popular (music-hall), canonical (Shakespeare) – which he deployed in daily living, and drew on to narrate his life in retrospect.

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ANN-CATRINE EDLUND

The Songbook and The Peasant Diary

As Participants in the Construction of the Modern Self

ABSTRACT. During the first stage of mass literacy, the written word became an increasingly vital part in everyday life of ordinary people in Sweden, as elsewhere in the Western world. Two literacy practices were commonly used in a Swedish-speaking context: copying texts in songbooks and diary writing. These practices evolved by the mid-1800s and lasted until the mid-1900s. Diary writing and blogging are nowadays considered practices explicitly related to identity construction. The link to identity construction is less apparent in the vernacular literacy practices of the songbook and the diary. In this article I discuss the ways these vernacular literacy practices participated in the discursive construction of the modern self for ordinary people. The theoretical basis lies in the New Literacy theory and the Actor-Network theory, in which literacy is seen as a social activity and literacy artefacts, such as the songbook and the diary, as participants in the discursive construction of identity. Discourse is here understood as the mediating mechanism in the social construction of identity. A case study focusing on songbooks and diaries of a young woman from a rural area in Sweden illustrates different aspects of the construction of the modern self within these vernacular literacy practices.

KEYWORDS: the modern self, identity construction, songbooks, peasant diaries, vernacular literacy practices, stable mobiles, actor-network theory

A Textually Mediated Social World

There is no doubt that most people in different parts of the world are presently living in a social world permeated with writing activities of various kinds. For example, text messaging, Facebook and Twitter have become increasingly prominent in everyday life. David Barton and Carmen Lee state that “we live in a *textually mediated social world*, where texts are part of the glue of social life” (Barton & Lee 2013:27).¹ Deborah Brandt describes the phenomenon as “the turn to writing as a mass daily experience” (2014:16; 2015:3). However, the present-day scene is not so distant from the situation in the Western world during the first stage of mass literacy, which took form during the latter part of the nineteenth century.² Thanks to literacy campaigns many people possessed functional literacy skills that enabled them to engage in both established and evolving literacy practices. Letter writing was so common that it is even possible to say that a shift from oral culture to scribal culture had taken place during this period (Lyons 2013:246; Liljewall 2007:185). Writing postcards, diaries, autobiographies and songbooks represented evolving literacy practices – practices that took part in varying social contexts. One might say that already by the end of the nineteenth century, the social world was becoming textually mediated for the public at large in the Western world.

The democratisation of writing and its impact on the lives of ordinary people can be regarded as a hallmark of modernity (Lyons 2007:29). Another hallmark is the emergence of the modern self. Anthony Giddens argues that the late modern self should be seen as a reflexive project, built up by biographical narratives that need to be coherent, although they are constantly revised (Giddens 1991:5). The narratives form the basis of the subjective identity of the individual, i.e. both self-understanding and individual feel-

¹ The idea of the social world as textually mediated was originally introduced by the sociologist Dorothy Smith (1990).

² According to Deborah Brandt who has studied literacy learning in the United States, *mass literacy* can be defined in the following way: “mass literacy refers to the nearly universal participation in meaning-making based on encoded symbols (i.e., alphabets or characters) as well as the systems and expectations that grow up around this phenomenon. Mass literacy is stratified in terms of access and reward and various in practice, value and impact” (Brandt 2009:55). Brandt also discerns two stages in mass literacy, the first stage during the nineteenth century and the second stage beginning at the latter part of the twentieth century (Brandt 2009:70, 2014:15ff.). Issues of literacy learning are here concerned with both changes in technology and distribution of knowledge (see also Vincent 2000).



The literacy practice of postcards was widespread in Sweden in the beginning of the twentieth century, as in the rest of Western Europe (Hall & Gillen 2007:101). For example, as many as 43 million postcards were sent from 1903 to 1904 in Sweden (Edlund A.-C. 2012:138). The 1909 photograph, "Writing of postcards", is from the national exhibition of applied arts in Stockholm. Photo: Anton Blomberg, Stockholm City Museum.

ings.³ Participation in literacy practices is one distinct way of construing narratives of identity. Thanks to improved literacy skills, emergent writers could take part in autobiographical, epistolary or other vernacular literacy practices where various narratives unfolded. One can thus say that the evolving notion of the modern self was also becoming textually mediated for the public at large. Until recently, historical research on literacy and identity construction has focused on the reading practices of privileged people (Lyons 2010:2; Howard 2012:1).⁴ However, in recent years, studies of

³ The concept of *subjective identity* indicates that the identity of individuals depends on different discourses and differing social contexts (cf. Scott 1999:44; Edlund A.-C. 2007:252 note 25). According to philosopher Seyla Benhabib, narratives bring continuity to the self (1997:126). The construction of self-identity in the form of different narratives in the late modern era is also discussed by psychologists (Freeman 1993; Bruner 2003:85f.). See also David Gerber's research on immigrant letters where the narrative construction of the self in immigrant correspondence is discussed (Gerber 2006:67).

⁴ How literacy practices of ordinary people may have been overlooked can be seen in the case of compiling a bibliography of autobiographical texts written by Swedish women 1650–1989: Laconic diaries were not included in the bibliography, which led to the exclusion of ordinary women, because their diaries often consisted of short entries (Hættner Aurelius et al. 1991:12).

the literacy practices of ordinary people – and especially those dealing with writing – have become more numerous (see e.g. Edlund A.-C. 2007, 2008; Edlund A.-C. (ed.) 2012; Edlund A.-C. & Haugen (eds.) 2013; Edlund A.-C. et al. (eds.) 2014; Howard 2012; Kuismin & Driscoll 2013; Liljewall 1995, 2001, 2007; Lyons 2013; Sinor 2002).

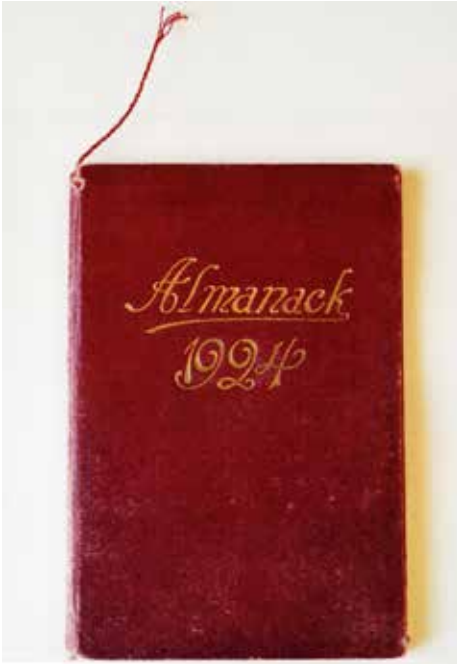
Aim and Outline

In this article I wish to demonstrate how two vernacular literacy practices, the peasant diary and the songbook, engage in the discursive construction of the modern self, in the Swedish context. These practices evolved by the mid-1800s and lasted until the mid-1900s. My focus is on the following questions: 1) How are the writing practices related to the modern self? and 2) What forms of social agency are enabled by the literacy artefacts?

I shall start out by introducing two central concepts: *vernacular literacy practices* and *stable mobiles* and by presenting the two literacy artefacts, the songbook and the peasant diary. A case study focusing on songbooks and diaries of an ordinary young woman from rural Sweden in the 1930s and 1940s illustrates different aspects of the construction of the modern self within these literacy practices. The paper ends with a concluding section in which I discuss the social agency enabled by the literacy artefacts – and the extent to which the artefacts may have participated in the discursive construction of the modern self.



The songbook of Maiden Wallström (1906–1967) dating from 1921. The literacy practice of songbooks was common among young people in Sweden at the beginning of the twentieth century (SVA: H1431). Photo: Ann-Catrine Edlund.



The diary of the farmer Karl Johan Lövgren (1887–1967) is an example of a Swedish peasant diary with short daily notes of weather and work. Mostly men engaged in this literacy practice. Photo: Maria Sundström.

Vernacular Literacy Artefacts as Stable Mobiles

The theoretical basis lies in the New Literacy theory and the actor-network theory, in which literacy is seen as a social activity, and literacy artefacts, such as the songbook and the diary, as participants in the discursive construction of identity. Diary writing and copying texts in songbooks are examples of *literacy practices*, a key concept within New Literacy Studies that defines all use of writing as a social act, and hence emphasises the activity of the participants involved (Barton 2009).⁵ To participate in a literacy practice, it is not sufficient just to have formal reading and writing skills; knowledge of the actual practice is also required, since the practices are constantly embedded in differing social structures.

I utilise the concepts *vernacular literacy practices* and *stable mobiles* in exploring the ways the literacy artefacts such as the songbook and the diary participate in the discursive construction of the modern self. Discourse is here understood as the mediating mechanisms in the social construction of identity (Ivanič 1997). *Vernacular literacy practice* is a useful concept when discussing the writing practices of the songbook and the diary. Vernacular

⁵ For a critical discussion of the concept of the *literacy practice* see Ivanič 2009 and Gustafsson 2013.

literacy practices are strongly linked to everyday activities, since they are “rooted in everyday experiences and serve everyday purposes” (Barton & Lee 2013:138). They are self-generated and voluntary and not framed by the needs of social institutions (e.g. school or church). As there is no institutional training linked to the practices, learning and practice are intertwined. Vernacular literacy practices are also a source of creativity, invention and originality since they are relatively unregulated, and therefore particularly dynamic (Barton & Hamilton 205:22; Barton & Lee 2013:138f.). Linguistic norms may therefore vary in different practices, depending on the social and cultural context. The practices might also “provide a voice for groups and individuals who may otherwise not be heard” (Barton & Lee 2013:139).

The use of the term *vernacular* in the concept of *vernacular literacy practices* is neither restricted to either vernacular language (i.e. dialects) nor used a synonym for non-elite people. In this article I shall concentrate on two vernacular literacy practices performed by ordinary people – where vernacular language is involved to a small extent. By *ordinary people* I refer to “those with little or no formal education from the lower strata of society” (Kuismin & Driscoll 2013:8).

In order to emphasise the material dimensions of literacy I draw on actor-network theory (ANT) developed by the sociologist Bruno Latour



Writing desk and chair from northern Sweden, probably dating from the turn of the twentieth century. Photo: Museum of Västerbotten.

(2005). ANT suggests that agency can reside in artefacts, because aspects of human agency can be delegated to objects. It has been claimed that literacy artefacts are especially efficient social agents when it comes to making links across different contexts, since they have the capacity to build and sustain stable connections and networks across both time and space (Barton & Hamilton 2005:30; Brandt & Clinton 2002:344ff.; Bartlett 2008). Examples of literacy artefacts include note books, writing desks and pens. The artefacts can be regarded as *stable mobiles*, “representations of aspects of the world that are portable and thus can be accumulated and combined in new ways at a distance [...]” (Barton & Hamilton 2005:29).⁶ The notion of *stable* signals the fact that the artefacts are durable: they represent different aspects of reality and give the experiences a sustainable form, while *mobile* signals that the artefacts are portable and can travel between contexts.

Writing Practices of the Songbook and the Diary

My case study focuses on the songbooks and diaries of Linnéa Johansson, born in 1917 in the north of Sweden.⁷ Linnéa learned how to read and write at school, although she attended school for only four semesters: living far out in the countryside and having a seriously ill mother who needed care she only had access to an ambulatory primary school.⁸

These artefacts are instances of two common vernacular literacy practices in Sweden – practices that evolved during the latter part of the 1800s and persisted in the first part of 1900s. Little is known, however, about the social contexts of the songbooks and their function – the field is largely uninvestigated. The songbooks of Linnéa can be framed within the songbook practice that seems to have been most common among young people, where texts were copied and collected. Besides songs and poems, notes about expenses, recipes and diary entries can also be found under the same cover (Ekrem 2002:122ff.; Edlund A.-C. 2003, 2007:175ff.; Ternhag (ed.) 2008). The songbooks were also engaged in collaborative practices: notebooks were passed on to friends who wrote down song texts, poems, greetings or just their autograph. Songbooks were kept by women and men. Young women wrote in their songbook before they married, while it was common for

⁶ The concept of *stable mobiles* is inspired by a concept from actor-network theory, *immutable mobiles* (Latour 1987:227ff.).

⁷ Linnéa also participated in other vernacular literacy practices such as book-keeping and letter writing. We know from her cash book that she spent both time and money on letter writing. During a six-month period she could spend half a month's salary on stamps.

⁸ Compulsory schooling was introduced in Sweden in 1842, when the Primary School Act was enacted (Lindmark 2004:20).

men to keep a songbook when they worked far away from home as sailors, construction workers or soldiers (Nordström 1995:8).⁹ Although these books mainly consist of copied songs, they had not necessarily been taking part in singing practices. It seems that the primary function of the songbook was related to literacy practices (Nordström 1995:16). The songbook resembles the so-called commonplace books in which early modern Englishmen wrote down extracts from texts they were reading, among other things (Darnton 2009:149).



The songbook of Gunnar Alexis Kronheffer (1899–1994) dates from 1922 when he was working as a navy at the construction of a railroad in Sweden (Inlandsbanan). Kronheffer had copied popular songs, poems and a great deal of socialist texts in his notebook (SVA 1311). Photo: Ann-Catrine Edlund.

The diaries of Linnéa Johansson can be framed within the literacy practices of the peasant diary, a fairly common practice in Swedish agrarian society from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth century. The Swedish term *bondedagbok* (peasant diary) has been given a fairly broad definition: the diary keeper must be active in an agrarian environment and make a living in connection with farming, and he or she must also belong to the category of the ordinary or common people (Liljewall 1995:34).¹⁰ One might think that there is a more obvious link between the diaries and the making of the self in comparison to the songbooks – but not necessarily, since the diary notes

⁹ That songbooks were relatively common during the early 1900s is indicated by the some 700 songbooks that have been preserved by the Centre for Swedish Folk Music and Jazz Research (Svenskt Visarkiv) and other archives in Sweden. The tradition of writing in a songbook seems to have more or less died out in the 1950s, judging from the collections of songbooks that have been made (Nordström 1995:16).

¹⁰ Peasant diaries have also been the focus of scholarly attention in other parts of north-west Europe (Ottenjann & Wiegmann (eds.) 1982; Lorenzen-Schmidt & Poulsen (eds.) 1992; Larsson & Myrdal 1995; Lorenzen-Schmidt & Poulsen (eds.) 2002). It has been difficult to agree on a common term for the diaries, however, since the socio-economic conditions vary to a substantial degree between different places and over time in Europe (Liljewall 1995:34).

normally consist of short records without any reflections. Most peasant diaries consist of short entries about the weather and work done at the farm, but they can also include accounts and annual reports of crop yields (Larsson 1992:7). The origin of the peasant diaries is due to the modern age where time and the individual had become salient concepts. There are, among others, two main sources of inspiration for this vernacular writing in Sweden: the Almanac published by the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences and the instructions from the authorities, conveyed at the agricultural schools (Storå 1985:83; Larsson 1992:8).¹¹

The Writing Practices of Linnéa Johansson's Songbooks

During the years 1931 to 1937, when she was 14–20 years old, Linnéa Johansson copied a total of 164 texts covering 288 hand-written pages in two songbooks. Popular songs dominate, which is no wonder, because the songbooks were written during “The Golden Age of Schlager” (popular music).¹² Other copied texts are spirituals and religious songs, temperance songs and poems from poetry albums. There are also quite a few diary entries at the end of the copied texts. They are frequently written in brackets, which perhaps indicates that diary entries diverge from the usual practice in songbooks. The copied texts are written in standard Swedish while Linnéa spoke a dialect that differed substantially lexically and syntactically.¹³ The act of copying is therefore also a practice in writing standard Swedish.¹⁴ Most of the texts are duplicated from her mother’s songbook, from journals or from the songbooks of her friends (Edlund A.-C. 2003:38f.; cf. Nordström 1995:16). A significant textual feature in Linnéa’s songbooks is that every single text ends with a closing signature composed of her autograph, the date, and often the location, too: “Linnéa Johansson, Stavsjö (the location) the 23 of August 1931.” This signature is a structural element in the songbook practice (Nordström 1995:17; Rehnberg 1967:216). Through the signing, the copied texts are

¹¹ The Almanac had a wide circulation in Sweden and is one of the most widely read books in older times, besides the Bible, the Catechism and the Hymn Book. By the end of the eighteenth century the circulation figures were as high as 300,000 (Melander 1999).

¹² See Strand 2003:91ff. for a presentation of the history of schlager music in Sweden.

¹³ See Dahlstedt & Ågren 1980 for a brief introduction to the dialect of Linnéa Johansson (the dialect of the province of Ångermanland).

¹⁴ Nowadays, this written standard Swedish has a similar spoken variety, mainly spoken on radio and television. But in the early 1900s the first encounter with the standard language was normally in school. Apart from learning how to write according to the standard norms, pupils were also introduced to a reading pronunciation (Teleman 2003:406). It has sometimes been referred to as “spoken Swedish by the book” (*boksvenska*) and could also be heard when people read printed texts aloud in church or at religious meetings (Widmark 1991; Edlund L.-E. 2013:364).



Linnéa on her confirmation day (July 1931) with her father and one of her elder sisters. Confirmation classes seem to have been the starting point for Linnéa's songbook practice.

connected to a certain person, a certain time and space – the texts are given both an individual and a deictic reference. Linnéa is not the sole participant in the songbook writing practice: her friends have also written down songs and some of them have only written their autograph.



The two songbooks of Linnéa Johansson.
Photo: Maria Sundström.

The Writing Practices of Linnéa Johansson's Diary

It seems that the regularly recurring literacy event of copying texts in the songbooks formed the basis for the subsequent diary writing of Linnéa Johansson. At the time she stopped writing in the songbook she began to jot down diary entries more regularly. This literacy practice was to continue throughout her life (Edlund A.-C. 2007; 2013). From the age of 17 to 25 she worked as a maid for 18 employers, both in agrarian and middle-class environments. Working as a maid in Sweden in the 1930s meant that one had to live in the employer's household, often sleeping in the kitchen, with no access to any private space.

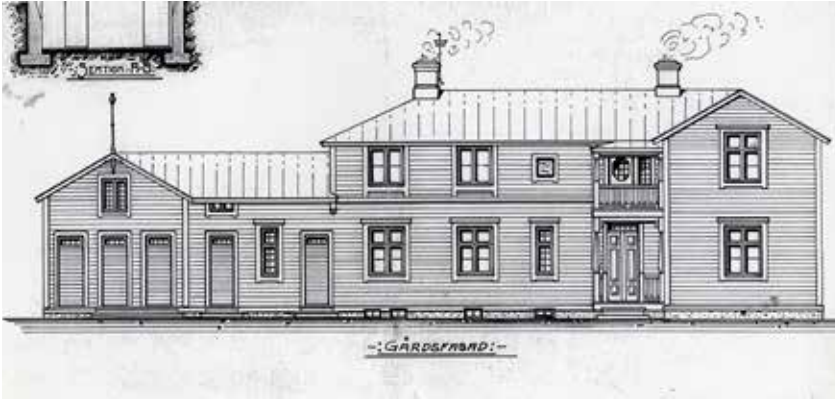
Unlike in the songbook practice, Linnéa Johansson is the sole writer in her diary. The entries are mainly short records of weather and work. The practice is a daily activity, and she also writes in her diary on several occasions in a single day (Edlund A.-C. 2007:192f.). She uses a pencil and small notebooks, which makes it easy to write at different locations within the household.

There is an interesting change in the focus of Linnea's diary practice. At first the activities at the farm are in the foreground, and the master of the farm seems to be the main character. Linnéa herself is barely visible. But when she leaves the agrarian environment and starts to work as a maid in a city in 1937, Linnéa turns into the protagonist. Now her chores, her spare



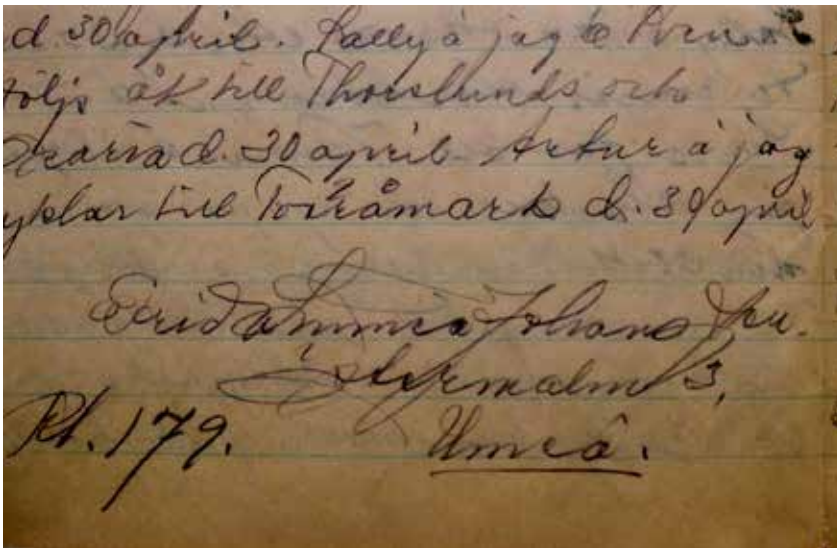
Linnéa Johansson's diaries, 1934–42. Photo: Maria Sundström.

time, her joys and sorrows are depicted in the diary. In this new and unfamiliar environment in which she feels alone and vulnerable, she initiates a literacy practice where she is more of a subject. Her middle-class employers rarely pay attention to her chores as long as she fulfils them, but in the diary notes they are highlighted, especially the regular housework of cleaning and washing up. On 14 March 1938, there is a list of all the textiles she washed up: 33 sheets, 80 towels, 29 napkins, 7 tablecloths, 50 handkerchiefs and 21 potholders. The diary also includes complaints about the hardship of her work. When Linnéa has hung the laundry, she writes that her hands hurt so much that she can barely use them (“så ont i mina händer så jag kan knappt ta i nånting”). The new turn in her writing practice also makes it possible for her to question her own social position (Edlund A.-C. 2007:229). On Christmas Eve 1937, she presents a list of the members of the household leaving for church, introducing them by their respective titles. The diary note ends with a short description of her own duties: “I stayed at home cleaning the sweat off my brow” (“jag var hemma och städa i mitt anletes svett”).



Linnéa Johansson worked as a maid in a bourgeois environment in the town of Umeå 1937–38. The plan shows the design of the building where Linnéa did the laundry. (Municipal archive of Umeå.)

There is a common structural element in Linnéa's songbooks and diaries: she repeatedly ends her entries with her autograph, date and location. There are at least 30 variations of her signature. During one period (1939–1940) Linnéa occasionally writes her last name as *Robertsson* rather than *Johansson*. She has explained that she longed for this change of name, but it was unthinkable as she has told me in an interview. Only in the diary can she assume the name of Linnéa Robertsson.



Linnéa Johansson's signature on 30 april 1938 includes her full name, the address in Umeå, and even the telephone number: Frida Linnéa Johanson, Östermalm 3, Umeå. Rt 179. (Photo: Maria Sundström)

L.J.
 L.J.s.
 L.J.s.n.
 L.Json.
 Linnéa J.-n.
 Linnéa J.
 Linnéa J.son
 Linnéa
 Linnéa Johansson
 Linnéa Johansson Flyn Hoting

Variations of the signature in the diary notes during 1934 when Linnéa Johansson is working as a maid in the village of Flyn in Hoting. The signature is mostly composed of her autograph, sometimes with the location added.

Although Linnéa Johansson's schooling was short, it is obvious from her writing that she learned the spelling norms of standard Swedish. She is a writer who is conscious of following the norms of the written language. There are some features in her writing that could be called non-standard, but they are marked graphically. For example, when the potato harvest is finished, she uses the dialect word "pären" for potatoes, placing it between quotation marks, instead of the standard form *potatisar*. This use of graphic notation for many of the dialect features indicates the fact that Linnéa is very aware of the standardised written language and has the ambition to comply with these norms in her diary writing.¹⁵

The Songbook, the Diary and the Self

The songbooks and diaries of Linnéa Johansson can be regarded as stable mobiles that provided a space for writing practices. The artefacts brought together her individual experiences and gave them a visible and permanent form – a stable form. The songbooks and diaries were mobile in the sense that they could easily travel with Linnéa when she was moving from one employer to another.

The writing practices in which the songbook and diary engage share the characteristics of vernacular literacy practices: they are self-generated and voluntary; it is Linnéa Johansson herself who has initiated them and she is performing them out of her own interest. The language in the diaries

¹⁵ Different studies show that ordinary people seem to strive to comply with the written norms in their writing (e.g. Edlund L.-E. 2005:331; Nordlund 2007).

is mostly standard written language; in this way the artefacts also provide a site where she can practice writing in the standard variety of Swedish. The most obvious difference between the two literacy practices with regard to identity issues is that there are participants other than Linnéa taking a vital part in the songbook practice – and hereby the songbooks are involved not only in subjective identity issues but also in social identity issues, such as establishing and strengthening social bonds.

In the songbook, collecting texts is a way of making sense of the world, like the commonplace books studied by Robert Darnton who sees collecting as “a semi-conscious process of ordering experience” (2009:169). The act of collecting texts may also be related to an idea of the modern self (Ternhag 2013). When compiling texts in a book of her own, Linnéa Johansson develops a sharper sense of herself as an autonomous individual.

In the diary, the moment’s fleeting experience is given a permanent form. The daily literacy event of writing in a diary gives continuity and constancy to the self – linking diary writing with identity. The diary practice also allowed Linnéa to acknowledge her professional activity as a maid. Furthermore it gave her a somewhat increased room for manoeuvre related to a private sphere and made it possible for her to challenge or question her employer’s social position. The diary practice also gave Linnéa a chance to explore and try out a new identity – how it would feel to bear the name of Robertsson. Only in the written space could she assume the name of Linnéa Robertsson.¹⁶

The autograph of Linnéa, repeatedly written in the two artefacts, is moreover a strong articulation of the self and a mark of individuality. The songbook and the diary both provided a space for biographical narratives where the self was articulated in different ways. One space for text collecting that was semi-official, and another space for diary entries that was more private. The artefacts also made it possible for Linnéa to act as a modern member of society in a textually mediated social world. To participate in these vernacular literacy practices is to change the meaning of the self (cf. Howard 2012:306). It can be assumed that the writing practices had a strengthening effect on the subjective identity of Linnéa.

Literacy Artefacts as Social Agents

I have illustrated the way literacy artefacts such as the songbook and the diary participated as social agents in the discursive construction of the modern self. My case study shows how these artefacts provided a space for

¹⁶ The use of different autographs and identity issues is also discussed in a study of a young boy’s writing in the late nineteenth century (Edlund L.-E. 2005:329).

writing practices and were related to the modern self in two distinct ways. Firstly, the artefacts are attributes for the members of modern society. Secondly, they enable a space where the notion of the modern self can be textually mediated.

To be a member of modern society requires both literacy skills and competences in standard language. Either formal or functional writing competence is required – i.e. either a more formal and passive competence for copying texts or a more functional and active competence that enables participation in different literacy practices (Liljewall 2013:33). In the specific Swedish social and cultural context, the songbooks and diaries provided a space where the competence in standard written language taught at school could be practised, since there was a large gap between the dialects spoken by the people and the Swedish standard written language. As attributes for the modern citizen, the artefacts demonstrated that the owner of the notebooks had the necessary skills for participating in writing practices. This applies especially to the songbook that took part in collaborative literacy practices. As attributes the artefacts enact the modern citizen in demonstrating the literacy and language skills of the owner.

The artefacts I have presented also enabled a space where the modern self could be textually mediated. When writing in the songbook and diary, the writer takes part in modernity. Furthermore the act of writing provides an opportunity for the writer to articulate and develop a notion of the modern self. The writer takes the position of an actor in a social world that is textually mediated – whether the act of writing consists of compiling texts in songbooks or producing daily diary entries that form a narrative about the passage of time. The artefacts connect different representations of the writer's world view, whether it is individual collection of texts in the songbooks, or daily diary notes of individual experiences. As stable mobiles the artefacts stabilise and reify the experiences of the writer by giving them a permanent form. The stable mobiles have the capacity to stabilise meaning – and therefore they also may have the capacity to articulate and stabilise the identity of the writer – or the self (Barton & Hamilton 2005:32). They also provide possibilities to explore alternative identity positions. One might say that there is a strong link between the act of writing and the evolving notion of the modern self for ordinary people (cf. Howard 2012:107). The writing practices are of course situated in both time and space, and their relation to the making of the modern self may vary in several respects depending on differing social and cultural contexts.

Conclusions

Vernacular literacy practices in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, in which the songbook and the peasant diary took part, gave an opportunity for ordinary people to participate in a textually mediated social world. These literacy practices, arising from the first stage of mass literacy, probably had a great impact on how ordinary people conceived of themselves. The songbook and diary both provided space for narratives of identity, whether it was the act of collecting texts or writing diary entries. The literacy artefacts were also attributes for the members of modern society which demonstrated the literacy skills of the owner of the artefacts. The songbook and the peasant diary can hence be regarded as participants in the discursive construction of the modern self.

Apart from the notion of the modern self, the literacy artefacts can also be said to reify different categories of social identity. I hope that this brief sketch of mine will further the study of the songbook and the ways it relates to the discursive construction of identity. For example, one can postulate that the practices of the songbook reify the social category of youth since there were mainly young people who engaged in this practice. Further discursive analysis of the texts in the songbooks will undoubtedly reveal their connections to different categories of social identity, such as age, gender, heteronormativity, religion, national and regional identity.

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ANNE HEIMO

Socialist Endeavors, Fist Presses and Pen Wars

Literacy Practices of Early Finnish Migrants in Australia

ABSTRACT. This article is about the short-lived history of Finnish socialist societies in Australia in the first decades of the twentieth century. At the same time, it tells of the first Finnish community in Australia, Finbury, and how the members of this small community represented their life on the pages of *Orpo* (Orphan) in their own words and for their own needs. *Orpo* was a hand-written and single copy newspaper published by the “Asiainedustusseura Erakko” (“The Hermit Society for the Promotion of Affairs”) from 1902 to 1904. The society was established to advance the cultural, intellectual and social wellbeing of all of the members of their small community. *Orpo* offers a rare opportunity to study both individual and collective experiences of settling into a new country from the point of view of the migrants themselves as well as the literacy practices of these early Finnish migrants.

KEYWORDS: New history from below, hand-written newspapers, literacy practices, socialism, migration, Finns, Australia

In 1997 a memorial was erected on Finland Road on the Sunshine Coast, Queensland to commemorate the centennial of Finnish migration to Australia. About 40 people of Finnish ancestry still live in the same area of the first Finnish community in Australia, Finbury. Some of these are the descendants of Edvin and Maria Andersson, who were amongst the 200 or so who left Finland at the turn of the twentieth century to seek their fortune in Queensland. Today the Anderssons like other early Finnish settlers in the area are considered local pioneers and remembered for their achievements in sugar cane farming, sports and life-saving activities. The Anderssons' granddaughter Anne Margoc is the former chair of the Bli Bli on Maroochy Historical Society.¹ Her paternal grandparents, the Suosaaris moved to Bli Bli in 1911. Both her grandfathers were keen socialists, and Anne remembers them squabbling over politics in her childhood. In 2013 she was handed a digital copy of the two volumes of the hand-written newspaper *Orpo* and Vilho Niitemaa's article, which includes the minutes of the Erakko society, which published the *Orpo*. Although Anne Margoc had all through her life heard about these and the people behind them as part of her family heritage, she had never taken into account that they still existed.

This article is about the short-lived history of Finnish socialist societies in Australia in the first decades of the twentieth century.² At the same time it tells of the first Finnish community in Australia, Finbury, and how the members of this small community represented their life on the pages of *Orpo* (*Orphan*) in their own words and for their own needs. *Orpo* was a hand-written and single copy newspaper published by the "Asiainedustusseura Erakko" ("The Hermit Society for the Promotion of Affairs") from 1902 to 1904. *Orpo* offers a rare opportunity to study both individual and collective experiences of settling into a new country from the point of view of the migrants themselves as well as the literacy practices of these early Finnish migrants.

In the second volume of *A Social History of Knowledge* Peter Burke cautions drawing a sharp distinction between the public and the private

¹ Bli Bli is a small locality by the Maroochy River near where Finbury (now abandoned) was situated. I have interviewed Anne Margoc and other first and second generation Finns in Australia mentioned in October 2013 as part of my project on memories of migration and family history of Finnish Australians funded by the Academy of Finland (2011–2014; Nr. 250307).

² This article is related to my study "Socialist endeavors underneath the Southern Cross. Literacy practices of early Finnish migrants in Australia", which is a part of a larger research project "Fragmented visions. Performance, authority and interaction in early twentieth-century Finnish oral-literary traditions" funded by the Academy of Finland (Nr. 2014–2017; 275378).

domains of communication. Although writing is commonly associated with the private sphere, it actually has very much to do with the semi-public sphere. Even intimate genres of writing like letters were commonly read aloud amongst family members or at meetings, and therefore Burke sees the letter as a hybrid genre, which mixes speech and writing. On the Internet this hybridity is even more apparent. Chatting or commenting on social media sites resembles colloquial speech although it is done in writing (Burke 2012:95). Folklorist Kirsti Salmi-Niklander also recognizes the resemblance between reading and writing practices, and refers to those expressive genres which comprise both of these as *oral-literary local tradition* (Salmi-Niklander 2013a:78). Her studies on hand-written newspapers, which combine oral communication with manuscript and print cultures, in Finland and in Finnish migrant communities exemplify this hybrid genre. (See e.g. Salmi-Niklander 2002; Salmi-Niklander 2004:9.)

Hand-written newspapers belong to what book historians call *post-Gutenberg scribal culture*. Scribal culture prospered in various parts of Europe for different reasons until the twentieth century, because it offered both a convenient way to express religious and political, even revolutionary, ideas as well as a means to educate and entertain (Salmi-Niklander 2013a:76). The history of hand-written newspapers in Finland is about a century long, from the 1850s to the 1950s. In the heyday of hand-written papers in Finland, the first decades of the twentieth century, they were produced in the hundreds. Hand-written newspapers were typically produced in small communities, who shared common objectives. The educated used hand-written newspapers as an alternative medium during times of censorship and political oppression. For the self-taught lower classes they offered a way to have their texts known to wider audiences. Student societies and popular movements found them a suitable means to introduce and discuss their ideas and especially for upper- and middle-class families hand-written newspapers were a part of their writing culture alongside letters and diaries (Salmi-Niklander 2013a:77–79; Salmi-Niklander 2013b). Thus it is no wonder that the early Finnish migrants in Australia also found the hand-written newspaper a convenient medium for discussion and self-expression in their new surroundings.

Throughout my research I have had an interest in so called ordinary people's history and the ways they themselves present it, and have therefore found Martyn Lyons's thoughts on "new history from below" very fruitful. With "new" Lyons wants to stress ordinary people as active historical agents and not only the objects of study as the "old" history from below did even if it strived to offer an alternative to conventional history (Lyons 2013:16–18). This is ever the more evident now in the digital era as people do history for

and by themselves and in their own terms on the Internet and social media side by side with history professionals (see e.g. Heimo 2014a; Heimo 2014b).

Early Finnish Migration to North America and Australia

The history of Finnish migration to Australia differs from migration to North America in several significant ways.³ Mass migration to North America began already in the 1870s, and by the 1920s over 300 000 Finns had migrated to the United States. (Kero 2014:42–43). At this stage migration to Australia was very little. It was only in the 1920s when the United States imposed a quota that Australia began to attract Finnish migrants and about two thousand Finns, mainly men, travelled to Australia (Koivukangas 1986:200; Institute of Migration, Statistics). In the United States Finns were not considered as “white” as Swedes or Norwegians, but were linked to Mongolians and American Indians (Kivisto & Leinonen 2014). In Australia the situation was quite the opposite, and Finns were favoured over many other Europeans, especially those originating from Eastern or Southern Europe, who were not considered “white” enough (Jupp 2007:11–12).⁴ All in all only some 24 000 Finns have migrated to Australia in the last hundred or so years, and it is estimated that there are now about 30 000 persons in Australia with Finnish ancestry, whereas in North America the number is much higher, over 700 000 (Statistics of the Institute of Migration).

Many of those who left Finland at the turn of the twentieth century

³ This difference has also had an effect on research. In both the United States and Canada as well as in Australia, Finns make up only a tiny portion of the population, and therefore the history of Finnish immigrants has aroused hardly any academic interest in these countries. In Finland the situation is different. There is an extensive amount of research on Finns in North America whereas there is much less research on Finns in Australia and most of it has been conducted by one historian, Olavi Koivukangas.

⁴ Australian migration history can be divided into three main phases. At Federation in 1901 White Australia Policy was the leading principle, and migration from Great Britain and Ireland was favored to ensure that Australia stayed Anglo-Celtic. In the 1930s assimilation became the main principle of migration policy. And it was only after the Second World War when the country desperately needed more workforces that Australia began taking migrants also from other European countries than Britain, but even then immigrants from certain countries were preferred over others. During 1947 to 1953 Australia took over 170 000 refugees, so called Displaced Persons, from East Europe and the Baltic countries. After this the Assisted Passage Scheme was used to draw especially Western-European and Nordic people, who were believed to be the most capable of adapting to life in Australia. At this point the ideal immigrant was considered to be of “Nordic descent and British culture, of rural background and enterprising character”. Finally in the 1970s assimilation was replaced by integration and multiculturalism was introduced as the new official policy of Australia in 1973 (Jupp 2007:11–12).

were active socialists who wanted to free themselves from czarist rule (Kostiainen 2014:132–135). Yet, the Finns in Australia never became as politically active as the “Red Finns” in the United States, who were notorious for their active role in left-wing politics and trade unions (see e.g. Kaunonen & Goings 2013:49–51; Kostiainen 2014). There are several reasons why these two migrant communities chose to follow different paths and this has more to do with the time of migration than with the number of Finns in these countries. Another reason why politics did not interest Finns in Australia was that most of those who migrated there in the early years of the twentieth century were labourers and farmers. The majority of them had little previous experience in politics, and they were more interested in finding work and earning money in hope of returning home to Finland than in getting politically organized. An additional reason was the effect of a certain few individuals on this small migrant community.

High Hopes and Bitter Disappointments

Before the late 1890s migration from Finland to Australia was minuscule. The first permanent Finnish settlement in Australia was founded at the turn of the twentieth century, when some 200 Finns migrated to Queensland, which was at the time recruiting migrants from Scandinavia. “Sturdy and hardworking Finn agriculturalists” were especially welcomed. (*The Sydney Mail* 14.10.1899). Among these were Matti Kurikka⁵ and 78 of his followers. Matti Kurikka (1863–1915) was a journalist, author and playwright and a well-known socialist and theosophist. Disappointed about the political situation in Finland, which was at the time under Russian rule, he decided to migrate to Queensland in 1899, which was then still a self-governing colony of Great Britain. There Kurikka planned to establish a socialist utopia “Kalevan kansa” (“People of Kaleva”). His plans attracted a lot of attention at the time and were followed by the press in Finland as well as in Queensland. (Niitemaa 1971:164–177.)

Kurikka arrived to Australia in high spirits, but soon discovered that suitable work was harder to find than what he had been promised by the migration officials of the Queensland Government. Kurikka was furious about the situation and regretted ever coming to Queensland. He wrote a letter full of resentment to *The Worker* (28.7.1900):

⁵ See Heimo et al. 2015; Kurikka’s attempts to establish socialist utopias in Canada are quite well-known, but his first attempt to found one in Australia is not, though it has been studied by historians Olavi Koivukangas, Vilho Niitemaa and Bill Metcalf, and the Australian author Craig Cormick has even written a novel, *Kurikka’s Dreaming* (2000), about it.

– I have now been here eight months. What did I find here: Disappointments, only disappointments! – Meanwhile I collected some experiences of a worker. I learnt to know that the labourers in Queensland – there are of course exceptions – are too drunk, too vulgar, and too full of hate against all foreigners that are as sober, friendly and honest as the Finns, to think that they could become equals with them striving for the same holy ideals – My friendly hope is only that the people of Queensland will rise to the same level of civilization as the other cultured peoples of the world.

Two months later after his bitter outburst Kurikka decided to leave Queensland for good and continued his journey to Canada. There he and some of his followers first founded a utopian island colony “Sointula” on Malcolm Island, British Columbia in 1901 and another called “Sammon Takojat” (“Forgers of Sampo”) in 1905 near Vancouver (Niitemaa 1971:185–187; Koivukangas 1986:91–93). According to Australian historian Bill Metcalf (1995:31–32) Kurikka blamed everyone but himself for not succeeding in his plans to establish a utopia and found a home for thousands of Finns in Queensland, when the actual cause was that he was a poor leader and as a man of the pen he, like most of his followers, was not accustomed to hard labor.

Alone and Abandoned under the Southern Cross

Not all of Kurikka’s supporters followed him to Canada; some remained in Queensland and moved to Image Flats, Nambour, where a few Finnish families had settled some years before to grow sugar cane. In December 1902 the population of this small Finnish community of Finbury was 19 Finnish men, 11 women, 25 children and 12 Finnish-Swedes (a total of 67 people). All in all the author “Tolonen” estimates that the population of Finns in Queensland at the time was about one hundred (*Orpo* 1903:2).

In June 1902 ten or so of Kurikka’s former supporters saw that it would be important for the community in Finbury to have a society of their own and founded “Asiainedustusseura Erakko” (“The Hermit Society for the Promotion of Affairs”). At the society’s first meeting they decided, that:

The purpose of this Society is to gather the Finns of Finbury for joint activities for the improvement of their intellectual and social conditions and the advancement of their material livelihood. The Society shall refrain however from adopting any manifesto, its purpose being to pursue such questions as shall concern improvements within the frame of the existing order. (Minutes of the Erakko society 30.6.1902; transl. Koivukangas 1986:303.)

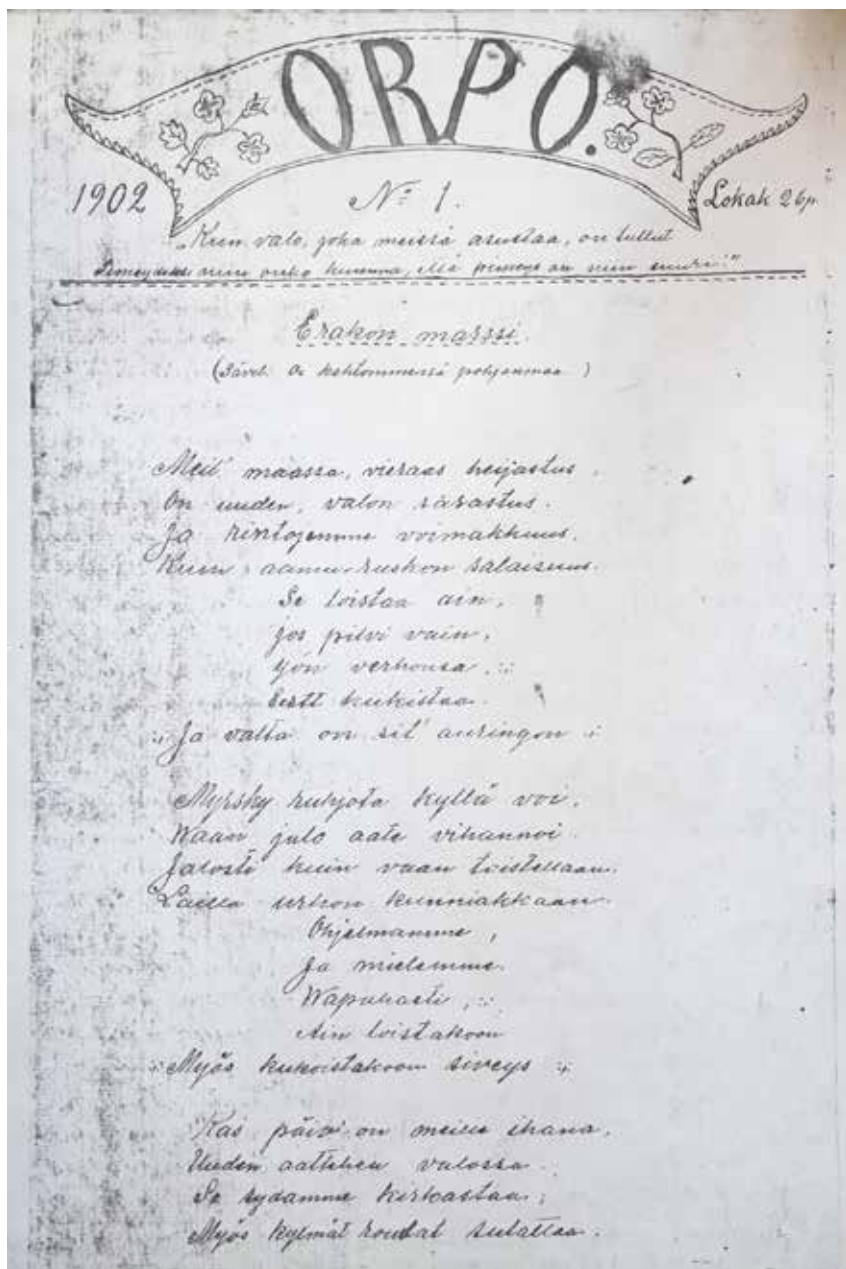


About a third of the school children at Highworth School in Nambour in 1905 came from Finnish families. Five of these were children of the Anderson family. (Photo: Institute of Migration.)

The minutes of the society also show that the members were constantly discussing and arguing over how and what they should do to advance the welfare of their small community. They planned, for instance, to improve local working conditions, transport and postal services and to start a temperance organization and a Finnish school for the children. The society also organized plays, festivities and other free time activities.

Nearly all the adult members of the small community joined the society, almost thirty people of whom one third were women (Niitemaa 1971:189). Even though the members represented very different, even contradictory views from one another – some were politically active, some were not; some were religious, some atheists; some were keen drinkers and some supporters of the temperance movement – the founders wanted to keep the objective of the society as open as possible and to support the cultural, intellectual and social well-being of all the members of their small community (Orpo 1904:9).

In addition to meetings and social events the Erakko society published *Orpo*. The newspaper, like the society, was named to illustrate the feelings of the small community, which felt somewhat isolated, lonely and abandoned in a foreign country and culture. The names aroused heated discussion for and against and were written about many times. Nonetheless, the newspaper demonstrates that the community was in interaction with the larger surrounding community and with other people living in the same



The cover page of the first number of Orpo (Photo: Institute of Migration).

area. The programmes of the Erakko society's festivities and other activities were frequently published, and sometimes also reviewed, in *Orpo*. These show that the Finns had contacts with others to the extent that some parts of the program were presented also or only in English, like Words of Welcome, poems and songs. Also inviting their English speaking neighbors to these events was discussed every now and then (*Orpo* 1903:8; *Orpo* 1904:7). A few of the Finnish men had foreign wives, which was sometimes scorned by other men (*Orpo* 1903:2; *Orpo* 1903:10).

Orpo, a Collective Enterprise

Orpo was published from 1902 until the Erakko society broke up in 1904. All of the numbers were written by hand and read aloud at the society's meetings, and soon the reading aloud became one of the main activities at these meetings. In this way those who did not participate in the actual writing also took part in what Margaret Ezell calls *the process of textual sociability* (Ezell 1999:39–40).

During these two and a half years all in all 26 numbers, and one special Christmas number, were published, each number consisting of 8 or 16 pages. During the first year the paper was published 16 times and according to the editorial board "87 texts, 17 poems, news and even a few advertisements" were published in its pages by 13 different people (*Orpo* 1903:11). In addition to lengthy, often three to four page long, ideological writings on socialism, trade-unions and women's rights, the paper also published news, letters, prose, poems, humorous stories, debates and critiques. Many of the entries were satires or parodies, or ironic in style, which is a common means in handwritten papers to handle both internal matters of small communities and wider political and moral issues (Salmi-Niklander 2013b:404–405).

