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From the revolutionary France to the awakening Finland: Desire to read as a construction in the discourse on public libraries during the 18th and 19th centuries

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Introduction

Literacy as a mechanical ability to read is not enough to make people read voluntarily and regularly. It is extremely difficult to force people to read if they do not want to do it of their own free will. A personal interest in reading is needed. The spontaneous reading interest or desire to read is a historically conditioned social construction, adopted first by the educated classes. My paper investigates the process, when the educated people during the 18th and 19th centuries turned their eyes to the uneducated majority and wondered, if they possessed a potential desire to read. Was it worth while to offer them books through libraries? Two cases are presented. The first is described with the aid of Roger Chartier's study of Abbé Grégoire's questionnaire during the French Revolution (1790s), when he gathered information about, e.g., the reading habits and literacy of the peasants. The second part of the paper is an analysis of a similar discussion some decades later in Finland, then quite a backward rural country, concerning the existence of a desire to read in the Finnish lower classes. Was it possible, suitable and safe to activate it? This discussion that seems to overarch decades and centuries is pertinent even today for libraries, although in a different historical context.

Modern Man = Reading Man

Historical changes in reading styles as defined by Rolf Engelsing (1970/1973) and Erich Schön (1987) can be linked to the birth of the modern concept of man in the early modern period. The modern man can, among many other features, such as rationality and individuality, be defined also as a reading man possessed by the desire to read, a concept almost non-existent in premodern times. "The desire to read" should be seen as a historically conditioned social construction, not as an inherent attribute of man. It didn't attain all people at once, but wandered under a long period of time like a contagious disease from a country to another and from a group of people to another. The purpose of the present paper is an analysis of the discussion in the Finnish press around mid-19th century concerning whether there existed a *desire to read* in the Finnish lower classes as genuinely as it existed among the educated classes. My object is also to show that the discussion was not only a local Finnish phenomenon but a part of a European and, eventually, global development. There is a history of the desire to read to be written and I hope that my contribution is a step forward in this direction.

The concept of the desire to read developed when, first in courts and academic circles, people began to read voluntarily, for their own individual enjoyment. The desire to read spread among the European middle-class during the 18th century, and in the late 19th century even to the rural population and the urban working class. It is a part of the "civilizing process" described by Norbert Elias (1982). The whole system of human desires and their control was restructured (see e.g. Foucault 1975 and Alasuutari 1992).

The new reading habit, self-sustaining, spontaneous and extensive, seemed to be contagious over all boundaries, socially as well as geographically. In some occasions the break-through of the desire to read seemed to be so dramatic that it caused alarm in the authoritative circles of the society. This was especially the case of Germany during the last decades of the 18th century. There was a hot debate on the dangers that the unbridled spreading of reading might cause to the society, when totally new groups of people (women, juveniles, lower classes) seemed to start reading actively and daily. At its worst the phenomenon seemed to be like a disease and it was called by many alarming names, such as "Lesewut" (reading rage), "Lesesucht" (reading passion), "Leserei" (profuse reading; for more details see König 1977 and Erning 1974, see also Foucault 1988, p. 390-391 for expressions of French concerns during the 18th century). There has been a discussion in the historical literature concerning the factual reality of the "Lesewut". Some believe that the debate in the end of the 18th century was just a plot of the reactionaries to put the lower classes back to their places (see e.g. Schenda 1970, p. 59).

The many names of the "desire to read"

Whether we accept the "Lesewut" as a historical, factual phenomenon or not, it is undoubtedly so that there was something in common to all the discussions, lamentations etc. over the new reading habit, namely that it was believed that there was a new, spontaneous desire to read in new groups of people. It was believed that uneducated persons could not control that desire, because hitherto they had not read daily and extensively. Reading was not one of their normal features as it self-evidently was of the small group of educated persons. This kind of reading, as many other forms of behavior (such as polite conversation, refined manners etc.), presupposed a certain self-control, a level of education, a kind of individuality that the victims of the reading rage were not supposed to possess.