In the beginning the editorial board consisted of three men, who were all followers of Kurikka, Johan Peurala, Adolph Lundan and Johannes Kotkamies. In addition to writing their own stories, the editors were expected to copy the writings of others literally and without correcting the language or misspellings even that it meant that some of the writings were poorer than the editors strived for. Therefore the editorial board was not always content with the quality of the texts, but the practice was defended, because the society wanted to keep the published writings as "authentic" as possible (e.g. *Orpo* 1903:11). This practice was exceptional compared to many other hand-written newspapers, which usually edited the texts that they received (Salmi-Niklander 2013b:402). The editorial board would have wished to publish more intellectual and ideological writings, and accused the members of not being committed enough to their cause. The authors came from different social classes, which also caused some strains between

them. For instance one frequent writer, “Tolonen”, complained in his column that one of the editors, who himself wore a tailcoat and bowler hat, had laughed at his simple and coarse trousers (*Orpo* 1903:11).



Sugar cane workers at Axel Rönnlund's farm. Johan Peurala, one of the editors of *Orpo*, in the front. (Photo: Institute of Migration.)

All of the members of the society were welcomed to write in the newspaper, but not all of them did. For some authors it was their ever first opportunity to have their texts published. For example “dan”,⁶ the author of the only science fiction short story published in *Orpo*, describes how nervous he felt about writing although the editors of the paper had been supportive. It seems that his story “Ilmapallolla Marsiin” (“To Mars by Balloon”) was first read aloud at the society’s meeting and only afterwards published in the newspaper, because in addition to his short story, a critique of the story as well as “dan’s” reply were also published in the same number. In his critique “Man, you are a liar!” “Liinus”, who was later chair of the Erakko-society and an editor, denounces the whole story as absurd and lacking all logic. In his reply “dan” defends his story, but also comments on his feelings about the reception of his story, and how relieved he felt after seeing how people enjoyed the story when it was read aloud at the meeting (*Orpo* 1902:3).

⁶ The original is in lower-case.

⁷ dan’s story is a rare example of Finnish space science-fiction and was published in the journal of the Finnish science-fiction society in 2015. (See Heimo & Koponen 2015.)

Although the society promoted women's rights, this did not mean that women were always treated appropriately. The harassment of women by drunkards and the way women are addressed and mocked in public were discussed several times in *Orpo*. Male authors also accused women of not being active enough in the society or the newspaper. In February 1903 Anjaliisa Töppönen promises to begin writing, if in the future women are also allowed to take the floor and are listened to at the meetings of the Erakko society (*Orpo* 1903:2). This seems to have worked, because in his review one of the editors, Johan Peurala states “[At the society’s annual meeting] two new people joined the newspaper. One of these is a woman, which means greater tactfulness is added to its former manly stiffness. This has resulted in a woman also expressing her thoughts in *Orpo*” (*Orpo* 1903:16; transl. by author).

Because most members of the society or the community did not read or speak English, the paper provided an important window not only onto the surrounding society, but also on global events and current issues, wars, politics (e.g. attempts to assassinate the Czar of Russia, gossip concerning royalty). The editors preferred to use international newspapers as sources, though these papers tended to focus on war as the editors complained. News was copied and translated when necessary from Finnish, Australian and other newspapers, e.g. *Työmies*, *The Worker* and *The New York Herald*. The local newspaper *Nambour Chronicle* was considered too sectional and “too fixated on ball games” (*Orpo* 1904:5) and therefore not favoured.

The promoting of socialist ideology was the main goal of the newspaper, but the minutes of the society show that it was aware of the newspaper's role as the documenter of the history of the first Finnish settlement in Australia. This was also the reason why the paper was read at the meetings and not lent to the members to read at home, where it might have got lost or damaged (*Orpo* 1904:7). In spite of this acknowledged role of historical documenter very few of the texts were about local affairs or conditions. In some cases it is difficult to be sure whether the authors are referring to local events or writing about Finland, because they frequently use Finnish terms like “torppari” (crofter) and place names were either translated into Finnish or referred to by Finnish substitutes, like “Etukylä”, “Keskikylä”, “Peräkylä” or “Sydänmaa”.

Kirsti Salmi-Niklander (2013a:84; 2013b:406) identifies the *local event narrative* as a typical genre of hand-written papers. A local event narrative consists of a description of an event in a local community – an excursion, a meeting, a social evening or a festival – which often has only current interest. However in *Orpo* there are very few if any of these. J. O. Peurala's story tells about six men – presumably Matti Kurikka and his followers – in

Mareeba, who needed a place to sleep and some of them end up sleeping in a pigsty (*Orpo* 1903:7). There are also some texts that are about local events but these are better defined as gossip or critiques. The only piece that actually describes local life is a description of a typical Saturday evening in Nambour written originally in Finnish by "Salo":

Saturday Night in Nambour, August 1903

A pale moon shines in the cloudless sky. The stars wink their eyes like a maiden, who has just met her loved one. A train whistles in the North, and a moment later it already gallops on the bridge. Here, there a man sways, otherwise it is silent as in a grave on the street.

Clap, clap, clap say the saddle and hoofs of a horse or two. Now also a cart goes by. Idle men in their Sunday suits get together in Central Nambour, but neither do the girls want to stay at home. And who would since there will be a dance, only a dance and nothing else tonight!

It is 8 o'clock. The Salvation Army in the middle of street prays. Negroes have joined them. Men move from one hotel to another, some play pool. Some dance, some tiptoe, the shopkeepers do "business".

There on the bench sits a group discussing the future of Nambour. From two newspapers (*The Chronicle*) about the selling of Mitchell's and King's land and how the cattle king will get them, also about the new dairy and that the policeman will become a "farmer" in a year's time. It is 9 o'clock and the train whistles in the South, I rush to the station like everyone else. The train arrives in full speed. Lots of hustle and bustle...!

A pale moon shines in the cloudless sky. The stars wink their eyes. The wind blows, and a drunken man nearly falls down while at another place the wind gently touches the hems of skirts and coats. Loose paper... (*Orpo* 16.8.1903; transl. by author.)

Christmas Cheers Turn Sour

In November 1903 the editorial board suggested that because compared to Finland Christmas was so pathetic in Australia, they should publish a special Christmas number to cheer everyone up. The special edition would consist only of prose, poems, and fairy tales and it would be lent to all of the members of the community to read at home. As it turned out, however, instead of circulating for two weeks from house to house, the paper circulated for seven weeks and only at the homes of a few members. After this experience the editors were even more against the borrowing of the newspaper than before. After the society voted for the circulating of the paper in June 1904, the editorial board resigned. The last entry is dated November 5th 1904.

Though the society was open for all, its members continuously had disputes with each other and with non-members of the society. The official

reason for closing the society mentioned in its records was that the members did not show sufficient commitment to the society's objectives, but there were other reasons too. Some of these had to do with personal matters and some with the co-ownership of land (Niitemaa 1971:190–194). In the end the small society had even divided into two parties, the Finnish nationalists (“Tvedis Finnit”) and the Socialists (“Suomalaiset”, The Finns) (*Orpo* 1904:7). Though the members were former followers of Matti Kurikka, the “Tvedis Finns” had lost faith in him and his ideas, and refused to take part in anything to do with their former leader, whereas the Socialists (Finns) decided to join Kurikka and leave for Canada. In the final number of *Orpo* one of the socialists, William H. Koskinen, wrote about his journey over the Pacific in length. He expresses much sorrow about leaving Finbury and his parents and brother there, but gives no explanation why he is leaving nor his destination: “Oh, is it now, that I have to leave Queensland forever? Farewell. Oh, you children of Finland grow in the cradle of Finbury” (1904:9, transl. by author). For some reason the editors, who must know where Koskinen is heading, present themselves as ignorant and state, that “the story might tell about a journey from Australia to America”. Perhaps they felt that he had deserted them and their cause?

A few years later in 1907 when the Finns’ seven-year land leases expired the rest of the Finns also left Finbury. Some of them moved to America and a few even returned to Finland. A small number of them moved nearby to Bli Bli, where the land was more suitable for farming sugar cane.

After the disbandment of the society one of the editors, Johan Peurala, took the two volumes of *Orpo* and the minutes of the Erakko society with him to Sointula, Malcolm Island. It is unclear what happened to the volumes of *Orpo* after this, but it seems that they were forgotten about for decades. In the 1970s they were found by chance and donated to the Institute of Migration in Turku in 1976. The papers of the Erakko society were also kept at Sointula until they too were handed over to the Collections of General History at the University of Turku in the same year (Koivukangas 1986:308).

The New Agenda: Sports, not Politics

After the Erakko society and *Orpo* were closed down in 1904, some people suggested that a new society better suited for the whole of the community needed to be founded (*Orpo* 1904:9). But it took nearly 10 years until the “Queenslandin Suomen Heimion Seura” (“Finnish National Society of Queensland”) was established in Brisbane in 1914. Some of the founding members were former members of the Erakko society. The aim of this new society was the overall mental and material improvement of the Finns. In the beginning it held back from all ideological issues, but in 1916 the members voted that the

society should be changed into a Labour Club and the plan was to follow the model of the Finnish-American Socialist Society. After the conversion into a labour club, the society was very active and made contacts with Australian and Russian socialists in Australia (Koivukangas 1986:308–310).

However in 1922 a new stage began in the history of the society. After the 1918 Finnish Civil a few dozen former Whites from Ostrobothnia moved to Australia instead of North America, where many of Finnish-Americans were on the Red side. Most of these men were single, came from the same rural area and worked at sugar cane farms in Northern Queensland for some years in order to save money to buy their own farm in Finland (Koivukangas 1986:118–125). Some of them like Nestori Karhula moved later on to Brisbane, where he became an active member of the Finnish community. Though Karhula was a former officer of the White Finnish army, he believed that it was more important to build trust between the former Whites and Reds than to sustain reservations between the former enemies, and decided that the society should focus on social and leisure activities and not political ones. This meant that in 1925 the Finnish National Society of Queensland moved back to its former nonpartisan stance and finally fused together with a new club, The Suomi Athletic Club, led by Nestori Karhula (Koivukangas 1986:114–118, 310–311). In 1927 the Suomi Athletic Club became the Brisbane Finnish Society, and at the same time the first Finnish Society in Australia. (<http://brisbanesuomiseura.blogspot.fi/>)

Later on as the Finnish population grew, Finns began to establish Finnish societies in all of the major cities and towns. There are still about 15 Finnish societies left and many other clubs and associations around in Australia. Today Finns also meet on the Internet (see e.g. <http://www.dundernews.com/>),



The Bli Bli on Maroochy Historical Society Inc. Facebook page with a picture of Anne Margoc's parents in the 1920s. (Screenshot 13 04 2016.)

and have several Facebook groups to keep in touch with each other. An interesting feature is that Finns continue to use Finnish on these sites, whereas e.g. Lithuanians and Latvian webpages and social media sites are usually bilingual and the Estonian ones are in English. This is probably to do with the fact that migration from these countries happened earlier and in greater numbers than Finnish migration to Australia.⁸

A Century of Literacy Practices Down Under

Over a decade after the closing of *Orpo* the *Suomi Newspaper* was established in Melbourne in 1926 as an information and news bulletin for the Finns living around Australia and New Zealand. Today it is one of the oldest Finnish language newspapers published outside Finland. Although it has always been printed the *Suomi Newspaper* resembles *Orpo* in many ways. It is a collective enterprise of the Finnish community scattered around Australia. Like *Orpo* it consists of news, letters, prose, poems, humorous stories, debates and critiques, most of which are written by members of the community and only some by the editor-in-chief, and like *Orpo* it also republishes news from other sources.

In the 1970s Finns began to write about their lives in Australia in the local Finnish-language press, *Suomi Newspaper* and *Finlandia News*, and to publish memoirs. Most of these if not all were written in Finnish and directed to the Finnish community in Australia as well as family members in Australia and Finland. However in her study of a hundred or so Finnish-Australian authors Marja-Liisa Punta-Saastamoinen (2010:283–284) noticed that Finnish-Australian literacy has aroused very little interest, and only a few of the authors are known even to the wider community of Finnish readers in Australia. Since the turn of the millennium a few Finnish-Australians have begun to make the efforts of individual Finns and the Finnish community known to the wider Australian audience, and for this reason have published their books in English. One of these authors is Satu Beverley, who moved to Australia in 1970 and has since written two histories of the Finnish Sydney Society (Beverley 1979; Beverley 2011). She is currently writing the history of Finnish societies in Australia beginning with the Erakko Society and the society's hand-written newspaper *Orpo*.

⁸ The “Beautiful Balts” were the first group of Displaced Persons to arrive in 1947 to Australia. These first arrivals were carefully selected to ensure that the Australian public would support Minister for Immigration Arthur Calwell’s mass migration program. After the arrival of these first “Beautiful Balts” all non-British arrivals were referred to as “Balts” irrespective of their nationality for some years (Pennay 2010).

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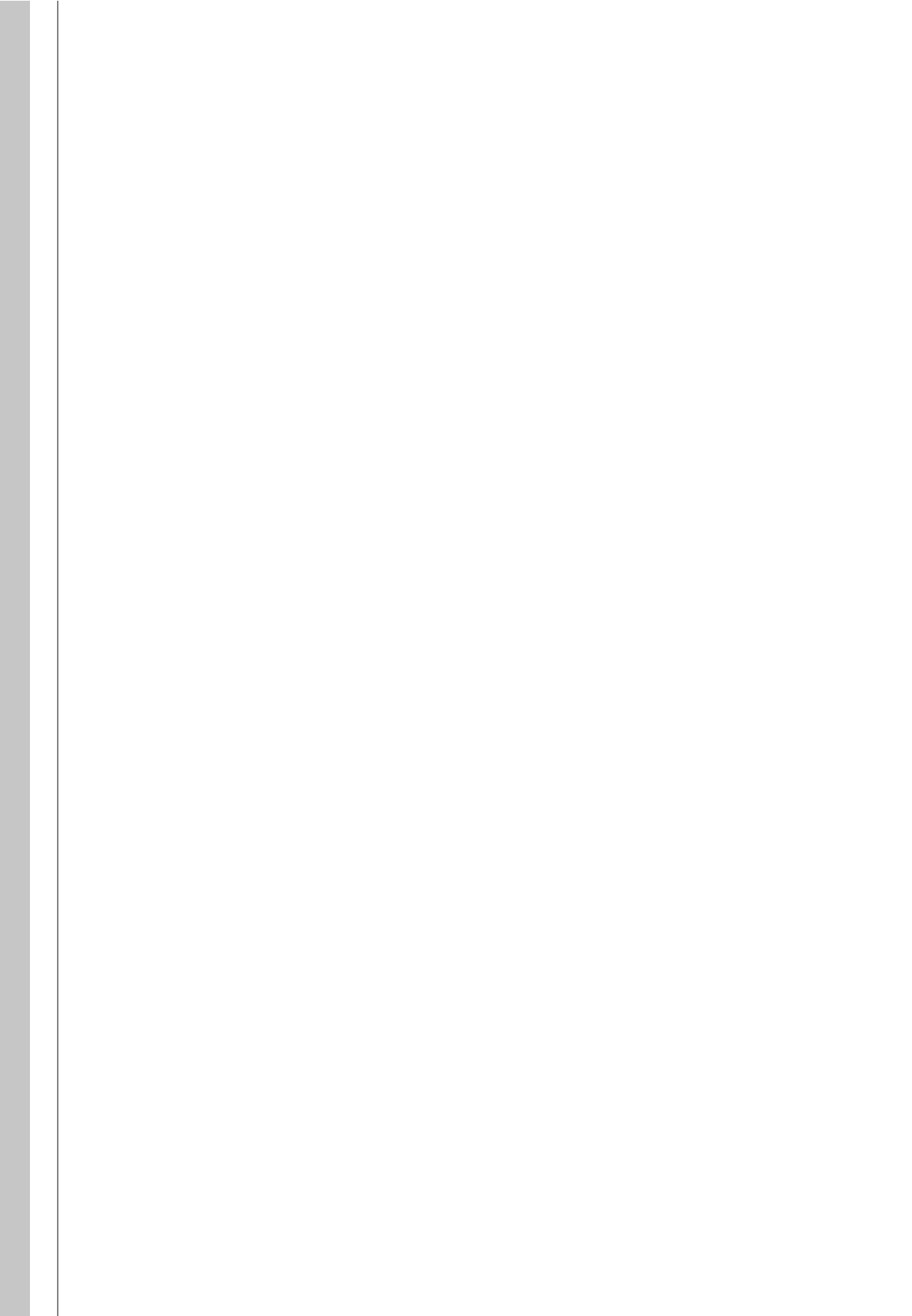
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EMESE ILYEFALVI

”When you have read my letter, pass it on!”

A Special Means of Communication by a Calvinist Minister Between the Two World Wars in Transylvania

ABSTRACT. Dezső Bonczidai (1902–1946) was a Calvinist minister in Kide (Chidea, Romania) between 1928 and 1946. From 1932 to 1935 he wrote regularly – every week or every two weeks – a hand-written newspaper of eight pages to the members of his congregation. This newspaper was called *A Pastoral Letter*. Such a form of communication was unique in Transylvania and also in Hungary at that time, because no similar pastoral activity has been found. The village was very small, consisting only of two streets, with 388 Calvinist believers; and although all of the people had daily connections, the minister chose a new form of communication. The paper examines this particular activity and the text-corpus in the contexts of the Transylvanian Calvinist Home Mission and the status of Hungarians in Transylvania after the Trianon Peace Treaty. The study analyses the author of the texts, his motivations, the ways these were realized in practice, and those settings and expectations in which this mixed genre was born: a newspaper written in the form of a letter. In addition it examines the attitude of the villagers to this new kind of communication, which made its contribution to the Transylvanian rural writing and reading culture.

KEYWORDS: handwritten newspaper, public letter, Calvinist religious communication, conversational community, reading habits from below, Transylvania

Dear Brother, when you read these lines, do not be afraid and do not turn away from it, because it is not a new tax book or a subscription list, which I want to test your wallet and patience with. No! This is only a letter, which I, your minister write to you with a brotherly heart, with brotherly love. From now on, every second week I will contact you with such pastoral letters, and I only ask you to accept them, and after you have read them, give them to others, so they can read them too. With these letters I do not want to disturb you, or give you a hard time, but I want to approach you with brotherly heart and love, as your minister. (*Pastoral Letter* No. 1.)

This paper is about Dezső Bonczidai, who lived from 1902 until 1946 and who was a Calvinist minister in Kide (Chidea, România) between 1928 and 1946. From 1932 to 1935 he wrote regularly – every week or every two weeks – a hand-written newspaper of eight pages to the members of his congregation. This newspaper was called *A Pastoral Letter*. This form of communication was unique in Transylvania and also in Hungary at that time, because no similar pastoral activity has been found. The village was very small, consisting only of two streets, with 388 Calvinist believers; and although all the people had daily connections, the minister chose a new form of communication.

In my paper, I will examine this particular activity and the text-corpus in the context of the Transylvanian Calvinist Home Mission and the status of Hungarians in Transylvania after the Trianon Peace Treaty. The study aims to analyze this literary practice as a social practice connecting it to research which argues that the socio-cultural context of literacy gives the meaning of reading and writing activities (Barton 1991; Besnier 1995:14; Lyons 2013). The case study also provides new material for understand reading and writing practices from below in the early twentieth century in Transylvania. My core questions are: Why did Dezső Bonczidai write these letters? How did he put them into practice? What kind of texts and genres can be found in his letters? What were the reactions of the villagers?

Sources

I found the first letter in the village, Kide, which was introduced to me by one of my main informants. After that I started to collect these *Pastoral Letters* and I managed to find 107 letters altogether, but of these only 40 are different. It means that there are letters which have survived in several copies. The letters are from three sources: I found 24 in the village of Kide from four different local people; then I found 22 further letters in the Transylvanian Calvinist Church District Archive in the city of Kolozsvár (to-

day: Cluj-Napoca, România);¹ but most of the *Pastoral Letters*, 61 in number, were found in the town of Székelyudvarhely (Odorheiu Secuiesc, România), which are owned by Dezső Bonczidai's distant relatives. To imagine the volume of these 40 different letters, they are approximately 150 pages transcribed into a WordDoc text file with single spacing.²

For this research, besides the letters, I also used supplementary and control sources to understand the historical and social context of this letter writing activity. The two main sources were the documents on Kide in that period from the Archive of the Transylvanian Calvinist Church District,³ and the *Minutes of the Kide Presbytery* which are still kept in Kide, in the Calvinist parish.

In addition, I have also conducted ethnographic fieldwork in Kide since 2007. Specifically in relation to this research, I made semi-structured interviews about Dezső Bonczidai and the Calvinist religious life in that period, in the summers of 2009, 2010 and 2012. During these interviews I talked to nine locals who knew the minister personally and to three further people who have knowledge of Bonczidai from the local oral traditions.⁴ I also interviewed Dezső Bonczidai's nephew, called Lajos Bóné, who was also a Calvinist minister in Kide for twenty-two years between 1952 and 1974.⁵

Dezső Bonczidai

Since the author, the creator of the texts is the minister, Dezső Bonczidai, we have to examine him in order to understand the primary context of the letters. I will take a look at his brief biography, his role in the village, and his motivations.⁶ Dezső Bonczidai attended school in Transylvania. When the

¹ Letters with No. 2–23 and posters advertising religious and foreign mission soirée, from the parcel *Kide község vegyes ügyei* [Miscellaneous issues of Kide] (1927–1946) in the Erdélyi Református Egyházkerület Levéltára [Archives of the Transylvanian Calvinist Diocese] (hereafter: EREL) in the Kolozsvári Egyházmegye Levéltára [Archives of the Diocese of Kolozsvár] (hereafter: KEL)

² For the literal transcripts of all the *Pastoral Letters* see: Ilyefalvi 2012:75–141. All quotations from the letters are my translations from the original Hungarian.

³ EREL KEL *Kide község vegyes ügyei* [Miscellaneous issues of Kide] (1927–1946), EREL KEL Vízitációs Jegyzőkönyv 1913–1952; EREL KEL Belmissziói jelentések, 1927, 1940–1946.

⁴ A. F. (85-year-old, male, Calvinist); B. B. (86-year-old, female, Unitarian); Cs. I. (85-year-old, female, Calvinist); J. L. (89-year-old, female, Calvinist); J. M. (82-year-old, female, Calvinist); L. V. (86-year-old, female, gr. Catholic, Romanian); N. I. (82-year-old, female, Calvinist); B. E. (87-year-old, male, Calvinist); Sz. Á. (70-year-old, male, Calvinist). See all of the transcribed interviews in Ilyefalvi 2012:181–214.

⁵ Collected: 17–8 July 2009. B. L. (= Bóné Lajos, 1928–2010.) For the parts of the interview about Dezső Bonczidai see Ilyefalvi 2012:205–214.

⁶ See Barton 1991:9 on the importance of roles and networks in literacy practices.

Trianon Peace Treaty was concluded in 1919, he was seventeen years old. He attended the Calvinist Theological College⁷ in Cluj-Napoca between 1922 and 1926, when he graduated. He never studied abroad. After the university he ministered in four places in Transylvania as an assistant minister. At his last post, in a small town called Szék (Sic, România), he met Sára Ajtai, a Calvinist teacher, and they got married. They did not have children of their own, but they raised an orphan boy from the streets of Bucharest.

Dezső Bonczidai and his wife went to work in Kide in 1928, when the bishop, Sándor Makkai appointed him as a deputy minister of Kide. Kide was not a very easy parish at that time. This can be seen from the very frequent changing (coming and going) of the ministers. The previous ministers in Kide (and the Catholic priests also) stayed only for one or two years, and after that they requested their relocation.⁸ Kide was a poor, dead-end village, the only village with a Hungarian majority within the nearby region (H. Csukás & Kecskés 1997). After Bonczidai arrived, he wrote a confidential letter to the dean, in which he described his initial situation.⁹ The congregation was not welcoming, because the minister had been appointed in Kide without asking their will or opinion, which was unusual. In this letter can be read all the problems that the young minister and his wife had to cope with. Firstly, the congregation was poor, and hence had difficulties with paying the minister's salary and the congregational tax. Secondly, the Calvinist school in Kide was threatened constantly by the Romanian government.¹⁰ Thirdly, there were difficulties in looking after the daughter churches of Kide (in neighbouring villages often difficult to reach), which was also among Bonczidai's responsibilities.¹¹ And finally, the stubborn, conservative and passive nature of the members of the Kide Congregation. Despite all of these difficulties, after Bonczidai arrived in Kide he immediately started his very active ministry. For example, according to *The Minutes of the Kide*

⁷ Today: Protestant Theological Institute of Cluj.

⁸ *Pastoral Letter* (hereafter: PL.) No. 18. (with the listing of the Calvinist minister of Kide); EREL KEL Kide község vegyes ügyei. Bonczidai Dezső: *Ref. papok életrajzi adatai*. Transcribed in Ilyefalvi 2012:144–154. The situation was the same with the Catholic priests, which was sensitively depicted by József Nyírő in his novel *Isten igájában* [God's yoke] (which is partly about Kide): Nyírő 1990:174–175.

⁹ EREL KEL Kide község vegyes ügyei. 562/1928. See the entire letter in Ilyefalvi 2012:158–159.

¹⁰ For more about the situation of the Transylvanian Hungarian religious schools after the Trianon Peace Treaty see Boldizsár Zeyk 2011:39–44; Mikó 1998:116–122.

¹¹ In that period Kide Calvinist Congregation had many daughter churches, where Bonczidai had to hold the services and perform other tasks too: to bury, to baptize, to teach children, to maintain the churches and so on.

Presbytery, in the same year, he established the *Kide Calvinist Women's Association*.¹²

Nevertheless Bonczidai did not have an easy start in Kide, and if one reads his formal letters in the archive, his letters with the dean or other people from the church leadership, one can see that he also wanted to go away from Kide; he asked for it and tried it several times, but he could not manage to do so. From the time when he started to write his *Pastoral Letters* to the congregation in 1932 there also are documents showing that he wanted to leave Kide, even if he remained without a job. But the congregation started to get used to Bonczidai and in 1934 the congregation itself invited him to be their normal minister, not just a deputy, as he had been until then.¹³ (See figure 1.)



Figure 1. Minister Dezső Bonczidai (middle, seated row) with the Church Elders of Kide, 1930s.

Pastoral Letters

After the description of the background it is time to take a closer look at the *Pastoral Letters* themselves and to examine how this system of correspondence worked. Starting on 16th of October in 1932, Dezső Bonczidai wrote his *Pastoral Letter* to the congregation for three years regularly – which meant

¹² KRE Pj. 1928. augusztus 12.

¹³ EREL KEL Kidei egyházközség vegyes ügyei 92/1934.

every week or every second week. Generally each letter was eight-pages long. He made the copies with a hectograph machine. (See figure 2.) Using this technique he also made posters to advertise the meetings and events of the Calvinist congregation. (See figures 3–4.) Usually a group of four or five neighbouring families received one copy, and they had to share it among themselves. One family read it and then, when they had finished reading it, they had to pass it on to another family within their group. The title of this paper comes from here, because Bonczidai always finished his letters with this sentence: “When you have read my letter, pass it on!”, and then he listed the names of those particular families. The letters have serial numbers till issue 35, but there were also a few out of turn letters on urgent topics.¹⁴

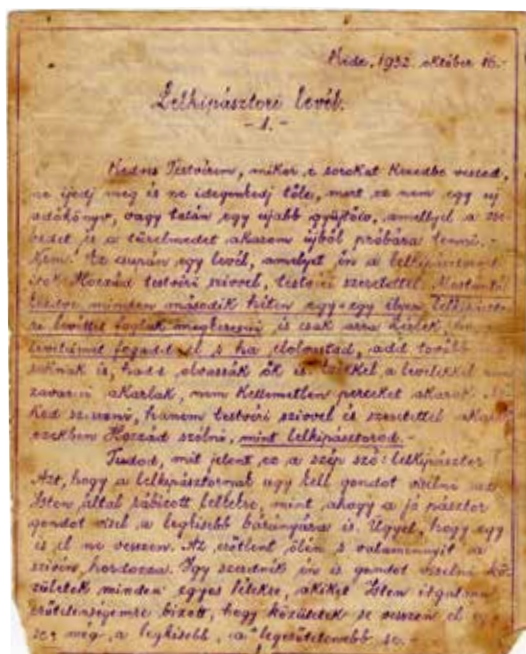


Figure 2. Pastoral Letter No.1.
Kide, 16.10.1932, p. 1.

¹⁴ From the letters without numbers the one dated 14th October 1934 asks the congregation to pay the Church tax immediately, the one dated 28th October 1934 communicated urgent news, the letter sent on 15th January was about the money box offering for the orphanage and encouraged the villagers to further efforts. The letter dated 10th December 1935 was for the young people from Kide who were in Kolozsvár, as servants, valets and craftsmen. It gave them advice and told them the addresses of “other young brothers” and encouraged them to stick together in the city. There is a text from 1942, dated but without a number, which is also called *Pastoral Letter*, but is written with a typewriter. At this time the letters were not regular, they were written only to reflect on an actual problem, for example to counter the attacks against the Calvinist school.



Figure 3 & 4. Poster 1 and 2 Advertising Foreign Mission evenings in Kide.



So far the letters number 27, 29 and 33 have not been found, but it can be concluded that his intensive letter writing lasted from 1932 to 1935.

Functions and Topics of the Pastoral Letters

Dezső Bonczidai's letters kept the connection with local oral traditions and everyday life, because they were about Kide and they were addressed to its people; but at the same time pieces of religious and historical literature were also incorporated in the texts. The minister gave these letters multiple functions. They were a new channel of communication; a way of reporting news, giving information, circulating notices; they helped in the preservation of the past (for example with local narratives); but they also functioned as a way of preaching and evangelisation. In total they strengthened the feeling of belonging to the Kide Calvinist spiritual community.

The texts existed in a very specific relationship, because they were written by a respected, prestigious member of the local community, the Calvinist minister. Therefore this 'one-man editorial' as an external institution represented and mediated the Calvinist Church. The genre of the letters was similar to denominational or congregational newspapers at that time,¹⁵ but they were much more personal and even further more direct which was implied by the frame of the genre – an interesting combination of the private letter and public letter – and also the person of the author.

In the letters, by using a similar structure and style to the Sunday service (he built on the liturgical tradition: short exegesis, instructive stories, congregational news, acknowledgement to supporters, songs, prayers), he inserted his texts into the sacred space and he also legitimized them. Beyond the composition, this was confirmed by the language of the texts, because the author used a ritualized Christian language, addressing his readers as "thee/thou", whereas in everyday, profane life he used the formal mode of address. The initial form of address always was "Dear Brother / Dear Brethren". The author used such rhetoric in his letters through which his aim of the simple communication of facts, his own opinions, feelings and attitude – according to the genre of letters¹⁶ – was obvious in every case. Several times the examples which he used for the exegesis were closely related to local happenings; the locals often knew whom the sermon / letter was about.¹⁷ With this rhetoric, the minister wanted to form public opinion.

¹⁵ The author follows the style and structure of *Református Naptár* [Calvinist Calendar] and *Református Ifjúság* [Calvinist Youth].

¹⁶ The *letter* is a form of self-representation, but here it represents his role as pastor, too. See Keszeg 2008b:247.

¹⁷ Confirmed by several informants.

Dear Brethren, I speculate a lot about why there is so little show of the speech of God, why the benches in the church are so vacant, why our singing is so drowsy, why there is so much apathy, why people don't turn to God, why they don't repent, why there are fathers who set a bad example, drunken presbyters, fallen maidens, why there are so many sins and so much weakness that has been revealed since my last letter? [...] We don't take seriously the vow that we give to God. Last time you vowed next to the holy table of Jesus Christ that "In the grace of God appeared in Jesus Christus you will devote your whole life to Him and in this world you will try to live impeccably and saintly as his redeemed one." Did you do that? Did you keep your vow? If you had done this, if you had kept it, then you would not have been mocked in front of your children and others, you would not have fallen, there would not have been rumours about you, and your life would not have been so miserable, cursed, and burdened. (*Pastoral Letter* No. 6.)

The author in his letters often employs the rhetorical genres also used in preaching, where a real conversation is imitated. In the letters the use of dialogues or pseudo-dialogues was typical. He answered questions he had previously been asked orally under the heading "the minister answers questions addressed to him".¹⁸

The question arises, if practically the same was written in the weekly letters as was told on Saturday at the service, at the Bible circle or in personal meetings, then what was the use of writing it down and circulating it? The letters of the minister created a new occasion to talk about the gospel and Church matters within the family circle, so he thereby established a new *literary event* too.¹⁹ Although Dezsó Bonczidai's letters seem like a one-sided format, every communication is a social and mutual interaction, and never only the sending of a message. Communication researchers have argued that church communication is a form that "primarily wants to discuss issues concerning the people's faith" (Szilcz 2007:78).²⁰ The problem of church effectiveness is therefore a communication problem too. The special sense of mission of the Church is essentially to "communicate the gospel," so the primary issue is "how the various churches and denominations can represent and make understandable their cases" (Szilcz 2007:78).²¹

The particular communication practice of Bonczidai gives a close picture of the relationship of the village and the minister, and the ways of

¹⁸ PL. Nos. 4; 10; 14.

¹⁹ For *literary event* see Barton 1991, especially 4–5. This phenomenon can be described by the *conversational community* concept of Salmi-Niklander, 2013:79. For the importance of oral dimensions of literary events see Besnier 1995:13.

²⁰ My translation.

²¹ Also see: Kádár 2005:80, 164, 192.

forming a community. His letters are excellent sources for understanding everyday religious life of Kide in that period too.²² To examine the letters I used the method of content analysis (Krippendorff 2013), through which I found the following key patterns: 1. letter, correspondence; 2. caring for the spiritual life, transmission of the gospel message; 3. Church expectations: good and proper Calvinist behaviour – local habits; 4. reading the Bible, reading culture, reading distributions; 5. sharing information: religious occasions, organization of the congregational life; 6. local narratives; 7. the world we live in – the problems of modernity.

Dezső Bonczidai in his letters reflects on the form of communication he has chosen, the writing of letters. He explains its purpose in the first letter (cited above). In the second year of writing he again formulates the substance of his effort, that “I want to be a resounding word for you through these pastoral letters, that through them every week my word may be heard in your house and heart. If you are ill I will stand beside your bed. If you keep away from God’s house, let your house be the church. Let me greet you every week, God’s blessings on you and yours!”²³ He asks for feedback in the 18th letter: “Do you read my letters? Do you think about them? If you do, have you tried to go on the pathway I laid down?” At other times, he calls attention to how to read his letter, that one should do it slowly, thinking about every line of it.²⁴ In favour of the rapid flow of information and the coverage of the whole congregation he often asks the addressees to forward it as soon as possible.²⁵ Here implicitly the village itself appears, because according to the 13th letter many have been complaining that the letters do not reach them, so it was important for these villagers to get them regularly and in time. In another letter, however, Dezső Bonczidai himself requests that if someone is disturbed by his letters, then they should contact him, and he will stop sending them.²⁶

The main part of the letters is about caring for the spiritual life of his people and communicating the Gospel message. In fact, that is the main purpose of the letters, and that is why the minister took the trouble to write, edit, copy, and distribute the letters week by week; because he wanted a more vital, and a better Christian life in the village. The letters always begin with a short sermon, but other genres are also related to this main

²² The institutional ethnographic researches from the 1940s show a totally different picture of Kide. In this article I cannot explain it in detail, but to understand the problem theoretically see Beyer 2011.

²³ PL. No. 18.

²⁴ PL. No. 1.

²⁵ PL. No. 1.

²⁶ PL. No. 21.

intention, such as: golden sayings, prayers, psalms/hymns, aphorisms, parables, pieces of good advice and edifying stories.

Another goal of the *Pastoral Letters* is to give an example of good and proper Calvinist behaviour. These parts have a very important ethnographic relevance, because from these one can get to know what was and what was not allowed for a Calvinist, and what norms a Calvinist had to live by. Of course, this is the view of the Calvinist Church, but the personal tone of the letters and the examples that Bonczidai gave in them let the attitude of the villagers also be seen. For example, Bonczidai expounded how a Calvinist girl²⁷ or a good elder has to behave,²⁸ what the proper form of the offerings is,²⁹ how people have to behave during church services,³⁰ or what behaviour is expected at the village festivities.³¹

A very important part of the letters concerns religious reading habits, because one of the missions of the minister is to make the habit of reading an integral part of the villagers' life. The letters provide excellent information about what books and periodicals were available in the village in the 1930s, how the peasants read, and how the distribution of these written texts worked.

The importance of reading the Scripture is the main topic of three letters. Immediately in the second letter, the minister – saying that many do not read the Bible regularly because they do not know where to start it – tries to help the believers to read the Holy Writ together every day by the introduction of a Bible-reading guide. Accordingly he published Bible-reading guides in the 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th and the 7th letters, and in the last one he writes that he thinks it is no longer needed because one can find a similar one in the Calvinist calendar from the 1st of January. From this, we can predict that many have subscribed to it. In the letters, however, the calls before the Words, psalms, hymn still remain: "Read it!"

The minister also wrote about the proper way of reading the Bible. He said that one should read the Bible before going to bed, but never in bed (!) and before and after reading the Bible one should pray, and should think about the given gospel passage. He also recommended reading the Bible as a whole family occasion.³²

In the *Pastoral Letters* Bonczidai also dealt with the Transylvanian Calvinist press, journals and books, he advertised them and made summaries of

²⁷ PL. No. 34.

²⁸ PL. No. 3.

²⁹ PL. No. 5.

³⁰ PL. No. 4.

³¹ PL. No. 14.

³² PL. No. 2.

their contents. He operated a small library too, from which the people could borrow these books. He drew attention to the real value of these written texts: he emphasized that one should not use them to light a fire, but instead keep them for later reading. “Brother! Do not use the *Harangszó* [Bell-Peal] to light a fire, to pack bacon, but collect it, so as you can read it years later!”³³

Dezső Bonczidai in his letters also deals with the distribution of Calvinist newspapers and other documents. From the texts we know that the congregation of Kide regularly purchased the Calvinist children’s journal *Az Én Kicsinyeim* [My Little Children] (twelve copies in 1932), and in January 1934 the minister ordered 25 copies of the *Református Újság* [Calvinist Paper] which had come out since 1933. In addition to these, it was mostly the *Református Naptár* [Calvinist Calendar] and the *Harangszó* [Bell-Peal] which reached the people of Kide. Several times there is a call or an encouragement to buy and read them. According to his opinion, no “thoughtful” Calvinist can go without the Calvinist calendar, and should not buy any other calendar.

The letters also had a function, to share information. There are many examples of the religious and other kinds of events in the village, and other news that affected the community, such as the introduction of a new church tax book or the deadline for registering for a confirmation etc. In some letters he even included the detailed programme of the events.³⁴ Through these, the former members of the congregation come alive for today’s reader: for example, who recited a poem and what that poem was or who sang a hymn. Based on the letters we can reconstruct the religious events of the congregation. Bonczidai also published the participation rate of these events.³⁵

A very interesting part of the letters is the local narratives. The minister also used his letters to collect data from the local oral tradition about Kide’s history, so that he could construct a local history about Kide with which the villagers could identify then and in the future. He published it in serials: firstly, the history of the village;³⁶ secondly, the different church histories, such as the Calvinist, Unitarian, Roman Catholic and Greek Catholic Church History of Kide; and thirdly, the description of these churches.³⁷ He made the former community of the village visible by lists of names, includ-

³³ PL. No. 14.

³⁴ PL. No. 7; 11; 17.

³⁵ PL. No. 21.

³⁶ PL. No. 2.

³⁷ PL. Nos. 3; 4; 6; 9; 10.

ing those of noble families in Kide,³⁸ the Calvinist ministers,³⁹ clerks and curators in Kide,⁴⁰ and the main supporters of the church.⁴¹

However these *Pastoral Letters* were not only about Kide. In his letters Bonczidai referred to the problems of the modern world, too. One can see, that for him it was important to write about the history of Kide, but he placed the life of the Hungarians in Kide into a wider, global context. Several times he referred to the minority status of the Hungarians in Transylvania, the problems of modernity such as wars, alcoholism, the situation of orphans and servants, the Great Depression etc. Headlines, news, current events, true stories, tales, anecdotes, dreams from Paris to Mexico, from Manchuria through Russia to Budapest appeared in his letters. From the informants it is known that in the 1930s only the Unitarian and Calvinist ministers and the Catholic priest had a radio, and there were villagers who never left Kide in their whole life. What did these news items mean for someone from Kide? Among the educative purposes of the pastor we already have seen the dissemination of knowledge and information. With this aspect of the letters he helps in shifting the horizon from the enclosure of the homeland, by establishing the possibility of breaking out from the uniformity of the place.⁴² From this point of view it can be seen why his letters were so significant.

What was the villagers' reaction to this new form of communication? How did they read the letters? Unfortunately, very little is known about this. From the first letters it can be seen that a few families complained that they did not get a copy of the *Pastoral Letters*, which in my opinion implies that they would have liked to get them, that is, they were interested in them.⁴³ However, there were also families or persons who were even against them, so it divided the community. For example, there was an anonymous writer, who in his letter to Bonczidai criticized his ministry and in particular his *Pastoral Letters*. We know that from the 22nd *Pastoral Letter* because Bonczidai answered this anonymous writer in public. The anonymous villager confronted the pastor in many respects. It is significant that he chose the form of a letter, maybe because of the habit of communication started by Bonczidai.

Is there any information about how the villagers did read the letters? For this, only fieldwork interviews can give proper answers. For example,

³⁸ PL. No. 3.

³⁹ PL. No. 18.

⁴⁰ PL. No. 19.

⁴¹ PL. Nos 2; 14; 19; 21; 22; 23; 24; 25.

⁴² See Bausinger 1986.

⁴³ PL. No. 13.

one of my informants could quote from the letter literally, so I assume that he read the letter several times in his life. Also, this same informant said that his father used to read it aloud to the whole family.⁴⁴ It is also significant that many of the villagers kept the letters, but everybody (including those who did not) considered them important because of the parts about the Church and village history in them. When Dezső Bonczidai died in 1946 the Church Elders of Kide summarized what he did for the congregation. In this summary they commemorated his *Pastoral Letters*: “for years he edited and wrote informative and valuable *Pastoral Letters* to the families of the congregation and he did it with his own hands.”⁴⁵ Since they wrote it eleven years after the last *Pastoral Letter* was circulated, I assume they still considered them important.

Understanding Dezső Bonczidai’s Pastoral Letters

At the beginning of this article I stated that Bonczidai’s *Pastoral Letters* were unique. This seems to be true, because no similar Hungarian pastoral activity from that time has yet been found. But was Bonczidai an exceptional minister? Was he an eccentric graphomane? Where did he get these ideas, and where did he get the samples and patterns for his letters? If we look at Bonczidai in his immediate context we can understand it. In the Protestant village communities of that time, ministers always had a key role in everyday religious life: they were the intellectual leaders of the villages (Kósa 1993:20; Keszeg 2008a:17–19; Keszeg & Becze 2001:16). In the nineteenth century, as a counter to secularization, every historic Church carried out missionary activities with inner reforms (Szigeti 2004). In the Hungarian Calvinist Church the “home mission” began in the first third of the twentieth century. Their aim was to deepen the religious life through regular Bible reading, praying, singing and other forms of home worship. In accordance with this the role of the pastor changed. Later, after the Trianon Peace Treaty, the roles of the Transylvanian ministers extended further (Kósa 1993:22). Between the two World Wars, the Transylvanian Calvinist Church not only undertook the cherishing of the Hungarian folk traditions, but also the improvement of the standard of village life, and the education of the peasants (Ozsváth 2011:241). With the institutions of the home mission they made a unified system for each age group and sex. They set up Sunday Schools, Bible circles for girls and boys, Women’s Associations, Men’s Associations, Camps and Conferences and so on (Nagy 1991:330; Buzogány 2000). This unified system was very important because in Romania after Trianon the

⁴⁴ For reading aloud see: Szabó 1981; Keszeg 2008b:69; Lyons 2013:250.

⁴⁵ Pj = Presbiteri jegyzőkönyv (1928–1946).



Figure 5. Cover page of the *Erdélyi Református Naptár* [Transylvanian Calvinist Calendar], 1933.

existing Hungarian organisations of civil society became illegal, but within the Church they remained legal. The Church and the minister had become the symbol of national survival (Keszeg & Becze 2001:16).

Contributing to this, after Trianon, the Calvinist press went through an explosive development (Sipos 2002). They launched periodicals for each age group and sex, from children to women, from boys to men, from peasants to university students. This can be well illustrated by the cover page of the *Erdélyi Református Naptár* [Transylvanian Calvinist Calendar], which depicts a rural family where every figure – from the father to the children – holds a book or booklet and reads. (See figure 5.)

László Ravasz, a prominent figure of the Calvinist Home Mission said “The pealing bell is

the press, the press is the church, and whoever supports the Church press, builds the Church.”⁴⁶ A good example of this press craziness is that just for a three-day Calvinist camp the participants launched a handwritten newspaper called *Tábortűz*, which means *Campfire*. (See figures 6a & 6b.)

Dezső Bonczidai attended the Calvinist Theological College at a time when great figures and deep thinkers of the Transylvanian Calvinist Home Mission were teachers (Kozma & Hatházy 1996). He learned the patterns of how to be a “bonus pastor” from these teachers (Imre 1922). He thought that it did not matter if the Kide Congregation was not able to afford the Calvinist periodicals. He started to compose his own handwritten free newspaper based on the religious periodicals, and he did it in such a brilliant way that it met all the requirements and ideals of the Home Mission. He

⁴⁶ This slogan by László Ravasz was used in Calvinist newspapers between the wars as an advertisement to buy more of the Calvinist religious press; see, for example, *Református Ifjúság* [Calvinist Youth] 1936. III (9–10). Pp. 76.

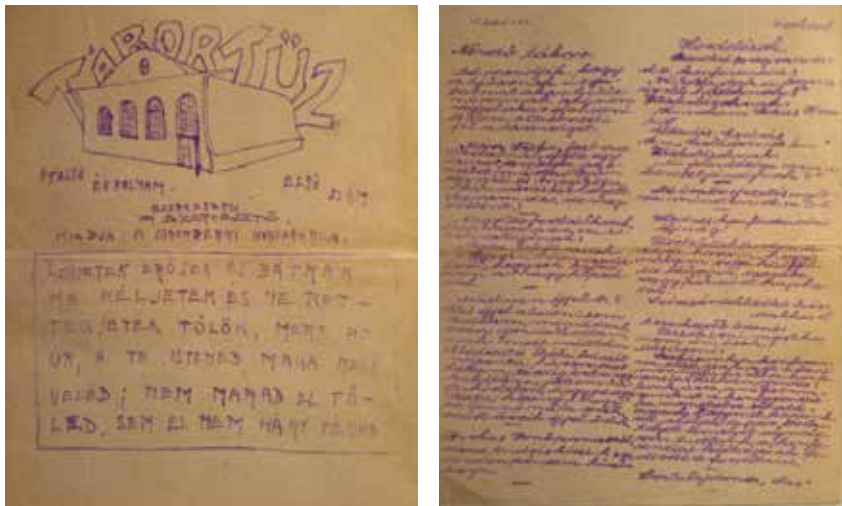


Figure 6a & 6b. *Tábortűz* [Campfire] launched for a 3-day camp.

chose the genre of letter by which he achieved the most important goal of the Home Mission: he made religion more personal, because everybody felt themselves spoken to.

From the ministers it was also expected to write about the history of their congregation (Nagy 1938; Imre et al 1937–1938) and Bonczidai chose his Letters to do this. He educated the people by providing information about the world in his letters, and by setting up a library.

Dezső Bonczidai was a “normal exception” as the microhistorians use this term (Levi 1989; Szijártó & Magnússon, 2013:149–150). In his figure and in his activity, the life and problems of an era and a very new form of a religious communication system were brought together and crystallized. His case also illustrates how a small godforsaken Transylvanian village reacted to this innovation/reform at the beginning of the twentieth century.⁴⁷ Today this kind of activity is common, almost every congregation has its own newsletter or newspaper, but back in that time with his *Pastoral Letters* he was a pioneer in Transylvania.

⁴⁷ See also the newest book of Martyn Lyons where he explains how literary practices from below can give us a “new history from below”. He argued that “writings of the individuals concerned help us to address some significant issues” (Lyons 2013:16).

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 KEL = Kolozsvári Egyházmegye Levéltára [Archives of the Diocese of Kolozsvár]
 Kide község vegyes ügyei (1927–1946) [Miscellaneous issues of Kide]
 Vizitációs jegyzőkönyvek (1913–1952) [Visitation Protocols]
 Belmissziói jelentések (1940–1946) [Home mission reports]
 KRE = Kidei Református Egyházközség irattára [Records of the Calvinist Parish of Kide]
 Pj = Presbiteri jegyzőkönyv (1928–1946) [Minutes of the Kide Presbytery]
 Bonczidai Dezső Lelkipásztori levelei, jegyzetfüzetei, Székelyudvarhely, magántulajdonban [Letters and notebooks of Minister Dezső Bonczidai, Székelyudvarhely, private property]
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MATIJA OGRIN

Manuscripts of Slovenian Peasant Writers and Readers

Genres, Subjects, Reception

ABSTRACT. Until recently, numerous Slovenian manuscripts from the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries have remained unknown. Many of them were written by Slovenian peasant writers or by rural clergymen and intended for peasant readers. These manuscripts represent a current of traditional folk culture that was abolished or suppressed by the authorities of enlightened absolutism in the Habsburg Monarchy. In this context, manuscript culture served as a medium in which Slovenian vernacular literature could exist and survive against the enlightened and rationalistic dominant culture. Based on the examples of three representative manuscripts (a songbook, a translation and adaptation of ascetic prose by Martin of Cochem and a passion play from Bad Eisenkappel/Železna Kapla), this article outlines how manuscript culture allowed writers to adapt and reshape texts in order to meet the interests of their local community and to reaffirm their traditional identity.

KEYWORDS: Slovenian literature, manuscript culture, Baroque, modernisation, Martin of Cochem, Bad Eisenkappel/Železna Kapla, passion play

Modernisation “from Above” and Folk Tradition

A considerable number of manuscripts in Slovenian language that have remained unknown or overlooked by scholars until now were created by peasant writers during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and were intended for their own local community. These texts existed only in manuscript form. Some of them were never intended for printing because they were written to accomplish certain functions within a family, a local community, a church gathering, or similar. However, a few of the surviving manuscripts were carefully prepared and, to all appearances, were intended for publication, but this never took place for various reasons.

The historical provinces mostly or partly inhabited by Slovenians (Carniola, Carinthia, Styria, Gorizia, and Trieste) formed part of Inner Austria, the Habsburg hereditary provinces between the Semmering Pass and the Adriatic of the Holy Roman Empire (later the Austrian Empire). In the second half of the eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century – which is the time of origin for most of the preserved Slovenian manuscripts – the Enlightenment strongly reshaped political, social, and religious life in the Austrian lands. The enlightened absolutism of Maria Theresa (ruler 1740–1780) and Joseph II (co-ruler 1765–1780, emperor 1780–1790) introduced an attempt to reform the entire state and its institutions. The absolutist state was conceived as an instrument for the welfare of the people, and every subordinate body from peasants up to feudal lords was to strive toward this end (Reinalter 2005:64). This attitude was underpinned by the ideas of the Enlightenment political philosophy about natural law and natural rights for happiness and wellbeing, which the absolutist monarchs in Austria wanted to put into practice from the top down (Reinalter 2005:62–63). They realized this by means of the ever-growing centralisation of the state to the detriment of feudal lords and through control of the Catholic Church, which was often referred to as “the revolution from above” (Reinalter 2005:62–63). At the centre of Joseph II’s reforms is the idea of a unitary state with a centralized government, the system of an enlightened police-state: “everything for the people, but nothing by the people itself.” The monarch was to be the only one to rule, directly or indirectly through his authorized officials.¹ Josephinism as a political practice of Joseph II, as derived from the Enlightenment, sought to exercise full control over the Catholic Church in the monarchy, even so far as to intervene in the Catholic liturgy with requests

¹ “Im Mittelpunkt der ursprünglichen Philosophie des Josephinismus stand das System des aufgeklärten Polizeistaates: alles für das Volk, nichts durch das Volk, was in einem utilitarisch-sozialen Sinn verstanden werden muß, und die Überzeugung, das nur *ein* Mann herrschen und regieren könne” (Reinalter 1993:16).

to reform it on the model of simpler Protestant and puritan practices (Reinalter 1993:16).

Similarly to the Protestant lands, the Catholic Enlightenment reduced religion to a nucleus of “natural,” “rational,” and ethical principles, whereas irrational, dogmatic, and mystical elements were either interpreted in a naturalistic way (e.g., physical interpretation of miracles) or left out of consideration (Borgstedt 2004:35). Of course, these ideas circulated in a very limited area: in German and Austrian towns, the “terrain of the Enlightenment” was limited to the citadel and the surrounding houses of the noblemen, whereas many ordinary people continued to practise late-medieval and even occult religious rituals (Borgstedt 2004:35–36). When the proponents of the Enlightenment came across ordinary people with entrenched spiritual beliefs of this kind, they forgot about tolerance as their fundamental enlightened postulate, and they expressed a sharp attitude of repudiation and rejection. It was in the confrontation with the mysterious and spiritual elements of Christianity that they demonstrated the limits of their tolerance (Borgstedt 2004:36). In this context, Josephinism was not alone in its efforts to subordinate and reform the Church; in fact, it enjoyed strong support from several cultural, religious, and state-church (*Staadkirchentum*) tendencies, termed the Catholic Enlightenment (Klueting 2005:128–129). One of its expressions was the vigorous interventions by some bishops and later the emperor into traditional forms of Catholic devotion: the curtailing of festivals, and prohibition of or limitations on passion plays, processions, pilgrimages, and so on. These measures were carried out in practice only because they corresponded with the interests of the Jansenists and reformed Catholicism as a whole, with the goal of total subordination of the Catholic Church in Austria to the state (Klueting 2005:129), purified of everything that Joseph II and the enlightened Catholic authorities labeled as “superstition” (Reinalter 1993:16).

From these tendencies on the one hand, and from the endeavor to make religion “rational” and “useful”, measures were taken that culminated in such radical reforms as the abolition of hundreds of monasteries,² abolition of lay confraternities, and suppression of popular folk pieties, such as pilgrimages, passion plays, devotions to the saints, and devotions to the Virgin Mary, which were perceived as “irrational” or “indecent” by many reformist Catholic bishops; for example, by Febronius in Trier or Herberstein in Ljubljana, as well as by other proponents of the Catholic Enlightenment

² After 1780, from seven hundred to eight hundred monasteries in the monarchy were abolished by Joseph II and their property seized by the state (Borgstedt 2004:45), among them sixty-nine in what is now Slovenia (Kogoj 2004:331).

(Borgstedt 2004:43). These radical measures, taken in the Catholic Habsburg Monarchy, were admired even by Protestant Enlightenment intellectuals, some of whom named it the “second Reformation” (Borgstedt 2004:37). Moreover, what is most relevant, the fundamental attitude of the Catholic Enlightenment expressed in these measures was active in Austria for the long transition from Maria Theresia into the nineteenth century, and ended as late as the *Syllabus of Errors* in 1864 (Klueting 2005:131). As Borgstedt (2004:31) put it: “there was Josephinism before and after Joseph II.”

These reforms and bans were mostly carried out in ignorance of what the related devotions actually meant to the vast number of common people: the Bavarian prince-elector Maximilian III Joseph, for instance, prohibited a passion play in 1770 with the explanation that “the people would not be kept back from work, prayer, and other business, and they would not be spoiled by laziness” (Borgstedt 2004:45). Great parts of the population, especially the peasants, who were deeply attached to their archaic social habits and religious practices, reacted with strong disapproval and even hatred against the authorities (Reinalter 1993:19). This does not mean that the peasants were a uniform group of devout Catholic believers. When defending pilgrimages, saints’ days, processions, and other traditional Catholic festivals that fell under the pressure of the enlightened authorities, the peasants were also defending their holidays, leisure, singing, and other social habits – in a word, their traditional social rights and religious expressions. In addition to the positive measures introduced by the two enlightened monarchs and their officials, such as the legal reduction of forced labor, the abolition of mortmain, and so on, imposed modernisation produced many effects that were perceived by the common people as an attack against traditions and common sense, and even against the Catholic religion and devotion.

This rather long historical introduction outlines the political and cultural situation in which the manuscripts that I present here were blocked or trapped into a “corner” of society, separated from the main developments of the dominant Enlightenment culture, with no prospects for further cultural or social impact – except for what could be achieved in the local surroundings where the manuscripts were written, read or listened to, borrowed, and sometimes transcribed. Despite the liberal censorship in the Josephinist era, these folk texts of (sometimes uncanonical) Catholic provenance did not and also *could not* find their way into printed books. This was not only for material reasons (i.e., the expenses of print), but mostly because of a cultural clash between the socio-religious tradition of the common people and the high culture of the ruling Enlightenment elite. Textual material, marked by medieval beliefs, Baroque spiritualism, or even folk superstition,

such as prophecies and prediction of future events, was considered unworthy to be read because it was unworthy to exist.

Nonetheless, the peasant writers continued their literary activity on their own, producing manuscripts for their local communities that supported the spiritual religious tradition, as well as related folklore and social habits, well into the nineteenth century. As a consequence of modernisation, which was imposed by the authorities from above but not accepted by the common people, the manuscript culture survived in the Slovenian lands for another century as an entire complex of production, mediation, and reception of handwritten texts. These texts, often compiled from earlier manuscripts or fixing an earlier oral tradition, had a great past; regrettably, however, they had no future.

Genres and Perspectives

Although this literature was mostly written by peasant writers for peasant readers, in some cases it demonstrates influences from seventeenth-century German Baroque literature. Nevertheless, these manuscript texts retain a distinct folklore character, according to three basic criteria (Stanonik 2004:48, 53, 173). First, they maintain strong elements of religious and ethnic tradition. Second, these texts also include an aesthetic function or dimension, but in most cases this does not prevail over the other functions of the literature. Finally, the language of this literature is strongly marked by dialects and regional idioms.

Below I take a closer look at some manuscripts that continued the folk literary tradition and thus supported the related folklore and devotional practices of the local surroundings. The genres of these texts range from folk songs and hymns to prayers, hagiographies, meditative prose, and even religious drama. In Slovenian manuscripts of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, there are surprisingly almost no traces of more practical or empirical genres, such as diaries (“Keeping a diary was a fairly common practice in Swedish agrarian society from the mid-19th to the early 20th century”; Edlund 2013:89) or autobiographical writings, for example, which were fairly frequent in Finland (Kuismin 2013).

The typical Slovenian texts that I present recall the inner world of the common people – not the empirical world, but the spiritual world, one that was already known to the readers and listeners, and the text only reaffirms and recalls it with some variation. In the world of spiritual traditions that peasants wanted to affirm against Josephine rationalism, there was little room for innovation and change. Here, alteration was accepted only as a variation of what had been accepted and established long before. For this reason, presumably, the majority of manuscripts were not signed by their

writers or scribes; only a handful of them can be attributed to individual writers. In such a context, one cannot find, for instance, any diaries or autobiographies among these manuscripts at least until the late nineteenth century. Instead, one finds hagiographies, especially ones strongly intertwined with oral and legendary elements, and related prayers. One cannot find political pamphlets against Josephinism; instead, one finds meditations on the coming of the Antichrist and the End of the World. The perspective of these texts is open to faith, imagination, and even myth – with a variety of themes and motifs related to Christmas, Epiphany, Lent and Easter, Corpus Christi, patron saints, and the Virgin Mary, which were rooted in folklore contexts such as pilgrimage, name days, processions for good weather, door-to-door caroling on Epiphany, and several others.

I shall examine three examples of manuscripts from two conceptual perspectives. The first perspective focuses on various contexts and modes of their use and related performative or participatory actions attested in the manuscripts.³ The second perspective is closely related: because the context in which the texts were used was related to how they were created, it is also pertinent to consider them as *manuscript* publications (as opposed to printed) according to Harold Love's three modes of scribal publication: his "classification does suggest the three agents most likely to have performed acts of publication: the author, the stationer or scrivener for whom manuscripts were articles of commerce, and the intending reader" (Love 1993:46–47).

The Krebs Hymnal, Late Eighteenth Century

The Krebs Hymnal⁴ from the late eighteenth century is a characteristic example of a large group of Slovenian hymnal manuscripts, a popular and widespread genre of books for use at home and in church, on pilgrimages, and so on. Like many others, this hymnal is basically a miscellany of various religious and folk songs. There are some canonical hymns, for instance, on the Holy Eucharist – and even this one, surprisingly, is written in two-foot amphibrach verse, which is a typical prosody in Alpine Slovenian folk

³ This approach is indebted to Martyn Lyons' conceptual starting point in *The Writing Culture of Ordinary People*: "My study focuses on the scribal culture of western European peasants, workers and artisans in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in order to examine the context of lower-class writing, the forms it took and the functions it performed" (Lyons 2014:8).

⁴ The manuscript consists of ninety-seven folia, small octavo, in two hands, one of them cultivated, the other one rather coarse; cf. KOKFS Ms 4; Register of Early Modern Slovenian Manuscripts, ms. 022, *Krebsova pesmarica*; available at http://ezb.ijs.si/fedora/get/nrss:nrss_ms_022/VIEW/, [20. Nov. 2015].

songs. Others are songs for various popular pilgrimage churches in the Baroque era in Slovenia, or songs for the veneration of saints; for example, for Saint Francis Xavier in Radmirje, and several others for the Virgin Mary in Kropa, Kokra, and elsewhere. In addition to these serious and pious songs, one can find also some folk songs with a humorous tone and subtle erotic hints; for example, on matrimonial matters and weaknesses.⁵ These joyous songs at the end of the book are followed by an inserted sheet with an apocalyptic poem on the Day of Judgment.

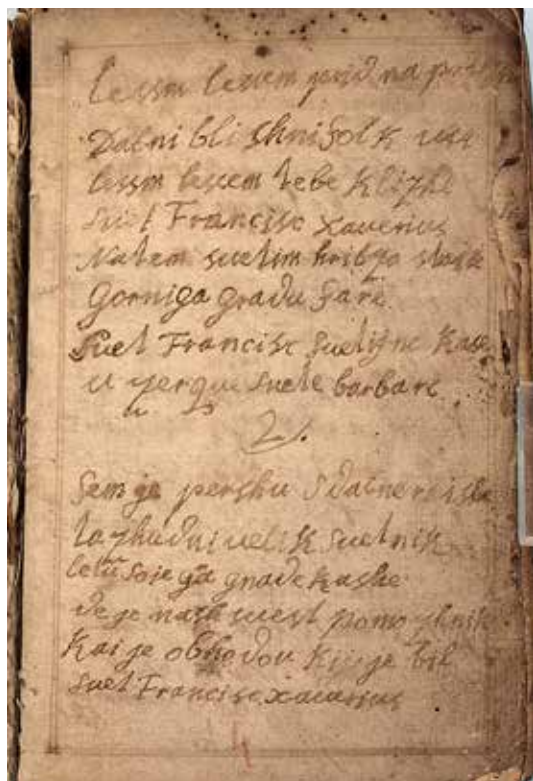


Figure 1. The first folio of the Krebs Hymnal with the song on St. Francis Xavier. Source: Register of Early Modern Slovenian Manuscripts.

The coexistence of such diverse texts demonstrates that this manuscript was composed according to the various needs and complexities of everyday life in some local surroundings. The exact original location of the book cannot be determined, but it can be supposed that Franze Krebs owned the

⁵ It should be noted, however, that a songbook consisting exclusively of Slovenian secular folksongs was unthinkable in the eighteenth century. The specific character of folk culture in the Baroque period is given by the coexistence, sometimes even by the synthesis, of Christian culture and folklore, where pious pilgrimage songs stand alongside humorous folk pieces and in some way “protect” them with religious authority.

book as a possible local leader of pilgrim groups, leading the believers to the churches in the towns mentioned above. The most probable context of the original use of this songbooks is therefore singing while on pilgrimage routes in Carniola and Styria. The context of the route and pilgrimage also provided more liberty for humorous and erotic content in the songbook.

It should be noted in this respect that codicological examination reveals that some quires differ in size and extent, and what is now the first quire was sewn in later, as were also some folios at the end of the book – and these roughly match the two manuscript hands.⁶ This physical heterogeneity of the manuscript is correlated with the diversity of texts, and it mirrors the variety of actual needs and interests of its users. Against Love's typology of scribal publication modes, this manuscript would most suit the third type, user publication: "Its most characteristic mode was the edition of one [manuscript], copied by the writer for private use into a personal miscellany or 'commonplace book'; however, this was never an isolated activity since it always involved a transaction between at least two individuals – the copyist and the provider of the exemplar" (Love 1993:79). In the case of the Krebs Hymnal, it should be added that the transaction involved at least two copyists and several providers of the exemplars. Several people were involved in its production, and even more in its use: probably a singing group of wandering pilgrims.

The dominant culture of the Enlightenment in Austria at the end of the eighteenth century would never allow such a collection to pass into the medium of the printed book and to its audience in the middle and upper strata of society: the Church as well as state authorities of the time suppressed the pilgrimages, but the Krebs Hymnal is filled with songs for pilgrim devotions to the saints and Virgin Mary; the Jansenist clergymen maintained the doctrine of severe moral rigour, but the Krebs songbook also contained humorous and erotic hints. Nevertheless, a small inscription from a borrower ("Franze Krebs, I thank you for these books of poems") testifies that this manuscript had an audience, albeit a small one, but in any case one in which the song texts could realize their musical, religious, and social function among a vivid group of pilgrims.

Meditations on the Four Last Things, Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

An interesting group of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century manuscripts offers Slovenian translations and adaptations of apocalyptic and

⁶ The two separate hands do not correspond with any difference in content, but with strong difference in orthography, errors and other irregularities.

ascetic writings. At least three manuscripts survive, representing translations and adaptations of German writings on the coming of the Antichrist.⁷ Another frequently translated and transcribed subject was the Four Last Things. These meditations on death, judgment, hell, and heaven are mostly derived from *Das Grosse Leben Jesu* (The Great Life of Jesus; 1696), a monumental ascetic work by the German Capuchin friar Martin of Cochem (1634–1712). Friar Martin was a highly influential and popular Baroque writer of religious literature. His works aimed at spiritual development of a Christian believer, which was achieved by means of a brilliant serene style, poetic imagination, and profound theological insight, propagated in numerous editions.⁸ Several compilations were created in Slovenian – not in print, of course, but as manuscript publications instead.

What is most interesting is that, in the two examples of the Four Last Things⁹ that I have studied, there are two completely different versions of the text: each “author” or translator has compiled and adapted the original text in his own way, with numerous deliberate abridgements and arrangements in the translation, but also with additions and variations. Each compiler prepared his own “edition” of Martin of Cochem’s work, in accordance with his literary perception of features that appeared to be most important. This is a strong individuation of the text, possible only in the world of handwriting.¹⁰

The precise context in which the two manuscripts were used is difficult to determine, but it is clear that they were used for private reading, which also implied the possibility of reading aloud in the evening to the illiterate.

⁷ In Register of Early Modern Slovenian Manuscripts, mss. 015, 017, and 024; available at <<http://ezb.ijs.si/fedora/get/nr:ss:ms/VIEW/>> [20. Nov. 2015].

⁸ His books were published in more than 450 editions between 1666 and 1740 alone, and in over 1,500 editions by the twentieth century (Meid 2009:779).

⁹ NŠAL 102 and NUK Ms 42. In Register of Early Modern Slovenian Manuscripts, mss. 034 and 037.

¹⁰ An interesting example of linguistic adaptation is the prayer book of Maria Shametini (probably not a peasant girl but a member of some middle class group) dated 1778, which was transcribed from several printed sources and is mostly suited for devotion during mass. The special feature of this little book is not only its distinctive decoration in red ink and a skilled hand; what is really unique here is the linguistic form. In Slovenian, as in other Slavic languages, there are masculine, feminine, and neuter forms of participles governed by the gender of the subject. In this manuscript, all of the participles expressing any action by the reader (e.g., ‘I recalled my deeds’) are in the feminine. This means that every prayer was grammatically written for the needs of the girl or woman that owned the manuscript – a feature that is not found in any Slovenian printed book, but was possible in the realm of handwritten text. (UKM Ms 23. Register of Early Modern Slovenian Manuscripts, ms. 053; available at: <http://ezb.ijs.si/fedora/get/nr:ss:nrss_ms_053/VIEW/> [20. Nov. 2015].)

The function of both manuscripts was both literary and religious: to enable the reader or listener to enjoy the style and spiritual insights of Friar Martin in Slovenian. It is important to note that these two manuscripts were probably written by priests and not by peasant writers, but were surely used in a very simple, probably peasant milieu: the improvised homemade binding attests to this possibility.

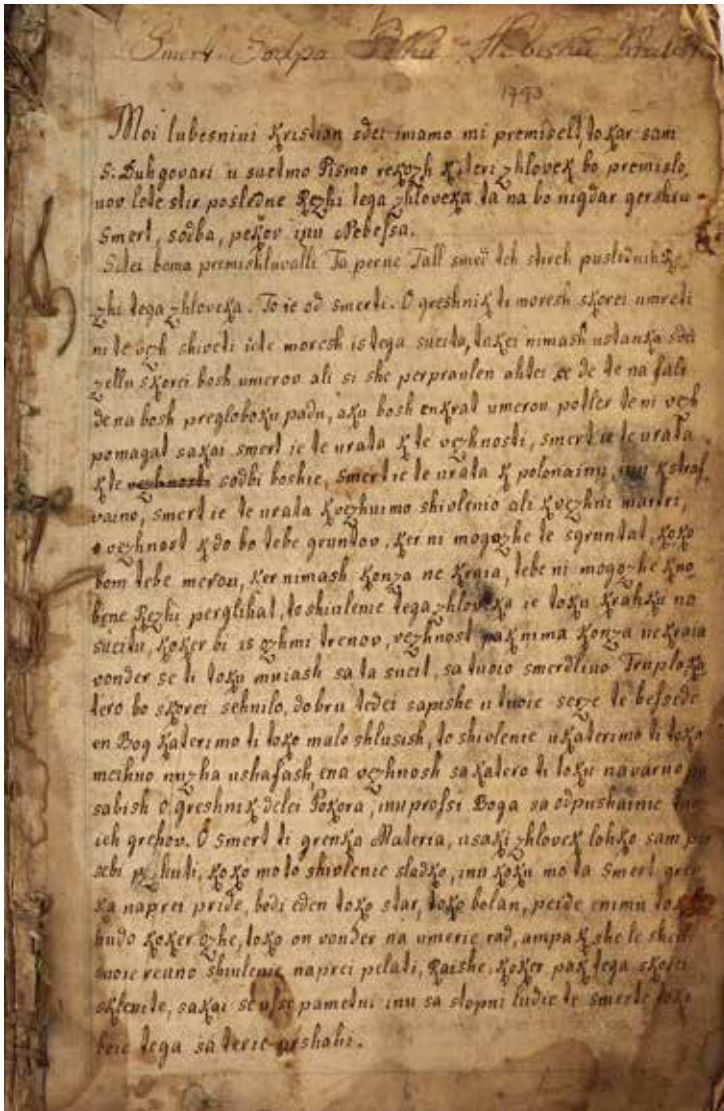


Figure 2. Meditation on the Four Last Things – death, judgement, hell, and heaven, 1793, first folio. Source: Register of Early Modern Slovenian Manuscripts.

Both manuscripts originate from the decades shortly before or after 1800, but both contain some special orthographic features typical of early- and mid-eighteenth century Slovenian writings, which could possibly be interpreted as a sign that the two texts are not primary works by the translators, but instead transcriptions from earlier source texts. The attribution of the publication mode also depends on this question: do both or one of them attest to a *user publication* or possibly *authorial publication*? This question remains open, and further analyses will be needed to solve it with some certainty.

Texts by Father Martin of Cochem were vigorously rejected by the Enlightenment authorities (Kasper 1997:1423). Despite this, they appeared in hundreds of German editions even in the nineteenth century. It is significant to note, however, that in Slovenian Catholic space, which was always strongly attached to German and Austrian Catholicism and open to their influences, there is only one *printed* edition of a book by Martin of Cochem, and it is not a Baroque ascetic meditation, but a more canonical theological topic: the *Explanation of the Holy Mass*, which appeared as late as 1875, reprinted in 1879 and 1905. Here I have outlined only two among the manuscript translations and adaptations of Father Martin's works in Slovenian. At the threshold of the modern age, they circulated as manuscript publications, which kept these Baroque premodern meditative texts alive among their readers even a century before one of them was graciously allowed to be printed.

The Kapla Passion Play, Late Eighteenth Century

An eminent representative of Baroque literary culture, preserved, adapted, and transmitted in the manuscripts of Slovenian writers, is the Kapla Passion Play (Sln. *Kapelški pasijon*). The play was performed in the eighteenth century in the village of Bad Eisenkappel/Železna Kapla (known shortly as *Kappel/Kapla*) in today's Austrian Carinthia. The manuscript was recently rediscovered (Prunč 1989)¹¹ and preserves one of the only two Baroque dramatic texts in Slovenian known today, the other being the Škofja Loka Passion Play.¹² In comparison to this one, the Kapla Passion Play is slightly more influenced by the local Carinthian dialect, but on the other hand it is much more extensive because it includes three dramatic performances: 1) on Holy Thursday morning a play about the Last Supper, the holy Eucharist, and the farewell of Jesus from his mother, the Virgin Mary; 2) on Holy Thursday

¹¹ SNI. For a description of the manuscript, cf. Register of Early Modern Slovenian Manuscripts, ms. 018; <http://ezb.ijs.si/fedora/get/nrss:nrss_ms_018/VIEW/> [20. Nov. 2015].

¹² Cf. the digital scholarly edition (Ogrin 2007), available at: <<http://nl.ijs.si/e-zrc/sp/index-en.html>>.

evening a play about the passion of our Lord; and 3) on Easter Monday a play about the Resurrection with the inclusion of a medieval mystery play on weighing souls.¹³

This tripartite structure, which is typical of late medieval passion plays, is one among the features that indicate a long textual tradition, standing behind this very late copy. It is presumed that the text originates from the Jesuit collegium, located in nearby Eberndorf/Dobrla vas. Undoubtedly, however, the text was copied and rearranged several times before it appeared in the actual manuscript. A considerable textual tradition is indicated by the fact that the dramatic text is apparently written in prose – and yet textual analysis reveals long passages in verse. The textual transmission has introduced simplifications and adaptations for the peasants who copied and performed the dramatic text. Beneath the somewhat coarse prose, one discovers pieces of fine dramatic poetry.

The writer of the surviving Kapla manuscript was surely a local priest, as can be inferred, for instance, from his skilled usage of abbreviations of *nomina sacra* (e.g., *Xti* for *Cristi*). The real users and recipients of this text, however, were peasants from the village who learned their parts by heart, performed the play as actors, and enjoyed it as an audience. The extant manuscript was copied shortly before 1800 – at a time when passion plays were strictly prohibited in Austria. It is possible that someone simply copied the text for his private use and reading in a limited audience, thus creating a *user publication*. On the other hand, some codicological details make it more plausible to infer that the text was copied because it was actually performed, which would mean that the peasant community in the Carinthian mountain village of Eisenkappel/Železna Kapla lived in their own way, sometimes even regardless of legal measures and laws. If this proves to be true, it is an example similar to what Love's classification terms an "entrepreneur publication," although the local priest was not a professional transcriber working for pay, but assumed a similar role in the *publication* of this manuscript: he transcribed the text for other users: the peasants of Eisenkappel/Železna Kapla.

Conclusions and Reflections

Several manuscripts contain readers' inscriptions, thanking the owner of the manuscript for the loan—or the other way around, as in the large hagiography of St. Catherine of Siena, in which the owner warns the girls bor-

¹³ A critical edition is to be published in 2016 by the Research Centre of Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, entitled *Kapeski pasijon. Editio princeps*, edited by Erich Prunč and Matija Ogrin. Ljubljana: Založba ZRC.



Figure 3. The Kapla Passion Play, cca. 1797, p. 8, with the scene of farewell of Jesus and Mary. The detail contains three interventions by subsequent hands. Source: Register of Early Modern Slovenian Manuscripts.

rowing the book: “Here you have the book for two weeks, but be careful not to lose it, Franza and Mina Shmitik.”¹⁴ These inscriptions show that the manuscripts were borrowed and read to a larger extent than one is inclined to imagine today. Passing from hand to hand, the corners of some manuscript folia became so dark that the text nearly disappeared because of use. The manuscripts had their own audience—it was different and smaller than the audience of printed books, but nonetheless an audience. Just as for the Finnish autobiographical texts, one can also say for earlier Slovenian texts that “for every surviving text, dozens of others must have been lost or destroyed” (Kuismin 2013:102) and with them also the traces of their audiences.

Some conclusions may be drawn from these examples. First of all, the manuscripts written by or intended for Slovenian peasants at the beginning of the eighteenth century demonstrate that, originally, texts of several literary genres came into existence in higher cultural environments (such as monasteries in the case of Martin of Cochem’s texts or a Jesuit collegium in the case of Kapla Passion Play), but over a century or two they passed down across social classes and were received (translated from German into Slovenian), modified, and even mixed with other texts, and finally used by the lowest, peasant social class. This is the case for several ecclesiastical

¹⁴ FML Ms. 3 c 61, inside back cover.

hymns, meditative prose, and even drama. Initially, they were conceived and written by highly educated monastic writers in the seventeenth century or earlier, and were subsequently received, reshaped, and adapted for the needs of the most common, poor, and subjugated peasants. In this way, vernacular literacy, through the medium of manuscript culture, allowed for a great social shift of some literary genres and content and for a cultural transfer from southern German space into the Slovenian lands. Hans Naumann's concept of *gesunkenes Kulturgut* (Dow 2014:93) would be highly pertinent for further research in this direction, on condition that the passage of cultural goods from upper to lower strata be analyzed as involving the active participation of ordinary people in this cultural process.

Second, comparison of witnesses and textual versions indicates that folk writers copied and rearranged the texts with a great deal of liberty, and consequently the "versions" derived from the same original text may be profoundly different. This means that manuscript culture allowed for variability and individuality of reception, and for a synthesis of copying and authoring. Manuscript culture allowed for individualized reception of texts, according to the horizon of the copyist – completely contrary to the uniform and large-scale character of printed books. In this way, manuscript culture as a vehicle of vernacular literacy served the needs of the common Slovenian people and their local habits, and fostered the identity of small communities and individuals.

Third, the established culture of enlightened Austrian Josephinism and its dominant culture was in sharp conflict with the Slovenian (and other) vernacular culture and literature of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This was a conflict between a nearly medieval, partly spiritualistic, partly naturalistic and superstitious, and in any case traditionalist life attitude of peasants on the one hand, and the modern, rational, empirical, and "progressive" world view of the authorities on the other. Under circumstances when suitable printed books were not available, Slovenian peasant writers continued to write and transmit their "pre-modern" texts by means of manuscripts even well into the nineteenth century. Moreover, the production of manuscripts allowed them to select, reshape, and include texts by their own choice and according to related context of use. The contexts of the three manuscripts outlined here were singing on pilgrimage routes, private reading and meditation about the Last Things, and dramatic performance in the mountain village of Eisenkappel/Železna Kapla. The first and third of these contexts required people's direct participation, which had an impact on the selection and idiom of the texts. The second context – private reading – seems to be most neutral, but in fact the two manuscripts of the Four Last Things demonstrate that, even there, the re-

ipients introduced substantial differences in both manuscript “editions” or “publications.”

The sharp measures and reforms, which were aimed at suppression of traditional religious practices and related folklore, and were enforced by the Church and the secular authorities, produced a context of rapid changes in which writing was a means to preserve the values of traditional, nearly medieval village communities in the clash with modernity. In this way, manuscript culture served them as a technique of cultural “self-sustainability”: by writing their manuscripts, these Slovenian peasants created spiritual goods on their own for themselves, and in this way they sought to transcend the burden and weight of everyday life.

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KARIN STRAND

Street Ballads Spreading the Word

The Case of “The Two Maids Who Married Each Other”

ABSTRACT. This article is based on a court case in 1800 that the local court of Vaksala, a parish near Uppsala in Sweden, did its best to keep from public attention due to its subversive nature. It concerned a major fraud: two young women had managed to marry each other; one of them was cross-dressed and named as a man. Soon after the trial, however, the story was spread and commented on in popular song prints (in Swedish: *skillingtryck*) and thereby reached a wide audience in several parts of the country. In the article, I analyse the production of these prints. Using the court protocol as a source, I discuss the relation between the actual events and their popular representations in songs for the mass audience. Which parts of the complex issue are included, and which are conspicuous by their absence? Who is the narrator, from which perspective is the story retold – and what are the moral implications?

KEYWORDS: broad sides, chap-books, printed ephemera, popular print, folk songs, lyrics, media history, female transvestism, cross-dressing

Jag borde ej skrifwa som intet är lärd,
 Ej eller arbetat i Studiers afärd,
 Men efter den gåfwa försynen mig gifwa
 Wil jag med en Wisa förtälja och skrifwa
 Hwad som i dag Bladen man läsa kan få
 Hur pigor nu ställa til sit giftermål

I ought not to write, since I am not learned
 and have not studied,
 but using the gift that Providence gave me,
 I will tell you a story
 of what you can read in the papers:
 how maidens planned their marriage.²

("The two maids who married each other", stanza 1)¹

What can ephemeral song prints, written from below, tell us about the reality of common people, and their experiences? In Swedish, as in Danish and Norwegian, such prints are called *skillingtryck*,³ an early mass medium for songs and verses addressed to a wide public. The print type goes back to the late sixteenth century, had its heyday in the nineteenth century and finally declined in the 1920s.⁴ The print was usually made out of a half-sheet folded twice, making an 8-page booklet containing one or several songs, i.e. *lyrics*. Instead of melody notes (which very few could use anyway), there are sometimes references to other, familiar tunes that the texts could be sung to. When there is no particular melody specified, one can assume that the salesman in the streets sang it.

Nowadays the term *skillingtryck* is used as a neutral concept in folk song research as well as in archives and libraries to designate prints of this kind. It was, however, probably never used by its sympathetic audience, the many thousands who bought, read and sang from them. The term was coined by its critics as late as in the nineteenth century, referring to the cheapness of the prints in a direct and indirect sense. Although pejoratively encoded, the term points to an essential feature of these texts: they were commercial and affordable products, designed to make a wide appeal to be interesting and to sell widely.

Outside Scandinavia, similar printed ephemera were common all over Europe, but there is no exact equivalent to the *skillingtryck* as a print type. In British culture the closest related artefacts are *broadsides* and *chap-books*; popular prints that certainly contained popular songs but had different for-

¹ Ob 1800d, Kungliga biblioteket Stockholm (KB).

² Word-for-word translation: Birgit Sawyer.

³ The coin value "skilling" was introduced in 1776 in Sweden and in the early nineteenth century one or a few "skilling" was a common price for a song print of this kind. For a discussion on the rise and use of the word *skillingtryck*, see Jonsson 1967:601–606.

⁴ A remarkable exception to this decline are the so called *beggar verses*, song prints sold by e.g. blind and unemployed people to earn a living, that flourished in the 1920s and 1930s. C.f. Strand 2013, 2014, 2015a.

mats. The broadside was a single sheet printed on one side only; the chap-book could have anything from 4 to 32 pages and contain any kind of printed folklore in prose or verse (Shepard 1973:26).

The song repertoire of the *skillingtryck* was heterogeneous, presenting all kinds of songs: traditional folk songs, hymns, songs on everyday matters like news and sensational crimes, sentimental love songs, humorous songs, mockery and propaganda.

In my present research, I study song prints that deal with current, social matters: beggar verses of the blind and poor; reports in verse and prose of spectacular crimes, and temperance songs (Strand 2016). Many of these texts were written especially for the prints, some had other origins but were well suited for the popular medium. Dealing with different issues, and told from different perspectives, the songs in my study share a general aim to move, inform and influence their audience for certain purposes. To a high degree they do this by using emotional modes, drawing on fear, sensation or sentimentality. The representation of social problems as affective dilemmas can be described in terms of *a politics of affect*: to reach and influence the audience's consciousness through the feelings, the bodily sensations.⁵

The very format of the song and the print as a whole set a distinct limit, as do assumptions about the taste and interests of "the common (i.e. not learned) people". Since there is no room for nuances or problematisation, the narration must be concentrated, effective and comprehensible. Aesthetically and rhetorically, this is realised on the manifest level by features such as moral polarisation and melodramatic plots (Strand 2012).

What particularly interest me are the song prints as interfaces between current, urgent matters and the (heterogeneous) audience implied; the potential buyer in the street and at the market place, wanting entertainment and information. How do the songs present their issues, whose side of the story is told and what is the moral? Which parts of the matter are included and which are excluded? In short: how can we understand the relationship, the "exchange rate" as I like to think about it, between the reality of social exclusion, impairment, crime and misery and their representations in intriguing, versified and singable terms?

To answer such questions, close readings of the printed texts are not enough. Methodologically, we need to enter the socio-historical and cultural context of the songs. More specifically, we also need to uncover the very creation, the birth and fate of the text and explore how, when and why a

⁵ See e.g. feminist critic Ann Cvetkovich (1992), who uses the concept more specifically in her analysis of Victorian sensational novels as she problematises the construction of the middle class woman as a by definition emotional (rather than intellectual) being.

particular issue ended up as a printed song for sale. Is there a known author, and were there other sources at the time to build upon?

In this article, I will exemplify this approach by discussing the production of *skillingtryck* on a certain, sensational crime. The matter was of such nature that the local court did its best to suppress any knowledge of it. Nevertheless, the story became widely spread and commented on by distribution in several prints, in verse and prose.

First, let us look at the court case and its background as documented in archives and court records.⁶ The event will lead us to a partly hidden, gendered aspect of non-privileged people's experiences.

The Vaksala Case

In the summer of 1800, just outside the town of Uppsala in Sweden, the local court of Vaksala had to investigate a scandalous matter. The case concerned a crime committed in the parish in 1799 by two young women – one of them dressed as a man – who had managed to marry each other. By obtaining a false medical certificate that the groom was a man, and a priest's certificate that his name (and identity) was "Anders Magnus Åhrman", they had fooled doctors, priests and employers, as well as relatives and friends. The crime was considered both a serious fraud and a violation, a mockery, of the sacrament of marriage and the holy orders of God.

To adopt a false identity and change one's gender, was a serious offence, although there are few examples in legal history where this resulted in a prosecution. Rather, it is the actions that this makes possible that are addressed: frauds, falsifications, disturbance of order. The pretending, the masking of one's "true self", signified fraudulent behaviour in general, causing suspicions of committed or planned crimes. At a time lacking secure evidence of identification, it was of great importance that people really were who they appeared to be.

The crime was revealed when the bride accused her husband a couple of months after the wedding. This was the starting point for the legal investigation. During the interrogation it turned out that the groom Anders Magnus Åhrman, whose true Christian name was Anna Maria Åhrman, had lived cross-dressed as a man for five years before the marriage.

According to her testimony, Anna Maria Åhrman was 17 when she first changed clothes. At that time, she had recently moved to the district from Gävle, a town 100 kilometers from Uppsala, to start employment as a maid

⁶ Above all, I refer to the crime record; *Protokoll vid urtima ting, volym 2* (1800–1820) (Vaksala Häreadsrätts arkiv AIII, Landsarkivet in Uppsala) as "VD" and date (day-month). Pages refer to a pdf-copy of the record. E.g: VD 10.9:114.

in the household of Lieutenant Benzelstjerna at Ålbo. During her duty at Benzelstjerna's, and as witnessed in court: by the support of her master, she changed her clothes to a man's outfit and obtained a local midwife's certificate of her manhood. This was stated after only a brief examination outside the clothes; in court Åhrman admits to having folded a piece of cloth and put it in her pants for a "man's sign" (VD 18.8:90). The certificate was then brought to the vicar of the parish, from whom she obtained a priest's certificate of male identity.

What made her take this drastic step? According to Åhrman, she was persuaded to the transformation by the daughter of the tenant at Ålbo; a young woman who was pregnant with an illegitimate child, and persuaded Åhrman to father it. In return, the girl and her mother promised to help Åhrman to get a job and a place to stay in Stockholm. The pregnancy as well as the alleged persuasion was emphatically denied in court by the tenant family. Åhrman, however, gave detailed information about the child that was eventually born and placed in an orphanage in the capital (VD 2.8:60f).

Benzelstjerna's explanation for having helped Åhrman with her change of gender was that she had assured him that she actually was a man (VD 10.9:114). Benzelstjerna claimed to have believed the peculiar state since there had been a rumour going around that his maid was a hermaphrodite.

Having obtained a priest's testimonial of her new identity, in the autumn of 1795 Åhrman moved to Stockholm, a city that then had about 75 100 inhabitants.⁷ There she worked as a tailor's apprentice for two years, until she was discovered to be a woman (VD 2.8:28). She then moved back to Uppland, still dressed as a man, and got a job as a servant at the Eka mansion. There she met Fredrica Lundmark, an inspector's daughter from a parish nearby who for a period had served as a housekeeper at Eka (VD 2.8:30). Fredrica was the eldest of seven brothers and sisters and was 19 years old at the time.⁸

During their service, Fredrica and Anders Magnus became close friends; so close that they even shared a bed. They both asserted in court that their friendship was completely virtuous and claimed never to have touched or even seen each other without clothes. Eventually the friendship led to the decision to marry. According to Åhrman, the marriage was in the interest of Fredrica and her parents – who were well aware of the true sex of the "husband" – because of a prospect of inheritance. Word against word: according to Fredrica and her family they had all believed that Anders Magnus was a man.

⁷ Utrednings- och statistikkontoret, table 2.3, published on <http://stockholmskallan.se/Soksida/Post/?nid=5748> (visited 150220).

⁸ Landsarkivet i Uppsala: Vaksala kyrkoarkiv. Husförhörslängder 1793–1799.

Female Cross-Dressing: A Hidden Tradition

Why did Anna Maria turn into Anders Magnus? Women disguised as men have by definition been quite a hidden phenomenon, but as historians have shown, it was presumably quite widespread in Europe in early modern times.⁹ In Holland alone, Dekker & van de Pol (1989) have made 120 case studies of criminal reports, and in a Swedish context Jonas Liliequist (1997a; 1997b; 2002) has pointed out several cases. In at least five of the known Swedish cases, the women in question married other women. It is worth noting that the women we know of today are only the ones that ended up in court, that is: those who were discovered. The real number is, by definition, veiled.

Who were these cross-dressers and what were their motives for adopting a male persona? From a contemporary point of view, with our current scholarly attention on queerness and sexual identity, it is tempting to interpret female transvestism as an expression of transsexual or homosexual identity, of love that had to be disguised. It is true, as Dekker & van de Pol (1989:59–63) have shown, that love for another woman has been *one* motif for transgressing gender boundaries. In societies with complementary (hierarchical) gender roles, where heterosexual marriage was the only conceptualized and acceptable form for love relationships, “turning into a man” was a way to make sense of and live out same-sexed attraction.

More often, however, there have been cruder material reasons for cross-dressing than indecisive gender identity and erotic desire – especially for girls from the lower classes (Dekker & van de Pol, 1989:25–34). Economically, in hard times, men had better chances to earn a living: as soldiers, sailors and tailors for example. Another recurrent motive for women adopting a male disguise was the need to escape: to get away from the law or the family, to escape from their husbands or quite the contrary: to follow them in war or at sea. Some women seem to have done it out of sheer adventurism. In many cases it is hard to discern one single reason.

Whereas the *reasons* for women to cross-dress have been various or are hidden from us today, there are nonetheless some discernable common denominators for the *persons* taking the drastic step and their social context. As stated by Dekker & van de Pol (1989:13), the vast majority were girls from the lower classes. They were orphans or had severe family problems and were adolescent when they first changed their clothes (Dekker & van de Pol 1989:17–25). Interestingly enough, in many cases it is clear that they were aware of other women who had earlier done the same thing. There has, in other words, been a consciousness of being part of a tradition, be it a

⁹ Female cross-dressing has occurred in ancient and medieval times as well, see e.g. Sawyer 2003.

non-official, largely vernacular, tradition (Dekker & van de Pol 1989:41–44). If not through personal acquaintance, the knowledge has been transmitted through sayings, stories – and songs.

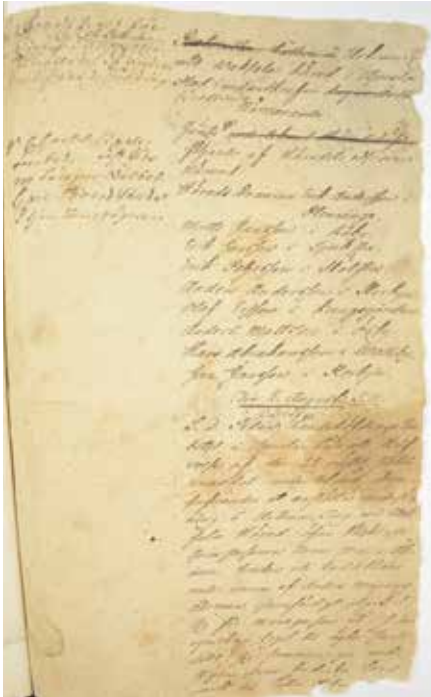
Within Swedish folk song tradition, female cross-dressing is quite a recurrent theme, above all within epic genres like the medieval ballad. The case of the two maids in Vaksala is, however, as far as is known, the only reality scandal that ended up in a song print of this kind. How, then, did it become songs for sale?

From Court Room to Song Print

Anders Magnus Åhrman and Fredrica Lundmark married on the 30 December 1799. The scandal, the fact that the groom was a woman, was officially discovered as the bride and her father went to the local priest a couple of months after the wedding and wanted to cancel the marriage. The bride claimed that she hadn't known anything about her husband's true sex until after the wedding. This was the starting point of the investigation that ended up in the local court of Vaksala in the summer of 1800. The trial lasted from 21 July until 10 September.

The case proved to contain betrayal on several levels: false testimonies, disguises, lies. In the trial, as documented in the 121 pages of the protocol, it turned out that not only had the women fooled priests, doctors, family and friends, but they also declared to have been fooled by each other. A fundamental issue concerned false expectations of inheritance: the "groom" was thought to have a fortune of money and land back in Gävle to inherit, but as became evident after the wedding, this was not true. According to Åhrman, as she claimed in court, Fredrica Lundmark had heard rumours about Åhrman's options to inherit, and was, therefore, eager to marry. Fredrica, on her part, asserted that it was Åhrman who had bragged about the forthcoming fortune, but that she didn't marry Anders Magnus for money, but out of love for the person she thought was a man.

The trial in the local court attracted a lot of people. Due to the nature of the matter, though, it was decided from the outset that the interrogation should be kept behind closed doors. The assembled crowd was therefore asked to leave (VD 2.8:25f). In the final phase of the investigation, on September 10, a printer, Johannes Edman in Uppsala, turned to the court and asked for permission to print the protocol (VD 10.9:119f), which was becoming a rather common practice in court cases of public interest at this time. With the explicit reference to the nature of the matter, however, the local court of Vaksala refused printing of documents concerning the case, due to its violation of moral and divine orders. The court stated that the case was not for public knowledge (VD 10.9:120).