The new reading habit has in the historical literature many names that range from relatively neutral ones, such as the German "Leselust" or the English "reading habit", to clearly pathological ones, such as the "Lesewut". Without the possibility to study original

sources it is not always easy to decide, whether the terms have actually been used in the past or if they are concepts that researchers have developed to interpret the phenomena described in the sources. The German "Lesewut" debate is well documented and the terms mentioned above were really used. I have had a closer look at the Swedish and Finnish sources, where similar terms also appear (for more details see my dissertation: Mäkinen 1997). It seems that in Britain the discussion concerning the dangers of reading did not attain a similar intensity as in Germany; accordingly there did not crystallize parallel terms to the German "Lesewut" or "Leselust", but even there the growth of the reading public was a fact or at least it was perceived as so (cf. Black 1996, p. 41; Altick 1963, p. 67-77). In the American and English literature following formulations have been used: 'reading habit' (Klancher 1987, p. 20; Altick 1963, p. 71), 'relish for reading' (Wiles 1976, also Gilmore 1989 p. 18), 'popular interest in reading' (Altick 1963, p. 72.), 'reading as a necessity of life' (Gilmore 1989, e.g. p. 18); "an 'insatiable thirst' for reading" (Galbraith 1997, 26). In the context of British library history the question of reading for pleasure according to one's own choice is often connected with "the Great Fiction Debate" of the late 19th century (e.g. Sturges & Barr 1992, Snape 1995). In the French research literature, forms as "le goût de la lecture" (Chartier 1986, Thiesse 1984), "l'appétit de lecture", "passionnés par la lecture", "soif de l'instruction" (Chartier 1986), are to be found.

The concept 'desire to read' developed only when reading was spreading wider in the society and to new groups of people. It is in the first place a didactic and analytical concept, which is used foremost to describe the behavior of others, not about oneself; when it was used, eyes were cast downwards. The actual discussion on the "desire to read" in Europe took place in varying historical, social and economic conditions; in many cases the terminology and even concepts used differ so much from each other that the contemporaries and even the observers of our time have difficulties in seeing the utterances as instances of a general discourse.

Abbé Grégoire's questionnaire

There is an important case of the usage of the concept "desire to read" during the French Revolution, a case that has many striking similarities with the half a century later Finnish example that I am going to describe in detail in this article.

Abbé Baptiste-Henri Grégoire (1750-1831), *curé* of Embermesnil, later bishop and deputy of the National Assembly, was one of the remarkable figures of the French Revolution. Even before the Revolution he was known for his efforts in popular enlightenment. He, for example, established a library for his parishioners. In 1790 he sent all over France a questionnaire containing tens of questions 'regarding the patois and the customs of country people'. He later used the answers he got to write a memoir, where he suggested actions to enhance the popular enlightenment, although his suggestions do not appear as liberal today as they did then. He, e.g., suggested that local languages (such as Breton and Occitan) should be liquidated and French be adopted as the national language in France. How he used the responses he got is, however, not crucial here.

Roger Chartier has in an article (1986, English translation 1988) described and interpreted Abbé Grégoire's questionnaire and responses to it. In fact, the responses it elicited were not numerous and even among those only a quarter (eleven) deals with the questions that interest us here. Still it is as close as we can get to the thoughts of people two hundred years ago, although Chartier points out that phrases and images used in the responses should not be understood too naively: they are not objective evidence of the reading habits of the French rural people during the early years of the Revolution, because at best they show us how

educated people (those who responded to Grégoire's questionnaire) represented to themselves and others the behavior of the peasants (Chartier 1988, pp. 153-154). But that is precisely what interests us here.

Chartier picks from the questions and responses of the Abbé some for a closer scrutiny. The most interesting among them is question nr 36:

"Have country people a taste for reading?"

Important from our point of view is that Grégoire asks his respondents to evaluate the status of the "taste for reading" (le goût de la lecture) among the simple country folks. His question presupposes that the respondents themselves know what it is to have a "taste for reading"; they knew how to observe it in the country people, which is not self-evident, because "a taste for reading" is an abstract concept that can be observed only indirectly from the behavior of the people. Besides the question about the taste for reading, another thing that is of special interest for the present article is that the neighboring question inquires, if the local priests lend books to the peasants.

According to Chartier, the responses that Grégoire got were somewhat contradictory. First it is important to notice that the respondents could make a distinction between the mechanical, instrumental ability to read or literacy and the desire to read. Some responses stated that asking about their taste for reading "was too high an ambition for people who do not know how to read: 'They are still, for the most part, delivered over to the deepest ignorance. Not knowing how to read, they could not possibly have a taste for reading' [...]; 'Country people have no taste for reading because they scarcely know how to read' [...]; 'Three-fourths of country people not knowing how to read, it would be useless to have books to lend them' [...]." Some thought that the question was wrongly put or senseless; it appears that according to them the rural people could not by definition have a desire to read. One respondent replied: 'Country people have no taste for reading, *ignoti nulla cupido*.' Some other answers were as illuminating in their briefness: 'Eh! How could they have?' (Chartier 1988, p. 153) So it seems that it was difficult to make reading an attribute of the uneducated country people, they simply did not possess a taste for reading.