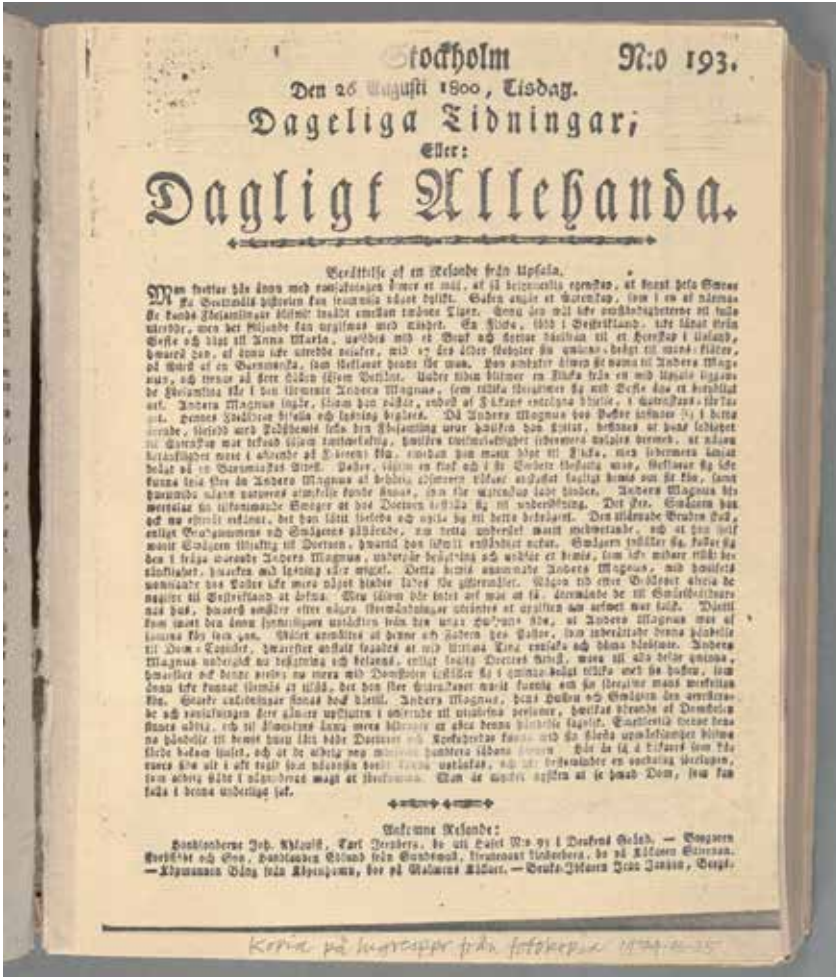


One of the 121 pages of the court record, *Protokoll vid urtima ting 1800–1820, Vaksala häradsrätt*. Photo: Bo Danielsson, Landsarkivet i Uppsala.

At that point, however, the word was already about to be spread to an audience far outside Vaksala. Two weeks before Edman's proposal, there was an anonymously published article in the Stockholm paper *Dagligt Allehanda* that reported from the investigation. The *Dagligt Allehanda* was an advertisement-based paper, known for publishing gossip and scandal issues. The signature "A man travelling from Uppsala" informs the readers: "This ongoing investigation is of a case so remarkable that it hardly has any equivalent in Swedish legal history. It concerns the marriage, in a nearby parish, of two girls. The circumstances have not yet been fully investigated but the following can be asserted for sure."¹⁰ Then a quite well-informed summary of the case follows. It is obvious that the writer had either read the records, had personally attended the interrogation, or had an inside informant. The article ends: "One is truly curious about how things will turn out in this strange case".

After the article was published, it was soon printed in *skillingtryck* as well, and eventually gave rise to two different songs on the matter. To copy and use items from newspapers was a common practice for the producers of

¹⁰ The *Dagligt Allehanda* 26 August 1800 (translation from Swedish: Birgit Sawyer). Less than a month later, 20 September, the same article was published in the *Fahlu Weckoblad* (KB).



Dagligt Allehanda 26 August 1800. Photo: Jens Östman, Kungl. Biblioteket.

song prints (c.f. Enefalk 2015). In this case it is clear that the songs are based on the prose text, since details from it appear in the lyrics as well. In different combinations these three texts were printed and spread in song prints from the year of the trial until 1847. There are at least 12 unique prints on the matter, printed in six different towns in Sweden.¹¹

The more frequent of the two songs on the matter is "Jag borde ej skriva som intet är lärd" ("I ought not to write since I am not learned") which was published in 10 different prints between 1800 and 1847. The song obviously

¹¹ KB: A 5, A 37, E 1801 e, E 1805 c, E 1813 f, E 1843 m, E 1847 b, Ob 1800 a, Ob 1800 b, Ob 1800 c, Ob 1800 d. Uppsala universitetsbibliotek: UUB FV:52.



The first song print on the matter: Wisa om de twänne pigor som gifte sig med hwarandra ("Song about the two maids who married each other"), printed in 1800. Photo: Jens Östman, Kungl. Biblioteket.

took root in the oral tradition and got a life outside the prints as well, as for example is shown in a transcription from Gotland in the early twentieth century.¹²

As is often the case with crime report prints of this kind, the author of the lyrics is anonymous. There is evidence that several authors within the genre of "crime prints" were professional publicists and newspaper journalists; writers for whom the contribution to song prints was a side-line occupation about which they obviously did not wish to display their names. At any rate the anonymity was hardly motivated by any challenging qualities of the texts: the lyrical point of view of these songs takes almost exclusively the side of law and order, in populist terms.

The textual subject of "Jag borde ej skriva" stages a man of the people narrating, a person who lacks education but despite (or because of?) this makes use of common sense:

¹² Fredin 1909:28, "after the widow Hafström, Dala i Burs". This version of the song, "Täu pääkar umtaläs sum giftä si vill", only has 3 (out of the original 9) stanzas, but the moral and the perspective are essentially the same.

1. Jag borde ej skrifwa som intet är lärd,
Ej eller arbetat i Studiers afärd,
Men efter den gåfwa försynen mig gifwa
Wil jag med en Wisa förtälja och skrifwa
//: Hwad som i dag Bladen man läsa kan få ://
//: Hur pigor nu ställa til sit giftermål ://
2. Twå pigor omtalas som gifta sig wil,
Har det och fullbordat med alt som hör til,
Men missnöjda båda när de sig besinna,
När de sedermera fick se och befinna,
At skapnaden woro på jämlika sätt,
Å båda war qwinkön som icke war rätt.
3. Som straxt gafs til känna til lagfarna män,
Å alla bekänna at detta som hänt,
Fins icke beskrifwit från urgamlra tider,
Å ej något annat som warder det liker,
Men förmodligt blef Flickan som hade fin dräkt,
Bedragen på Mannen som har sig förklädt.
4. Hur skal man utgrunda dess upsåt för sann,
At Flickorna börjar så narra hwar ann,
Men troligt den ena för kärleken lider,
Den andra til pängar och arfwedel fiker,
Ty så kallade Flickan sad sig ega arf,
Som wore betydligt uti Gästrikland.
5. När sanning war klädt i sin rätta gestalt,
Så fans där als intet at få uti arf,
Då missnöjet gjorde fullkomligt den saken
At pigorna blefwo ock står under lagen,
Men ingen än weta hwad dom de kan få,
Ty bråtmåls historien det knappast förstär.
6. Men war för den flickan som sig har förklätt,
Wid sutton års ålder förbytit sin dräkt,
Wil hon ej bekäna i allmän het lämna,
Ty hon lærer blygas, för Skaparen rysa,
At hon har misbrukat hans händer och makt,
Å lika som gjort utaf honom förakt.
7. Wi bör alla wara förnöjda med det,
Som utaf försynen är blifwit beskjärd,
Å ingen ting söka at wrida och wända,
Ty sådant får säkert ej någon god ända,
De båda twå pigor det röna får,
Som nu i arästen båd ligger ock står.
1. I ought not to write, since I am not learned
and have not studied,
but using the gift that Providence gave me,
I will tell you a story
of what you can read in the papers:
how maidens planned their marriage.
2. Two maidens wanted to marry
and went through with it all,
but they were both dissatisfied
when they found
that they were shaped in the same way;
they were both women, which was not right.
3. What soon was known to men, learned in the law,
and to everyone else,
nothing similar had ever happened
or anything like it,
but presumably the girl who was finely dressed
was lured by the "man" who appeared in disguise.
4. How can we understand the intention as truth,
when the girls started to lure each other?
Probably one of them suffered for love,
and the other longed for money and inheritance;
the latter claimed an inheritance,
important enough in Gästrikland.
5. When Truth was dressed in its right form,
there was nothing to be inherited.
This was fully declared, and the disappointed maids
were found guilty,
Nobody can know how they will be punished;
a criminal story we cannot understand.
6. But why the girl in disguise had
– at 17 years old – dressed like a man,
she did not want to confess but left to be forgotten.
She felt shame before our Creator,
whose wish, hands and power she had abused
and treated with contempt.
7. We all ought to be satisfied
with what Providence has given us,
and not try to alter things,
because that will never end well.
Both maidens will experience this,
when they are now in prison.

8. Wi böra besinna at det ej är rätt,
 at ställa til giftermål på sådant sätt
 Att skämta med hela Gudomens praktikär,
 Och säga sig wara på ärligt sätt giftär,
 Mån Gud som är wärd både ära ock pris,
 Han bringar fram sanning på alla de wis.

9. När andra har syndat så har funnits dom,
 I Bråttmåls historien at lesa därom,
 Man nu blifwer ämnen på synder förökad,
 At knapt dom beslutit i werlden kan sökas,
 Mån himmelska Dommaren gör dom wäl rätt
 Om di sökte synder på tusende sätt.

8. We ought to remember that it is not right
 to organize a marriage like this;
 to joke with Divine practices
 and claim to be properly married.
 But God who is worth both honour and praise
 can bring forward truth in all ways.

9. When other people have sinned, they have been
 judged, as we can read in history.
 But now the forms of sin will increase,
 and it is uncertain what the judgements will be,
 but the heavenly Judge will do right,
 even if the sins are thousand-fold.

The narrator tells the story of the actual event by its main features: the scandalous couple, the marriage and the disappointment; and adds speculations about motifs and who might have been betrayed by whom. The tone might be perceived as mocking or indignant, but the explicit moral judgement is clear: this is a violation of God's order: it is not right "to joke with Divine practices".

As expressed, there is a certainty about the uniqueness of the matter: "Nothing similar had ever happened or anything like it". As a preferred understanding of the matter, the declaration is significant *per se*, although, as discussed, female cross-dressing was quite a recurrent phenomenon in early modern times. From the point of view of the producers, the exceptional and sensational state is an immediate argument for buying the print. At a deeper social level, the message can be understood as a moral imperative in the interests of the church and the law, pointing out the action as a vicious abnormality.

The overt rejection and condemnation of the gender masquerade and the false marriage is an apparent message that works on the manifest level. As an effect, however, there is also a quite opposite meaning. Considering the court's explicit ambition to censor the matter from public knowledge, the very spreading the word about the women's criminal actions is potentially empowering. The statement of the song can thus be said to be ambiguous, two-folded: "This is terrible!" But: "Listen to what poor girls of the common people are capable of!". As Dekker & van de Pol (1989:41–44) have pointed out, the hidden tradition of female cross-dressing has depended on the awareness of predecessors.

It is interesting to note that the song's open end, the depicted situation before the case was closed and the punishments declared, continued to be printed long after the trial was over. There was never a follow up-story, an updated version, but this frozen, suggestive uncertainty.

Concluding Remarks

To return to the initial question about what vernacular song prints, the *skillingtryck*, as a source material can tell us about the lives and experiences of ordinary, non-privileged people. Taking this particular criminal case and its life in song prints as an example, it is obvious that the prints could tell their contemporary audience quite a lot about (other) ordinary people, at least more than the authorities wished to. For researchers of today, they do lead us to popular phenomena of their time, verified as in this case, or fictive. In either way, the issues of popular song prints were by definition matters of their time. To appeal to potential buyers they needed to be interesting and relevant for the experiences and imaginations of yesterday's men, women and identities in between.

Finally: here I have only discussed the fate of the story, but what about the protagonists, the girls? In short, the interrogation process proved them both to be equally involved in and guilty of the fraud. They were judged to lose their honour and to pay 50 *daler* each, which they obviously did in December 1800 as is confirmed by a signed receipt attached to the final verdict of the higher court.¹³ It doesn't say who paid the penalty, but most likely it was Fredrica's father. Anna Maria Åhrman was then banished from the parish and the traces of her end here.

What happened to her next and where she might have gone can, unfortunately, only be a matter of speculation. A possible scenario is that she moved back to Stockholm where she, as mentioned, had lived and worked before as a tailor apprentice in the name of Anders Magnus. As compared to the villages and parishes outside Uppsala, the bigger city might have offered better opportunities to start anew, as a man or as a woman.

In whatever guise, it is intriguing to picture that she one day, among the street peddlers and song print sellers of the city, might have come across one of the prints about her and Fredrica, "the two maids who married each other". How did she feel about it? Was she ashamed; did it hurt; or was it, quite contrary, an adventure to brag about in the taverns, something that possibly led to further events? We will never know. What we do know is that she by then was only 23 years old, and that her life, as opposed to the song's story, was not yet finally written.

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KB = Kungliga biblioteket

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Fahlu Weckoblad

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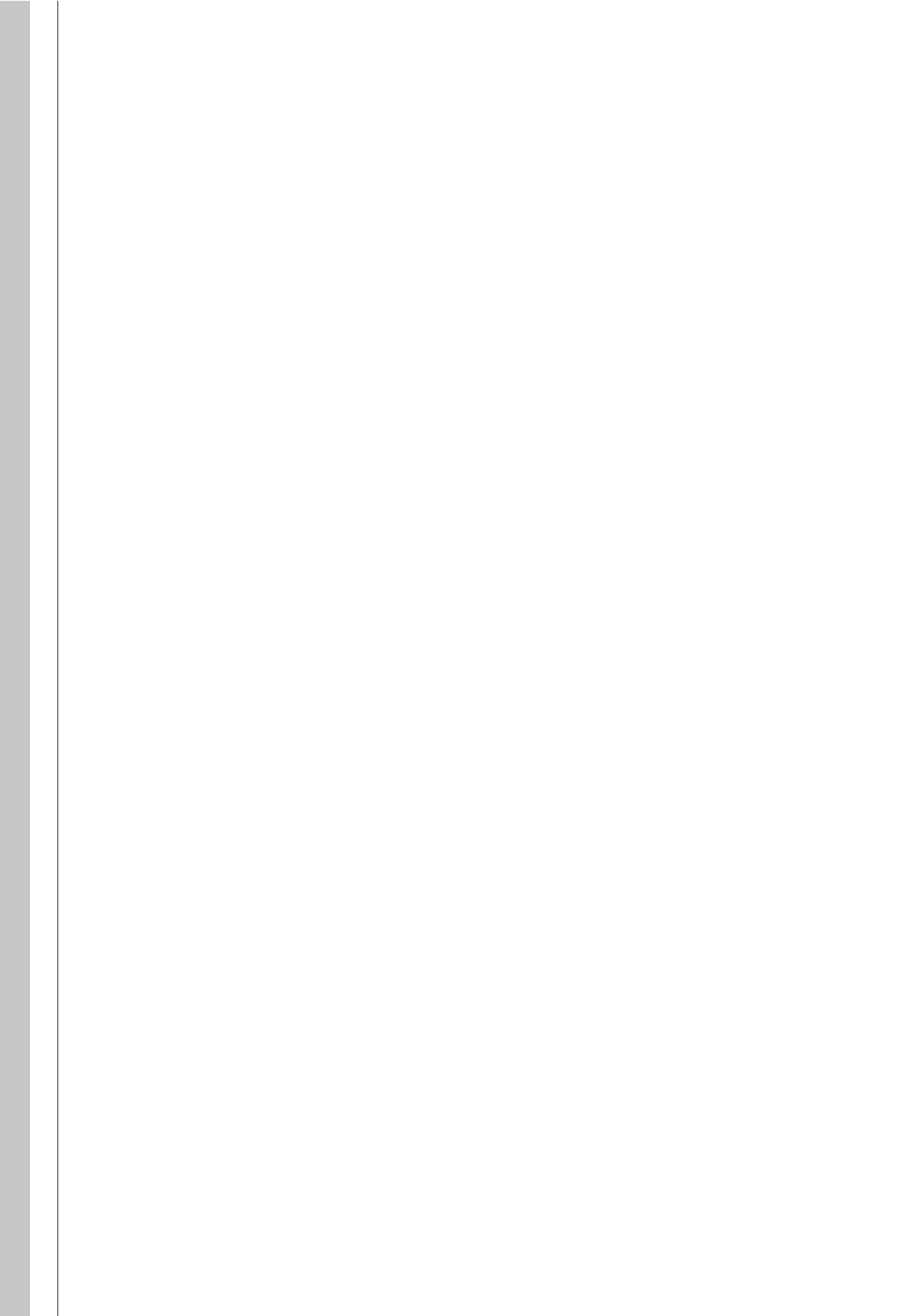
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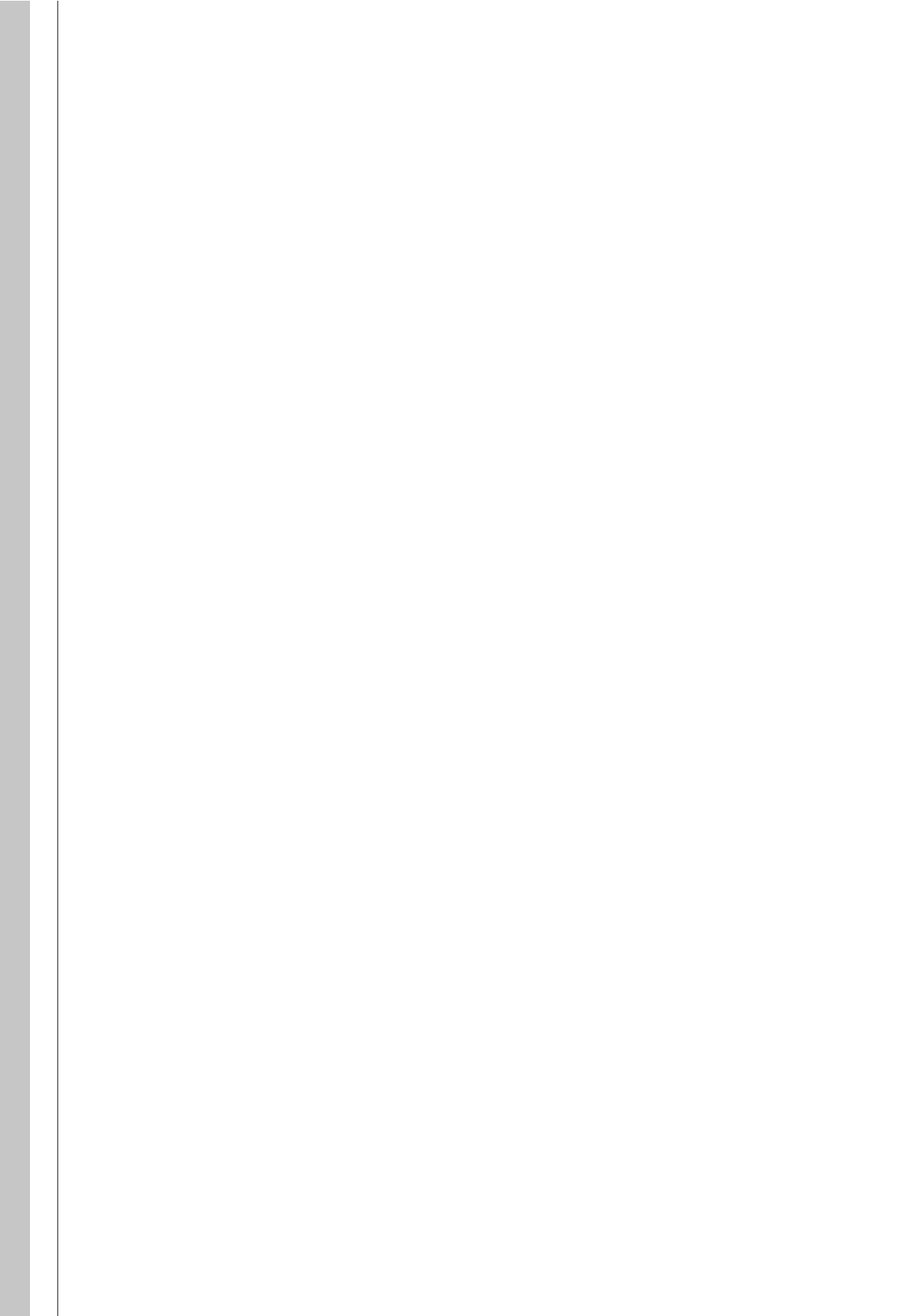
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Orality and Literacy



MARIJA DALBELLO

Reading Immigrants

Immigration as Site and Process of Reading and Writing

ABSTRACT. The European immigrants to America around 1900 were passing through various orders of literacy on their transatlantic journey and during processing at the ports of entry. An extensive record-keeping accompanying their entry into America produced an archive that is in itself a monument to sophisticated information management. The activities at the processing station of Ellis Island in the Port of New York, a site of passage for some twelve million immigrants from 1890 to 1954, include well-documented literacy forms and practices. The “reading from below” approach described in this paper focuses on: (1) the passage itself as the site of reading and literacy; (2) reading the immigrants’ bodies as shaped by the criteria of legibility defined by the ideologies of the state, eugenics, and the labor market; and (3) immigrant visibility and representations in the media. Drawing on oral histories, archival records, and contemporary media and visual culture, this research reflects on the institutional “ways of seeing” in the Progressive era – its ambiguities regarding scientism, efficiency, and human value – that shaped how immigrants could be seen and interpreted.

KEYWORDS: Ellis Island, 1890s–1920s, immigrants, literacy, information processing, visuality,opic regimes

Discourses of Literacy and their Reading “Against the Grain”

They stood in line together – those who saw America as adventure, and those who saw it as a beacon of hope; it was a business of numbers on how to feed, house and process – 4,000 people at a time.

Georges Perec, *Ellis Island*

In their 1980 documentary titled *Ellis Island*, Georges Perec and Robert Bober explore the migration narrative from Europe to America. The first part “Traces” is set on the dilapidated Ellis Island in New York harbor. Using historical photographs depicting scenes from the time of highest migration from Europe to America around 1900 – mounted on cardboard props and filmed in the exact locations in which the actual subjects posed for the photographers a long time ago had stood – they summon nostalgia. In their directness and materiality, the photographs’ spectral presence is left open for Perec’s script (Wagstaff 2013:35). From traces and imprints left in the photographs and the site itself, petrified “afterimages” become jumping off points for new narratives of migration. Through emblematic photographs that defined the iconography of migration from Europe to America, the past lives in the “afterimages” summoned by cardboard props in this forlorn space, decades after its closure as an official site of immigration in 1954 and before its renovation as a museum of immigration in 1990.¹ At the time of writing, in areas accessible only to specialized tours, one still finds the oversized black-and-white transfers on broken glass windows or in the dark recesses of the decaying and overgrown detention buildings.

The juxtapositions of place and photographs in Georges Perec and Robert Buber’s documentary presented a way of exploring the context of European immigration to America from “an archive” of official records that had become iconic images of migration. Similarly, this essay reinterprets source material through close readings of the official records to decode discourses of literacy in the context where immigrants did not leave the traces of their own writing in direct voice. Drawing on photography, archival record, oral histories, the interpretive albums produced by genealogists, and imagery circulated in the popular press, the analysis uses reading “against the grain” to reveal contemporary and institutional ways of seeing. This methodology involves scrutinizing narratives and texts, cross-reading stories of origin and migration (Wiget 1991:210), reading documents and archival materiality to reveal “how documents were shaped and collected in the first place” – as

¹ Ellis Island was operational from 1892 until 1954 - National Archives and Records Administration, Record Group 85–Casefile 58A734 (NARA RG 85–58A734).

developed in the context of history of women and gender (Yale 2015:348); and recognizing how integral were they to the context of the “constituent processes of empire-building” including colonial administration (Ballantyne 2005:104). This involves reading the archive in a critical and self-aware way, with an understanding of how records were generated and sensitive to the unspoken and the echoes in the existing archive.

The historiography of marginal populations and the “reading from below” also involve critical reading of “visuality” beyond visual representations and the graphic nature of documents. “How we see, how we are able, allowed, or made to see, and how we see this seeing and the unseeing therein” (Foster 1988:ix) depends on institutional position. For example, the official photographs would construct ways of seeing that included the reading and inscription of immigrant bodies by the authorities, thus repositioning the notion of reading and writing to include the “scopic” regimes defined by medicine, public health, legal, and trade organizations—all embedded in the daily routines controlled by the immigration authorities.² The institutional ways of seeing in the texts produced in the context of visual inspection, in the descriptions of protocols followed by the professions engaged in the processing of immigrants, and in official photography expand the historiography of “reading and writing from below” by revealing immigrants’ literacy, the contextual literacy artifacts, and immigrants’ presence in these performances of literacy. How were the literacy events staged and what was the discourse around immigrant legibility and literacy at the liminal points of their passage from Europe to America, to the cultures of reading and writing exemplified by the modern state?

The forms of reading and writing linked to the administrative practices developed in the United States during the Progressive era (roughly from the 1890s through 1920s) left a rich record of the process of construction, transformation, and redefinition of immigrants’ lived humanity as they were tested, documented, and tracked. This process involved a system of control of documents, observation of immigrants’ physical characteristics and ability, multiple points of inspection and translation. The non-literate individuals had to work the system as they were also passing from realities within which orality could organize their routines, crossing thresholds of politics, languages, and cultural forms, to enter the world of literacy shaped by modernity. The process of “translation” from one state to another involved entering through a system of information processing organized by the immigration authorities, which was rationalized and rooted in the ide-

² Gillian Rose defines the notion of scopic regime as the “ways in which both what is seen and how it is seen are culturally constructed” (Rose 2011:2).

ology of scientific management. This ideology was expressed with particular intensity in the space on the margins, at the ports of entry and exemplified in the practices at Ellis Island between 1890s and 1920.

Immigrants' Legibility

The immigrants would be read and had become legible from the point of view of the society that was to receive them. Caricatures from the period show, for example, a tidal wave of immigrants breaking down a "gated" entrance to the United States under their force, or a sieve with immigrants needing to jump and pass through a mesh (figure 1). These two representations reflect the intensity of fear about an uncontrolled wave of immigration, but also that the immigrants had to "fit" as they landed. Immigrants had to be legible within the system of processing that was designed and optimized to exclude the physically and psychologically infirm. Becoming legible was a reality constructed by the ideologies of the state, eugenics, and the labor market. The points of legibility had the power of inclusion or exclusion, within which multiple political, ideological, and representational forces were in play. Both the media and the immigration bureaucracy played important roles in shaping of the criteria for legibility by recognizing immigrants in terms of types, as shown in this caricature from the popular press (figure 2) and in visual texts representing the immigrants, in scripts for testing and inspections conducted by civil servants.



Fig. 1a. "Immigration restriction prop wanted." In: Philadelphia Inquirer, January 23, 1903.



Fig. 1b. "A finer screen needed." In: The Brooklyn Daily Eagle, May 13, 1903.

Figure 2. The bureaucracy and the media played an important role in the process of translation and shaping of the criteria for legibility by recognizing immigrants in terms of types.



Fig. 2a. "Old World types that arrive to the New World." From: William Williams Papers (Scrapbook), The New York Public Library.



Fig. 2b. Augustus Sherman photographs.



Fig. 2c. "Four years of progress at Ellis Island". From: William Williams Papers (Scrapbook), The New York Public Library.

Ellis Island was a key transition point for tidal waves of immigrants who entered into the New World's labor force defined by industrial modernity that required uniformity. The records that enable reconstruction of the process of making immigrants legible as they were being "read" as white, male

industrial workers can be found in the extensive correspondence of the case files of the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Immigration. For the most part, the activities intended to establish control over the immigrant body within a distinct culture of literacy and numeracy assumed passivity and matching of individuals against categories developed by the immigration authorities and the professions. Being subjected to inspection, the immigrants had no agency unless they understood the operations of the system by means of which they were seen and for which they needed to be legible. And, if they were read in certain ways, the outcome could be exclusion (i.e., detention and deportation).

The arriving immigrants needed to be ordered and processed within the cultures of reading and writing that supported the functioning of a rational modern state through inspection and copious record keeping and novel methods in data management. The translation of human difference to systematic ways of seeing relied on categorization, documentation, indexing of this knowledge and its retrieval. In the immigration case files, official correspondence and the media, the theme of the “unfit immigrants,” i.e. those “likely to become public charges” and their presence in America tends to be framed as a failure in the system of inspection or the result of corrupt or inefficient inspectors that allowed the “unfit” to slip through the system. Scientism, pragmatism, and reformist zeal shaped the criteria for systematization and the techniques for identifying undesirable individuals while maintaining an underlying concern with fairness and humanity. The Progressive era perfected information processing and documentation in the attempt to control and manage immigration. Literacy and legibility shaped these material cultures and practices of inspecting immigrants at the U.S. border and also exerting pressures on the large emigration industry in Europe. Ellis Island came to signify the margins of modernity in this wide-ranging process.

For over sixty years after its opening in 1892, Ellis Island served as a gateway for millions of immigrants coming to the United States, after being selected as the first federal immigration facility by the federal government. Common estimates agree that twelve million immigrants passed through Ellis Island until 1920, a million annually in the peak years around 1900 and that the authorities processed three to four ships, or 4,000 to 6,000 people daily. While the processing took place on board of ships for first class and cabin passengers, steerage passengers streamed through Ellis Island and its about ten checkpoints in five hours. A small number was detained there for legal and medical reasons. Literacy became an exclusionary category only in 1917, when the Congress passed the requirement for immigrants over sixteen to be able to read. The quotas introduced in 1921 also changed immigration with the exclusion of Southern Europeans. In 1924, further restrictions

with a quota based on national origin curtailed immigration further, with 150,000 allowed each year. In the twenty years between 1924 and 1943, Ellis Island was used as a detention center for “enemy aliens.” The last detainee and immigrant left the island in November 1954 when the General Services Administration declared the immigration center surplus property.³

The Passage as a Site of Reading and Literacy

The American public’s concern regarding the tidal wave of immigrants arriving at the Port of New York at Ellis Island involved debates about literacy and illiteracy throughout the Progressive era. A *National Geographic Magazine* article, based on data in Commissioner General of Immigration F.P. Sargent’s report, noted that, “about 28 percent of the total number [of arrivals in 1906] were illiterate [while] only 6.2 percent of the total white population of the United States and only 4.6 per cent of the native-born whites in 1900 were illiterate” (Grosvenor 1907:329). While literacy was quite common, it was unevenly distributed in terms of class, gender and country of origin. The arriving populations carried the stigma of illiteracy even though nearly seventy percent were in fact literate at the time of landing. The debates about literacy by implication targeted immigrants from rural areas and Southern Europe.⁴

European immigrants to America were exposed to literacy artifacts from the start of their journey. A steerage ticket could be obtained through shipping lines’ agencies and the ticket agents who traveled to villages. After 1900, an immigrant had to secure a passport (or workbook) from local officials and a United States visa from the nearest American consular office. As prospective émigrés presented themselves, travel agents would perform initial screenings in their office. One of the undercover investigators hired by the United States Bureau of Immigration reports in an exposé intended to reveal the inefficiency and the lack of diligence of inspection at origin:

³ The Great Port of New York (entry port from 1820s) was one of seventy other federal immigration stations. Commissioner William Williams (May 1902–1905, 1909–May 1912) shaped the inspection practices at Ellis Island. He followed Commissioner Thomas Fitchie and Assistant Commissioner Edward F. McSweeney (1899–1902) and was succeeded by Frederic C. Howe, with Andrew Watchorn as interim Commissioner (1905–1909). The span covers the Progressive era to New Deal in the U.S. politics. Ronald H. Bayor (2014) and Vincent J. Cannato (2010) provide factual and source information for studying Ellis Island. This information is complemented by the National Archives and Records Administration, Record Group 85 (Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service), The Ellis Island Oral History Project, U.S. Department of the Interior, and Ellis Island Immigration Museum, National Park Service website.

⁴ Carlo Cipolla (1969) remains the main source of information on the figures for populations from Southern Europe and the Habsburg areas.

[N]ame, age, occupation, name and address of people to whom I was going, name and address of nearest relative left behind, amount of money in my possession, nationality, last residence, whether married or single, and whether ever before in America. [...] beyond this no inquiries or investigation were made as to my literacy, my past, the source of my passage money, my morals, or mental condition. My workbook, which was to serve as my passport out of Austria, a counterfeit with a false and completely blurred seal, was closely examined, but no unfavorable criticism was offered. (Krenzelok, *The Steerage Experience*, no date)⁵

Some of the information from the initial profiling made it into the ship's manifest, which was the central document for legal and medical inspection in the Ellis Island facilities. In the archives, there are references to incorrect entries and failures of record keeping in ship manifests even though the manifest remains a key document to identify individuals who made the passage.

As part of their process of deciding to emigrate, the immigrants participated in a print culture created by the migration industries including almanacs, handbooks, and guides on emigration that were widely available in many languages. Shipping companies and banks were issuing almanacs and "facts on file" for prospective immigrants, a type of informational brochure about the destination – partly to encourage emigration – written almost as tourist guides, some with detailed description of the ship and the passage, including laws and regulations in the countries of immigration and comparison with home countries, sections covering "the labor question, weekly wages, and living expenses" and even assessments such as "The West: Who Should Migrate Thither" in one such typical *Handbook* (2014 [1880]). The splendor of the transatlantic liners was depicted during the golden age of steamship travel in a wide range of media that included postcards, memorabilia, and photo albums with detailed descriptions of stately salons, sitting rooms, and other luxuries such as, in one instance, a fish-tank on board of a ship. Ships were social worlds and their captains and officers memorialized in broadsides. These artifacts of print culture and what they represented encoded a class differential – of who could see them, read them, send them to others, and participate in the dream of travel and emigration.

The sorting of different classes of passengers by status and gender constraining the spaces they would be entering and sharing on the ship was

⁵ Sending male and female investigators in the steerage disguised as immigrants was a practice organized by the Bureau of Immigration to investigate on the conditions of travel. The reports prompted changes to the 1882 Passenger Act, Section 1 (in effect from January 1, 1909).

integral to ship travel.⁶ The passage was widely documented in visual texts published in illustrated magazines, postcards, and reports. They offered insights into the regimented conditions in the case of steerage passengers contrasted with luxuries of first- and second-class travel. For the former, vaccinations, roll calls, and other activities on board of ship were documented in illustrated dailies, generally in dramatic and chaotic terms.⁷ Documented in contemporary photographs was the ship's interior: ambient signage and prohibitions regulated movement on the ship and routine activities of the passengers; the letters of the alphabet organized the sleeping arrangements in bunk beds. There were notices in German and English that spelled out the rights of the passengers (required by the Passenger Act of 1882 and amid reports of lawlessness and harassment of women by the crew members), but posted in "inconspicuous places" in the dining room and in the women's sleeping compartment (*Reports* 1911:20), which was ironic because women who could not see them or read them could not quote or use them to defend their rights. A report prepared for the Congress about the conditions in steerage mentions entertainment in the form of "a very fair library of German and English books" in addition to "the band [that] played a half hour each afternoon in the dining room," a piano in the women's dining room, and the deck that served as a promenade (*Reports* 1911:28, 33).⁸ It is unclear whether the books in German or English could be or were read by the steerage passengers. They at least symbolically point to a culture of reading and writing. In the same report, the reference to dining rooms and tables, indicates that when not set for meals, they were being "covered with red cloths and could be used for games, writing, or any other purpose." The "bill of fare" in the mornings listing the offering of the four meals is often noted in oral histories. The "notices of the distance traveled each way were also placed there" – part of the material culture of literacy integral to the regulated environment on board of steamships (*Reports* 1911:28).

The methods of passenger surveillance and inspections were a source of multiple communications and legislative acts as port authorities and the shipping companies devised systems to identify immigrants who were unfit for processing. The cases of immigrants who were deported include careful

⁶ The conditions varied. Single women could have somewhat superior passage than other steerage passengers. The prices of tickets also varied: a ticket-price of the first class compared to steerage could be 100 times higher (2,500 dollars compared to 25 dollars).

⁷ *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Weekly*, April 27, 1901 shows vaccination of steerage passengers in mid-ocean. The illustrated weeklies and magazines often presented dramatic and chaotic conditions on ships.

⁸ These reports originated from the U.S. Immigration Commission, known as the "Dillingham Commission" (1907–1910).

transcripts of interviews and hearings preserved in the files of the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), often in attempts to establish the prior condition that justified deportation at the shipping agents' expense. For that reason, the medical inspections on steamships targeted steerage passengers. In this report by an undercover agent traveling in steerage:⁹

The second day out we all passed in single file before the doctor as he leisurely conversed with another officer, casting an occasional glance at the passing line. The chief steerage steward punched six holes in each passenger's inspection card, indicating that the inspection for six days was complete. One steward told me this was done to save the passengers from going through this formality every day. The fourth day out we were again reviewed. The doctor stood by. Another officer holding a cablegram blank in his hand compared each passenger's card to some writing on it. There was another inspection on the seventh day, when we were required to bare our arms and show the vaccinations. Again our cards were punched six times and this completed the medical examination. Just before landing we were reviewed by some officer who came on board and checked us off on a counting machine operated by a ship's officer. (Krenzlok, *The Steerage Experience*, no date)

This description makes it clear that the surveillance methods were being instrumented and routinized – by means of the punch card, counting machines, and passenger cards. All of these forms of writing, counting, or visual inspection were ordering operations in the form of a reduction to facts, ciphers, numbers, and lists. These were the normative measures within which immigrants could be looked at and be seen. This “machinery of reading” implied constant comparison against an official list of features. The inspections needed to produce correct information that would be impervious to human error, or inefficiency. These reading processes required optimal conditions, as noted in copious documentation on the inspection practices and technical description of routines. There were references to insufficient light conditions and the inability to conduct medical inspections in reports. For example, an inspection report dated February 4, 1914 refers to the inability to inspect due to the artificial light conditions in second class on board of ship, ordered exceptionally in order to intercept the “peasant type” immigrants who purchased cabin tickets to evade steerage and its associated inspections at Ellis Island station.¹⁰ In a related discussion of the proposal

⁹ Daily medical inspections were described by one of the agents in her report (Krenzlok, *The Steerage Experience*, no date).

¹⁰ NARA RG 85-52320, Box 1.

to transfer second-class cabin “aliens” to Ellis Island, there are similar deliberations around the optimal inspections on ships. In a 36-page transcript of a discussion of the conditions necessary for a satisfactory inspection, there are numerous references to light conditions, visibility calibrated by the light levels, distances measured in feet, including this observation that matches a human to a camera eye: “one can’t make a steerage inspection properly in a light that you can’t take a photograph in, because you can’t get any better image of an individual in poor light than the camera lens can, than the camera film can”.¹¹

Reading the Immigrant Bodies: Ideology, Politics and Representations

Caricatures as a form of reading exaggerated the categorizations of processing during inspections by creating typologies that could be understood and legible for the public (figure 2) as were the posed photographs of arriving immigrants (figure 3).

Immigrant Types: Typologies, Caricatures, Specimens

Photographs of the arrival scenes in various spaces on Ellis Island feature the individuals waiting in orderly lineups about to be processed. These scenes are punctuated by the examination events and typologies – as a way of control and “reading” the individual immigrants or identifiable groups. The scrapbooks compiled by Commissioner of Ellis Island William Williams include clippings from the contemporary press, with his typed annotations and photographic portraits of immigrants by Augustus Sherman. It is striking how the drawings preserved among the clippings (shown in figures 2 and 3) echo the photographs of the most striking “specimen” in the encyclopedia of immigrant types known from the article in the *National Geographic Magazine* (1907) titled, “A Look at the people coming through Ellis Island”. The captions are interpretive, e.g. “Cossack immigrants, of whom about 5,500 were admitted in 1906,” “Holland women,” “A German family of one daughter and seven sons,” “A Scotch family of seven daughters and four sons,” “Roumanian shepherd’s family as they appeared on landing in New York,” and so on, are all groupings in set configurations shown in figure 3. Their posing conforms to a composition vocabulary that privileges sorting by size, age and gender to create representational tableaux.

The physical postures and number, while capturing diversity, are also regimented. That creates visual tension between uniformity and structure and individual expressions. Like their physical postures, their numbers and

¹¹ NARA RG 85-53438.



Figure 3. Photographs of the most striking "specimen" in the encyclopedia of immigrant types from the article in the National Geographic Magazine (1907) "A Look at the people coming through Ellis Island". The captions are interpretive, e.g. "Cossack immigrants, of whom about 5,500 were admitted in 1906," "Holland women," "Holland children," "A German family of one daughter and seven sons," "A Scotch Family of seven daughters and four sons," "Roumanian shepherd's family as they appeared on landing in New York," and "Ruthenian Girl".



See Figure 3.



See Figure 3.

bodies provide an insight into their vitality and fertility when representing families. The naturalistic rendering of these emblematic images has an aura of “strange beauty” – combining individual and type in a single rendition. The viewer is positioned ambiguously – as one with privileged insight who inspects the scene but is also open to compassion. The institutional positions of the photographers who recorded the immigrants in the midst of arrival and processing, among whom was social photographer Lewis W. Hine, reveals a position that is ambiguous in its combination of documentary zeal, classic rendering, and empathy. The immigrants remain objectified, as specimens would, while irreducibly present. Exemplary in the genre of portrait photography capturing individuals as types, the images combined the multiple ways of seeing. On the one hand was the surveillance (institutional position of the state) and rationalism in immigrants’ role as specimens. On the other hand, their humanity produces an emotion of “charitas” or empathy. Both of these positions were integrated in reformist discourse.¹² This identification with a double position of “inspection” – first by the state through immigration officials, and secondly by the public, was compassionate if ambiguous toward immigrants. Through posing and ordering, the American public could participate in the surveillance of the physical types yet respond subjectively. The social position of those consuming the *National Geographic Magazine* photos and those depicted in them were distinct but offered inclusion. Once legible to the state and the public, immigrants were expected to enter society without their folkloric appearances.

The public circulation of images was deliberate. Commissioner Williams was known for sharing information with the press as a gesture aimed at providing visual evidence to debunk accusations of mistreatment of “the aliens” at Ellis Island brought against him by the ethnic organizations and the German press. From the coverage of cases in the daily press, we know that some of these individuals were deported (for instance, a family of Roma whose story was followed in the news, reporting bizarre details of their behavior as they fought deportation).¹³

¹² Lewis W. Hine is also known for using photography to reveal the conditions of child labor.

¹³ William Williams papers (Scrapbook 2, leaf 31 verso) include press clippings with sensationalist titles, “Gypsies Fight to Resist Deportation: Inspectors Have to Put Them Aboard Waiting Tug and Steamer by Force: Men Even Use the Babies as Clubs in Struggle” *The Evening Mail*, July 22, 1909 and “Wield Babies as War Clubs: Gypsies Thus Rush to Attack on Immigration Inspectors Who are Deporting Them: Women Faint at Spectacle,” *The Globe*, July 22, 1909.

Representations of Reading and Writing

The images depicting inspectors, doctors, hearing boards, and translators show representations of literacy in their activities of seeing and transforming observations into data points, making notes, writing reports. The immigrants would be shown in transitional spaces at various points of inspection – being questioned, taking tests, being looked at by the medical and legal staff, or waiting (figure 4). The candid shots of officials in action are depicting “studium” (after Roland Barthes) in their intention to capture the story of the process. They present scenes in a banal, direct way. Their intention to be “good historical scenes” allows us to engage in the cultural, linguistic, or political interpretations. The individual portraits, however, have a second



Fig. 4.1 a & b. Photographed by Edwin Lewick. From: William Williams Papers (Scrapbook), The New York Public Library.



Fig. 4.2-4.4. The immigrants shown in transitional spaces at various points of inspection being questioned, taking tests, being observed by the medical staff and officials.

element that disturbs the studium. They include a “punctum,” a photograph’s quality that “stings” or “wounds” as we create a personal connection to the person or object depicted (Barthes 1980:26–27, 37, 41).

The images from the detention rooms, the hospital, and the Ellis Island Library depict an idea of literacy that is actively attached to the immigrants – at least on the surface. The images of children in care of the American



Fig. 5a 1–5. Ellis Island Library (“The Tower of Babel”) (Photo: Percy Sperr, The New York Public Library).



Fig. 5b. “Women’s detained room: Writing the first letter home” (1903). (Photo: J.H. Adams, Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, Transfer from the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, Social Museum Collection, 3.2002.300.2.)

Red Cross are of receiving and reading books. An image of a solitary reader “Lost in the paper of his home language,” “Immigrant boy inspecting loan collection from New York Public Library,” “Readers in the Ellis Island hospital library,” “One of the letter writers in Ellis Island Hospital Library” (figure 5) offer visual evidence for the existence of the Ellis Island Library that was operated by the New York Public Library and was known as the “The Tower of Babel” (photographed by Percy Sperr).¹⁴ A photo captioned, “Women’s Detained Room. Writing the First Letter Home” (1903) by J.H. Adams complements the iconography of reading and writing in this series of representations of immigrant cultures of literacy situated in the port of arrival. The scene may be interpreted as dictation in which the letter-writer composes a letter in front of a curious audience. The image is ambiguous. The letter-writer could be writing a letter on behalf of her villagers who surround her, or she could be engaged in some other fascinating activity, emphasized by a small boy in the foreground inquisitively handling the envelope. The wonder is reflected in the faces that surround the central figure in this image, clearly intended as non-writers or non-readers observing the skill of literacy. “Writing the first letter home” in the processing station is the scene in which literacy is presented as collective and in the context of orality (represented by non-writers who may be listening, or dictating). The role of illiterates as onlookers in this gendered representation is in contrast with a woman letter writer and a child in an ambiguous role of a learner. There are multiple ironies at work as the differences of gender are brought to the analysis.

In the context of detention quarters, in the hospital and the library, immigrants are seen engaged with reading and writing. The activities in detention also included handiwork for women. We can imagine that lace, knitting or stitching are cognate to writing in the movement of hands that create patterns. We rarely see conversation depicted in these visual texts.

Marking and Labeling

Inspection practices were un-ambiguously normative and involved observation as immigrants moved up staircases that were used to reveal medical symptoms, such as heart disease. Information from ship manifests was being matched with the information that immigrants had to produce at various point in the legal inspection. The inspection cards on their clothes were punch cards stamped with a combination of numbers: the cross-section of page and line number of the ship’s manifest where their name appeared (*Ellis Island History*). That was an effective way to enable visual processing

¹⁴ The Ellis Island albums are digitized, with originals in the New York Public Library.

at each inspection point, to sort the passengers, and for inspectors to quickly parse pages from the ship manifests on arrival. The ship manifest was the lookup table at the core of management and cross-indexing that could be used for quick retrieval, for sorting and filtering (a fundamental operation in data management that also relied on a mechanical system for ordering). The signs pinned on their clothes, various baggage tickets, and receipts obtained at various points in the legal and medical inspection represent a system of labeling that accompanied the processing. One immigrant notes humorously, “we must have looked like marked-down merchandise” (Ellis Island Immigration Museum, National Park Service, *Ellis Island History, The Inspection Process*). Among the markings that facilitated bureaucratic processing were the green chalk letters drawn on immigrants’ clothes that would indicate a particular condition that would require additional verification and detention (figure 6). The coding schemes marked immigrants for exclusion as they were being sorted out of the line and chalk-marked with letters designating a condition, or illness, with TC for trachoma, X for debility. Thus, the letter marks would indicate separation and exclusion.

Coding

Anthropometric methods were used to code appearances in this laboratory of human diversity. Henry Goddard, a proponent of eugenics, introduced



Fig. 6a. Lewis W. Hine photograph of Italian family.

X	Suspected mental defect	F	Fee	P	Physical and Limp
⊗	Definite signal mental disease observed	Ft	Foot	P ₃	Prognosis
B	Bark	G	Color	S _c	Scalp/Furrow
C	Conductivity	H	Hair	S	Sanity
CT	Trachoma	K	Kernia		
E	Eyes	L	Limb		
		N	Nose		

Fig. 6b. Coding scheme for chalk markings.

intelligence tests in 1909 and was the first to apply them to measure the ability to learn using tasks that did not require language, building on the intelligence test being developed by Alfred Binet at that time, directly translated from French. The nonverbal intelligence tests measured the ability to gain knowledge, complementary in intent to literacy tests. At Ellis Island, Goddard operated with a group of assistants:

first, an assistant would wander through the halls and visually identify people thought to be mentally defective (subjective bias as well as informed consent was yet to emerge as a debate in psychological enquiry). Once identified, the potential candidate, often confused and frightened, was taken to another location where the revised Binet-Simon scale, along with some other performance measures, was administered. If the person was found to be mentally defective they were often deported. (Fletcher & Hattie 2011:19–20)

Literacy tests introduced in 1917 for immigrants of sixteen years or older required “forced reading” of a forty-word passage in immigrants’ native tongue. The test was fraught with assumptions about literacies, race, and class. Instructions for inspectors were published in the manuals. The reports of these tests are circulated in genealogy sources, pointing to the contradictory ways in which the literacy test was applied:

[T]hose from the Punjab district of [sic] Afghans, for instance, had to follow a series of printed commands, such as picking up a pencil and handing it to the immigration official. Most immigrants, however, had to read biblical translations, such as: “Your riches are corrupted, and your garments moth eaten. Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire” (James 5:2,3), which was the requisite passage for Serbians. (Krenzelok, *Ellis Island, the Immigration Experience*, no date)

According to the same report, the inspectors who worked ten hours a day, seven days a week had to question four to five hundred immigrants a day. The National Archives files contain case files with information about hiring, salaries, and also corruption cases and scandals involving inspectors who failed in their role.

This system of coding operated in a high uncertainty environment for the individuals involved in the process that required informed decision-making on the part of those processing immigrants, but also in the behavior and sense making on the part of the immigrants. On the one side were the immigrants, on the other the individuals conducting inspections – each could easily disrupt the methods of processing, undermine the system of translation and legibility. The civil servants were instruments whose

labors supported the vision of policy makers. The institution they represented, i.e. the United States, did not want to be tricked.

Misreadings

The port of entry was a place of reading and writing in a most ordinary sense. The concession stand in the baggage area that featured translations for food in thirty languages, the post office located at the bottom of the staircase after immigrants passed their medical and legal inspections, where they could change their currency into United States dollars,¹⁵ or send a letter with news of successful passage or when families were separated, are both amply documented in oral histories. The railroad agents where immigrants could purchase tickets to their final destination and other points were also loci of misreading and often of exploitation that was discussed in the correspondence originating from the Commissioner and the concessioners and in the prosecution of corruption cases. The telegram was also a form of writing appearing in the context of miswriting, as in this testimony:

after getting my railroad ticket I was approached by an agent of the telegraph company. The ordinary immigrant would not have distinguished him from the immigration officials. "Show your address," he commanded. What's your name? and before I knew what it was all about, Thirty cents for the telegram. And so he caught them, except those who had been there before and refused to be caught again. Later I learned the usefulness of these telegrams. It said "Meet me at Union Station," but mentioned no trains. My friends spent a night at the station and then didn't meet me. The other telegrams are about as effective. (Krenzelok, *The Steerage Experience*, no date)

Concession agents, by misleading immigrants to misrecognize currency, and immigrants' misreading of uniformed officials, represented other forms of misunderstanding leading to immigrants being tricked and robbed. During Commissioner Williams' term, he introduced regulation in order to diminish these activities and remove dishonest travel agents, missionaries, and others who were preying on the arriving immigrants.¹⁶ Oral history-

¹⁵ William Williams papers document the reforms aimed against private concessioners defrauding immigrants.

¹⁶ In the William Williams papers, "Unfavorable communications" were letters, including curses and death threats on account of some of these policies (1902-1909). In 1910-1912, William Williams notes: "there are at the present time thirty-five immigrant aid or missionary societies having representation at Ellis Island and a larger number would be likely to interfere with the transaction of Government business" - NARA RG 85-53294; 85-53438, Box 1, Folder 8.

sources often refer to instances of cultural confusion, misreading, and misunderstandings, often with happy endings that were needed in retelling the stories from the immigrant past when landing in the land of opportunity.

As noted in the context of inspections on ships, the fears of misreading were tied to visibility, and fears of misreading at Ellis Island to the problems in information retrieval, or corrupt data (when ship manifest as key lookup table was incorrect, resulting in “misplacements” within a mechanical system), as well as human error or trickery. Official reports also focus on the tools of processing, specifying office furniture, card indexes, and document retention, the training and skills required by clerks, stenographers, matrons, inspectors and translators. All of these elements participated in constructing specific views of the social world at Ellis Island and its “statism,”¹⁷ upholding a vision of a modern governing process that shaped how immigrants were transitioning from Europe to America.

“Afterimages”

At the time of writing, a channel on *Youtube* social media site reveals a playlist “Popular Ellis Island Videos” that contains 200 documentaries, and they can be seen as a form of inscription “from below” in capturing the efforts of family historians, genealogists and enthusiasts participating in the creation of a digital memory of immigration. Particular genres in the collection of *Youtube* videos include the stitching together of these well-known photographs with personal documents, letters, and narratives, sometimes oral histories narrated by family members. In the world of mash up and remix, familiar historical documents find their place in animated scrapbooks and family photo albums. Relatives’ and personal stories are re-circulated in video after video. Their appropriation of documents from archival and official sources to create amateur historical narratives are complemented by sources from their personal collections. The genealogist sources created by descendants and inheritors of personal immigrants’ stories through copying, repetition, and recirculation of a collective immigrant experience represent a form of reading from below as they mediate the personal histories of immigration.

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¹⁷ Oz Frankel (2006) focuses on media by which the modern state distributes representations and classificatory knowledge.

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Figure 1

1a. "Immigration restriction prop wanted." In: *Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 23, 1903. From: *William Williams Papers (Scrapbook)* – The New York Public Library.

1b. "A finer screen needed." In: *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, May 13, 1903. From: *William Williams Papers (Scrapbook)* – The New York Public Library.

Figure 2

2a. "Old World types that arrive to the New World." From: *William Williams Papers (Scrapbook)* – The New York Public Library.

2b. *William Williams Papers* (Series I. Ellis Island, 1902-1914, 1939, n.d.). Augustus Sherman photographs, ca. 1905-1914.

2b. Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library. "Alsace-Lorraine girl." *The New York Public Library Digital Collections*. 1906. <http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47da-dc8f-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>; January 18, 2016.

2b. Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library. "Romanian piper." *The New York Public Library Digital Collections*. <http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47da-dc8b-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>; January 18, 2016.

2b. Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library. "[Gypsy family.]" *The New York Public Library Digital Collections*. <http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47de-79d8-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>; January 18, 2016.

2b. Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library. "Dutch woman." *The New York Public Library Digital Collections*. <http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47da-dcb6-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>; January 18, 2016.

2c. "Four years of progress." From: *William Williams Papers (Scrapbook)* – The New York Public Library.

Figure 3

3.1. The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Photography Collection, The New York Public Library. "A family of seven sons and one daughter, Ellis Island." *The New York Public Library Digital Collections*. 1904. <http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47d9-a972-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>; January 18, 2016.

3.2. The Gjenvick-Gjønvik Archives. "Polish and Slovak women." [1904?] <http://www.gjenvick.com/Immigration/EllisIsland/1907-05-ALookAtSomeOfOurImmigrants.html#axzz3wgFwmhgs>; January 18, 2016.

3.3. Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library. "Russian Cossacks." *The New York Public Library Digital Collections*. 1906. <http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47da-dca0-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>; January 18, 2016.

3.4. The Gjenvick-Gjønvik Archives. "A Scotch family of seven daughters and four sons" [1906?] <http://www.gjenvick.com/Immigration/EllisIsland/1907-05-ALookAtSomeOfOurImmigrants.html#axzz40RBzXuW9>; January 18, 2016.

3.5. The Gjenvick-Gjønvik Archives. "Roumanian shepherd's family as they appeared on landing in New York." [1904?] <http://www.gjenvick.com/Immigration/EllisIsland/1907-05-ALookAtSomeOfOurImmigrants.html#axzz3wgFwmhgs>; January 18, 2016.

3.6. Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library. "[Dutch children.]" *The New York Public Library Digital Collections*. <http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47de-79d7-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>; January 18, 2016.

3.7. Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library. “[Three Dutch women.]” *The New York Public Library Digital Collections*. <http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47de-79da-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>; January 18, 2016.

3.8. Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library. “Ruthenian woman.” *The New York Public Library Digital Collections*. 1906. <http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47da-dcb8-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>; January 18, 2016.

Figure 4

4.1. Photographed by Edwin Lewick. From: *William Williams Papers (Scrapbooks, circa 1902-1910)* – The New York Public Library.

4.1a. Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library. “A private interview between a young immigrant and an Ellis Island official. Two staff members [?] are also present.” *The New York Public Library Digital Collections*. 1902 - 1910. <http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/6191646f-18f5-432a-e040-e00a18063fa6>; January 18, 2016.

4.1b. Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library. “Medical inspection of men.” *The New York Public Library Digital Collections*. 1902 - 1910. <http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/6191646f-18f6-432a-e040-e00a18063fa6>; January 18, 2016.

4.2. “Intelligence Test” [source unknown].

4.3. “Ellis Island officer is giving an intelligence test, Ellis Island, NY, c. 1900.” (01.025.2883) From: La Guardia and Wagner Archives. CUNY <http://www.laguardiawagnerarchive.lagcc.cuny.edu>; January 18, 2016.

4.4. “Officer of US Public Health Service administers intelligence test 1915” [source unknown].

Figure 5

5a 1. Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library. “One of the letter writers in the Ellis Island Hospital Library.” *The New York Public Library Digital Collections*. <http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47d9-8348-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>; January 18, 2016.

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5a 3. Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library. “Lost in the paper of his home language.” *The New York Public Library Digital Collections*. <http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47d9-8341-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>; January 18, 2016.

5a 4. Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library. “Building a bridge from Dreamland” *The New York Public Library Digital Collections*. <http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47d9-8340-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>; January 18, 2016.

5a 5. Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library. “A corner of the Ellis Island library.” *The New York Public Library Digital Collections*. <http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47d9-8342-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>; January 18, 2016.

5b. Adams, J.H. 1903. Women’s Detained Room: Writing the First Letter Home. [photograph, Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, Transfer from the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, Social Museum Collection, 3.2002.300.2], <http://www.harvardartmuseums.org/art/159379>; January 6, 2016.

Figure 6

6a. The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Photography Collection, The New York Public Library. "Italian immigrants at Ellis Island, 1905" *The New York Public Library Digital Collections*. 1905. <http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47d9-4e77-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99Fig>; January 18, 2016.

6b. Coding scheme for chalk markings.

6c. Immigrant inspection card, Liverpool to New York – Cunard R.M.S. Lusitania 1910. <http://www.gjenvick.com/Immigration/ImmigrantDocumentation/1910-07-09-Card-Lusitania-SwedishImmigrant.html#axzz3wgFwmhgs>; January 18, 2016.

MARIJKE VAN DER WAL & GIJSBERT RUTTEN

At the Crossroads

Orality and Literacy in Early and Late Modern Dutch Private Letters

ABSTRACT. In this paper, we examine the interplay of orality and literacy in Dutch private letters written by less-privileged people, using an extraordinary source of letters from the past. Drawing on the *Letters as Loot* corpus compiled at Leiden University, we show that these Early and Late Modern letters contain both typically oral elements, i.e. traces of the spoken language not usually found in the contemporary written and printed language, and typically written language features such as epistolary formulae. Our case study of clause chaining presents a phenomenon whose status on the oral-literate scale is more difficult to establish and whose distribution reveals remarkable social class patterns. We conclude that despite unambiguous interferences from the spoken language, what we traced in the letters is to a large extent not the *everyday spoken language* of the past, but rather the *informal written language*. That informal written language may be characterised as *hybrid*, only in the neutral sense of combining both oral and written elements, not indicating any ‘defective’ variety. On the contrary, the letters show the fully-fledged everyday language of less-skilled letter writers, men and women at the crossroads of the spoken language, and their simultaneous awareness of writing practices and conventions.

KEYWORDS: letter writing, private letters, literacy, orality, formulaic language, letter-writing manuals, clause chaining

1. Introduction

The linguistic experiences of illiterate and semi-literate people from past periods and the related cultural practices are mostly beyond the horizon of historical linguists, in the Netherlands as well as in other Western and Northern European countries. As has been argued over the past years, however, so-called *ego-documents* such as private letters can be used to assess the linguistic practices of less-skilled writers, and may give an insight into the spoken language of the past (cf. Elspaß 2012:156). Private letters with their language of informal communication between spouses, parents and children, relatives, and friends, are both testimonies of writing practices and “the ‘next best thing’ to authentic spoken language” (Nevalainen & Rasmolin-Brunberg 2012:32). Furthermore, it is the language history *from below* approach that constitutes an appropriate historical-sociolinguistic framework. This approach not only focuses on the written language of ego-documents, thus differing from more traditional accounts of language history largely based on edited and published literary language, it also shifts from the traditional focus on the language of the elite, mainly men from the upper ranks of society, to an emphasis on the language of the lower and middle ranks, both men and women (cf. Elspaß 2007).

In this paper, we will examine the interplay of orality and literacy in Dutch private letters written by less-privileged people. We begin by discussing literacy rates in the Northern Netherlands (section 2), the problem of finding appropriate sources and the rediscovery of a treasure trove of letters from the past (section 3). This extraordinary source comprises not only Late Modern Dutch letters from the 1770s/1780s, but also Early Modern letters from the 1660s/1670s, allowing us to develop a diachronic perspective. The *Letters as Loot* project, which fully concentrates on the rediscovered letters, is presented in section 4 where we introduce our corpus and the external variables that we distinguished. In section 5, we show that our Early and Late Modern letters contain both typically oral elements, i.e. traces of the spoken language not usually found in the contemporary written language, and typically written language features such as particular epistolary formulae. We will also deal with the question of how these formulae were acquired and whether evidence can be found for the often debated role of letter-writing manuals. In section 6, we present a case study of clause chaining, a phenomenon that could be considered an oral feature, but that at the same time may have functioned as a strategy in written discourse. We also give an explanation of the remarkable social class patterns found in the letters and finally in section 7 we draw our conclusions.

2. Literacy and Letter Writing

When examining Early and Late Modern private letters, we have to take into account the contemporary circumstances of literacy and illiteracy. Although the rate of literacy in the Northern Netherlands was high compared to other European countries at the time, part of the population could neither read nor write.¹ Around 1800, literacy rates were about 80 per cent for the male and 60 per cent for the female population (Kloek & Mijnhardt 2001:18), but the degree to which people participated in a reading culture differed greatly, as we have discussed elsewhere (Rutten & van der Wal 2013). We also have to bear in mind that those who were able to read may not have had any writing skills, as reading and writing were taught in succession, not simultaneously (Blaak 2009:3–4; Kuijpers 1997:501). Literacy rates were lower for the Early Modern period. On the basis of signature studies of marriage contracts, it is commonly estimated that two-thirds of the male population and one-third of the female population were able to write in the Northern Netherlands in the second half of the seventeenth century (Frijhoff & Spies 1999:237).

However, not all these literates may have used their reading and writing skills regularly. It has been argued repeatedly that daily activities and occupation, and in particular the extent to which reading and writing were important in everyday life, should be considered as significant variables in historical sociolinguistics (Vandenbussche 1999; Elspaß 2005). Merchants and captains, for instance, needed writing skills and regularly practised writing in their professions. The captain's wife, who arranged a lot of business during her husband's absence, necessarily had to be able to write, whereas many female activities did not require writing skills and writing experience. The same applies to, for instance, soldiers and lower-rank sailors who did not use these skills in their daily activities.

Literacy as well as reading and writing experience thus differed in the language community across gender and social rank: the estimated literacy rates as well as reading and writing skills were higher for the upper social classes than for the lower classes and higher for men than for women (Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg 2003:40–43; Frijhoff & Spies 1999:237–238). Against the background of these differences, originating from gender- and class-specific schooling opportunities and daily activities involving or not involving writing experience, we have to address the question of what written material *from below* is actually available for historical-sociolinguistic research?

¹ Around 1800, the northern Netherlands, Scandinavia, Iceland, Prussia and Scotland had less than 30 per cent male illiterates, a much lower percentage than, for example, the southern Netherlands, England, Ireland and France (cf. Graff 1987:173–248).

3. Letters From Below

Although in Early and Late Modern times many Dutch private letters must have been written by people from all social ranks, relatively few survived and until fairly recently, linguists interested in ego-documents had to rely mainly on those written by men from the higher ranks of society. Private letters from women in general and from both men and women of lower and middle ranks were available only in very small numbers, scattered over various archives in the Netherlands (cf. van der Wal 2006). The rediscovery of an impressive collection of Dutch private letters, kept in the National Archives (Kew/London UK), however, opened up entirely new perspectives. These letters dating from the seventeenth, eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, are among the papers, both commercial and private, that were confiscated from ships taken by the English fleet and by private ships (privateers) during the frequent warfare between England and the Netherlands. These papers were considered evidence in the legal procedure that followed, when the High Court of Admiralty (HCA) had to decide whether the conquered ships were taken lawfully and thus could be declared a lawful prize. After the final decision, the so-called Prize Papers remained in the HCA's archives, and, miraculously, they survived and were rediscovered in the 1980s by maritime historians (cf. Figure 1). It was, however, not until a rough inventory was made in 2005 that the Prize Papers appeared to comprise about 40,000 Dutch letters, including 15,000 private ones, sent from the Netherlands to, for example, Asia, Africa, the Caribbean region and vice versa.² A subsequent pilot study by Marijke van der Wal revealed that these private letters were sent by people of all social ranks, men and women alike, which made them excellent material for a historical-sociolinguistic analysis, and offered an unprecedented opportunity to gain access to the everyday language of the past. This unique collection has been at the core of the *Letters as Loot. Towards a non-standard view on the history of Dutch* (2008–2013) research programme, directed by Marijke van der Wal at Leiden University (cf. Rutten & van der Wal 2014:1–2).³

4. Letters as Loot

The main goal of the *Letters as Loot* research programme was to conduct the first extensive sociolinguistic analysis of these Dutch private letters, for

² The inventory made by Roelof van Gelder is available at <http://www.gahetna.nl/collectie/index/nt00424>

³ The *Letters as Loot* research programme was funded by The Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO). For further information see also <http://www.brievenalsbuit.nl> (English and Dutch version).



Figure 1. HCA box with documents in the National Archives Kew, UK.

which we selected letters from two periods with a deliberately chosen interval of about 100 years, the 1660s/1670s, from the prelude to the Second Anglo-Dutch War to the end of the Third, and the 1770s/1780s, from the start of the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War to the end of the American War of Independence (see Table 1; the figures in bold indicate the periods of the selected letters).

Table 1. Chronology of Anglo-Dutch Wars.⁴

1st Anglo-Dutch War	1652–1654
2nd Anglo-Dutch War	1665–1667
3rd Anglo-Dutch War	1672–1674
4th Anglo-Dutch War & American War of Independence	1776–1784
Napoleonic period	1793–1813

The original manuscripts of the letters were photographed, and diplomatic transcriptions were made on the basis of these digital photos. From our corpus of approximately 2,000 transcribed letters, we compiled our balanced

⁴ Apart from these periods, documents survived from ships taken during the War of the Austrian Succession (1739–1748) and the Seven Years' War (1756–1763), periods of partial neutrality and changing alliances.

corpus of almost 1,000 letters, from 716 different writers, and amounting to 424,500 words, following particular guidelines that restricted the number of words of individual writers (cf. Table 2).⁵

Table 2. The lemmatised and POS-tagged *Letters as Loot* corpus.

Period	Subcorpus	N letters	N words	N writers
1660s–1670s	Total	549	228,000	424
(1660s–1670s)	Autograph	260	118,000	202)
1770s–1780s	Total	384	196,500	292
Sum of both subcorpora		933	424,500	716

Each word form was lemmatised, i.e. related to the corresponding modern Dutch lemma, and labelled with the appropriate part of speech (PoS), which enabled searching by word form, lemma and part of speech. This corpus is available as an internet database at <http://brievensbuit.inl.nl>, comprising photos, transcriptions and metadata, and provided with extensive search facilities.

One of the metadata added to the database is the autograph/ non-autograph label. Being aware of the literacy rates discussed in section 2, we had to determine whether letters were self-written or whether illiterate or partly literate senders of the letters had relied on professional writers or on others with writing skills such as relatives, friends and neighbours whom we refer to as social writers. When examining the language use of different social ranks, it is obviously crucial to establish whether letters are autographs or non-autographs, otherwise we would risk linking the language use of an unknown social or professional writer to, for instance, the lower-class sender of a letter. This issue is less problematic for the eighteenth century: the increased literacy rate allowed us to compile an eighteenth-century subcorpus of only autographs (cf. Table 2). Going back further in time, however, we needed to identify Early Modern letters as autographs or non-autographs by using our Leiden Identification Procedure (LIP). For details of this procedure and various problems and solutions, we refer to Nobels & van der Wal (2012) and Nobels (2013:53–76). Here we only mention that we were able to establish the autograph status of 260 seventeenth-century letters (see Table 2).

In the internet database, the main variables of our historical-sociolinguistic research can be chosen for search actions. These variables are gender (male/ female), age (<30, 30–50, >50), social class and region. Relying on the stratification made by historians, we distinguish four ranks or classes for the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Northern Netherlands or the

⁵ For details see Rutten & van der Wal (2014:15–17).

Republic of the Seven United Provinces (see Table 3; cf. Frijhoff & Spies 1999:188–191; Bruijn 2008:16).⁶ The highest rank of nobility and non-noble ruling classes is scarcely represented in our material, nor is – obviously – the class of have-nots. The missing highest level does not present us with a serious problem, since data from this rank are well known and have dominated traditional language history. This leaves us with a social stratification of four ranks or classes, viz. the upper class (UC), the upper-middle class (UMC), the lower-middle class (LMC) and the lower class (LC), a four-partite classification that we would like to stress is relative rather than absolute. To assign specific letter writers to social ranks we used a variety of criteria, the most important being the writer's profession or, in the case of women, the husband's profession.

Table 3. Social stratification of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Republic of the Seven United Provinces.

Historians' stratification	Letters as Loot corpus
1 Nobility and the non-noble ruling classes	
2 Bourgeoisie, e.g. wealthy merchants, ship owners, academics, commissioned officers	Upper Class / UC
3 Prosperous middle class, e.g. large storekeepers, non-commissioned officers, well-to-do farmers	Upper-Middle Class / UMC
4 Petty bourgeoisie, e.g. petty shopkeepers, small craftsmen, minor officials	Lower-Middle Class / LMC
5 Mass of wage workers, e.g. sailors, servants, soldiers	Lower Class/ LC
6 Have-nots, e.g. tramps, beggars, disabled	

Search actions may combine word searches with the variables under discussion and with various other metadata relating to the sender or the addressee of letters.

⁶ It should be noted that we use the term class as a synonym for rank, not as the nineteenth-century notion of class.

Having compiled a balanced corpus, we examined various phenomena at the phonological, lexical, morphosyntactic and discourse level. After exploring the oral and written characteristics of the letters in the following section, we will present one of these phenomena, i.e. clause chaining *and*, as an illustrative case study.

5. Oral and Written Characteristics

Our corpus comprises letters by people from four social ranks who, as we discussed in section 2, differed in writing experience. Therefore, our documents are expected to be relatively oral in two respects: firstly, we are dealing with private texts as opposed to public/edited texts, and secondly a considerable number of letters are related to people who were not used to reading and writing, but who needed to communicate with family members or other relatives at a geographical distance, sailing as employees for the Dutch East or West India Company, or staying in overseas territories. Such a corpus would be expected to show a remarkable number of linguistic features linked to the spoken language of particular regions, which we did indeed find. We will restrict ourselves here to a few examples of characteristics that vanished from the written language in the period of incipient standardisation, such as (1) and (2), or that are hardly attested in the written language throughout the history of Dutch, such as (3) and (4):

- (1) *h*-dropping in words such as *andt* for *handt* 'hand', *adde* for *hadde* 'had' and *usvrouw* for *husvrouw* 'housewife'; a feature found mainly in the south-west;
- (2) *sk/sc* in initial position, where <sch> is common in this period, indicating the change from /sk/ to /sx/, i.e. from s+plosive to s+fricative; e.g. *scip* for *schip* 'ship', *biscop* for *bischop* 'bishop'; a North-Hollandic feature;
- (3) <ee> spellings for reflexes of Gm. *ē* as opposed to the common <ae> and <aa> spellings, e.g. *geet* for *gaet* / *gaat* 'goes', and *seet* instead of *saet* / *saet* 'seed'; a North-Hollandic feature;
- (4) *n*-deletion in nominal and verbal forms such as *schulde* for *schulden* 'debts', *gesonde* for *gesonden* 'sent' and *zij konde* for *zij konden* 'they were able'; a feature of almost the whole Dutch language area with the exception of the north-east and the south-west.

Such localisable forms, related to particular regions, give the impression of a high "degree of orality", as we have argued elsewhere (Rutten & van der Wal 2011). It should be noted, however, that non-localisable or supraregional forms prevail in our corpus (cf. Rutten & van der Wal 2014:73–74). Clearly the shift from spoken to written language use often implied a shift from localisable language features to supralocal elements. This testifies to a strong

awareness of the medial, situational and, consequently, linguistic differences between spoken and written language, even among less-skilled language users from the lower and middle ranks of society.

Apart from oral characteristics, we come across typically written language features such as epistolary formulae, that is formulaic strings found repeatedly in letters, and, as may reasonably be assumed, even largely restricted to the language of letters.⁷ Building on Elspaß (2005:157–196), Wray (2002), and Rutten & van der Wal (2012), we distinguish four main types of such formulae: text type, intersubjective, Christian-ritual and text-structural formulae. A letter is first of all characterised by text type formulae such as an address, opening and closing. An illustrative example is the *Praise God in [a particular place] at [a particular date]* opening formula, which is frequently found in seventeenth-century letters. Other frequent formulae are the intersubjective formulae which focus on the relationship between the writer and the addressee. Among these we find the four-partite or even more extended health formula, which is also well known from the history of English and other European languages: *I let you know that I am in good health/ I sincerely hope that the same applies to you/ If not, I do regret it/ As God knows, who knows the hearts of men* (cf. Austin 2004; Laitinen & Nordlund 2012:70). The most frequent Christian-ritual formula is the commendation formula with which the writer commends the addressee into the hands of God: *zijt de heere bevolen* ‘be commended to the Lord’ and its variants. Yet another function, i.e. marking the transition of one part of the discourse to another, is fulfilled by the so-called text-structural formulae, such as the Dutch equivalent of *I let you know that* which initiates discourse or indicates a change of topic. This formula is also found in both English and German letters of the Early and Late Modern period (Austin 1973:16; Elspaß 2005:165, 168–170), and in Finnish letters from the nineteenth century (Laitinen & Nordlund 2012:69). We note that these text-structural formulae are very convenient strategies in our letters which frequently lack punctuation and paragraphs (cf. Figure 2).

In the corpus, we find a large variety of what appear to be formulae, which, moreover, show a striking similarity with those found in private letters from other language areas. Such a noticeable similarity points clearly to a shared epistolary tradition in Western Europe which has been the topic of various studies (cf. Nevalainen 2001; Poster & Mitchell 2007 and references there). In this context, the questions arise of how the formulae characteristic of that widespread tradition were acquired by letter writers and whether

⁷ For our elaborate study of formulaic language we refer to Rutten & van der Wal (2014:75–172).

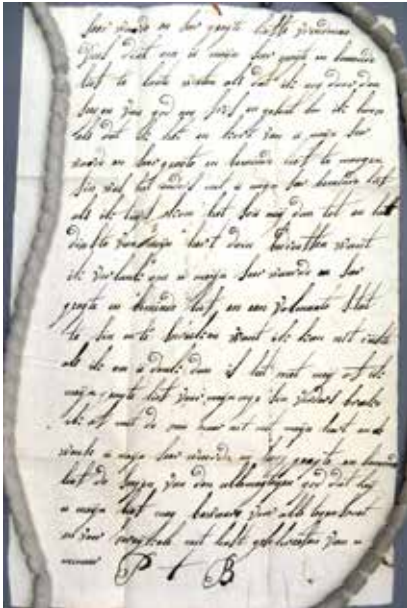


Figure 2. Eighteenth-century letter without punctuation.

the often reprinted letter-writing manuals played a decisive role. Our digital letter corpora allow us to investigate the characteristics of Early and Late Modern Dutch private letters and to compare them with the advice and models in manuals. We established many remarkable differences between the manuals and actual language use, as we showed elsewhere in more detail (van der Wal & Rutten 2013; Rutten & van der Wal 2014:187–202). The more elaborate Dutch manuals, aiming at an audience fairly high up the social scale, and translations of popular foreign manuals such as De la Serre (1654) and Breton (1645), do not show any resemblance to the formulaic language of our letter corpora. We did find formulae that occur in our letter corpora in booklets targeted towards a more modest audience or intended to be used in elementary schools, although sometimes these appeared as marginal options. What does surprise us, however, is the absence from manuals of particular popular formulae such as the frequent *looft God bovenal* ‘praise God above all’ formula, and the popular closing formula *duizend goede nachten* ‘a thousand good nights’. Yet other striking discrepancies are the presence in manuals of formulae that do not feature in our letters and the survival in eighteenth-century manuals of old-fashioned formulae, vanished from usage after the seventeenth century (cf. Rutten & van der Wal 2014:197–199). Therefore, in our view, the differences outweigh the resemblances to the extent that direct influence of letter-writing manuals on actual practice is not very likely. We have to consider another option: that pupils at school and youngsters at home learnt letter-writing conventions and formulaic

language by imitation in practice, that is by reading and copying letters and hearing them read aloud. Similar claims have been made for English letter writing in the long eighteenth century (cf. Austin 1973:13; Brant 2006:9–10; Whyman 2009:28–45;), and for German and Finnish letters from the nineteenth century (Elspeß 2005:194–195; Laitinen & Nordlund 2012), as well as for Dutch elite correspondence from around 1800 (Ruberg 2005).

Having shown both oral and written language characteristics in the letters, we continue with clause chaining *and*, a phenomenon whose status on the oral-literate scale is more difficult to establish.

6. Clause Chaining *and*: Between Oral and Written

In present-day spoken English, discourse units may be connected by semantically empty conjunctions such as *and*, as in the example:

- (5) And it's very well equipped.
 You know the kitchen,
 and and it's got a dishwasher,
 and it's got all kinds of you know mixers and plates
 and you know every kind of equipment you need.
 And and staple things.
 (Chafe 1985:111)

The main function of *and* in (5) is not to create coherence at the textual level, but to signal the continuation of the discourse. Clauses linked by a semantically bleached connective such as *and* are a “common feature of narrative discourse” (Beaman 1984:59), established for oral genres by, among many others, Chafe (1985). This phenomenon has also been observed with regard to Early Modern English by Culpeper & Kytö (2010:158–183) who concluded that the frequency of this *and* is relatively high in *speech-based* genres such as trials, drama and witness depositions. We find similar examples in our corpus such as (6), which seem to be prototypical cases of oral residue in a written text type (Ong 2002 [1982]:36):

- (6) *t is alles wel ontfangen en volgens uw versoek neef heuck gesproken*
 ‘it is all well-received, and in accordance with your request I have spoken to cousin Heuck’

Here two separate statements are made, connected to one another by *and*, which is commonly rendered *en* in the eighteenth century, and *ende* in the previous century, a connective which could easily have been omitted. This use needs to be distinguished from *and*'s more common coordinating func-

tion at the level of two noun phrases (*geluck ende salijgheijt* 'happiness and salvation') or two verb phrases (*nu sal ik van deeze afstappen en tot de ander over gaan* 'I will now abandon this subject and proceed to another one'). We refer to the use of *and* as a cohesion creator, that may be omitted, as "chaining *and*".

From Chafe's work on present-day English and Culpeper's & Kytö's study on historical English dialogues, it seems that chaining *and* is an oral element, in yet another respect than the oral, localisable elements in section 5. Furthermore, Brinton notes that "[b]ecause of their frequency and oral nature, pragmatic markers [such as chaining *and* – MW&GR] are stylistically stigmatised and negatively evaluated, especially in written or formal discourse" (1996:33). Against this background and that of previous studies on the presence of oral elements in the written language, we would expect less experienced writers to produce more of these oral *and*'s. We thus hypothesise that relatively more bleached connectives will be found in letters from the lower classes than in letters from the upper classes, more in letters by women than in letters by men, and more in letters from the seventeenth century than in letters from the eighteenth century. In other words, bleached connectives, as more oral characteristics of language, are expected to be less prominent in letters by writers who were more involved in the written culture and who used mainly other non-bleached connectives and punctuation to indicate continuation of the discourse.

We would thus expect clear social patterns in the distribution of chaining *and*. We therefore examined part of our total corpus by compiling a smaller subcorpus of approximately 70,000 words for each period, consisting of only autographs (cf. Table 4). This restriction was necessary because of the laborious type of analysis that we intended to perform.

Table 4. Subcorpus for clause chaining *and*.

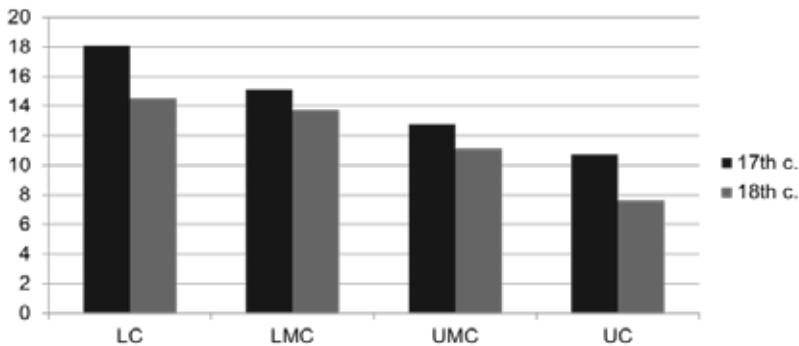
	LC	LMC	UMC	UC	Total
	letters/ words	letters/ words	letters/ words	letters/ words	letters/ words
1660s–1670s	10/5,500	40/24,000	48/27,000	22/15,500	120/72,000
1770s–1780s	26/9,000	38/13,800	48/23,500	48/28,000	160/74,300

Following social historians as discussed in section 4, we distinguish between lower class (LC), lower-middle class (LMC), upper-middle class (UMC) and upper class (UC).

We divided our subcorpus into so-called *discourse units* whose main

functional property is that they prototypically contain one new idea (Chafe 1994:108–119). In the process of dividing letters into discourse units, we took the clause as a starting point. For a detailed description of our method and the problems involved we have to refer to Rutten & van der Wal (2014:271–280). In our subcorpus we counted what proportion of *discourse units* begin with chaining *and*, in both periods and in the different social ranks. The results are shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Proportion of discourse units with chaining *and*.



N discourse units 17th c. = 8,282

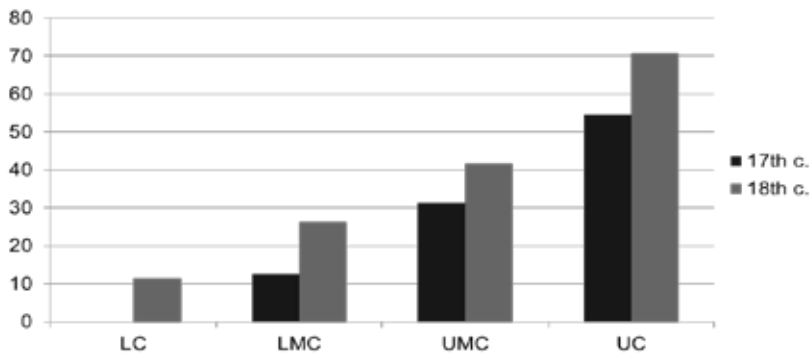
N discourse units 18th c. = 8,987

Figure 3 reveals a social difference for both periods. In the eighteenth century, the number of discourse units that begin with chaining *and* decreases as the social class rises and the number also decreases in all social ranks, compared to the numbers in the previous century. In the seventeenth-century LC, 18% or almost one in five of all discourse units begins with chaining *and*, whereas there is a less than 11% occurrence in the UC. Thus we may have found an oral element that was subject to social variation, and that gradually decreased over time as literacy rates rose and more people became involved in the written culture. At the same time, however, we have to realise that chaining *and* could be a typically written element: another means to create cohesion in the absence of punctuation. For less experienced writers, that is lower-class writers, chaining *and* is a relatively simple tool to create cohesion; well-educated people, mainly men from upper classes, with elaborate writing experience, had less need of chaining *and*. The latter also made use of another means, i.e. punctuation.

In this respect, it should be noted that clause chaining also implies the separation of clauses. On the one hand, *en* and *ende* continue discourse and signal that the new clause proceeds from the preceding clause. On the other

hand, they mark the transition from one clause to another, thereby separating them from each other. The same function is performed by punctuation marks such as commas and full stops which signal the end of a piece of discourse, but also indicate the beginning of another clause. To illustrate letter writers' familiarity or lack of familiarity with punctuation, we examined the use of punctuation in our subcorpus, distinguishing letters with and those without punctuation.⁸ We note that letters with consistent punctuation throughout the whole letter appear to be almost absent. Most writers who use punctuation do so irregularly, or in any case irregularly compared to punctuation in contemporary printed books. Often, they vary not in the choice of a particular punctuation mark, but in the presence of punctuation. As becomes clear from Figure 4, the use of punctuation is not at all common in letters from both periods: in our subcorpus, 67 out of 160 eighteenth-century and 32 out of 120 seventeenth-century letters show any punctuation. The columns of Figure 4 indicate the proportion of letters with punctuation across social class. In the eighteenth century, a strong social difference occurs, ranging from about 10% punctuation in the LC to 70% in the UC. In the previous century, the proportion of letters with any punctuation is even less in all social classes. Figure 4 also clearly shows that the rise of punctuation must have been a change from above (cf. Labov 1994:78).

Figure 4. Proportion of letters with punctuation.



N letters 17th c. = 120

N letters 18th c. = 160

Returning to the status of chaining *and*, we conclude that chaining *and* could be an oral element, but also a written strategy to create textual structure, a strategy that was gradually replaced by punctuation. In the absence of spoken language data, there is no chance to find out whether either of

⁸ Therefore, Figure 4 does not give the proportion of discourse units separated by punctuation, but the presence of any punctuation in the letters.

them or both are the case. The question whether *and* is an oral or a written element becomes less important, however, when we simply establish that *and* is the typical and frequent strategy of connecting discourse units in our letters.

7. Conclusions: Orality and Literacy

At the beginning of this paper we mentioned that private letters are both testimonies of writing practices and “the ‘next best thing’ to authentic spoken language”. Our research of the confiscated Dutch letters gave us an unprecedented view on the writing practices of letter writers from the lower and middle classes, including the differences and the patterns of variation and change, which we could only briefly illustrate here. For a more detailed description we refer to Rutten & van der Wal (2014) and to Nobels (2013) and Simons (2013). As far as the representation of the spoken language is concerned, we arrive at two findings. We did find more oral or local elements in our letter corpus than in contemporary printed publications, but generally we came across relatively little influence from spoken language, as we argued in section 5. The shift from spoken to written language use thus clearly implies a shift from local and oral language features to supralocal and written elements. We conclude that what we traced in the letters is to a large extent not the *everyday spoken language* of the past, but rather the *informal written language*. That informal written language comprises both what are considered more oral and typically literate phenomena and may therefore be characterised as *hybrid* (cf. Martineau 2013:133–134). The label *hybrid*, however, may be confusing when hybridity is interpreted not just as a combination of both mainly written and mainly oral elements, but also as indicating what, in any respect, is a ‘defective’ variety. That would be a misunderstanding. The informal written language of our Dutch private letters is not defective at all. It is the fully-fledged everyday language of letter writers from the lower and middle ranks of society, the everyday language of men and women at the crossroads of the spoken language and their simultaneous awareness of writing practices and conventions.

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JILL PUTTAERT

Linguistic Hybridity in Nineteenth-Century Lower-Class Letters

A Case Study from Bruges

ABSTRACT. This contribution focuses on linguistic hybridity in a small corpus of nineteenth-century pauper letters, written by lower-class scribes from the West-Flemish town of Bruges, in current-day Belgium. We argue that these writings from below do not exclusively display standard language norms, nor are they a direct written manifestation of a local dialect. To describe this so-called linguistic hybridity, we will analyse three features: schwa-apocope, h-procope (and hypercorrect h-insertion), and so-called adnominal accusativism. Through a corpus study of these forms, we will show that dialect variants of these features do occur, but they are remarkably rare. Nonetheless, we do find a considerable amount of instances where older regional (i.e. more widespread) variants are used. This leads us to conclude that these writers were somehow aware of the fact that, when putting pen to paper, formal or supraregional communication was desirable. In their actual writing, however, they neither follow standard language norms nor local dialect forms consistently, drawing on a fairly elaborate linguistic repertoire to produce complex and inherently hybrid varieties. We aim to demonstrate that the written hybridity in these letters should therefore be regarded and evaluated as a form of a language manifestation in its own right, rather than as a watered down version of the predominant standard language.

KEYWORDS: Historical sociolinguistics, Dutch, language history from below, linguistic hybridity, pauper letters, egodocuments

1. Introduction

Various Flemish archives preserve collections of numerous nineteenth-century letters of poor and needy people who begged for financial support from their local government. Most of these ‘pauper letters’ are addressed to the governor of various institutions for charity, others are written to a local mayor, a minister, and some are even sent to the king and queen.¹ This article² focuses on the language in pauper letters from Bruges, in the province of West Flanders³ (see figure 1). As the project in which this case study is embedded has only recently started, the present article provides a first small-scale and exploratory case study on linguistic aspects of 26 pauper letters from Bruges, written by 26 different scribes between 1851 and 1891. The corpus in its entirety comprises 4179 words: the longest letter counts for 329 words and the smallest has only 60 words. The average length is 161 words. The aim of this modest study is to delve into the particular character of these writings from below from a sociolinguistic point of view: as we will show, they cannot be regarded as transliterated dialect,⁴ nor can they be classified as standard language. Following Martineau & Tailleur (2014) we argue that these writings display a type of linguistic hybridity, which may be typical for such writings (see section 3). To demonstrate this, we will focus on three features: schwa-apocope, h-procope (and hypercorrect h-insertion), and so-called adnominal ‘accusativism’. We start with a description of the rise, development and dialectal usage of the features under scrutiny, and move forward to a quantitative analysis of each feature, exploring the possible existence of linguistic hybridity in our corpus of writings from below.

First, we will briefly discuss the historical and linguistic background and the act of writing, which is interwoven with (the quite ambiguous

¹ Much previous work on such pauper letters in Europe has focused on the English context – cf. for instance the work of Sokoll (2001) on Essex pauper letters (1800–1834), and of Fairman (2000) on similar writings in the English record offices. In Belgium, the work of Van Ginderachter (2007) also focuses on pauper letters, which were sent to the king and queen.

² I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers and the editors for their constructive feedback and comments.

³ Work on these letters, as well as on many similar letters from other cities in West Flanders, will be at the heart of the new project ‘Forgotten voices from below. A sociolinguistic analysis of lower class correspondence in the Low Countries’, supported by the Research Foundation Flanders, carried out by the author of the present article at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel and supervised by Wim Vandenbussche and Rik Vosters.

⁴ With a transliterated dialect we mean a written variety in which the dialect of the scribe is almost literally put on paper. In this written code only very few dialect features are adjusted to the standard language, since the writer simply does not master the standard language (Willemyns 1983:82).

term) *literacy* (section 2). Next, we will concisely outline the meaning of *linguistic hybridity* (section 3) before proceeding to the corpus study (section 4). The chapter closes with some preliminary conclusions and reflections (section 5).



Figure 1. Map of (present-day) Flanders with West Flanders, East Flanders and Bruges.⁵

2. Historical and Linguistic Context

The nineteenth century was characterised by mass literacy drives all over Europe, providing an easier than ever access to the written word for large sections of society that had been illiterate ever before. Even the lower middle and the lower classes⁶ learnt to write and consequently produced a large number of texts (Elspaß 2007:151). For less (or hardly at all) educated scribes, the task of writing a letter must have required remarkable efforts. Extraordinary social circumstances such as migration (see for instance Elspaß 2005) and war (see for instance Sandersen 2007 and Van Bakel's [1977] corpus of Flemish soldiers correspondence from the Napoleonic era),⁷ often forced them, however, to put pen to paper in spite of their limited literacy skills. The same urge to write surfaced in situations of extreme poverty, when unfortunate people felt the need to write and ask for relief and financial sup-

⁵ This map is based on a map from <http://www.dekrachtvanjestem.be/bij-u-in-de-klas/politiek-woordenboek/gemeente>.

⁶ We certainly are aware of the ambiguous term *social class* as methodological problem. One should take into account that the social and economic structure in nineteenth-century Flanders and the rest of Europe, was subject to continuous change. Furthermore, classes of different countries or even cities are not comparable without a careful analysis of their specific situation (Vandebussche 2002:29).

⁷ Van Bakel's corpus has recently started to be used for larger-scale linguistic analyses (e.g., Rutten, Vosters & van der Wal 2015).

port. These *begging letters* reveal exceptional information concerning the written word of ordinary people, even if their literacy skills were limited at best.

We want to assert here that concepts of *literacy* and *writing skills* (when applied to barely schooled people from the lower social ranks in nineteenth-century Flanders) are as heterogeneous as for other language communities abroad. “The term encompasses unskilled writers who barely know how to write down their name, as well as more educated and very fluent writers who have received education but still show a few vernacular features in their writings”, Martineau & Tailleux stated in relation to writers from nineteenth-century French Canada (2014:25). We therefore need to conceptualise literacy as a continuum with very elaborate writing skills on one side, and total illiteracy on the other – with a whole array of possible literacies in between these extremes (see also Marijke Van der Wal 2006:8).

To further the complexity of the discussion at hand, it is well known that scribes whose writing skills were too modest to write a letter, asked for help from family and friends who were able to write – so-called *social scribes*. In this context, Nordlund (2013) introduces the concept of *polyphony* in a text: “Instead of only one writer, letter writing could include several actors who composed the text together. These included scribes, narrators, overhearers, those who dictated and those who performed the physical act of writing” (Nordlund 2013:382). As such, the letters that scholars study (in history and historical sociolinguistics, for instance), might thus be a result of a cooperation between several people. In our specific case (i.e. discussing letters from nineteenth-century Bruges) we do assume that all of the people who jointly composed a letter were very likely to be part of the same social class. While the idea of polyphonous voices and social scribes does not make these sources less valuable for linguistic research – quite the contrary: this complexity makes them even more worthwhile to investigate –, we are currently developing a protocol to be able to classify the writings in our corpus and label them as *autograph*, *non-autograph*, *probably autograph* or *probably non-autograph*.⁸

In the (language) historiography of Dutch in Flanders, there is a persistent idea that people from the lower social strata hardly ever wrote, because they were simply not able to. In some extraordinary cases where these people actually did put pen to paper, they are commonly believed to have written

⁸ Marijke Van der Wal, Gijsbert Rutten and Judith Nobels dealt with a similar problem identifying the writings in their corpus and composed a procedure called *the Leiden Identification Procedure* to determine the autograph status of a letter. For a detailed description of the procedure, see: Nobels 2013:53–76.

in their local dialect (cf. Vanhecke et al. 2006:515). Several scholars in history and historical sociolinguistics, however, found that this written language from below is not a transliterated dialect at all (Vandenbussche 2002; Elspaß 2007:152; Lyons 2013:23, among others). In his work, Vandenbussche (2007:282), who studied reports of trade meetings from nineteenth-century Bruges, written by lower-class writers from the apprentice rank of the tailor, wool weaver, carpenter, shoemaker and brush maker trades uses the term *intended standard*⁹ to refer to the written language in the documents under scrutiny: this intended standard is used “to refer to a variety which does not meet the formal requirements of a standard language (e.g. consistent spelling and grammatical correctness) but which is nevertheless intended by the writer to fulfil the functions attributed to a standard variety (e.g. supraregional communication, prestige variety)” (Vandenbussche 2002:34–35).