On the other hand there were symptoms visible in the rural people of an awakening taste for reading caused by the Revolution. (Chartier 1988, p. 154) This was not the first nor the last time that great events have created an unprecedented taste for reading or a hunger for news. It had very dramatically happened in Germany during the Reformation with its deluge of religious pamphlets, although it didn't develop into a permanent reading habit except among a small part of the bourgeoisie. Something similar, on a much more modest scale, was going to happen in Finland during the Crimean War (1854-56), when everybody wanted to read about the destruction that the British navy caused in Finnish harbor towns.

In one response to Grégoire's questionnaire it was told that: "Everywhere the people are beginning to read; this impulse needs to be maintained. In the most ignorant classes of society, one can find men worthy of instruction who ask only to learn. I know that the people is quite apathetic, but I know that it is less so from day to day, and that it contains enough men avid for instruction to make the taste universal sooner or later. [...]" Another respondent had remarked "that since the Revolution, they have taken up a certain taste for writings that are relative to it". The change had, according to one correspondent, been swift. He had noted that before the Revolution people had not read anything, but after six months "the country people are fired with enthusiasm for reading. They know the constitution better than our city people who scorn the decrees." (Chartier 1988, p. 155)

I have quoted a length original statements from Chartier's article, because, when we compare them with statements in the Finnish press and correspondence some sixty years later, we shall find striking, sometimes almost word-to-word similarities, as if a discourse that was opened in the revolutionary France in the 1790s had finally found its way into the faraway forests of Finland. What is also pertinent in the responses to Grégoire's questionnaire and their interpretation by Chartier, is that the educated people began to assume that there was a potential "love of reading" or a "desire to read" or even a "thirst for instruction" hidden in the simple country folks. And that desire or thirst could by proper actions, by schools and libraries, be awakened. To assume a desire of that sort was a novelty, which is illustrated by a statement in a response: "The ease with which one can read, the desire to acquire learning, the profit that one draws from his reading is ordinarily what gives a taste for reading, and as soon as country folk are able to enjoy these advantages, I have no doubt that they will love reading just as much as better governed men [les hommes policés]." (Chartier 1988, p. 155-156)

The traditional distinction between those, who were supposed to read (les hommes policés), and those, who were not supposed to read, was shaken only after a deep restructuration of the prevalent discourse. This restructuration was needed both for the elites and for the common people themselves, because the old representation that they had about themselves did not include reading. Even the reader and the readership was a construction that had to be created. The new readers had to construct a self-consciousness as members of a particular audience (on constructing new readers and readerships in Britain, see Klancher 1987, p. 33, 36-37, 44-45).

Reading in Finland in the beginning of the 19th century

Even if the end of the 18th century seems to be a turning point in the history of reading among the educated or urban middle-class, there had been a long incubation process before it. It took decades, even a hundred years, before the reading habit, the "desire to read", had permeated the educated, Swedish-speaking upper classes in Finland, altogether less than 5 percent of the total population. Despite the geographical distance they followed rather closely the continental trends even in reading. Joint subscriptions for newspapers, reading societies, circulating libraries, series of novels published in installments and other institutions of reading gave at last to the "better people" the impression that the reading habit was an integral part of their nature, one of the features that distinguished them from the common people. But could there be a desire to read in the common people? It was rather late that this question became an issue.

The mechanical ability to read (but not necessarily to write) was quite common in Finland from the 18th century onwards, because according to the Lutheran point of view it was considered necessary that each and every Christian was able to read God's word. Literacy was based for the most part on home instruction, because there was no system of primary schools in the country before the 1860s, although parish schools and other forms of primary education existed here and there. The clergy frequently controlled the ability to read and it was not, e.g., possible to get married without knowing how to read (nearly all that Johansson 1981 tells about reading instruction, methods and results in Sweden applies also to Finland).

There was little scope for using the hard-won literacy outside the religious context and even there reading was more of a ritual, not reading to acquire information or for pleasure. In a sense it was the pietist revivalism at the turn of the 19th century that first made rural people read with understanding, but even it was limited to the religious sphere. There appeared also some occasional cases of spontaneous interest in reading among the common people, e.g. the

later philologist and compiler of the epic poem *Kalevala*, Elias Lönnrot, son of a poor village tailor, showed in his youth an irresistible urge to read. Another interesting phenomenon was a religious sect in the Western part of the country, whose members translated religious and even worldly books from Swedish and German into Finnish and circulated them as manuscripts among themselves. This group that was active in the late 18th and early 19th century has by later historians been called the "Ostrobothnian Mystics". But all in all reading for other than religious purposes was extremely rare among the common people. The repetitive and ritual reading style was considered natural by the common people themselves. They did not possess an extensive "desire to read" in the modern sense.