The term *intended standard* has not been widely adopted in historical sociolinguistics, however, and various scholars may be hesitant to use the term, as it would imply that the written language of almost untrained scribes from the lower social echelons is held up to formal writing norms which many of these writers would not have had access to (see also Nordlund 2013:184). From this perspective, writing correctly was not relevant as a formal linguistic concept to many writers. As such, we should not see these writings as futile attempts to conform to certain formal language norms.

Rutten & Van der Wal (2011:269) suggest the term *intended supralocal variety* instead of *intended standard* to refer to these writings from below. In their study on the degree of orality in Dutch private letters from the seventeenth century, they took note of a *supralocal orthographic leveling* instead (ibidem). Generally, Rutten and Van der Wal found traces of spoken language, but it is certainly clear that people did not write in their local dialect. “They used an *intended supraregional* variety instead and were, to a large extent, perfectly able to do so” (ibidem). This *intended supraregional variety* seems to be an acceptable term which is less stigmatising and therefore might be the answer to the terminological issue.

3. Hybridity

Through the case study presented in this chapter, we aim to show how a significant amount of linguistic hybridity characterises the writings from less- or partly-educated people in our corpus. This *written hybridity* has been described by Martineau & Tailleur (2014) in their discussion of private doc-

⁹ It was Ahrend Mihm who introduced the term *intendiertes Hochdeutsch* in his 1998 study of “Arbeitersprache und gesprochene Sprache im 19. Jahrhundert”. He used this term to characterise the written language of lower-class people in formal situations.

uments written by people from different social classes, specifically focusing on nineteenth-century French in Canada. They argue that there is a certain hybridity “in the sense that [private texts from lower order scribes – JP] reveal an intricate relation to local vernacular and supralocal features alike” (Martineau & Tailleur 2014:224). As we have shown in the previous paragraph, these scribes were certainly aware of the existence of language norms, but because of their minimal schooling and their limited access to these norms, they wrote a hybrid variant that by no means was a local dialect, but could be called an *intended supralocal variety* (Rutten & Van der Wal 2011:269) in which scribes try to avoid local features, and meet a certain supralocal variety, sometimes however with interferences of their local speech. Still following their reasoning, one might say that it concerns varieties that are to be located between the extremes of the classic traditional sociolinguistic continuum from standard to dialect (see also Dossena 2012:26-27), a concept recently rebranded and elaborated by Auer (2005:26) under the label *diaglossia*, “the most wide-spread relationship between dialect and standard”.

Concerning the time and place the writings in this case study stem from, we can postulate that there was a fixed standard variety for written usage, alongside a number of local dialect varieties from in and around the town of Bruges, used almost exclusively in everyday spoken language. Looking at the degree of dialect retention in West Flanders until the twentieth century, it is safe to assume that a West-Flemish dialect was the main variety of the scribes from our corpus. Obviously, the writers might have drawn upon different registers in spoken language too, but this remains a matter of speculation. It is, however, important to underline here that this study focuses on the possible manifestation of hybridity in the written code and we certainly do not want to (or cannot) draw any conclusions concerning the spoken vernacular.

An emphasis on linguistic hybridity would allow us to investigate to which extent lower-order scribes (in writing) were able to draw on such a continuum of linguistic varieties between the extremes of standard language on the one hand and dialect on the other. Our point of departure would be that the written hybridity described above should be seen (by linguists) as a form of a language manifestation in its own right, regardless of the possible predominant standard language.

4. Case Study

In this section, we aim to examine the hybridity in the pauper letters used for this case study. In order to do so, we focus on schwa-apocope, h-procope and adnominal accusativism. Our choice of these features is related to the

types of indexicality (i.e. the degree of awareness of a certain marked variable) introduced by Labov (1972). Using his terms and building on the study of Rutten & Van der Wal (2014:324–361), we postulate that the apocope of schwa could be called a *marker* for some language users (especially experienced, upper-class scribes) in the period and region we are talking about, while for other, less-experienced and lower-class scribes, this variable would be an *indicator*. H-procope might be a stereotype, since it is definitely stigmatised and several nineteenth-century grammars and language guides (Des Roches [1761], for instance) explicitly stress that <h> should be pronounced properly. The adnominal accusativism could on a certain level definitely be called a *stereotype*, since it was ideologically used by some grammarians to stress the (so-called) linguistic opposition between the North and the South of the Low Countries. For less-educated scribes (like the ones in our corpus) this feature might have been a marker.

It is crucial to underline, however, that this study is a modest first exploration of (a part of) our data; we do not want to make any large-scale extrapolations on the basis thereof. Future research on an extended body of data will be used to confirm or corroborate our findings.

a. Schwa-apocope (first person singular verb form, simple present, indicative mode)

The deletion of the final schwa in Dutch is the result of a phonological change which started in the thirteenth century and characterises one of the main differences between Middle Dutch (ca. 1200–1550) and Early Modern Dutch (ca. 1550–1650) (Marynissen 2004:610–611). Schwa-apocope is the disappearance of the unstressed vowel ə in word endings, affecting several grammatical categories such as nouns, verbs, prepositions, adjectives, and numerals (idem:609; Nobels 2013:155). There are, however, some contexts in which the final schwa still exists in present-day Dutch, for instance: in fixed expressions, the declension of the adjectives and personal feminine nouns (Marynissen 2004:609–610).

Both language external (geographical, temporal) and language internal (phonological, morphological) factors play a role in the rise, development and spread of this feature. Concerning regional variation, we see that, opposed to standard Dutch where final schwa disappeared in many cases, the schwa is still today preserved in East-Flemish dialects and in some varieties of neighbouring West-Flemish dialects. Since in this case study we look at writings from West Flanders, namely Bruges, we will briefly outline the West-Flemish dialect forms regarding this feature (see also figure 2). Apart from the aforementioned endings on schwa, some West-Flemish language varieties also have verb endings for first person singular simple present on

–en (e.g. *ik werken*, ‘I work’), especially found in Bruges, and –n (e.g. *ik werkn*), which can be located mainly at the coast and the west of West Flanders, but is not found in the dialect of the city of Bruges, where speakers still pronounce the unstressed *e* vowel in –en. The dialects of southeast West Flanders, on the contrary, still have the older form with a schwa ending (e.g. *ik werke* ‘I work’, and *wij werken* ‘we work’) (Devos & Vandekerckhove 2005:32–33; MAND II, Goeman et. al. 2008:50, 56).

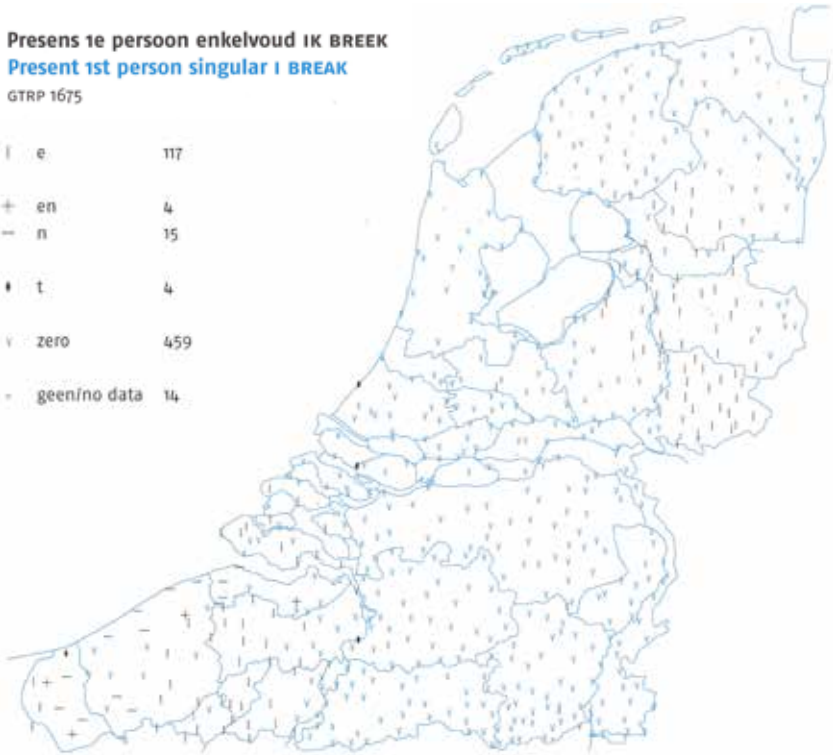


Figure 2. The first personal singular verb form for the present tense of the verb *breken* ‘to break’ in present-day Dutch dialects (MAND II, Goeman et al. 2008).

As already briefly mentioned, the ending on *-e* was an older form that gradually disappeared from the standard language. Whereas in the first quarter of the eighteenth century, the grammarian Egidius Candidus Pastor (E.C.P., also known as Gilles De Witte, 1713) still prescribed for instance *ik hoore* ('I hear'), *ik schrijve* ('I write') and *ik hebbe* ('I have'), Des Roches (1761) in the second half of the same century already recommends *ik geloof* ('I believe') and *ik heb* ('I have'). Later grammarians Willems (1824) and Behaegel (1829) also use *-ø* exclusively. It is therefore clear that the late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century normative tradition prescribed the endings with schwa-apocope. The ending on *-t*, *-en* or *-n* are very local, dialect forms from West Flanders.¹⁰

In the corpus we compiled for this case study, we found four types of verb endings for the first person singular, simple present indicative mode: the standard *-ø* endings (see example 1), the ending on schwa (see example 2), the ending on *-en* (example 3) which is typical for West-Flemish dialects, and finally endings on *-t* (example 4), also a dialect feature.¹¹

- 1) Ik *heb* het zeer nodig voor min [pacht?] te betaelen
I have it very necessary to my [rent?] to pay

'I am in dire need of it to be able to pay my [rent?]'
(Ambrosius Bonte, 1880).

- 2) Ik *verhope* dat gij mijn verzoek zult vol doen
I hope that you my request will satisfy

'I hope that you will meet my request.'
(Amelia Spetebrood, 1861)

- 3) Ik *bevinden* my in het gesticht
I find myself in the institute

¹⁰ For the case study discussed in this article, we focused on regular verb forms of the first person singular in the simple present. We excluded the verbs *zijn* ('to be'), *zullen* ('shall/'will'), *kunnen* ('can') and *mogen* ('may/can') since they are irregular, the verb *willem* ('to want') since it originally occurred rarely with a final schwa in the first person singular of the simple present in Middle Dutch (Nobels 2013:158; Van Loey 1970:174), the verbs *doen* ('to do') and *gaan* ('to go'), since they only show variation in endings on *-n* and *-t*. Finally we excluded the verb *moeten* ('to have/must'), since its conjugation in the West-Flemish dialect differs from other regular verbs [for instance: *ik moe(n)*] (Devos & Vandekerckhove 2005:73).

¹¹ In the dialect variant we would expect: *ik (h)en* in the first example, *ik verhopen* in the second, *ik bevinden* in the third and *ik vragen* in the fourth example.

'I am located in the institute.'
(Jean Baptiste Caudron, 1863)

- 4) zoo heer gouverneur ik en *vraegt* niet anders of ten
so sir governor I [neg.] ask not different if it
- is van UE om eenigen onderstand
is from you for some support

'so sir governor I don't ask anything else than to have some support
from you'
(Joannes Franciscus Hinderyks, 1860)

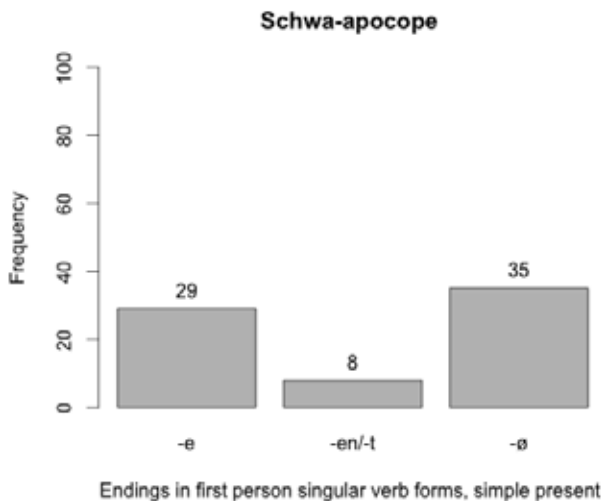


Figure 3. The distribution of the different endings of the first person singular verb form.

When looking closely at our results for the first person singular verb forms (figure 3), it becomes clear that the endings $-\emptyset$ and $-e$ are the most common in our corpus. While the standard ending on $-\emptyset$ is used in 49 % of the cases, the regional ending on schwa counts for 40 %. It is remarkable that the traditional, local dialect forms ($-en$ and $-t$) are not used very frequently and $-n$ does even not appear at all. This is interesting, since it supports our hypothesis that these lower-order writings cannot simply be regarded as a transliterated dialect. The ending on $-en$ is only used in four cases out of the 72 and $-t$ five times.

Dialect endings on *-t* occur in the conjugation of the verbs *hebben* (e.g. Ik *hebt* ook een kind ‘I also have a child’), *komen* (e.g. *dat ik u eenen gratis komt af te smeeken* ‘that I come to ask you forgiveness’) and *vragen* (e.g. *zoo heer gouverneur ik en vraegt niet anders of ten is van UE om eenigen onderstand* ‘so sir governor I don’t ask anything else than to have some support from you’).

Despite the very low rate of dialectal forms, it must be said, however, that the more regional ending on schwa is very frequent. Since this variant is still today widely used all across West and East Flanders and even parts of the northeast Netherlands, this cannot be seen as a local dialect feature. It occurs alongside the standard *-ø* form. In other words: we do not only find a prominent use of the standard *-ø*, but also notice a frequent use of schwa ending, which is a more regional variant, used in a larger part of the Dutch language community. Forms that can be linked to the West-Flemish dialect are very rare.

b. h-procope

In many southwestern Dutch dialects, /h/ before a vowel is not pronounced at the beginning of a word (e.g. *emel* for *hemel* ‘heaven’) and in some cases in the middle of a word before a morpheme boundary (e.g. *werkuis* for *werk-huis* ‘employment place’). Regarding the dialect of Bruges, De Wolf (s.d.:32) notes that /h/ in the beginning of a word is never heard or “aangebلاzen” (‘aspirated’).

This tendency to drop /h/ already existed in Old Dutch (ca. 600–1200). The phenomenon is also found in Middle Dutch, namely in texts from Flanders and Brabant (Weijnen 1970:42; Van Loey 1970:97). One of the consequences of h-procope, is hypercorrection (De Wulf 2003:227): the over-generalised use of a feature due to an incorrect analogy with the prestigious form, for instance *haap* instead of *aap* (‘monkey’).

Given the fact that h-dropping is still a very common phenomenon in West Flanders and looking at the map (figure 4), it is safe to assume that /h/ was also dropped in the dialect of Bruges at the time of our corpus.

For the case study discussed in this article, we looked at words with <h> and/or a vowel in anlaut, excluding proper nouns and names, for which no variation was found in a preliminary survey of the data. We chose to exclude contexts with possible h-dropping in the middle of the word before morpheme boundaries, since our corpus has not been annotated with morphological information and morpheme boundaries, making it impossible to extract all relevant instances automatically.



Figure 4. The pronunciation of h at the beginning of the word *huis* 'house' (FAND IV, De Wulf et al. 2005:433).

When looking at the result of our study, it becomes clear that there are almost no instances of h-procope (figure 5). Out of the 305 hits, <h> is dropped in only three cases (the words with h-procope are marked in bold, followed by the present-day standard form between square brackets):

1) en den pastor doet geene **erstelling** [herstelling] aen het gene
and the pastor does no restoration on that what
 ik voorgaendelyk dede
 I previously did

'and the pastor doesn't restore the things I've done previously'
 (Johannes Van De Kerkhove, 1853)

2) en haren vader die is voor den 2 mael *er trouwd* [hertrouwd]
 and her father who is for the second time remarried

'and her father is remarried for the second time'
 (Matilde Bruhaen, 1869)

3) Maer *eilaes* [helaas], naer den tyt van vieren dertig jaeren myne
 But *unfortunately after the time of thirty-four years my*

pligten heben gekweten gelyk het behoort
duties have fulfilled as it suits

'But unfortunately, after [lit. the time of] thirty-four years of doing my
 duties as it should'
 (Philippe Hubin, 1891)

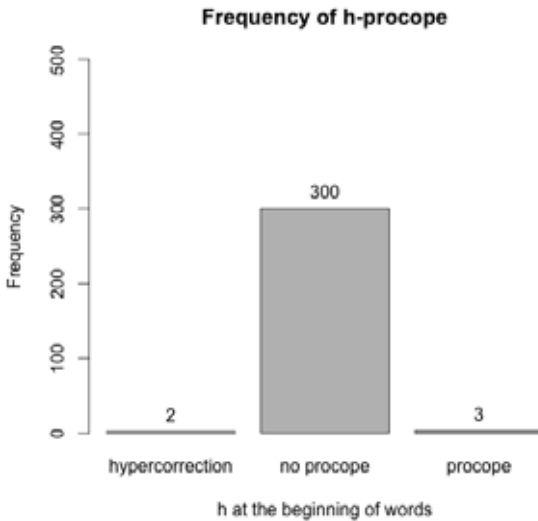


Figure 5. The frequency of h-procope in this corpus.

Hypercorrect h-insertion occurs only two times, both in a letter from one and the same scribe (vrouwe Blanke Staebles) and is used twice in the same word – she writes *hals tu blieft*, instead of *alstublieft* ('please').

We can thus conclude that h-procope and related hypercorrect h-insertion rarely occur in the corpus. Since h-procope is a common phonological

phenomenon in West-Flemish dialects, and since it is not reflected in the writings of our scribes, we may assume that these writers were somehow aware of the fact that putting pen to paper implied formal communication: they were conscious of the need to avoid this feature from their everyday, spoken vernacular.

c. Adnominal accusativism

In Early Middle Dutch (ca. 1200–1350) there was a morphological distinction between the nominative and the accusative for singular masculine definite articles: in the accusative case, *-n* was added (*den* ‘the’), whereas in the nominative case, the form remained uninflected (*de* ‘the’). Some time between the fourteenth and sixteenth century, this system became subject to change and the originally accusative form *den* started to also appear in positions where a nominative form would be expected (cf. Goossens 2008:64–69). This phenomenon is called *accusativism* and its development was mainly situated in the Southern dialects of Dutch, initially especially in the Brabant area. Accusativism is common in articles (*de/den, een/eenen* ‘a/one’), adjectives (*goede/goeden* ‘good’) and pronouns (*zijn/zijnen* ‘his’).

The absence or presence of accusativism *-n* forms is phonologically conditioned in the local, spoken dialects. De Wolf (s.d.:60–64) postulates that the dialect of Bruges displays specific phonological conditions: the accusative form is used before stop consonants (e.g. *den dwerg* ‘the dwarf’), in some cases with assimilation (e.g. *dem boer* ‘the farmer’) and before a vowel (e.g. *den oven* ‘the oven’, *den hengst* ‘the stallion’ with a silent /h/). In the dialect of Bruges, not only masculine words get *-n*, but also some female words appear with *den/dem/deng* (e.g. *den dochter* ‘the daughter’). Consequently, the pronunciation helps only in some cases to determine the grammatical gender.

In the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century normative tradition, the opposition *de/den* became subject of an ideological debate. Gradually, a dichotomy was created and in several normative works and ideological debates, the Southern language users who were assumed to utilise *den* were put in opposition to the Northern language users who were assumed to speak and write *de*. This ideological opposition, however, ignores the fact that there indeed were instances of *de* in the South and *den* in the North and could therefore be called tendentious. Yet, some eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Southern grammarians (among whom Henckel 1815:135) did stress that *den* was the only acceptable norm.

All of the Flemish normative works competing for the accusativism prescribed *den* regardless of the phonological context (Vosters et.al. 2012:140), but in spite of their endeavours, *de* became the officially codified norm in Southern Dutch in 1844.

For this case study we exclusively focus on masculine articles *de(n)* ('the') and *een(en)* ('a/'one') and the possessive pronoun *mijn(en)* ('mine') in singular form. The other possessive pronouns *haar* ('her'), for instance in phrases like *haar man is ziek* ('Her husband is ill') and *zijn* ('his') with their variants were not used in the masculine form in our corpus and are therefore excluded.

When looking at the results of our case study (Figure 6), it becomes clear that the ending on *-(e)n* is the most common: it is used in 58 % of the cases, while *-ø* occurs in 37 % of the instances. The ending with *-e* is used only three times (5 %): two times in the lemma *mijn(e)* and once in *een(e)*:

- 1) Ik ben *eene* ongelukkigen
I am a [unhappy one]

'I am an unfortunate person'
(Jean Baptiste Caudro, 1863)

- 2) als dat *mijne* echtgenoot Frans schillewaert nu reeds
ten tijd
as if my husband Frans schillewaert now already
[for] time

van 8 weeken mij koom te verlaeten
of 8 weeks me comes to leave

'that my husband Frans schillewaert has already left me since eight weeks'
(Sophia Dupon, 1865)

- 3) Gy zyt *myne* eenigste hulp en troost
You are my only help and consolation

'You are my only help and consolation'
(Victorine Bulteere, 1865)

Moreover, Bruges-based forms from the spoken vernacular such as *dem* and *deng* do not occur at all. The variation in our corpus is thus smaller than it must have been in the spoken dialect of Bruges. Still, the formal prescribed norm since 1844 was *de*, which in our corpus only accounts for about 37 % of all instances.

However, the results by no means reflect the phonological variation that is typical for the spoken dialect from Bruges (e.g. forms like *dem* and *deng*, caused by assimilation).

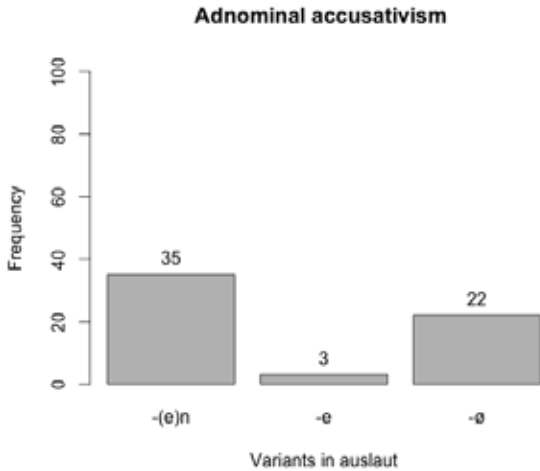


Figure 6. The occurrences of the adnominal accusativism in the corpus of pauper letters from Bruges.

5. Conclusion

The case study presented in this article provides an insight into the possible existence of linguistic hybridity in pauper letters, written by lower-class scribes from nineteenth-century Bruges. In this study, we searched for interferences of the local vernacular, as well as supralocal characteristics. In order to do so, we focused on three features: schwa-apocope, h-procope (and hypercorrect h-insertion), and the so-called adnominal accusativism.

The results lead us to conclude that the letters under scrutiny display the type of linguistic hybridity discussed above as far as these three features are concerned. Remarkably, in all the three cases, the standard variant is represented in many instances, while the typical dialect form is rare or almost non-existent. We do of course find variation among the different scribes and within the writing of each scribe, but it is remarkable that almost all of them display variation concerning two of the three features under scrutiny, namely schwa-apocope and the adnominal accusativism. Almost no variation was found concerning h-procope, and the consequent use of only one variant can hardly be found. Nevertheless, the variation used by each scribe, is never unlimited and most of them alternate between (only) two possible variants.

Concerning schwa-apocope, for instance, standard endings on $-\emptyset$ (e.g. *ik heb* 'I have') are used slightly more frequently than the more regional endings (i.e. more widespread) on schwa (e.g. *ik verhope* 'I hope'). West-Flemish dialect endings on $-en$ and $-t$ are found in only very few cases and $-n$, also a very common West-Flemish variant in the modern-day dialects, does not even occur at all.

Even more clear are the results of h-procope in our corpus. While in the dialect of West Flanders (like in many other Flemish dialects) /h/ at the beginning of a word, before a vowel is never pronounced, it is preserved almost categorically in the writings we analysed, with hypercorrect h-insertation being extremely rare. In other words: the scribes of our corpus who must have never used /h/ in word-initial position in their every-day local speech, systematically use <h> according to the prescribed norms when writing. Hence, we may assume that these writers were somehow aware of the fact that when putting pen to paper it was appropriate to avoid some features they used in everyday, informal situations, such as h-procope. The very few instances of hypercorrect h-insertion are also striking, since they show that these scribes not only were aware of the fact that h-dropping was a regional feature, but they also knew where exactly to put the <h> in their writings, i.e. when using a supralocal form.

The use of the adnominal accusativism, finally, also displays linguistic hybridity, since both forms like *de* (standard variant since 1844) and *den* (older form and regional) are present in the letters of our corpus. The latter, however, is more frequently used. Furthermore, Bruges-based forms from the spoken vernacular such as *dem* and *deng* (caused by assimilation) do not occur at all. Thus, there is less variation in our corpus than there must have been in the spoken dialect of Bruges.

Given the relatively low rate of dialect interferences, the many instances of regional and older forms and the frequent use of standard forms, we conclude that these writers were somehow aware of the fact that in writing, formal communication was desirable and features from their everyday, spoken vernacular needed to be avoided. A more supraregional language was thus desirable. This also means, of course, that the scribes of our corpus apparently mastered a code other than their informal local speech. However, the fact that local or regional forms are not absent from their writing either, shows that their language use is inherently hybrid, indicating that these scribes were capable of drawing on multiple linguistic repertoires when writing, notwithstanding their maybe sometimes limited levels of literacy. Linguistic hybridity is thus present in the pauper letters under scrutiny in the sense that both standard forms and more regional, sometimes dialect forms coexist. These results from our preliminary case study show that such 'writings from below' provide an interesting and surprisingly complex source for linguistic analyses. Further research based on a larger set of linguistic features, and on a more extensive set of data, with similar documents from other regions and a larger amount of different scribes, is, however, called for in order to corroborate these findings on a larger scale.

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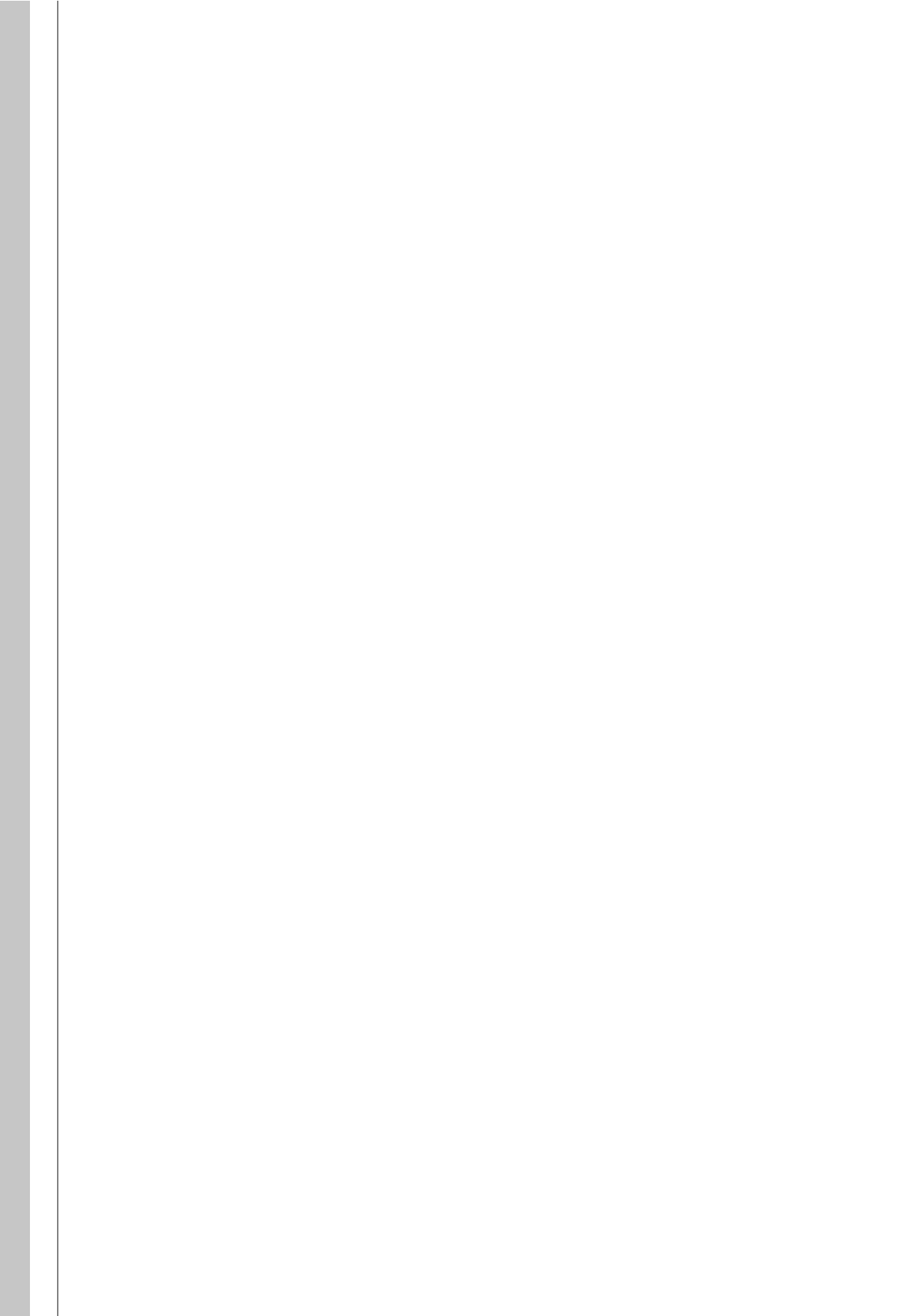
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Literacy and Agency



ANN O'BRYAN

“Sparse and Multiple Traces”

The Literacy Practices of African-American Pioneers in the Nineteenth-Century Frontier

ABSTRACT. The Beech Settlement in central Indiana was one of several communities of African Americans that flourished in the nineteenth century. This settlement was unique in that its settlers, led by a core of highly literate individuals, organized a circulating library. The circulation records and meeting minutes of the Board of Directors survive, as well as a list of some of the books that were held in the library. This article examines the surviving documents and other primary materials to portray a community of readers, writers, orators, and educators, who, although denied legal access to education until their migration, had learned to read and write, and had developed the skills to create a thriving community of readers.

KEYWORDS: nineteenth-century African Americans, library history, reading communities, African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church

Introduction

In her work, *Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History of African American Literary Societies*, Elizabeth McHenry points out that the study of reading and literacy of eighteenth and nineteenth century European Americans is aided by the existence of a plethora of resources, such as diaries and magazine subscription documentation. By contrast, evidence of the reading of African Americans, particularly in the early nineteenth century, is scarce, and the little surviving evidence is scattered. She argues for “reconstructing” the reading practices of nineteenth century African Americans “through what Roger Chartier has called the ‘sparse and multiple traces’ that remain” (McHenry 2002:8). This article seeks to use such “sparse and multiple traces,” including surviving manuscript documents and locally-printed works, to uncover the literacy practices of the Beech Settlement, a nineteenth century rural community of free African Americans in Indiana.

In antebellum America, African Americans, as a rule, were denied literacy and access to education. That did not mean, however, that the entire African American community was unable to read or write. Many African Americans, both free and enslaved, learned to read as well as write, and they taught each other – especially their children. Writing about free African Americans in urban areas of the North, McHenry states that literary societies provided space for reading and discussion, which also helped in the development of rhetorical strategies. She goes on to suggest that, informed by Enlightenment emphasis on the life of the mind, they found reading a means of acquiring knowledge, and writing as a tool for asserting authority, recording information, and communication on a public scale (McHenry 2002:23). Their organized activities were seen as a way to inform their fellow African Americans and to prepare them for life as full American citizens. Likewise, the organizers of the church and library in the Beech Settlement used similar strategies: they established an organization (in their case, a church that also housed a library), wrote documents that stated their purpose and intent, and maintained and preserved those documents.

North Carolina in the 1800s was home to a large community of Quakers. As they became increasingly uncomfortable with, and finally opposed to, the institution of slavery, they began to consider migrating to a free state. Indiana was one such free state, and in 1820 land became available for sale at low prices. The Quakers in North Carolina journeyed to Indiana, made land claims, and began migration to the frontier. From 1820 to 1840, Quaker families moved to Indiana and established small farming communities, from Richmond, on the border with Ohio and westward toward central Indiana and beyond. Many African Americans came with them and settled in the Quaker villages or on farms nearby. The history of the Quaker settle-

ment and the relationship with their African American neighbours is well documented: friendships and business relations were strong and in many cases continued years beyond the pioneer years.

This article focuses on one of many African American settlements that developed near Quaker villages in nineteenth century Indiana. The Beech Settlement, as it came to be known, was settled by several families who were friends of white Quakers in eastern North Carolina. The settlement was located about two miles northwest of the Quaker village of Carthage in Rush County, Indiana. Many bought land with holdings up to 320 acres and were successful farmers. They established churches and schools, and in 1842, established a lending library in the church that affiliated with the African Methodist Episcopal Church. The library's circulation records and the minutes of the annual meeting of the library members are held in the library of the Indiana Historical Society in Indianapolis. Using those library records, in addition to many other primary sources and genealogical records, as well as personal interviews with descendants, this article aims to bring to light a community of readers and writers who were largely self-educated, and who fostered and promoted education for their children and their community.¹

The Library

In 1832 the Beech residents held a meeting to organize their church. This meeting was recorded in a manuscript, a photocopy of which is included in the Roberts Settlement Collection in the Indiana State Library:

We the Coloured people of this Neighborhood being desirous to unite and build A Meeting House to the use of the Methodist Episcopal Church and we think on Land of James Roberts near the large spring to be a sootabel and convenient place To build one. Therefore we the under signers do bind ourselves to pay soms next to our names in gitting lumber for the building or otherwise in Cash. July the 18th 1832. (Indiana State Library: Roberts Settlement Collection)

Below these paragraphs are listed the names of the subscribers and the sums that they paid, ranging from 12½ to 25 cents.

Although originally organized as a Methodist church, the church in the late 1830s converted to the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) denomination. In 1840 the Indiana Conference (an official regional designation) of the A.M.E. Church was organized at the Beech Settlement. The A.M.E.

¹ Nesbitt, Anne. Phone and personal interviews, and email correspondence with the author. Vincent, Martha Sanders. Personal interviews and email correspondence with the author.

Church early on developed a Book Concern and Publications Department. The Book Concern published and distributed denominational materials such as Hymnals and Disciplines, and, more important for this study, the *Christian Recorder*, a weekly newspaper. (Kachun, 2006:649). The *Recorder* circulated, with the assistance of local subscription agents, throughout all areas of denominational reach, including the Beech Settlement. It included local church news, commentary on various subjects, as well as poetry and fiction.

In an article on a serialized novel published in the *Recorder*, Mitch Kachun provides an overview of the early history of Book Concern and its evolution during the nineteenth century. He writes that before the 1840s, it struggled financially and organizationally. During the 1850s under the leadership of Bishop Daniel A. Payne, it expanded its publishing beyond materials such as hymnals to more varied works, aimed at providing high quality reading material for its readership. By 1861, when Elisha Weaver became editor, the A.M.E. denomination was the most influential and successful black organization in the U.S. During the 1860s, the Book Concern grew and increased profits to the extent that it was able to purchase a building for production. (Kachun, 2006:651)

The Beech residents undoubtedly had access to publications of the Book Concern and the *Recorder*. Evidence of readership among Beech residents abounds in reports and articles in African American newspapers, such as *The North Star* and *The National Era*, as well as A.M.E. publications.² Clearly, the *Recorder*, and probably other publications of the Book Concern, formed a central body of reading material for the Beech families, and thus were influential in their education and their lives.

In 1842, ten years after the organization of the church, the library, called Mt. Pleasant Library, was organized. Minutes of the organizational meeting reflect a similar procedure to that of the church: the intent was stated in the opening paragraphs, followed by Articles of the Constitution, after which were listed the names of subscribers and sums paid. The William Henry Smith Library at the Indiana Historical Society holds two manuscript notebooks that contain the records of the Mount Pleasant Library. One notebook records the meeting minutes of the first and subsequent annual meetings. The other contains the circulation records from 1842 to 1869, listing each name, the accession number of the book that was checked out, the date it was checked out, the date it was returned, any relevant notes pertaining to the condition of the book after its return, and fees that were paid

² I have used the *Accessible Archives* database of nineteenth-century African American Newspapers to find evidence of Indiana readers.

for overdue returns or injury. Unfortunately, the names of the books are not recorded in the manuscript notebook.

The minutes notebook records a meeting at which a constitution for the library was written, officers and trustees were named, and the names of subscribers, with the respective amounts in dues paid, were entered. The articles of the constitution consisted of the official name of the library, the subscription fee (25 cents), the date of the annual meeting, the duties of the board of managers, secretary, and librarian, the proportion of library members required to amend the constitution, and a restriction against "novels, romances, or writings favourable to infidelity." This short phrase says much about the purpose of the library and the intention of the founders. "Infidelity" at this time meant unfaithfulness to Christian doctrine. This restriction, then, against novels, romances, and unfaithful writings suggests that the library was intended for moral as well as intellectual and educational development.

The same manuscript notebook records the proceedings of the first meeting of the board of managers. At that meeting, held on April 30, 1842, the books were "received, numbered, and placed in the Library", and by-laws (which were listed) were adopted. The by-laws were concerned with circulation rules, fines for overdue or damaged books, specific procedures for regularly examining the condition of the books and the Librarian's "register" (circulation and fee records), and evaluation of the Librarian's work. Finally, two persons were appointed to "assess the Librarian according to the 4th Article of the by-laws and report to the next annual meeting." There are 60 names on the list of charter members in the Library's minutes, six of whom were white residents of Carthage. Many lived on farms within a mile or two of the meeting house, while others lived in Carthage and the surrounding area. Not all of the names on the list of charter members appear in the circulation records. However, they well may have used the library without checking out books. Several were involved as officers or trustees, a few of them continuously serving in some capacity every year for which records are extant.

Every charter member paid at least 25 cents to join the Library. Some paid more: two of the white members paid \$1.50. James D. Roberts (on whose land the building was located) paid \$1.00. Daniel Watkins, one of the largest landowners, also paid \$1.00. Wright and Macklin Jeffries, who figure prominently in the history of the library as well as the community, paid \$0.50, as did Uriah Bass (a shoemaker in Carthage) and two others.

From the dates in the circulation records, it appears that the Library was open one day every two weeks or so – not always on the same day. Of the 53 charter members listed, 22 checked out a book on the first day the Library

was open; 21 others checked out books within the first two months; and 20 checked out books with some regularity over a period of time, such as a year, two years, or several months. Several patrons, especially from the Roberts, Jeffries, and Winburn families, checked out books every two weeks or every four weeks, with few gaps, which were often in the summer months when the work of farming was at its height. Some books were checked out repeatedly by the same person. For example, book number 129 was checked out at least eighteen times in the first two years, and nearly everyone who borrowed it did so at least twice. William Roberts borrowed it fourteen times between May of 1844 and May of 1846. He was almost the exclusive borrower of number 129 between November of 1845 and May of 1846, renewing it every four weeks.

The Reading Community

It is significant that many of the subscribers to the church congregation were the same as, or closely related to, the library subscribers. This suggests that the same families who were interested in organizing a church congregation were also interested in literacy and education. Many of these families played active roles in the Library's organization, maintenance, and use.

Brothers Anthony, James D., John, and Elijah Roberts came to Rush County around 1831 from Northampton County, NC. Anthony was a charter member of the library. He served as secretary to the library in 1844, 1845, and 1849; as assistant librarian in 1848; as librarian in 1850 and 1852; and as trustee in 1867, when the library's collection was relocated. In addition, Anthony was one of ten who in 1853 contributed to pay the library's debt of \$1.88. Two of Anthony's ten children, Abner and Dudley, became A.M.E. ministers. Anthony owned an 80-acre farm approximately a mile from that of James D. Roberts, and, consequently, also from the library and A.M.E. Church. Anthony taught school sessions in the Beech neighborhood.

Anthony's eldest son William was also a charter member of the library and one of the heaviest users of the library. Like his father, he also played a leadership role, serving as secretary in 1843 and 1850; librarian in 1844 and 1845; and assessor of damages in 1848.

James D. Roberts, Anthony's brother, owned the land on which the Mt. Pleasant Meeting House was built, as stated above. He was the first librarian, appointed at the first meeting, and served also as President in 1843, as treasurer in 1844, and as assessor of damages in 1845. He died May 29, 1849, leaving three orphaned children: Robert R., Jonathan, and Frances. Although he died early in the life of the library, his children and their descendants passed on the Roberts legacy of education.

After James D.'s death in 1849, guardianship of his children was given to Macklin Jeffries, another founding member of both church and library and

prominent community member. The circulation records show that Macklin Jeffries and Jonathan Roberts, age 14, visited the library and checked out books on June 5, 1849, one week after the death of Jonathon's father. Frances Roberts, James D.'s surviving daughter, married Irving Jeffries, who was a teacher and son of Walker Jeffries, a large landowner – an example of the many connections between these two families so active in education.

Robert R. Roberts, the youngest of James D.'s children, was an important member of the community and the church, and his children and later descendants exemplify the strong drive for educational achievement that is characteristic of the Roberts family. It was said of Robert R.:

In early life he was very strong, agile with his ax doing much in clearing and rail splitting in the early settlement of this county. [...] He was orphaned in his youth and had but little chance in the public schools, but being a great reader he was well informed and his knowledge was above that of the average man. He always attended old Mt. Pleasant Church and was attached to it as a child to its mother and in the last years of his life worked very hard to make it a comfortable place in which to worship (William Henry Smith Library: Carter).

Although Macklin Jeffries held legal guardianship of Robert R. when he was orphaned, the U.S. Census of 1850 for Rush County shows Robert living in the home of Wright Jeffries. Wright Jeffries appears to have been the most important teacher in the Beech Settlement, and the backbone of the Library. One wonders how much influence Wright Jeffries may have had on his interest in reading, and how he might have used the library.

Robert R. married Martha Watkins, daughter of Daniel and Frances Watkins, among the largest landowners in the neighborhood, and also users of the library. Among their children were Robert Alpheus, teacher, and Daniel, physician. Robert Alpheus became a successful educator, beginning his teaching career at age 16 in the Beech school, ending with a 22-year stint as principal of the Lincoln High School in Quincy, Illinois. The obituary in the *Knights town (Indiana) Banner*, December 2, 1938, provides some enlightening details on Robert Alpheus's life:

He attended school in The Beech, then taught this school at the age of 16, for seven years. He then taught two years each in Cambridge City and Greenfield, and was principal of the Shelbyville colored schools for nine years. He had been a student at Spiceland Academy and graduated in June of 1901. He held the highest grade Rush county teacher's license for 16 years and acquired a state license. Mr. Roberts also taught at Bloomington [the location of Indiana University] and attended Indiana University about 1902. After teaching at New Albany he left for

Terre Haute to attend and graduate from State Normal, and there he was married to Stella L. Horner. He was a brilliant scholar and instructor throughout life. The deceased won a pronouncing contest at the Shelby County Teachers' Institute, and on May 17, 1901 he won the state inter-Academic Oratorical contest. He became an Odd Fellow in 1886. [...] For 22 years he was principal of the Lincoln School at Quincy, and was a member of the A.M.E. Church there, also acting as a treasurer of the board of trustees and superintendent of the Sunday school.

Many descendants of several of the children of Robert Alpheus Roberts became teachers.

Brothers Macklin, Walker, and Wright Jeffries migrated to Rush County from Greensville County, Virginia, by way of Ohio, around 1831. Descendants of Occaneechi Indians, there was little (if any) African ancestry in the Jeffries family. However, they were usually labeled as mulattoes or free Negroes in tax and census records. Other Jeffries family members settled in Ohio and other parts of Indiana. Macklin and other Jeffries went to court to prove that they were white after they were denied their right to vote. Some of the Jeffries descendants married white partners and moved away from Rush County. Others married African Americans and became part of African American communities. Robinson Jeffries, son of Walker, for instance, became a minister in the A.M.E. church and served circuits and congregations in Indiana and Michigan.

Macklin, the eldest of the three brothers, was a charter member of both the A.M.E. church and the library. Later, he was a founding member of the Christian Church in Charlottesville. With the exception of the 1843 meeting, every library meeting for which there are records lists Macklin as a trustee. In addition, he helped to pay the \$1.88 debt in 1853, and in 1867 when the collection was relocated, he and Anthony Roberts selected pamphlets from the collection to be given to its members. Macklin owned a large farm on two parcels, one adjacent to the James D. Roberts farm, the other on the western edge of the settlement.

Wright Jeffries, the youngest of the three Jeffries brothers, was a teacher, as well as founding member and frequent officer and user of the library. His wife was Atlanta Winburn, daughter of Lewis Winburn, who, along with his brothers, was another frequent user of the library. None of the children born to Wright and Atlanta lived to adult age. However, the censuses of 1850 and 1860 show other children living in their home. As stated above, Robert R. Roberts, age 10, was living with them in 1850.

Wright was living in the home of his nephew Thaddeus Jeffries, one of Macklin's sons, when he died in 1911. He had kept his school books, the remaining library books, and the manuscript records of the library meet-

ings and circulation until his death. These were donated to the Indiana Historical Society by Thaddeus's daughter, Mary Jeffries Strong, in 1954. Mary was only thirteen years old when Wright died, but her granddaughter, who knew her well, tells of her close relationship with him and great admiration for him. Mary attended Butler University in Indianapolis, became a teacher, and was an avid reader. Wright told her about his teaching career and about the library, which, he told her, only included "classics." He obviously had a strong influence on her, which is exemplified in the fact that Mary preserved the books and records of the library for half a century after Wright died, and then donated them to the Indiana Historical Society.³

Of the books that Mary Jeffries Strong donated to the Indiana Historical Society, only one appears to be still in the collection: David Miller, *The Practical Horse Farrier: Containing a Treatise on the Different Diseases of Horses, and Cures for the Same* (Rushville, Ind.: For J.M. Taylor [by] George W. Hargitt, printer, 1851.) This book was apparently not used in either the library or Wright Jeffries' school, but was in his personal collection. The only evidence of what books may have been donated is the list of books recorded at the time of her gift to the Indiana Historical Society, and reference to two books that were recorded as damaged: *Goodrich's United States*, and *Leigh's Dictionary*. The provenance record in the Indiana Historical Society Library states that Wright Jeffries "kept the books after the library ceased to function. [...] The record and remaining books had been kept together by the donor," Mary Jeffries Strong. The books that Mrs. Strong had in her possession until 1954 included several song books; histories of the world, the United States, and New York; theology works; *Arator*, by John Taylor (a collection of essays on agriculture); a textbook on hydrostatics and pneumatics; textbooks on arithmetic, grammar, rhetoric, geography, and penmanship; Byron's works; Plutarch; Thomas a Kempis; and a travel book by Mungo Park, *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa*. The provenance record states that the books "were in the Mount Pleasant Library, or were used in school taught by uncle Wright Jeffries." Only seven of the 36 books on the list identify a call number. Therefore, it is difficult, or impossible, to ascertain exactly what was in the Library.

Writing: Rhetoric, Memoir, Poetry

The library records plus the information from census records and other primary sources begin to sketch out a picture of the reading community in the Beech Settlement. In addition to the library books, the community certainly had access to newspapers and periodicals, in addition to those available

³ Anne Nesbitt, phone interview with author, December 3, 2004.

through the A.M.E. book concern. Several abolitionist newspapers circulated widely from the 1840s, and articles, letters to the editor, and other news items indicate that they were read and subscribed to in Indiana. Many of the agents (people enlisted to obtain subscriptions) were among the Quaker communities between Indianapolis and Richmond, Indiana, and they certainly were circulated among Rush County Quakers. Carthage was a site on the Underground Railroad, confirming the abolitionist work of Carthage Friends.

In September, 1865, a convention was convened by the African Americans of Rush County, and held in the Beech settlement (probably in the A.M.E. church), to discuss and prepare for a state convention of the Indiana African Americans the following month. The document that resulted from the Rush County meeting was published (presumably by a local printer) as *An Appeal to the Friends of Humanity by the Colored People of Rush Co., Indiana*. The opening paragraph states that the purpose of the county convention was “taking into consideration their political condition in that State, their grievances, and the best mode of procuring a redress of the same, their rights and how to obtain them, and to appoint delegates to attend the State Convention of the colored people, to be held in Indianapolis” (October 24, 1865). The document then lists resolutions that were “unanimously adopted.”

The *Appeal* is written in a formal, official document format and uses language that draws from the Declaration of Independence. It states that inalienable rights have been denied to much of the population (African Americans), and that “these rights have long been flagrantly, wickedly and most inhumanly violated, by the degenerate sons of noble sires”. It states their commitment to “a Republican form of Government;” and that they “will petition the Legislature of this State, at its next session, to grant us access to the public school funds”.

This document is an example of use of writing and rhetorical strategy to demand, in McHenry’s words, “full citizenship and equal participation in the life of the republic.” Describing the literary societies in the urban North, she states that they “were aware [...] of the centrality of written texts of national construction to both the legitimacy of the new nation and to their status in it.” The *Appeal* functions exactly as such a text.

The Mt. Pleasant Library was most active in the 1840s and 1850s. During the 1860s circulation declined, probably due to the increased availability of books, newspapers, and magazines. As stated earlier, the A.M.E. publications and the *Christian Recorder* were readily available, there was at least one bookstore in nearby Knightstown. In 1869, the library dissolved and most of the books were moved to the newly-built and public school library in Carthage. The remaining library books, and records of circulation and meetings, were preserved by Wright Jeffries, a school teacher and

prominent member of the community as well as a founding member of the library.

Thomas P. Weaver was a member of a mixed race family that included Native Americans and African Americans. He was six years old when he and his family migrated from Guilford County, North Carolina, to Indiana in 1847. In 1922 he published a sixteen-page pamphlet of his memoirs in which he describes in detail the journey from the South to Indiana, his schooling in Quaker-taught schools, his later teaching four school terms, and his work up to the time of the pamphlet's publication. About half of the memoir, though, is an extended description of his time during the Civil War. He accompanied Elwood Hill, a Quaker from Carthage, as his servant when Hill enlisted in the Union Army. The incidents and experiences he describes in minute detail are enlightening, and provide a first-hand report of some important events of the Civil War.

The writing style of the memoir belies the facts of his early life: the child of a family in poverty, with an abusive, and probably alcoholic step-father, working from the time he was five years old, and leaving home at age 16, in order, as he says, to avoid being killed by his step-father's beatings. The first paragraph is a good example of his writing style:

After the lapse of 76 years the author of this Memoir will undertake to pen some of the scenes of his life from North Carolina to Indiana. The writer of this memoranda was born in Guilford County, North Carolina, February 17, 1841, and my father and mother started to Indiana, September 28, 1846. The first thing that happened after we had been only three days on the road, I, with another little boy, were stolen. The mode of theft was by enticing us into a shop by showing us bright, new tin cups, something we had never seen before. It took all the afternoon to find us. Had it not been for a kind lady that saw the man take us into his shop they would never have found us, and I can now say, thank God for the lady, as she gave the snap away. She saved us from being taken away that night and being sold (Weaver 1922:2).

Where the narrative relates events that were traumatic or dramatic in some way, he quotes poetry, usually a stanza of a hymn. The memoir includes many events of hardship, including nearly dying in a prisoner-of-war camp, but only when describing his step-father does he display deeply felt, painful emotion:

I shall now state that this man I called father was only my step-father, as I never saw my own father. I wish the Lord to forgive me as to what I may write as to my life with this step-father. As it is said, 'Let the dead rest.' If I write this sketch of my life and would leave these transactions out I would be a failure (Weaver 1922:4).

He then tells of when his father beat him so severely that he nearly died. In closing the memoir, after expressing thanks to God for bringing him through trials, and to friends throughout his life, he adds: "I hope friends will pardon me for calling the dead [i.e., his step-father] in question and relating things that perhaps had better not have been said, but as for me they had better never been done" (Weaver 1922:16).

Thomas Weaver also wrote some articles in the local newspaper, *Carthage Citizen*, including "Narrative on the Underground Railroad," in the May 13, 1921 edition. His youngest sister, Emma Weaver, was also a writer. She published a collection of poems called *Gleanings* in 1917, evidently through a printing office in nearby Knightstown. She worked as a maid in Knightstown until late in life. On the page facing the title page, she states the following:

This book preserves in memory the people, their deeds and old familiar places found within their pages.

I was born February 14th, 1859. My home was in a country home, in Grant county, Indiana, ten miles south of Marion, which is the county seat. I received my early education at Bethel, a county school; latterly at Carthage and Knightstown. I am a descendant of the Cherokee tribe of Indians.

There are numerous other examples of the reading and writing life of the early, as well as later, generation of Beech residents. The Indianapolis newspapers reported on "Colored Conventions" held to promote voting rights and support for education for African Americans. Those reports included writings by delegates from around the state to those conventions, including members of Roberts and Jeffries families. The *Christian Recorder* also published writings of Beech residents and descendants. Finally, the daughter of two of the original Library founders, Martha Harris McCurdy, moved to Georgia where she was active in the temperance movement and served as secretary to the noted A.M.E. Bishop Henry McNeal Turner in Atlanta. An autobiographical sketch of her life in James T. Haley's *Afro-American Encyclopaedia* states that in 1886 when she arrived in Atlanta she became a member of the good Bishop's family:

and when that learned divine caused to appear on the 25th of September, 1886, the neat journal, known as the *Southern Recorder* she became its efficient secretary and served as editor *pro tem* of the same for at least half the time that it was the property of Bishop Turner, and was therefore styled the mother of the *Recorder* by many of its supporters. The good Bishop enjoyed frequent hearty laughs over many things said in other papers concerning the wise sayings in his paper that were thought

to be his but were things said by Mrs. M. A. Mason, the secretary. [She was at the time the widow of her first husband, a Mr. Mason.] (Haley 1895:137)

Conclusion

As stated above, the Beech Settlement was one of many such settlements in Indiana, as well as Ohio and Michigan. The settlements in Indiana declined by the end of the nineteenth century as the children of the first generations moved to cities in search of employment. However, the descendants of several of the settlers continue to hold annual reunions that bring hundreds to the original sites every summer. The reunions at the old Beech Settlement site, held in the one-room church that once held the library, commemorate their history by having a worship service, a report on activities of various individuals, a remembrance of those who have died since the last reunion, a meal on the grounds outside the church, and much socializing. They are also attended by many white descendants of the Quaker settlers of Carthage with whom many of the African Americans had come to Indiana. The continuing maintenance of the church building (which is no longer in use as a church) and grounds, the work involved in having an annual reunion, the ongoing relationships among descendants who still live in the area as well as those who live elsewhere, and finally, the ritual of commemoration, serve to keep telling the story. The 'sparse and multiple traces' of the first generation of settlers are brought back to the Beech where they are annually remembered and celebrated.

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ANA RITA LEITÃO

Documentary Evidence in Early Modern Portugal and Overseas

A Window to Literacy Practices

ABSTRACT. Court files have provided a great revolution in the way we consider written culture in Modernity. Significantly, many testimonies brought into the light of our days are undeniable evidence of literacy among segments of the population traditionally placed in the shadows (Lyons 2010). The handwritten productions that we can find in civil, ecclesiastic and inquisitorial cases allow us to reconstruct more than just communication mechanisms outside the law. In fact, their search, seizure, handling and archiving are essential for understanding their use as documentary evidence. Moreover, such writings also provide personal perceptions about human relations, the everyday life and the impact of certain historical events. It is my purpose to discuss at what level personal informal manuscripts could be used as incriminatory evidence, the several roles they played even beyond the legal disputes, and how the modern researcher can explore this sources to study the literacy competence in the early modern Portuguese empire.

KEYWORDS: criminal justice, writings, evidence, literacy, Portuguese empire

Secret documents written by prisoners can tell us much about the Portuguese history of literacy. According to an inquisitorial set of rules, under the title “*Dos Remédios que os Inquisidores hão-de usar para que os presos se não comuniquem por escritos*”¹ (“Remedies that inquisitors should use so that prisoners do not communicate with each other through handwritings”), several prisoners were violating the prisons laws of exchanging information. This document, possibly dating from the first decades of the 17th century and made by the General Council of the Holy Office of Inquisition, shows several strategies to discover prisoner communication networks and reveals how prisoners dealt with the obstacles to the production, circulation and reception of the messages. Certain goods were wrapped in paper and cloth, chicken feathers were used to write, charcoal as ink, pots and other kitchenware to conceal messages, cats as messengers, and so on. Despite these measures, various marginal correspondence ended up being seized, scrupulously examined and, finally, attached to legal proceedings.

These are just some of many circumstances that explains why a variety of informal handwritings can be found in judicial records. Their appearance, though not always clear, was far from being an accident. Alongside other types of evidence – confessions, testimonies, suspicion and judgment – manuscripts and printed materials were being used as *documentary evidence*.² This term is a notion that was brought into use not until the middle of the nineteenth century, and even then had a less defined meaning than nowadays. Nevertheless, this kind of evidence was starting to become more and more apparent in Portuguese early modern jurisprudence.

In this paper, the main focus is to exhibit, from an ongoing post-doctoral research project, the existence of several *ordinary writings* (Lyons 2007) as the first steps of documentary evidence in the Portuguese early modern period. It will be argued how such manuscripts show the dynamic relationship between writing abilities, writers’ motives and social control in the early modern Portuguese empire.

On Evidence Gathering

Among the plethora of proceedings in civil, inquisitorial and ecclesiastical matters, it is possible to collect several examples of personal writing. However, due to poor preservation conditions, many of the existing files

¹ ANTT: TSO, mc. 15, number 28.

² Documentary evidence is a form of evidence that consists of any document (printed or handwritten) with writings on it, that is submitted, examined and allowed as evidence in a trial. In this paper I take into account only this sort of written proof, instead of considering several other physical evidence, in order to focus the study on literacy competence.

have been lost. This compromises systematic study and gives an incomplete image of the use of writing abilities and genres in the everyday life of earlier times.

Regarding their value for the contemporary researcher, judicial archives provide socio-cultural and linguistic data, especially in the case of such personal writing. Thanks to the research of the project *Post Scriptum* under the coordination of Rita Marquilhas (University of Lisbon), thousands of Portuguese and Spanish informal letters (from the 16th century to the beginning of the 19th century) have been discovered in regional, national and even international archives.³ In fact, more recently the study of letter writing in early modern societies has offered new insights not only into the usage of the language, including its varieties and cultural practices, but also in terms of the meanings of the materials (Daybell 2012; Daubel & Hinds 2010; O'Neill 2015; among others).

Besides personal letters, there are all sorts of ordinary writings used as evidence in the courts. However, it is not always possible to accurately assess the reasons for the selection and attachment of such documents. Compared to oral testimonies, they were not considered as strong evidence, yet still provided relevant data for someone's conviction.⁴ In general, it was possible to obtain them through several ways:

- By voluntary deliverance;
- Thanks to denunciation;
- By seizure;
- Through intercepted mail (private or public).

In several cases, it is possible to recognise the existence of such writings only from the description made on the criminal record or due to oral testimonies. After all, privacy was deeply conditioned by social restrictions – especially when concepts such as morality, sexuality and spirituality remained a public matter. However, the absence of potential documentary evidence is not always easy to explain. It could depend on the relevance of content or the physical conditions of the original, or even the discretion of judicial officers. Judicial officers had to frequently overcome several obstacles in the understanding of the written word, with regards to its authorship and/or addressee, especially when the source was kept in anonymity; authenticity

³ Our main goal at the project *Post Scriptum* is to collect and publish Portuguese and Spanish informal letters, written during the early modern period.

⁴ Concerning the law of proof in early modern Portugal and Europe, here are some suggestions (among many others): Ferreira 1730–1733; Langbein 1996; Macnair 1999; Madero 2009; Morais 2010; Pessoa 1913; Sampaio 2010.

vs. forgery of documents (either being handwritten or printed); other actors involved in the writing, as well as in the postage process; finally, the message itself – due to general grammatical errors, the nature of the physical medium or the use of techniques to make it undetectable.

At this level, we can observe the very first stages of forensic sciences, albeit with obvious lack of objectivity and systematic analysis in comparison to what constitutes modern documentary evidence.

Documentary Evidence and Writing Skills

Our findings in the judicial archives clearly demonstrate at what level the essentials of reading and writing were accessible to a higher proportion of common people than traditionally considered by historians, thanks to free education (Kamen 2000), but also to domestic education and several other non-formal opportunities, like in the context of instruction in a craft or trade (Fonseca 2006). This may be surprising to us nowadays, but court transcripts were used as a popular method of teaching Portuguese. As a matter of fact, some teachers used to present printed or handwritten texts, originally from judicial proceedings, for calligraphy training in the context of the development of early literacy skills. Despite being common, this practice was condemned by ecclesiastical and civil authorities, for it would not have instilled adequate principles in the education of the new generations. In fact, this concern was justified by a model of literacy in which alphabetic writing was associated with morality, religion and civilization (especially since the 17th century in the Iberian territories and their colonies overseas) (cf. Baker 2007).

Moreover, it can be argued that literacy competence among lower strata benefitted from the dissemination of written culture thanks to the advent of print. In one hand, the knowledge of certain models and structures would be spread through letter-writing manuals and printed models, vocabularies, vernacular language grammars, textbooks for mother-tongue teaching and guides for learning foreign languages, among many others. It is also possible to point out the consequences of the written culture through several legal proceedings, not only concerning to censorship. There is often documentary evidence in inquisitorial records against individuals who were clearly consistently exposed to a wide range of literacy practices – teachers, students, printers, booksellers, as well as merchants and businessmen (mainly Jews and *Conversos*⁵). In the context of the Portuguese Inquisition, these men

⁵ The word *Converso*, as well as the expression *New Christian*, were applied in the Iberian kingdoms and refer to baptized Jews and their descendants. Generally, it also point out the suspicion of secret adherence to Judaism. They have both a pejorative connotation and are synonyms of *Marrano*.

and women were mainly convicted for heretical proposals and *Jewish guilt*, and the ownership of forbidden books and suspicious writings – including the content of personal letters – played an important role in their trial.

Amongst the Portuguese judicial archives, the modern scholar can observe different writing abilities through various genres, ranging from private messages and letters to commercial correspondence, forged papers, pamphlets, prayers, spells,⁶ drawings,⁷ instructions to currency counterfeiting, ship's logbooks, cargo record books,⁸ lists of all kinds, financial accounting, memoirs of exceptional events (for example during time in prison), and family trees, amongst others. Depending on the nature of such productions and the reasons why they were attached to legal proceedings, each one not just represents a literacy event, but works as evidence of “literacy-in-action” (Brandt & Clinton 2002:348), where literacy acts as a social agent. Moreover, these documentary evidences suggests how literacy appeared as consequence of several factors besides schooling, like personal needs, economic demands and spirituality (Houston 2013; Lyons 2012). Evidently, the practice of literacy had a crucial social role, from the upper to the lower strata of society, and leads us towards the understanding of human relations, beliefs, intimacy and public/privacy boundaries. On the other hand, documentary evidence, in their variety, also confirm how both literate and illiterate people, even in rural society, would have been constantly exposed to the practice of writing (Marquilhas 2013; Eckerle 2013). However, the ways in which promotion of literacy occurred among the lower strata are still to be comprehended (Kamen 2000) in their whole extension and possibilities, particularly in Catholic kingdoms, such as the Portuguese empire.

Personal manuscripts, each with their own goals, add “a further stone to

⁶ For instance, it is possible to find the well-known magical formula *abracadabra* as a part of a ritual to heal malaria sufferers (as stated by Quintus Serenus Sammonicus, physician to the Roman emperor Caracalla) circa 1675. The small writings were written by Diogo Lopes Velho, a lieutenant of infantry. They should be used as an amulet and individuals would also have to say some common Catholic prayers, such as the Our Father and Hail Mary. Only one got to the Holy Inquisition. Despite showing a curious mistake – by adding an extra syllable: *abradacadabra*, instead of *abracadabra* – it is an important evidence of one popular healing, where superstition meets religion. Could this be an example of a common level of writing in early modern Europe – copying without understanding the content (Houston 2013)? (ANTT: TSO: IE, file 7415.)

⁷ Amongst the Inquisitorial files, they were mainly evidence of superstitious practices and beliefs, as well as of sorcery.

⁸ Frequently found in files concerning debts and other similar legal disputes. For instance, in the following reference, it was a case of lost, stolen, damaged or destroyed goods: ANTT: Feitos Findos, Conservatória da Companhia Geral de Pernambuco e Paraíba, mç. 6, cx. 8, number 1 (18th century).

the foundation work for a new history from below [...] with a newly-keen ear for real speech and subtle meaning” (Hitchcock 2004:295). Documentary evidence in early modern Portuguese criminal records challenges us to reanalyze more deeply the processes by which individuals constructed meanings and self-awareness. Such sources, in the context of the ecclesiastical, the inquisitorial and the civil courts, reveal not only the degrees of persecution undertaken by the Holy Church and the royal power, but also several strategies against their control, where writing played an important role.⁹

For instance, let us consider letters seized from Jewish networks in the 17th century (among several inquisitorial records), and correspondence, as well as pamphlets (among civil records), exchanged in the context of the civil war that took place in the government of King Miguel (1828–1834).¹⁰ Although motivated by completely different issues, in both cases writers had the urge to transmit confidential information under close surveillance and use correspondence as a strategy to ensure family ties and friendship at long distance (from exile to Portugal and vice versa).

Another interesting example where literacy serves transgressive purposes is a case of currency counterfeiting. In a civil legal proceeding built against Manuel Tavares Coutinho¹¹ (1825), a servant, there is a letter written with the goal of obtaining instructions to make counterfeit coins. He asked a friend, who happened to be a goldsmith previously condemned for counterfeiting. The answer to this demand contrasts in its dimension and content. Being concerned with the transmission of precious information, the addressee, Francisco Soares Antunes de Carvalho, wrote a short, enigmatic message, delaying the presentation of the requested information. In this way, the writer adjusted the message to the circumstances. After all, such practice was a crime against the crown, and both of them could be already under surveillance.

Victims, Offenders and Writers' Motives

Although letters tend to be more conventional in the early modern age (Bergs 2007:29), particularly with regard to politeness, formulaic sequences and genres, there are cases in which creativity may have been inspired from

⁹ It is necessary to point out that, in Portugal, the Holy Office of Inquisition was a royal court, instituted by King João III.

¹⁰ Both available at the Portuguese National Archive (ANTT – Torre do Tombo), the last one in two different documentary collections: *Processos Políticos e Devassas do reinado de D. Miguel*, and also in *Intendência Geral da Polícia* – where hundreds of seized letters can be found in miscellaneous sections.

¹¹ ANTT: *Feitos Findos, Processos-Crime, Letra M*, mc. 71, number 76, cx. 157.

spoken discourse and/or lack of skills in written discourse. In the huge variety of writings found, this quest for documentary evidence reveals more about popular everyday writing, including ephemeral genres. However, we only have access to what inquisitors and judges decided it was worthwhile to preserve as testimonial evidence in the context of legal disputes. There are fewer examples of writing belonging to women, although these examples demonstrate intentions as diverse as business, seduction and creativity. After all, functional skills were needed for survival (Baker 2007) and were even used as instruments of power, regardless of social status, language knowledge or literacy competence.

Interest in certain types of text depended on the content, circumstances and participants involved. Some records are more likely to have documentary evidence, concerning specific accusations – such as bigamy, solicitation, Judaism, conspiracy, sodomy, obstructing the course of inquisitorial justice, sorcery and superstition. These ordinary documents are important not so much for their content, but because of their existence (Lyons 2007). Due to their very nature, they reveal a diversity of details, not only for what they convey; but for what they imply in their dissemination or, in the opposite sense, in their private ownership. Documentary evidence could be used in more ways than solely to convict criminals. In fact, it could provide:

- A way to obtain evidence – direct or indirect - of a new offence;
- An alternative source of information;
- A strategy for identifying all those involved in a certain social network and, therefore, finding further guilty persons.

Yet, even the most reliable results could not be considered as solid evidence to convict offenders. In order to illustrate the great variety of genres, themes and situations, I will introduce and give more specific details on several examples, awarding particular attention here to the Portuguese Inquisition. For a better understanding of the presented texts, the material transcribed is standardized in what concerns morphosyntax (except for the enclitic forms), word boundaries, abbreviations (all expanded), use of capitals and punctuation.

Communicating Behind Bars

Inside prisons, restrictions were one among many factors that influence the quality and availability of resources, including restrictions on speech itself. Poor reading and writing abilities were not an obstacle strong enough to inhibit the interaction between individuals, even under close observation. It is possible to identify verbal and non-verbal strategies, mainly through

the details described by guards and the content of complaints made by cell-mates. Messages could preserve an author's identity or hide meaning. The economy of words and use of figures of speech were obvious keys to ensure success in such marginal interactions. Both strategies worked as a code that could be deciphered only by those who shared insider knowledge.

The *beef pot strategy* was well known among prisoners – but it went awry for one imprisoned doctor, Miguel Nunes, aged 33, convicted for persevering in the Law of Moses. Despite knowing the risks, he needed to comfort his wife and sent her a small note on the 28th January of 1601. On the same day the guards intercepted the small wrapped paper – written on a page of a book – in a clear violation of secrecy in the inquisitorial prison at Coimbra (Figure 1).

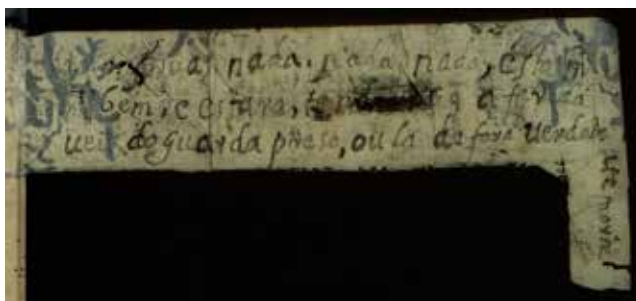


Figure 1. Miguel Nune's note to his wife. (PT/TT/TSO-IC/025/00889). Image courtesy ANTT.

Due to the physical medium, the small paper was attached and transcribed to the defendant's file. There were no doubts concerning its authorship, and the addressee – also in the exact same prison – was soon revealed. In addition, there was a strong suspicion about the delivery of several notes and warnings in Latin, giving some hope to other *conversos* or revealing judicial procedures.

It is possible to observe common features of the genre in the message. The context clearly affects the quality of the discourse and itself leads to linguistic economy, making the content difficult to interpret. On the other hand, the absence of punctuation and capitals also compromised its understanding. Here is a revised version, preserving the original content:

Send me a sign if this is delivered, so that I can rest. Be patient. When was the day, if someone else came. About the cans, nothing, nothing, nothing, it's very, very well and it will be. I'm afraid the wound came from the imprisoned guard or from outside.
Sincerely yours until death.¹²

¹² The original message was the following: "Mandai sinal se é este dado, para que repouse. Paciência. Quando foi o dia, se veio mais alguém. Das conservas nada, nada, nada, está muito, muito bem, e estará. Temo que a ferida veio do guarda preso, ou lá de fora. / Verdadeiro até [à] morte." ANTT: TSO: IC, file 889, folio [13A front and back].

This message also suggests the existence of verbal/non-verbal (the *sign*), linguistic (taking advantage of sentences' juxtaposition, repetition of words and the absence of certain points of reference in the speech) and strategic resources in the interaction of this couple. The author also makes use of a remarkable variety of speech acts considering the dimension of the writing: there is a demand, an encouragement, an inquiry about two issues, gratitude and some news. After all, it was an opportunity too precious to be missed.

This scenario does not differ much from the interaction that took place in the same prison, allegedly around 1600. Ana Fernandes, aged 52, was married to a tax-gatherer. She and her two sons, Brás and Diogo, were persecuted and imprisoned, but not at the same time. Once again, we are facing an interaction driven by familial motives and concerns, between New Christians.¹³ The messages exchanged were very brief, following previous attempts at contact in which mother and son tried to reach each other without raising the guards' suspicion by non-verbal interactions, in which the exchange of specific objects would confirm the identity of the sender (Ana) to the addressee (her son Diogo, aged 30).¹⁴

The analysis of such manuscripts by the judicial authorities was a considerably difficult activity. They were often, as in this case, made of easily degradable material, with handwriting that was difficult to read, and displayed notoriously bad syntax, spelling and discursive consistency. Ana Fernandes' messages present a peculiar handwriting and are not easy to decipher, which shows how poor her writing skills were. When asked about her writings, her son Diogo stated that she was illiterate in an attempt to avoid a more severe punishment and to keep further interactions secret. However, the evidence was strong enough to prove the opposite to be true.

Empowerment Through Literacy

For this topic, I have chosen a few cases where there is a strong perception about the power of writing skills as a way to claim justice and/or to achieve social prestige. For Vicente Nogueira, letter writing was an important part of his plan to fool the Inquisition. The 45-year-old Catholic clergyman from Lisbon and ex-Associate Judge at Casa da Suplicação (a Supreme Court) was convicted of sodomy. In December 1630, he not only wrote a letter to be used as evidence, but also sent a paper to be seen only by his partner, the priest Álvaro Pires, where he explains all the details of the plot (Figure 2).¹⁵

¹³ See previous footnote (4).

¹⁴ They can be seen in two different places: ANTT: TSO: IC, file 2398 and ANTT: TSO: IC, file 37.

¹⁵ Both letters are available at <http://cards-fly.clul.ul.pt/teitok/postscriptum/pt/index.php?action=home> as PSCRI383 and PSCRI384 (xml codes).

It is common to find situations in which the writer has the intention to use letter writing as an incriminatory strategy. This was the case for Maria da Fonseca, a woman abandoned by her husband. A letter from 1661 proved to be an important vessel for her to demand justice.¹⁶

Mister Pascoal Coutinho,
I've heard that, despite being married to me, you pretended I was dead in order to marry another woman, a thing I had never expected from you. But these are the ways of the world. And you also took all my assets and left me with no home, two causes that were enough to report on you to the church. However, considering you are my husband by name, I won't denounce you, and I haven't said anything to the vicar, because I'm sure you'll remember me by sending me something for my maintenance. Because every honest woman with her husband away suffers from this kind of need.

I hope you will help me as an honest man. And if you don't do as I say, I'll arrange things on my own, and I warn you that it will be cheaper to do what I say than to try the strictness of the Holy Inquisition.

And as I trust you'll do everything, I hope God keeps you as it is my wish.

1st May 1661, AD, Maria da Fonseca.¹⁷

She blames her husband for bigamy, an offense against the values of the Holy Church. Through a letter of reproach, she describes the complete scenario, making clear that Pascoal Coutinho was aware of his immoral conduct. When Maria claims that she did not intend to denounce him, the context of delivery of the letter clearly demonstrates the opposite. On the other hand, in some passages, what appears to be a simple justification – “because I'm sure you'll remember me by sending me something for my maintenance” – takes the form of a demand, by putting pressure on the addressee. At this level, Maria plays with the common sense about basic rules of conjugal life, through a conscious choice of words and hidden meanings.

Another woman, Leonor Caetana, felt the need to expose a priest, André da Conceição (circa 1734). This is how one of the letters began:

¹⁶ ANTT: TSO: IL, file 142, Folio 6 front to 7 front.

¹⁷ Translated by Clara Pinto, from Portuguese: “Senhor Pascoal Coutinho,/ Tenho por notícia que vossa mercê, sendo casado comigo, me fez morta para se casar com outra, o que nunca esperei de vossa mercê, mas são coisas deste mundo. E também levar vossa mercê todo o meu remédio e deixar-me posta na rua, causas eram estas muito bastantes para me valer da igreja. Mas atento a ter vossa mercê nome de meu marido e por isso o não acuso nem dei disto parte ao vigário geral por me parecer se lembrava vossa mercê de mim, com me mandar com que me sustente, que as mulheres honradas sempre em falta de seus maridos passam necessidades destas. [...] E advirto-lhe que mais barato lhe há-de ser o fazer o que lhe peço, que experimentar o rigor da Santa Inquisição [...]”.

Jesus, Marie, Joseph
 Sir, or better saying, great charlatan,
 Your mercy holds some demon from hell, if you're not one of them,
 or a minor son his slave, who is tempting so subtly the souls. Tell me
 if you have found in a book approved by the Inquisition the doctrines
 that Lucifer has taught us, he, who wanted to be superior to God. Tell
 me if Jesus Our Lord, when he was in this world, did he ever do such
 dishonest actions with the women who were with him, like those you
 have done to us. [...] ¹⁸

Between recriminations, she tried to persuade him to confess his faults to the Holy Office. Leonor intended to provoke a spontaneous reaction from him by using irony and sarcasm. It is interesting to observe the creative accusatory salutation. Furthermore, she reveals an acknowledgment of the value of letter writing to set out her own defence. However, André seems to have understood her intentions and tried to use the same strategy to prove that he was not alone being guilty of solicitation.

Language and Symbolic Power

The institutions of early modern discipline – ranging from superior to trial courts – are not to be considered as having always clear boundaries concerning their jurisdiction. For conventional religious and spiritual concerns, inquisitional and ecclesiastical courts were chosen to convict offenders who endangered the public from a moral and behavioural point of view.

In another case, from the eighteenth century, limited resources led to a peculiar choice. The amount of letters preserved by the Holy Office concerning the priest Bernardo de São José¹⁹ is impressive and relates to his crime: heretical proposals. Whilst being a spiritual director and confessor, he dangerously inspired various nuns to follow his doctrine. At the moment of his arrest in his convent, in April 1761, authorities found forbidden books (manuscripts with prophecies about the return of King Sebastian and others from Bandarra) and more than two hundred letters from a single nun describing mystical revelations, as a sort of spiritual exercise based on the false doctrines he used to preach – which included not only some variations

¹⁸ Original version in Portuguese: “Jesus Maria José/ Senhor/ ou para melhor dizer grandissimo embosteiro/ Vossa mercê cerra algum demônio do inferno, se o não é, é filho menor seu escravo que assim anda tentando as almas tão sotilmente. Diga-me se achou em algum livro que passasse pela santa inquisição as doutrinas que nos ensinou o Lúçifer, que se quis fazer mais que Deus. Diga-me, Nosso Senhor quando andava no mundo obrou alguma vez com as mulheres que seguiu que as ações tão torpes que conosco obrou [...]”. ANTT: TSO: IC, file 3326, folio 20 front.

¹⁹ ANTT: TSO: IL, file 8619.

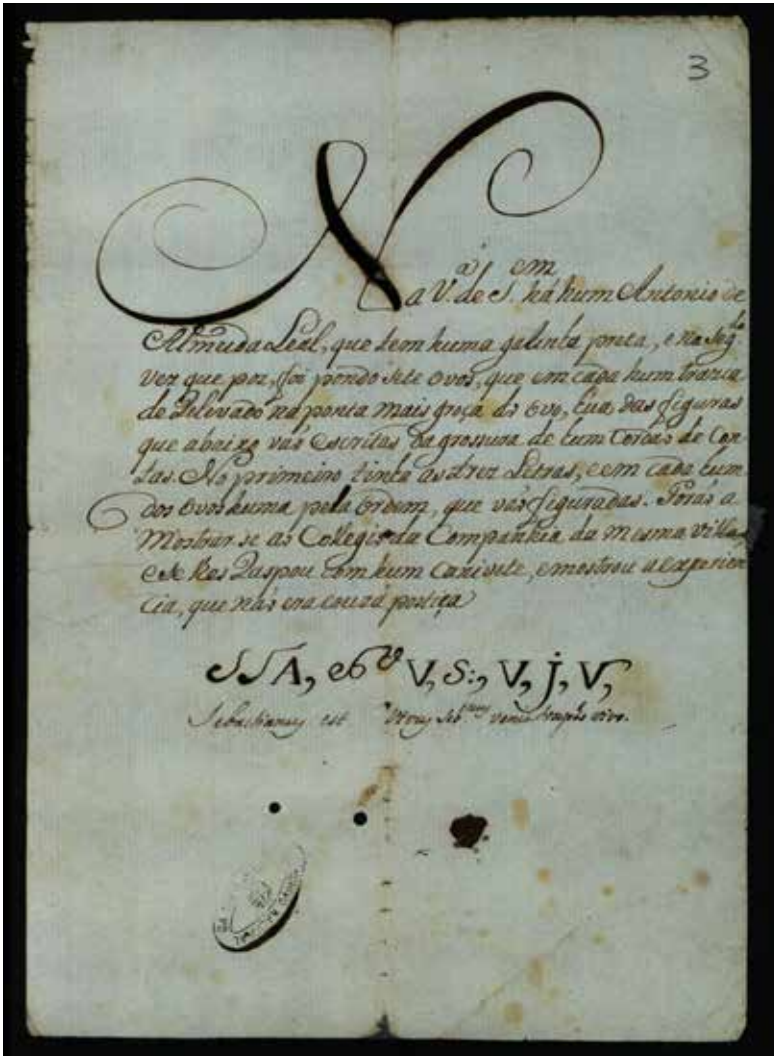


Figure 3. A superstitious writing. (TSO, mc. 22, n.º 123-2) Image courtesy ANTT.

of the Catholic dogmas, but also other blasphemies, such as superstitions concerning Sebastianist myths (Figure 3).²⁰

²⁰ Sebastianism is a movement or cult that arised after the desapareance of King Sebastian (1554–1578) in the battle of Alcazarquivir. This event led to the lost of the independence of Portugal in favor of Philip II of Spain. This movement started in the context of the Spanish dominain (1578–1640) with the belief that King Sebastian, deemed a Messiah, had not perished and that he would return to restaure Lusitanian greatness (Suárez 1991).



Figure 4. Recycling printed pages. (PT/TT/TSO-IL/028/06276) Image courtesy ANTT.

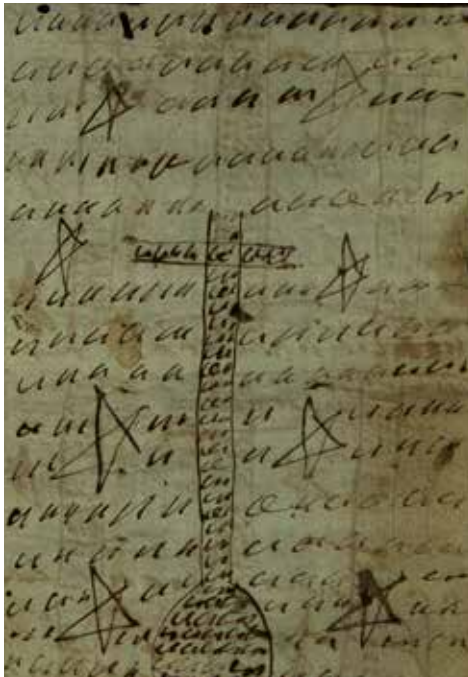


Figure 5. A sort of writing. (PT/TT/TSO-IC/025/08583) Image courtesy ANTT.

Whilst he was imprisoned, further writings were found, mainly correspondence between Bernardo and another prisoner, Alexandre Bulhões.²¹ Alexandre's approach was more pragmatic, showing concern for other prison mates, and whom they could trust. Bernardo, on the other hand, had spiritual concerns and took the opportunity to defend himself in his letters.²² Ironically, he had chosen the front page of a treatise on criminal and civil law to write some of them (Figure 4).²³

Finally, there are situations where a completely illiterate individual has used writing abilities to demonstrate the symbolic value of a manuscript. In many cases involving communities where illiterates formed the vast majority, the written word was believed to have some sort of supernatural power. The healer Manuel Marques Ferreira is one paradigmatic example from the first decade of the eighteenth century. Against the interests of the King and the Holy Church, men and women worked in the shadows to bring hope and cures (either mental and/or physical) to the most desperate situations.²⁴ Even though Manuel was unable to read or write, his use of a particular manuscript book made, deliberately, quite an impression on his public (Figure 5). Manuel and his two followers used to consult the manuscript in their superstitious practices, making a big impact with their performance. Supposedly, these healers could decode the indecipherable language present in that manuscript, mainly composed of scribbling, crosses and Stars of David. In truth, they were indecipherable as a result of having been made by someone without literary skills, with the clear intent to simulate writing. This document is a precious testimony of how magical properties could still be attributed to reading and writing abilities.

Conclusions

This presentation began by a general analysis of evidence gathering, in order to give further information on what is today considered *documentary evidence*. Above all, it was my concern to deliver contextual meanings in order to better understand the judicial interest in writings, how Portuguese early modern judicial institutions gain access and dealt with them. Consequently, I discussed the argument that personal writings considered to be documen-

²¹ ANTT: TSO: IL, file 6276.

²² Just a few were included in Bernardo's case file, while many others can still be found in the miscellaneous archives from the Holy Office of Inquisition.

²³ *Tractado practivo juridico civil e criminal*, from Manuel da Costa Franco, in an edition from 1764.

²⁴ For a better understanding of this matter through Portuguese Inquisitorial records, see Walker 2005.

tary evidence, in both their variety and creativity, are an important source for the study of literacy practices.

The evidence that has been examined forms just a small example of the gigantic profusion and potential of these sources. This sample of cases evokes past human trajectories and highlights the relation, traditionally located in the higher social groups, between everyday life and written culture. In order to fit the goals and dimension of this article, I have presented and briefly analyzed only a few cases, mainly from the Portuguese Inquisition, housed in the Portuguese National Archive, in Lisbon. Thanks to systematic research, many more documents can still be found. Although it is impossible to access every sort of personal writing ever made, criminal records can, undoubtedly, provide us with a fuller picture of the relevance of literacy for men and women in the early modern period in Portugal and overseas.

Reading and writing were not, after all, remote achievements in the early modern age. Whether or not they had poor reading and writing skills, these men and women were able to play significant roles in their societies. They could, in fact, become active agents, not just in the shaping of their own lives, but also of society and culture, values and beliefs, and the nature of resistance against a superior power – whether it be God or a King. As stated by Howard (2012:3), “through writing they could become historical actors, and their complex writing defies the generalizations about lives of uniformity or passive victimhood”.

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[Miscellaneous] mç. 15, number 28.

IC: Inquisição de Coimbra (*Coimbra Inquisitorial Court*)
Processos ('files'): 37, 889, 2398, 3326, 8503.

IE: Inquisição de Évora (*Évora Inquisitorial Court*)
Processo ('files'): 7415

IL: Inquisição de Lisboa (*Lisbon Inquisitorial Court*)
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AILE MÖLDRE

An Autodidact Agent of Estonian Book Culture

The Case of Tõnu Franzdorf (1862–1940)

ABSTRACT. The article studies the activities of a small-town agent of book-culture from the viewpoint of book history. It concentrates on the life story of Tõnu Franzdorf (1862–1940), a self-taught author, journalist, editor, bookseller, publisher and owner of a printing office from Narva. The data on the actors of book industry, especially on those who worked outside Tallinn and Tartu, is scarce. Therefore the material preserved at the Estonian Cultural History Archives of the Estonian Literary Museum on Tõnu Franzdorf serves as valuable source for establishing his background, education, career in journalism and the book industry. Franzdorf was a typical representative of his time in being an autodidact correspondent for periodicals as well as a book-shop owner and printer. At the same time his long career in journalism is quite exceptional. This was the achievement for which he was acknowledged in the Republic of Estonia (1918–1940) whereas his modest literary works did not meet the high standards of the literary circles.

KEYWORDS: autodidact, book history, book culture, history of journalism, Estonia

Introduction

The present article studies the agents of book culture in Estonia at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries from the viewpoint of book history. The paper uses Tõnu Martin Franzdorf, who was an autodidact author, journalist, printer, publisher and bookseller from Narva, as a case study of a self-taught agent of culture, following his career, its accomplishments and impact through six decades, from the 1870s till the 1930s. His life story is presented in the political, cultural and social context of the period. The people who participated in the book industry of Estonia during that period were mainly self-educated, making Franzdorf a typical representative of his time. Thus the approach also represents the new history from below as it has been characterised by Martyn Lyons (2013:16–17), studying an individual experience, the life of an ordinary man in the context of broader history of social and cultural change.

The late nineteenth and early twentieth century was a period of rapid changes in economic, social and cultural life of Estonia. Although Estonia was part of the Russian Empire, the ruling class consisted of the Baltic Germans. It was only during the last decades of the nineteenth century that the Russification reforms led to the wider use of the Russian language in administration and education. According to the census of 1897 the population of Estonia was 986 000 inhabitants, 90 % of them Estonians, 4.5 % Russians and 3.5 % Germans (Eesti ajalugu 1992:41). Estonians predominantly occupied the lower ranks of the society – for centuries they had been peasants, during the modernisation of the society since the late nineteenth century they also became factory workers and petit bourgeois.

The enlivening of social and cultural life is mirrored in the rapid increase of newspaper and book production in the Estonian language. Growing sales turned the book into a commodity which could support a larger number of entrepreneurs than ever before. More and more people entered the book industry as publishers, printers and booksellers, sometimes combining all these activities. Two hundred and seventy-seven private entrepreneurs and organisations were active as publishers in 1850–1900 (Jantson 2009:234) and 383 in 1901–1917 (Hamburg 2001:154). Towards the end of the century the leading position in publishing was occupied by booksellers (Eesti 1978:148, 154). Another characteristic feature of the period was the increasing involvement of people of Estonian nationality in book production, hitherto dominated by Germans.

Publishing and printing were concentrated in the larger towns of Tallinn and Tartu. Tartu was an old university town and centre of the national movement. Tallinn was the administrative centre of the Governorate of Estonia, characterised also by rapid industrial development. But it was a specific

feature of the period that issuing and printing of books and periodicals took place in many small towns. For example, 46 printers were active in the smaller towns of Estonia (outside Tallinn and Tartu) in 1901–1917 (Eesti-keelne 1993). Such extensive participation in the production and distribution of printed matter encourages us to take a closer look at the life stories of the people who contributed to the emergence of the phenomenon.

Literature and Sources

The development of the book industry in Estonia during this period has been treated in general book histories as well as in several articles that shed light on different aspects of book production. The biographical data is mostly presented in student research works, based on the study of biographical reference books and periodical press. The monograph *Eesti raamat 1525–1975: Ajalooline ülevaade* [The Estonian Book 1525–1975: A Historical Overview] (Eesti 1978) presents the basic facts of the development of the book industry during that period. It includes data on the printing offices, booksellers and publishers active in Estonia in 1860–1917. The book includes brief information on the agents of book culture who were active outside Tallinn and Tartu. Uno Liivaku's (1995) *Eesti raamatu lugu* [The Story of the Estonian Book] concentrates on the analysis of statistical indicators of book and periodical publishing, omitting the treatment of individual printers, publishers or booksellers.

Research on publishing mainly treats the activities of cultural societies which were among the most important publishers of that period (Kalvik 2004; Liivakivi 2005). Several research works concentrate on the development of printing in different towns of Estonia including Tallinn (Robert 1991) as well as the smaller towns of Pärnu (Muinaste 1969) and Võru (Kuljus 2005). Various aspects of bookselling in 1850–1917 have been studied by Signe Jantson (2004, 2009; Jantson and Reimo 2006). Her Master's thesis (Jantson 2004) also presents biographical data on a small proportion of booksellers. Mait Tälts (2012) has presented Tõnu Franzdorf's biography in an article published in the journal of Estonians living in Sweden.

The published reference books offer information on better known and noteworthy actors of the book industry, leaving especially those active in smaller towns in obscurity. The non-privileged persons with low education do not appear in school yearbooks or collections.

The card catalogues of the national analytical bibliography in the Estonian Literary Museum (*Eesti Kirjandusmuuseum*) and the National Library of Estonia (*Eesti Rahvusraamatukogu*) enable us to identify the articles on book industry enterprises and their owners published in the Estonian press during this period.

Many agents of book culture were active also in journalism as correspondents or editors of newspapers or magazines. Thus the collections of biographies of journalists are also relevant. Data on the journalists who worked in the Estonian press until the Soviet occupation in 1940 can be found from the manuscript compiled in the Department of Journalism and Communication, Tartu University in 2002 (Harro et al 2002).

Those involved in the book culture of small provincial towns neither kept diaries nor wrote memoirs, which makes it difficult to establish their motives, choices and ambition in entering this particular field. Moreover, it is often complicated, if not impossible to establish their life stories from birth till death. As Lyons (2013:19) argues, scholars have often expressed the difficulty in searching for documentary sources about the life of ordinary people. Due to the lack of written ego-documents researchers can only conjecture or imagine their feelings and opinions.

Thus the rare sources that shed at least some light on this topic become especially valuable. The Estonian Literary Society issued a biographical reference book *Eesti avalikud tegelased* (Public Figures of Estonia) in 1932. During the preparatory work of this publication detailed questionnaires were sent to several noteworthy owners of printing offices, booksellers and publishers who had been active since the end of the nineteenth century and were still alive and active at the beginning of the 1930s. These questionnaires are preserved at the Estonian Literary Museum and serve as an important source of biographical facts. Some respondents supplied answers with rather long comments, presenting short life stories instead of bare collections of biographical facts. Among these was Tõnu Franzdorf – a self-taught journalist, writer, bookseller, printer and publisher from Narva.¹ His relatively voluble responses to the questionnaire make it possible to follow his actions and aspirations in his long involvement in the press and book culture (during the 1880s–1930s).

Childhood and Books: Punishment for the Unfortunate Study of the Estonian National Epic “Kalevipoeg”

Tõnu Martin Franzdorf was born on 16 August (28 August according to the new calendar), 1862 in a farmer’s family in Venevere parish in Lääne-Viru County in the Governorate of Estonia. He studied in the local parish school (TF: 1/2). Elementary education became obligatory in the Governorate of Estonia in 1867. According to a special law every child from the ages of ten to thirteen had to go to school for at least two to three winters. That

¹ The source of all the references to Franzdorf is the questionnaire “Tõnu Franzdorf F 193 M 6:11” in the Estonian Literature Museum, cited in the text as “TF”.

sufficed for learning the basic skills – reading, writing and counting (Eesti 1992:25).

Franzdorf recalled that their family subscribed to newspapers but had few books. Books were rare in the whole neighbourhood (TF: 1/3). The situation was quite typical for that time – Estonian-language weeklies had been regularly issued since 1857, they were very popular and widely read (Liivaku 1995:109–110). The distribution of books differed in various parts of Estonia due to the economic conditions and level of education. Roughly speaking the Governorate of Livonia (the southern part of Estonia) was wealthier and also better provided with books than the Governorate of Estonia. Franzdorf's home was situated in the Governorate of Estonia where peasant families were poorer and owned fewer books. They typically possessed Bibles, hymnals, textbooks and almanacs. Novels were less frequent and people often borrowed them from others (Liivaku 1995:92–95).

Franzdorf describes an episode from his childhood, illustrating his early fascination with books. His schoolmate's father, a forest ranger had a copy of the national epic *Kalevipoeg* (Son of Kalev) (TF: 1/3). *Kalevipoeg* was written by Friedrich R. Kreutzwald, founder of the Estonian literature, using folkloric sources and inspired by the Finnish *Kalevala* (Jürjo 2012). The text is not only an outstanding monument in the history of Estonian literature but also of utmost importance in the process of nation-building, emphasizing the patriotic ideal. It was first published as a scholarly edition in 1857–1861. The popular edition was printed in Finland in 1862 (Kalevipoeg 2004).

The distribution of the popular edition was rather modest at first and it took about a decade to sell the 1000 copies (Ilmub 2004). The Baltic German bookseller Franz Ferdinand Kluge who owned a bookshop in Tallinn has written, that Estonians were evidently interested in this book, but considered its price – 60 kopecks – too high (a pound of butter cost 55–65 kopecks, a bushel of potatoes – 70–75 kopecks) (Noodla 1975:1370). The sales increased towards the end of the 1860s due to the impact of the national movement.

Young Franzdorf longed to see the copy of *Kalevipoeg*, but the forest ranger did not allow his son to take the precious book to school. So one winter Sunday Tõnu left home and went to the forester's house without telling his parents. The study of the book lasted for many hours. The forester lived about six kilometres from Franzdorf's house. It was a very cold day and it began to snow towards the evening. The forester did not allow the boy to walk back home alone, so Tõnu stayed overnight and the next day went straight to school. All this time his parents were unaware about the location of their son and when he got home at last, his father punished him by beating. The story illustrates his early interest in books and desire to find reading

material. Franzdorf didn't give a systematic overview of everything that he read during his childhood, but a few examples he mentions are books of Estonian fiction (TF: 1/3).

The Beginning of Journalistic Activities

In 1878 Franzdorf's family moved to Russia where they rented a dairy farm. After military service in Poland he returned to Estonia in 1888 and became a policeman in a small settlement, Iisaku (TF: 1/2). While living in Russia, he started to write short articles and poems for Estonian newspapers and continued to do so during the following years of his military service where he served as a clerk. Thus it was only natural that he draws attention to his regular reading of several Estonian newspapers in his response to the questionnaire (TF: 1/3).

He proceeded with his journalistic activities also in Iisaku. Gradually the range of his contributions became more varied and solid. Besides writing fiction and short reports he translated, or rather adapted, fiction as well as popular-science stories. It was not customary to indicate the source language of a translation at that time and Franzdorf also omitted that information. Probably he translated from Russian, which he knew well due to the years spent in Russia.

The rise of national journalism was one of the mechanisms that made national awakening possible. Viive-Riina Ruus (2012) has argued that not only the reading of newspapers, but contributing to them too, became an Estonian national peculiarity. Towards the end of the nineteenth century this turned into a near mania for writing. It became an essential way to participate in public life. Thus Franzdorf's eager participation in the press was not exceptional, but rather in line with the spirit of the time. However, the situation was similar to Finland where, just like in Estonia, the newspapers provided peasants and workers one of the few possibilities to write, publish their texts and take part in the public debate. The number of correspondents who sent articles to the Finnish newspapers reached 2,200 already in 1847–1865, increasing considerably as of the 1870s (Stark 2013b:146, 159).

In the course of time Franzdorf longed to take the next step and establish his own newspaper. The newspaper *Eesti Postimees* [Estonian Postman] published a short announcement on 17 October 1892 informing the readers that Tõnu Franzdorf planned to publish an Estonian-language political newspaper *Külaline* [The Guest] in Rakvere (Kodumaalt 1892). However, starting a newspaper required a licence from the Board for Publishing Affairs (part of the Ministry of Internal Affairs). Franzdorf's application was turned down. He made at least three more unsuccessful attempts to publish a newspaper or a journal before he was eventually granted permission

to establish a newspaper in 1906 (TF: 1/4). The regulations had become more liberal due to the revolution of 1905. By then he had already moved to Narva.

In Full Swing – Franzdorf as Editor, Publisher, Printer and Bookseller in Narva

His newspaper called *Kaja* [Echo; 1906–1911] was the first Estonian-language newspaper to be published there after a gap of eight years. Narva was the third biggest town in Estonia at that time (21 000 inhabitants in 1913). It was an important industrial centre, the location of the Krenholm Manufacturing Company, one of the biggest and most modern textile factories in Europe. Narva belonged to the Province of Petersburg and many Russians had moved there during the centuries. This migration was intensified by industrialisation and thus the proportion of Russians and Estonians was practically equal at the end of the nineteenth century (both 44 %). During the following decades the proportion of Estonians started to increase, reaching 58 % in 1913 (Naidjonov 2012:12–13).

According to the data provided by Franzdorf in the questionnaire, he arrived in Narva in 1895 (TF: 1/3). He first established a bookshop (1901) where he sold printed matter in Russian, German and Estonian. In 1906 he started to publish *Kaja*, and established a printing office for printing his newspaper (Jantson 2004:108). This practice was quite typical of the time – many of the printing offices opened in Estonia then were established for printing newspapers (Robert 1991:31–32; Eesti 1978:137–146). Besides this main activity the majority of them fulfilled the orders from various institutions and private persons.

Two other Estonian-language newspapers had been established in Narva in the same year, but only Franzdorf was able to carry on for a longer period. After withdrawal from editing of *Kaja* and leaving it in the hands of others, he continued with editing a new newspaper under the title of *Uusleht* [New Paper, 1912–1918]. The content of his newspapers exceeded the scope of a typical local newspaper to some extent, including also world news. Political topics were treated in *Kaja*'s early years when this was possible and expected due to the social atmosphere after the revolution of 1905. Franzdorf wrote editorials revealing him to be a supporter of Estonian national movement and a socialist. Later, when the treatment of politics became impossible due to the tightening censorship, these issues were substituted with traditional enlightening and educational articles. These pieces of writing helped to broaden the minds of the readers, which was close to the ideals of an autodidact editor like Franzdorf.

Beside journalistic activities Franzdorf wrote and translated fiction. Be-

The number of book titles published and/or printed by Franzdorf is not large (36 titles). He published mostly fiction, often in fascicles as supplements to his newspapers, which was a common practice of the majority of newspaper publishers. These were mostly translations of light reading which he had partly translated himself. Almanacs were immensely popular at that time and every publisher tried to include them in their lists. Franzdorf even published two different titles of local almanacs. He fostered the creative work of his fellow journalists publishing the stories and poems of the co-workers of *Kaja* in 1908. As a printer he mostly fulfilled the orders of local societies printing their reports and statutes.

That Franzdorf was an autodidact was by no means exceptional among those involved in the book industry. The data available on the education of booksellers who had entered the field at the start of the twentieth century demonstrates that many had low formal education, limited to the first level of elementary education (Jantson 2004:90). The scanty data on the education level of printers suggests the same. At the same time several of these booksellers also acted as publishers and thus, due to their profession, shaped the content of the printed matter available to the readers. In the context of nation-building it was expected of them to issue books that could enhance the intellectual level of Estonians. Those who acknowledged this responsibility and delved into self-education received support from libraries and numerous societies who organised various courses. Franzdorf did not elaborate on the process of his self-education in the responses to the questionnaire, simply stating the fact.

Respect for books and learning had been characteristic of Estonians for centuries. Folklore provides evidence of the regard that Estonians felt towards religious books, which were considered to be sacred (Paatsi & Paatsi 2008). This regard later expanded to all books. The general level of literacy was high – according to the census of 1897 96 % of Estonians (starting from the age of 10 years) living in the Governorate of Estonia were literate (Karjahärm & Sirk 1997:150). However, intellectual (it was possible to obtain secondary and tertiary education only in the German and Russian languages) and financial obstacles hindered their way to better education. Thus only 0.33 % of the 900 000 Estonian peasants who lived in the Governorates of Estonia and Livonia had studied in secondary schools and 0.02 % in the institutions of tertiary education (Karjahärm & Sirk 1997:149–150). The general level of education started to increase at the beginning of the twentieth century when more secondary schools were opened and it became possible to establish Estonian-language private schools in 1906 (Eesti 1992:61).

However, as a newspaper editor with elementary education Franzdorf belonged to a small minority among those journalists who were active in

the early twentieth century. Only 4 % of the journalists working in 1905–1918 had only primary education, while 36 % were highly educated (Pallas 2000:153). The leading newspapers repeatedly wrote about the importance of education in the work of a journalist. For example, an outstanding Estonian writer and journalist Eduard Vilde wrote in 1899 that only in Estonia it was possible to become an editor direct from a farm house (that is – without education, without any understanding of quality literature or knowledge of languages) (Pallas 2000:152). This was not pointed at Franzdorf, but clearly the journalistic circles valued formal education. The Estonian journalist from the late nineteenth century had been considered a public person with the mission of a national leader and of an educated teacher of the public (Lauk 1997:25). Hence, if their formal education happened to be limited, it was necessary at least to attempt to compensate for this by self-education.

The study of the social background of booksellers who opened their shops in this period has established that the majority of them were born in peasant families (Jantson 2004:89–90). In case of the journalists the proportion originating from peasant families is also notable, although not as dominant as among booksellers – 52 % of the journalists active in 1878–1904 came from peasant families; by 1905–1918 their share had decreased to 46 %. A notable proportion were descendants of the families of schoolmasters (Pallas 2000:150). Here it is possible to detect the correlation with the higher education level of journalists mentioned above.

Survival after Bolshevik Looting – Franzdorf's Life in the Independent Republic of Estonia

After the *coup d'état* in Russia in October 1917 the Bolsheviks tried to seize power in Estonia also, but succeeded only partially. On 24 February 1918 the Estonian Salvation Committee declared the independent Republic of Estonia (Rosenthal 2012b). Soviet Russia had not given up the plan to invade Estonia and establish Bolshevik power. On 28 November 1918 the Red Army started an offensive towards the border town Narva, which marked the beginning of the Estonian War of Independence. The Red Army was pushed out of Estonia in May 1919 and a peace treaty with Soviet Russia was signed in February 1920 (Rosenthal 2012a).

The reign of Estonian Bolsheviks in Narva and the preceding German occupation were unfortunate for Franzdorf as he was unable to issue his newspaper. But the worst blow came when the retreating Bolsheviks ransacked his bookshop and printing office, confiscating a printing press, paper stocks, books, manuscripts and other supplies (TF: 1/4). These losses left him in material distress, which he was never able to overcome. Franzdorf's application to get compensation for his printing-office from the Estonian

government was rejected (Franzdorf 1928). Lack of capital made it difficult to re-establish the newspaper, printing-office or bookshop. The attempt to publish his newspaper *Rahva Häääl* [Voice of the People] in 1926 was short-lived, limited to three issues. He earned his livelihood mainly by sending contributions to various newspapers and taking on temporary jobs such as courier in the Narva Bank of Landlords. At the same time Franzdorf remained active in politics and social life of the community. For example, he stood as a candidate at the parliamentary election in 1926 (Narvas 1926), participated in the work of the Narva Society of Landlords, the council of the Narva Peter church congregation, etc.

The archival documents demonstrate that on several occasions he applied for a pension allocated to noteworthy cultural figures (writers and artists) in the Republic of Estonia. After his application was turned down by the Ministry of Education in 1923, he asked for a recommendation letter from the prestigious Estonian Literary Society, but failed to get it (TF: 2/7; 2/8; 3/9). The response from the latter explained that Franzdorf was, above all, known as a journalist and should seek support from the association of journalists. It was clear that various experts did not consider him quite worthy of special treatment. And their opinion cannot be criticised – as it was mentioned above, his literary work was really rather modest.

The Estonian press dedicated short articles to his 70th and 75th jubilees acknowledging him as a long-time journalist in Narva who contributed to the development of Estonian-language press in this border city (Narva austas 1932; Narva vanima 1932; Tõnu Franzdorf 1932; Seltskond 1932; Tõnu Aruküla-Franzdorf 1937). The article celebrating his 75th jubilee, however,



Tõnu Franzdorf at the age of 75.
(Uus Eesti, 28 August 1937, P.9.)

mentions his poor education and characterises his life work as important for Narva, although perhaps not brilliant.

The use of such epithets seems a bit odd in an otherwise positive jubilee article, but it demonstrates the changes that had taken place in the values and attitudes of the cultural circles during the years of independence. The issue of education is, of course, less important here than the meagre talent. Many outstanding figures of the national awakening including, for example, poetess Lydia Koidula, were not highly educated, but no one doubted their greatness. The Noor-Eesti (Young Estonia) movement had initiated the conscious cultivation of high-level aesthetic programme already at the start of the twentieth century, aiming at the conversion of Estonian literature and culture according to the European models. These expectations of professional perfection had a profound impact on the subsequent development of Estonian culture, but around 1900 the reading matter published in Estonia largely consisted of quite simple imitative pieces. Two decades later Estonian culture clearly included elitist and popular layers. The dominant highly intellectual and demanding mode also dictated the evaluation of Estonia's literary heritage. Thus eventually the dignified Estonian Literary Society, who had initiated the reference book on the public figures, did not include the article on Franzdorf in the publication, for which he had completed the questionnaire.

Although somewhat disappointed by all this, Franzdorf obviously did not become bitter. He continued to participate in the activities of various Narva societies and to contribute articles to newspapers. And as the jubilee articles indicate, he was not forgotten in Narva or even in Estonia as a whole. During the campaign of the Estonianisation of surnames in the mid-1930s he changed his name to Aruküla. Franzdorf died on 22 October 1940 aged 78.

Conclusions

The characteristic feature of the cultural life of Estonia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century is the wide participation of all strata of society, including large numbers of peasants and descendants of peasant families whose formal education was often limited to elementary level. They acted as correspondents of numerous periodicals published at that time, participating in public life and contributing to the process of nation-building. Many of them became involved in the creation of reading matter on a larger scale – as editors and publishers of newspapers, magazines and books, as printers and booksellers, occupying themselves in all the phases of the communication circuit. These processes were not concentrated only in the bigger towns Tallinn and Tartu, but publishing, printing and bookselling were spread to many small towns of Estonia.

Tõnu Franzdorf was one of these autodidact actors of the newspaper and book industry. Following his life story on the basis of archival material and articles from the periodical press provides a possibility to observe the development of his career and examine its typical and exceptional features. His low education, fascination with reading and contributions to periodicals were all rather common phenomena. But only few were able to establish their own newspapers, a task which demanded overcoming administrative and economic hindrances as well as the presence of certain intellectual and organisational capacities.

As research has demonstrated the journalists were mostly representatives of the first generation of intelligentsia, being rather well educated. In this context Franzdorf was rather an exceptional figure, characterised by ambition, enthusiasm and perseverance. Finnish researcher Kaisa Kauranen (2013:39–50) has identified six types of motives of writing of ordinary people in Finland in the nineteenth century including economic and work-related motives, religious motives, desire to participate in the life of the community or the society, the need to communicate with one's family and friends, desire of self-expression and writing at someone's request. Among the motives that probably inspired Franzdorf's activities the desire to participate in the life of the community (society) could be pointed out. He started by writing short articles for various newspapers and later communicated with the local community already via his own newspaper. His literary works such as poems and stories also indicate the wish of artistic self-expression. As Kauranen (2013:48) concludes, these writings are characterised by overlapping motives – writing of belles-lettres was stimulated by the desire to write texts of literary value which would be read by other people. At the same time these literary works aimed at influencing the community.

Life stories that are similar to Franzdorf's can be found from many countries, for example from neighbouring Finland. Laura Stark (2013a:178–179) has written about the Finnish self-educated correspondents of newspapers Antti Manninen and Tapani Kärkönen who were active in the 1860s. Like Franzdorf they had been born in peasant families but their active participation in the press contributed to their social mobility – Manninen was an author of books on agriculture, teacher and newspaper editor; Kärkönen became editor of the newspaper *Tampereen Sanomat* [Messages from Tampere] and established a handicraft school.

Franzdorf and the other small-town publishers and printers enabled local culturally active people to participate in public and cultural life. Local newspapers and other publications treated topics that were close to people, making it possible for them to take part in shaping the content of the printed matter. Local printing offices supported the creativity of people who

lived outside the bigger towns, offering them a possibility to publish their works, which, most probably, would have been turned down by the leading publishers. This possibility for self-expression, regardless of the education of the authors or level of the works, expanded the breadth of culture. During the next decades in the Republic of Estonia (1918–1940) this wide participation in written culture decreased due to the professionalization of the press and increasing sophistication of literary life.

Franzdorf's contribution to literature as an author and publisher was quite small in quantity and modest in content. He himself obviously overestimated his literary accomplishments when he applied for a state pension. The refusal to grant him the pension does not seem unjust. However, he was remembered and appreciated as a long-time journalist who had been active for decades. Thanks to this recognition his life is better documented than the lives of his many colleagues, left in oblivion.

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MIKE SANDERS

From ‘Technical’ to ‘Cultural’ Literacy

Reading and Writing within the British Chartist Movement

ABSTRACT. This article explores the politicisation of established conventions and traditions of reading and writing from below through a specific focus on the uses of literacy within Chartism (Britain’s first working-class movement). It argues that Chartists understood that ‘technical’ literacy (i.e. the ability to read and write) was a necessary but insufficient precondition for working-class emancipation. The Chartist movement believed that in order to challenge the cultural hegemony of the ruling classes, the working-class needed to achieve ‘cultural’ literacy – the ability to understand and produce complex cultural forms, particularly poetry. Through an analysis of an anonymous, working-class woman’s poem published in Chartism’s leading newspaper, the *Northern Star*, the article demonstrates that the drive for cultural literacy came from below, rather than from the movement’s leadership. It then examines the political challenge inherent in the idea of cultural literacy through an analysis of the ways in which Thomas Cooper’s ‘Chartist Epic’, *The Purgatory of Suicides*, was mediated in and through the *Northern Star*. The article concludes by arguing for the importance of ‘cultural literacy’ as both site and object of working-class emancipation.

KEYWORDS: Chartism, cultural literacy, working-class radicalism, poetry, reading

This essay explores the political role accorded to literacy within the world's first working-class movement – Chartism – which played a major role within British society from the late 1830s to the early 1850s.¹ Its central argument is that, whilst Chartism shared with earlier radical movements a belief that the acquisition of 'technical' literacy (i.e. the ability to read and write) was essential if the lower classes were to participate fully in the political life of the nation, it differed from earlier forms of radicalism by regarding technical literacy as a necessary but insufficient precondition for working-class emancipation.² For the Chartist movement, the acquisition of technical literacy by individual workers was seen as playing a vital role in the conquest and exercise of political power and, as a result, securing for workers the full fruits of their labour. However, from its inception, Chartism believed that full human emancipation presupposed cultural rights as well as economic and political ones. Across the Chartist press, whether in series like 'The Politics of Poets' in the *Chartist Circular* or the 'Beauties of Byron' in the *Northern Star*, the movement sought to reclaim 'elite' literature as part of the common, cultural inheritance wrongly denied to the working-class.³ Increasingly, the movement began to develop a rudimentary understanding of the role played by 'high' culture in establishing the legitimacy of the ruling classes. As a result, Chartism came to understand the necessity of challenging the cultural hegemony or legitimacy of the ruling classes in order to obtain political power. For these reasons, the essay argues, the Chartist movement not only believed that the working class needed to move beyond 'technical' literacy and achieve 'cultural' literacy – understood as both the process of engaging with 'high' culture (particularly literature), and of producing complex literary forms, especially poetry. This essay examines the ways in which, in addition, Chartists both theorised and promoted the acquisition of both forms of literacy (technical and cultural) through the movement's own publications, particularly its newspapers.

¹ In describing Chartism as the world's first working-class movement, I am highlighting the importance of industrial workers within its membership. There had been earlier labouring-class and artisanal movements in Britain and there are many continuities between these earlier forms of radicalism and Chartism. However, the presence of already proletarianised workers (as well as of trades becoming increasingly subject to proletarianisation) gives Chartism its unique historical character.

² Chartism was not the first labouring-class movement to regard literacy as essential to political participation. For a discussion of the importance of literacy to radicalism in Georgian Britain see Smith 1984. For a discussion of the interplay between literacy and radicalism in Regency and early-Victorian Britain see Haywood 2004.

³ 'The Politics of Poets' series ran for ten numbers in the *Chartist Circular* from 11th July, 1840 to 13th March, 1841. The 'Beauties of Byron' series ran in the *Northern Star* from 12th July, 1845 to 11th November, 1846. The series was briefly resurrected in 1849, but only ran for five numbers from 6th January, 1849 to 3rd February, 1849.

The essay begins by offering a brief outline of the history and significance of the Chartist movement, and demonstrates the various ways in which Chartism's political activities depended on the exercise of both technical and cultural literacy. Next, through an analysis of William Lovett's and John Collins' *Chartism* (1840), it traces the ways in which these leading Chartists theorised both the acquisition and function of technical literacy. In addition, it demonstrates that, in *Chartism*, technical literacy is never conceived in isolation from its cultural counterpart. The essay shows how the acquisition and exercise of reading and writing skills are often understood by Chartists as pre-figuring the transformed social order which is the object of their political activity. This is followed by an analysis of a poem from a working-class woman who signed herself, 'E.H., a Factory Girl of Stalybridge', which demonstrates how the relationship between technical and cultural literacy was understood by the 'grassroots' of the Chartist movement. Finally, it demonstrates the political importance of cultural literacy through a specific focus on the ways in which Thomas Cooper's 'Chartist Epic', *The Purgatory of Suicides* (1845) (Cooper 1877: 7–280), was mediated to a working-class readership in and through the pages of the leading Chartist newspaper, the *Northern Star*.

The formal origins of Chartism can be traced to the petition of the London Working-Men's Association in January 1837. This petition, which called for political reform, contained the 'Six Points' which would shortly form the basis of the People's Charter which gave the Chartist movement its name.⁴ Chartism's political demands were informed by the belief that it was their exclusion from the franchise which was responsible for the economic and social suffering of the working class. As Engels noted in his *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, the content of Chartism extended far beyond the 'Six Points':

The demands hitherto made by [the working class], the Ten Hours Bill, protection of the workers against the capitalist, good wages, a guaranteed position, repeal of the new Poor Law, all [are] things which belong to Chartism quite as essentially as the 'Six Points' (Engels 1987:241).

The Chartist movement organised three mass petitions of Parliament. The first petition, presented in June 1839, contained 1,280,000 signatures and, therefore, greatly exceeded the entire UK electorate which numbered no

⁴ The Six Points of the People's Charter were: universal male adult suffrage, secret ballot, abolition of the property qualification for Members of Parliament (MPs), payment of MPs, equal constituencies, and annual Parliaments.

more than 800,000 men.⁵ In November 1839, following the rejection of this petition, there was a Chartist-led insurrection in South Wales. This insurrection was quickly suppressed and the Government arrested and imprisoned most of Chartism's major leaders (very few of whom had been directly involved in the insurrection). The second petition, presented in May 1842, contained 3,317,752 signatures and thus outnumbered the entire electorate by at least three and a half to one. Its rejection was followed by a mass strike wave centred on Northern England. According to parliamentary clerks, the final petition, which was presented in April 1848, contained 1,975,467 signatures (the Chartist leadership always claimed this was an understatement). It too was rejected and by the early 1850s Chartism was a spent force in British politics.

Chartism sought to demonstrate its legitimacy and authority by means of petitions containing millions of signatures. In other words, one of the most basic forms of literacy – the capacity to sign one's name – played a fundamental role in Chartist political activity. However, the significance of literacy extended far beyond this most basic of Chartist gestures. Indeed, as has been argued by historians such as Dorothy Thompson, Edward Royle, and Malcolm Chase, Chartism was an intensely literary movement: pamphlets, newspapers, journals, poetry, and fiction, were all important forms of Chartist activity.⁶ Technical literacy, the ability to read and write, was central to the Chartist movement.

An important precursor of the Chartist press, *The Poor Man's Guardian*, famously declared on its masthead that "Knowledge is Power".⁷ Chartism also emphasised the importance of literacy as a way of acquiring that self-same knowledge which would function as power. Indeed, two of its early leaders, William Lovett and John Collins, theorised the conditions under which the working class could become possessed of this power. Arrested in July 1839 and imprisoned in Warwick Gaol, Lovett and Collins used their period of incarceration to draw up ambitious plans for an autonomous system of working-class education comprising: infant, preparatory and high schools, as well as a system of adult education and circulating libraries. Lovett and Collins titled their work, *Chartism; a new organization of the People, embracing a plan for the education and improvement of the People, politically and so-*

⁵ For a detailed history of Chartism see Chase 2007.

⁶ Royle 1986 and Thompson 1971 both draw attention to the role played by the printed word within the Chartist movement.

⁷ The *Poor Man's Guardian* was the leading radical journal of the 1830s and played a key role in the battle for press freedom known as the 'war of the unstamped'. For details of this struggle, as well as for the importance of the *Poor Man's Guardian*, see Hollis 1970.

cially (hereafter *Chartism*) (1840). As this title makes clear, for them, education (or the acquisition of full literacy) was not simply a means to an end for their movement, it was simultaneously the means *and* the end.

It is difficult to gauge the influence of *Chartism* on the wider Chartist movement. The relationship between Lovett and Feargus O'Connor (Chartism's paramount leader) was characterised by mutual animosity and mistrust. O'Connor, always jealous of any challenge to his pre-eminence, interpreted Lovett's call for a 'National Association of the United Kingdom for Promoting the Political and Social Improvement of the People' (hereafter, the National Association) as a direct challenge to his declared support for the newly formed National Charter Association. Lovett and Collins' proposals also coincided with other developments within Chartism, all seen by O'Connor as threats to the unity of the movement and, possibly, to his leadership as well. O'Connor, therefore, dismissed Lovett and Collins as advocates of "knowledge Chartism" and, more damagingly, misrepresented their position by claiming that they would make the franchise dependent on educational qualification. The combined effect of O'Connor's hostility and misrepresentation was to marginalise Lovett and Collins within the movement (Chase 2007:170–177).

However, the marginalisation of a person is not the same as quarantining an idea. Lovett's name might be mentioned only rarely in the columns of the *Northern Star*, but a commitment to educational activity as a major means of Chartist advance was ubiquitous within the movement. Chartist localities, or branches, founded reading rooms and workers' libraries, arranged discussion classes and educational clubs, and organised Sunday schools for both adults and children (Chase 2007:144). Tellingly, the only public building in Chartist Land Plan settlements championed by O'Connor was the school. Thomas Cooper, in his autobiography, records founding a Sunday school in Leicester which had at least eight classes, and also organising lectures and meetings on every night of the week. Cooper recalls giving lectures on a range of subjects including: Milton, Shakespeare, Burns, English History, Geology, and Phrenology (Cooper 1971:164–169). Amidst this welter of Chartist educational activity, Lovett and Collins' *Chartism* remains the single most comprehensive exposition of Chartist educational philosophy and, given the disputatious nature of the movement, the absence of any alternative to, or critique of, its methods, suggests that irrespective of their personal popularity, Lovett and Collins' educational ideas enjoyed wide support within Chartism.

One of the most striking aspects of the proposed National Association was its ambition. In *Chartism*, it details its third objective as:

To erect PUBLIC HALLS or SCHOOLS FOR THE PEOPLE throughout the Kingdom [...] Such halls to be used during the day as INFANT, PREPARATORY, and HIGH SCHOOLS, in which the children shall be educated on the most approved plans the association can devise; embracing physical, mental, moral, and political instruction; – and used of an evening for PUBLIC LECTURES, on physical, moral, and political science; for READINGS, DISCUSSIONS, MUSICAL ENTERTAINMENTS, DANCING, and other such healthful and rational recreations as may serve to instruct and cheer the industrious classes after their hours of toil, *and prevent the formation* of vicious and intoxicating habits (Lovett & Collins 1840:224).⁸

The National Association was clearly envisaged as providing an alternative to the existing patchwork of elementary educational provision in England and Wales, described by Jonathan Rose as follows:

The Anglican National Society (founded 1811) and the Nonconformist British and Foreign Schools Society (founded 1807) created networks of voluntary schools which began to receive government aid in 1833. Large numbers of children could be taught the basics through the ‘monitorial system’, under which each teacher recruited several monitors from among the older pupils, trained them in some very basic lessons, and had them transmit what they had learned to the rest of the class [...] The church schools naturally emphasised reading and religious indoctrination. Writing, or any other form of self-expression, was not encouraged (Rose 2001:148).

For working-class children the only alternative to the church schools (apart from home education) were the ‘Dame’ schools, local private schools which generally offered a very limited curriculum with low educational standards.⁹ Unlike the church schools, the proposed Chartist schools would be resolutely secular, and would also offer a much wider curriculum than either church or Dame schools.

Chartism also envisaged a very different ethos for its schools when compared to most of the existing educational provision for working-class children. In keeping with Lovett’s interest in Owenite ideas, *Chartism* places particular emphasis on the broader educational environment. Indeed, *Chartism* is quite prescriptive on the question of a school’s physical environment, its rooms are to be “lofty and spacious” and its playground “shall be tastefully laid out with plants, flowers, and such fruit and other trees as may be suited to the locality.” (Lovett & Collins 1840:233).¹⁰ The playground

⁸ All emphases in quotations from Lovett & Collins are in the original.

⁹ For an overview of the historiographical debate around working-class educational provision in this period see Rose 2001:146–156.

¹⁰ *Chartism* also includes a floor-plan of the upper storey of the hall (Lovett & Collins 1840:237).

is considered especially important for children attending the infant school, and the cultivation of physical well-being is identified as the first priority of the schoolmistress, with "intellectual" and then "moral" education as the second and third objectives of her mission (Lovett & Collins 1840:260/1). Indeed, for infant pupils, Lovett and Collins declare that "the air, exercise, and *moral training* of the play-ground are of paramount importance" (Lovett & Collins 1840:261) and note that "a skilful teacher will readily invent games and amusements for the children, will join with them in their play, and, when all their faculties are in full activity, will inculcate many intellectual and moral lessons" (Lovett & Collins 1840:263).

Chartism is no less prescriptive in respect of the proper ethos for an infant school. The over-riding priority, its authors declare, "*is to make the school-room a little world of love, of lively and interesting enjoyments*" (Lovett & Collins 1840:260). As a result of this commitment, all forms of corporal punishment are banned (Lovett & Collins 1840:235). Furthermore, and in stark contrast to the educational style soon to become the norm for working-class education provided by the state, Lovett and Collins declare their implacable opposition to all forms of rote-learning, arguing that it is incapable of producing either real knowledge or real understanding:

The child may be burthened with a multitude of words [...] it may be furnished with rules, figures, facts, and problems by rote without examination, and consequently valueless for practical purposes; all these acquisitions failing to produce *clear ideas*, and forming no *real basis* for reflection or judgement, cannot, therefore, be properly designated *real knowledge*. Yet this word-teaching, rote-learning, memory-loading system is still dignified with the name of 'education' (Lovett & Collins 1840:263).

In place of rote learning, Lovett and Collins propose the use of the 'object lesson', designed to make children active participants in, rather than passive recipients of, the educational process.

The purpose of the object lesson, according to *Chartism*, is to encourage children to use their "perceptive powers" as a prelude to developing first their "comparative" and then their "reflective powers" (Lovett & Collins 1840:263/4). Lovett and Collins give an example of just how such object lessons ought to be conducted. Their preferred object lesson (which is aimed at infant school pupils) needs an object and a case of moveable type (including capitals, lower case and punctuation). The teacher hands around an object and asks "What is it?" Implicit in this method is a belief that education is most effective when it allows children to be active collaborators in the production of knowledge by building on their existing understanding. Lovett

and Collins also see classroom learning as a dual dialectic comprising both the teacher-pupil and pupil-pupil interactions; they observe, for example, that “permitting *those that can* to name the object, will quicken the faculties of all” (Lovett & Collins 1840:266). Once a child has offered an answer, the teacher invites another child to compose the word using the moveable type. Once this has been done, the teacher asks another child to spell the word/s concerned, before asking a third to read the word/s. Next, the lesson moves on to consider the particular qualities of objects (for example, “Wax is soft”) with a similar process of composition, spelling and reading using the moveable type (Lovett & Collins 1840:265–266). Lovett and Collins conclude:

By this simple contrivance the children can be taught to spell *without the use of books*, and without the mischievous system usually pursued of *tasking* and over-burthening the memory with *words*, which, when acquired, are useless till the objects or qualities they represent are made evident to the sense of the child (Lovett & Collins 1840:266).

In keeping with established educational theory and practice, the emphasis in the Infant School is exclusively on the acquisition of reading and spelling skills. The teaching of writing is left to the Preparatory school with the preferred method of instruction also following the general movement from part to whole used for teaching spelling and reading. Lovett and Collins recommend that children are first taught to write individual letters, followed by the names of objects, before finally writing about the qualities and properties of those objects. In addition, and in keeping with their insistence on the primacy of physical health, the authors place a great deal of emphasis on teaching children the correct writing position, devoting some six paragraphs (dealing with body posture, position of arms and hands etc.) to this topic (Lovett & Collins 1840:275–276).

As the previous paragraphs make clear, for Lovett and Collins, the acquisition of literacy is about much more than obtaining technical proficiency. They regard literacy as a fundamental aspect of an educational system which is concerned with the full development of all human faculties:

As it applies to *children*, we understand [education] to imply *all the means* which are used to develop [sic] the various faculties of mind and body, and so train them, that the child shall become a healthy, intelligent, moral, and useful member of society (Lovett & Collins 1840:251).

For both authors the effects of a ‘bad’ educational system are plainly and painfully apparent in contemporary society. Noting the class-specific nature of the English educational system, they comment on the deleterious effects of both ‘aristocratic’ and ‘bourgeois’ forms of education:

If, for instance, our titled and wealthy aristocracy were 'properly educated,' we should perceive its effects in a diminution of their luxury and extravagance – in their abhorrence of war, duelling, seduction, and adultery [...] in their giving up the dishonourable practices of bribery and political corruption

[...]

If our commercial, manufacturing, and middle classes of society were '*well-educated*', they would abjure the fraud and gambling transactions of the stock-exchange; there would be less commercial swindling... (Lovett & Collins 1840:246–247).

Lovett and Collins are equally clear on the salient features of a 'good' educational system. In their opinion, a good educational system is one which emphasises the inculcation of a proper ethos, respect for labour, and which also recognises the importance of the imagination.

[Children should be taught] a love of justice, truth, benevolence, firmness, and respect for whatever is great and good [...] They should also be taught the importance of *useful labour* and the *value of industry* [...] and, therefore, seeing that labour is necessary, and that *all* are benefited by it, *all ought to labour and be industrious, according to their abilities*; [...] Nor must their *imaginative powers* be neglected; (Lovett & Collins 1840:268–269).

This insistence on an integrated and holistic approach to education which actively embraces the imagination, stands in sharp contrast to the arid utilitarianism championed by many bourgeois educational theorists as the most appropriate mode of instruction for working-class pupils.¹¹

In stark contrast to this degraded educational vision, there is from the very beginning of Chartist educational theory a recognition that technical literacy is a necessary but insufficient condition for a proper education. There is an understanding that literacy, whilst desirable, is not an end in itself. Literacy is always conceived of as a means to a cluster of related ends – the cultivation of a proper ethos, respect for labour, and a belief in the power of imagination – which extend beyond the mere fact of reading and writing. In short, the drive to technical literacy is informed by an awareness that its purpose lies beyond itself. For Lovett and Collins, education is

¹¹ Perhaps the most succinct statement of bourgeois educational policy in this period was given by Robert Lowe, vice president of the Committee of the Council on Education, and one of the architects of the 1870 Education Act who declared: "The lower classes ought to be educated to discharge the duties cast upon them. They should also be educated that they may appreciate and defer to a higher cultivation when they meet it": quoted in Wardle 1970:25.

understood as a process intended to produce citizens who are able to participate fully in the political life of the country. Fundamental to this participatory ideal is not only the capacity to understand and learn but also the ability to express one's self clearly, and this is made one of the primary objects of the high school in the educational system described in *Chartism*:

The object of the high school is for the still higher development of [the pupil's] moral faculties, – to extend his knowledge [...] and to cultivate, as far as possible, his powers of communicating knowledge (Lovett & Collins 1840:282).

To achieve this objective, students “should also be instructed as regards force, clearness, and beauty of style in their compositions; and the higher branches of English grammar” (Lovett & Collins 1840:283). This insistence on the importance of correct grammar was widely shared across the Chartist movement, as is evidenced by the inclusion of a series entitled ‘Letters on Grammar’ in the *Northern Star*. Written by M.M.P. (described as a “popular authoress”), this sequence of eight letters, published between 28th August and 16th October 1847, covered both orthography and the various parts of speech. These letters were well-received by the *Star*'s readers; for example, Chartists in Smethwick wrote to the *Northern Star* praising the letters and announcing the formation of a Sunday class to study grammar. Similarly, the Ship Inn locality of the National Charter Association (in Birmingham) passed a unanimous motion thanking M.M.P. for writing the letters and the *Northern Star* for publishing them.¹²

Neither *Chartism*, nor the wider movement, could rest content with the acquisition of technical literacy, this could only be a stepping-stone towards full political emancipation and participation. However, there is one aspect of the educational process where Lovett and Collins are out of sympathy with the wider movement, and that is the importance attached to imaginative literature. Briefly, *Chartism* shares in Owenism's general mistrust of imaginative literature and, as a result, literature is conspicuously absent from the curriculum of the proposed schools.¹³ The wider Chartist movement, in contrast, displayed not just a tremendous appetite for literature, but a desire for something which is best described as ‘cultural literacy’.

It is necessary to recognise from the outset that this demand for cultural literacy, for cultural access and inclusion, is not one which is inculcated in the British working classes by a leadership seeking to improve and reform the working classes from ‘above’. Rather it is a desire which is intrinsic

¹² *Northern Star*, 11th September 1847, p.5., and 18th September 1847, p.4

¹³ For details of the Owenite mistrust of imaginative literature see Murphy 1994.

to, and deeply rooted within, working-class culture. Consider, for example, the poem 'On Joseph Rayner Stephens' which was published in the *North-ern Star* for 18 May 1839. This poem, in praise of a well-known factory reformer, was written by someone known to us only as 'E.H., a Factory Girl from Stalybridge'. E.H. compares her position as a 'factory girl' with that of the millowners' wives and children, pointing out that their advantages are bought at the cost of her class's impoverishment and protesting against her cultural as well as her material deprivation. Indeed, for E.H., these are conjoined conditions:

Their children, too, to school must be sent,
Till all kinds of learning and music have learnt;
Their wives must have veils, silks dresses, and cloaks,
And some who support them can't get linsey coats.¹⁴

Two stanzas later E.H. returns to the question of cultural entitlement – “If they had sent us to school, better rhyme we could make/I think it is time we had some of their cake.” Here poetry is figured as a luxury rather than a necessity – as “cake” rather than ‘bread’ – but nonetheless it is something to which E.H. considers herself entitled. Like ‘cake’, ‘poetry’ signifies a life which is more than mere subsistence. It represents something better than the existing state of affairs. In short, it serves as a metonymic figure for working-class emancipation more generally.

E.H. already possesses technical literacy and she is painfully aware of its limitations. She tells us that her poem is not a ‘good’ one, and traces its faults to her limited education, which is in turn a product of her class position. A little further on in the poem, E.H. acknowledges that she is writing ‘bad’ poetry – “We factory lasses have but little time,/So I hope you will pardon my bad written rhyme.” In this couplet, working conditions (more precisely the sheer number of hours worked) join limited educational opportunities as a brake on working-class creativity. E.H. ends her poem with an expression of her determination to write better poetry: “May God spare your life till the tyrants are ended,/So I bid you good bye, till my verses I’ve mended.” Formally, this final couplet identifies political emancipation with improved cultural expression; the rhyme identifies the ending of tyranny with the possibility of better poetry. Throughout the poem, E.H. demands better – better education, better working conditions, and the chance to write better poetry. For E.H., poetry comes to symbolise working-class freedom and her poem provides a moving testimony to the importance of cultural literacy within the Chartist movement.

¹⁴ In this context *linsey* is most likely to be an abbreviation of *linsey-woolsey*, a coarse, inferior fabric made from a mixture of wool and flax.

E.H.'s desire for better poetry was not mere personal idiosyncrasy, it typified the desire for cultural literacy which informed the Chartist movement. The clearest expression of this is found in the commitment to poetic production which is such a striking feature of the movement. Every major Chartist newspaper and periodical contained a regular poetry column which carried contributions from Chartist writers. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the case of the movement's leading weekly newspaper, the *Northern Star*, which in little over a decade published almost 1,500 poems, the work of at least 390 Chartist poets, in its Poetry Column alone (Sanders 2009:70). Furthermore, as the work of Ulrike Schwab and Anne Janowitz has shown, there is a close correlation between the production of poetry and the exercise of leadership at all levels of the Chartist movement.¹⁵

In *The Poetry of Chartism: Aesthetics, Politics, History* I argue that the importance accorded to poetry in general and the existence of Chartist poets in particular, formed the basis for what I describe as "the argument from culture". "Put simply, Chartists argued that the capacity of the working classes both to recognise and produce good poetry demonstrated their fitness for the franchise" (Sanders 2009:77). In other words, cultural literacy becomes a precondition for the exercise of the franchise. In the rest of this article, I want to concentrate on what I consider to be the exemplary model of that 'argument for culture', namely the serialisation of excerpts from Thomas Cooper's 'Chartist Epic', *The Purgatory of Suicides* (1845) (Cooper 1877: 7–280; hereafter *TPoS*) in the Poetry Column of the *Northern Star* from September 6th to December 13th 1845. In particular, I want to trace the pressure of two inter-related dynamic forces which structure Chartist discourse in this field. Firstly, through the insistence on the cultural capacities of the working classes there is a clear contestation of the legitimacy of ruling class cultural hegemony. However, this privileging of cultural capacity simultaneously affirms the validity of 'culture' as a sign of civilization. Taken together, these dynamics both highlight and explicate the political challenge inherent in the transition from 'technical' to 'cultural' literacy.

The intellectual and cultural ambitions of Cooper's text are made clear by his own summary of the contents of Book One:

EXORDIUM. – Chartist address to the Potters and Colliers, on strike, at Hanley, 15th August, 1842 – Author's imprisonment. DREAM. – Voyage of Death and souls of Suicides – Landing on the Purgatorial shore – Tortuous journey – Cavern of wonders – Central dome – Hall of Suicide Kings – Its hieroglyphic shapes. Array of suicide spirits: Sardapulus, Chow-Sin, Cambes, Oedipus, Nauplius, Aegeus, Saul, Zimri,

¹⁵ For details of the connection between poetry and leadership see Schwab 1987 and Janowitz 1998.

Ajax Telamon, Codrus, Lycurgus, Charondas, Appius, Claudius, Antony, Nero, Otho, Maximian, Bonosus, Mithridates, Juba, Nicocles, his wife and daughters, Althea, Dido, Sisygambis, Cleopatra, Boadicea. Debate of Sardanapalus, Chow-Sin, Antony, Nero, Maximian, Mithridates and Lycurgus, on the prospect of an annihilation of Evil, and the universal reign of Goodness and Happiness, on earth and in Hades (Cooper 1877:7).

The sheer scale of *TPoS* – 963 Spenserean stanzas arranged in ten books – means that it well deserves its status as a ‘Chartist epic’. However, with its journey to the underworld (recalling both *The Odyssey* and *The Aeneid*), *TPoS* signals its awareness of the conventions of classical epic. Furthermore, as the list of protagonists in the Hall of the Suicide Kings shows, the poem depends on knowledge of both classical and ancient history more usually associated with elite schooling in Victorian Britain. Finally, the central set-piece debate of Book One (between Sardanapalus, Chow-Sin, Antony, Nero, Maximian, Mithridates and Lycurgus) clearly draws on the ‘Constitutional Debate’ which can be found in Herodotus’s *The Histories* and Cicero’s *The Dream of Scipio*.¹⁶ In these texts, the debate affirmed aristocracy as the best form of government; Cooper defies the tradition and declares for democracy. In short, *TPoS* is a poem which engages the ruling class on their own cultural terrain – the classics and the English poetic tradition – and in so doing, attempts to harness their legitimacy for purposes of the Chartist movement.

On one level *TPoS* attempts to disseminate ‘cultural capital’ more widely throughout the Chartist movement (it seeks to empower its readers by providing them with a set of notes explaining who many of the personages are).¹⁷ It is a poem designed to perform cultural and educational, and, therefore, political and ideological work. Both by providing a working-class readership with access to elite forms of knowledge, and by redefining that same knowledge as part of a common cultural heritage wrongly withheld from the working classes, *TPoS* uses the idea of cultural literacy to underpin working-class claims to full participation in the political process. The difficulty confronting this great cultural project was the sheer cost of *TPoS* itself. With a retail price of 7s 6d (or 3s more than the average weekly wage of the Leicester stockingers whom Cooper led), the volume was beyond the reach of many working-class readers.¹⁸ The poetry column of the *Northern*

¹⁶ My thanks to my colleague Professor Alison Sharrock for drawing my attention to this aspect of Cooper’s poem.

¹⁷ On ‘cultural capital’ see Bourdieu 1986.

¹⁸ In the nineteenth century, the British pound was divided into 20 shillings (abbreviated “s”), and each shilling into 12 pence (abbreviated “d”).

Star offered some sort of solution to this conundrum and, with Cooper's permission, the newspaper serialised extracts from *TPoS* over a fifteen week period during which it reprinted material from 256 stanzas (around a quarter of the poem) accompanied by an editorial commentary.

On another level, the significance of *TPoS* also resides in the fact that it has been authored by a working-class writer. The first extract from *TPoS* opens with a lengthy editorial preface which notes the sense of excitement surrounding the publication of Cooper's poem. Referring to Cooper's earlier career, the *Northern Star* comments that when a worker proclaims himself a poet, the sense of surprise expressed by the higher classes is akin to that which would attend the announcement by an aristocrat that he intended to pursue shoemaking. It also argues that the working-class writer labours under a double prejudice insofar as the "privileged classes refuse to acknowledge, or even investigate the merits of the daring aspirer" whilst "the proletarians, educated in the accursed belief of the natural and necessary inferiority of their order smile incredulously when told that John Smith, the weaver, or Robert Brown, the shoemaker, has written a book which the parson of the parish could not have written." (*Northern Star*, 6th September 1845). Thus, the *Northern Star* offers a complex analysis of the significance of cultural literacy. The comparison of poetry with shoemaking, identifies poetic production as a form of skilled labour thereby democratising it. The egalitarian tendencies of cultural literacy are also implied by the figure of the aristocrat who takes up shoemaking. The *Northern Star* first alludes to the political significance of cultural literacy by noting the elite's refusal to acknowledge the existence of working-class poets. This is followed by a reference to the parson, a figure who in many areas of the country would also serve as a Justice of the Peace and, therefore, as a local representative of the State. The implied superiority of the working-class poet to the parson underlines the *Star's* belief that the mere fact of Cooper's poem constitutes a challenge for cultural and political leadership.

From the very beginning of its serialisation in the *Northern Star*, *TPoS* is represented as a text whose political significance arises in large part from its aesthetic qualities: its political value resides in its aesthetic value. It exemplifies the importance which the Chartist movement attached to a multi-faceted field of class struggle designated by the term cultural literacy. In part, cultural literacy can be seen as a question of 'content', as a demand for access to elite forms of knowledge. In this respect, it is continuous with earlier forms of labouring-class struggle such as the battle for press freedom known as the 'war of the unstamped'.¹⁹ It can be seen as an extension of

¹⁹ For details of the 'war of the unstamped' see Wiener 1969.

that earlier struggle for 'political' knowledge into the 'cultural' sphere. In this aspect, it remains a contest over reading. However, the drive to cultural literacy, is also a question of 'form'. As both E.H. and Cooper demonstrate in their different ways, cultural literacy is about the ability of the working-class writer to express her or himself *fully*, i.e. not just in the functional sense of being understood but in a much richer sense encoded in E.H.'s desire for "better rhymes". In this aspect, cultural literacy becomes a contest over writing. Precisely because of its synthesis of content and form, *TPoS* stands as an exemplary text demonstrating the importance of cultural literacy. It is, simultaneously, an act of class struggle, an insurgent text which asserts the equality (if not the superiority) of the working classes with their higher class opponents, and a text which is to be judged by the highest aesthetic standards.

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Almanack
1924

The anthology *Reading and Writing from Below. Exploring the Margins of Modernity* is the outcome of a conference with the same name, held in Helsinki in 2014. 'Modernity' here is understood to have come into being any time from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries, depending on the context. By 'literacy' is meant the totality of the processes and practices involved in the production, dissemination and reception of written texts; while the perspective 'from below' indicates that the focus is on non-privileged people, their experiences and points of view. The main organiser of the conference was the Nordic project *Reading and Writing from Below. Towards a New Social History of Literacy in the Nordic Sphere during the Long Nineteenth Century*. The volume includes sixteen articles focusing on different aspects of the processes and practices of literacy in various European contexts and in the United States. Issues that are highlighted include: Writing Competence – Difficulties, Prejudices and Motives; Genres and Literacy Practices; Orality and Literacy; Literacy and Agency. Disciplines that the authors represent include history, ethnology, linguistics, literature and information studies.



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