Deadlock in popular education

It was regarded as dangerous to let the common people read freely. There always remained in the minds of the educated people the fear of the rage for reading or *Lesewut* as the German called it. Even if the Finnish educated people probably had not seen its worst forms, they were aware of its potentiality and had heard and read about it.

During the 1840s the backwardness of the Finnish educational situation became more and more obvious, as the idea of mass education was becoming universal in the western world. There were lively debates on educational questions in the Finnish press during the 1840s. The idea of an elementary school financed from public funds was generally accepted in Finland, but it was thought impossible on economic grounds. It seems that mid-century was a turning-point in this respect. The government (the Senate of the Grand-Duchy) appointed a committee to plan a feasible form of mass education. Its recommendations were conservative, but the act of appointing the committee was in itself symbolic.

On a principal level the discussion on mass education was won by those who propagated universal mass education. This was an international phenomenon. A group of American scholars has made extensive international comparisons on how the mass schooling spread in the western world. John Boli (1989) places the decisive phase at the turn of the 19th century: after that it was only a question of application and gradual acceptance of the principle. In his monograph on the birth of the Swedish mass schooling, the "folkskola", Boli interprets the birth of the universal mass education as a ritual creation of the modern citizen. The institutional changes in western societies during the modern era required the existence of a modern, free individual or citizen. Modern citizens were ritually produced in the primary school. The birth of the "folkskola" or mass education was a result of a social imperative, not something functionally determined (e.g. the demand of skilful labor force). (Boli 1989, p. 35-59. Esp. p. 47. See also the foreword by J.W.Meyer in Boli 1989). This was also the case in Finland: the idea of the universal mass education was accepted as a principle by the mid-19th century. Finland followed the general trend, even if lagging behind Sweden, which was caused by the political position of Finland.

In the beginning of the 19th century there still were some romantically-inclined persons who opposed mass education and popular enlightenment, because they feared that it might disturb the "pure nature" of the rural population, but after the 1840s there were hardly anybody in Finland who publicly contradicted the principle of mass education. There were more those who opposed it on practical grounds. The supposed negative side-effects of mass schooling were also brought up regularly, e.g. the alienation of children from the home.

There had been an extensive discussion on the pros and cons of mass schooling in the Finnish press in the beginning of the 1840s. In that debate it became clear that the idea of mass schooling was generally accepted. It is ironic that one of the things that triggered the debate was a casual remark by a priest, P.U.F. Sadelin, who has remained in the Finnish

library history as the founder of one of the first parish or municipality libraries. In a newspaper article (1840) he bluntly remarked that there is no need for and there should not be a general primary school or "folkskola" in Finland. In fact he did not oppose popular enlightenment as such but feared that the projected primary school would be similar to the traditional grammar school, where Latin was taught to the future priests and civil servants. This indicates that the nature of mass schooling was at that time unclear, as was the nature of libraries for the common people. Anyway, Sadelin and his followers were fiercely opposed by more liberal minds. (About Sadelin and the debate, see Mäkinen 2000.)

The debate in the early 1840s proved that mass schooling and popular enlightenment won on the public scene, they were considered legitimate and necessary—opposing them in principle showed at best only bad taste—, but nothing really happened during the decade, not at least on the decisive political level. There were separate individual projects by enthusiastic people, but compared to the size of the population they were completely minimal. Why wasn't there any decisive turn, such as the Swedish statutes on primary schools or "folkskola" of 1842? We can name various political, ideological and structural explanations for this stagnation, but none of them seems decisive alone.

Before the mid-19th century there were some 50 library projects—most of them rather short-lived—in Finland, which was not very much in a country of 1.5 million inhabitants. There was no real takeoff for libraries or popular enlightenment in general. Why? It can be said that the censorship and the reactionary system in general were responsible. Finland was at the time a Grand-Duchy under the reactionary Tsar Nicholas I (1796-1855). But on the other hand there is no evidence that the authorities opposed, e.g., parish libraries. The Board of Censors that controlled publishing, bookshops and libraries in Finland did not turn down one single application to establish a library for the common people and did not chase the libraries for which no permit was applied, even if many such libraries were mentioned in the newspapers. Another argument could be the suppressed state of the Finnish language: there was not enough Finnish literature to fill the libraries. In a way this is true, but on the other hand there was Swedish literature in abundance in every genre, but still there were not more than one or two libraries for the Swedish-speaking rural population before the mid 1840s.

It seems that it was as much a question of manners to speak about the common people's reading than material obstacles blocking the way. There were no proper concepts to legitimize a more general reading for the uneducated common people. Firstly, it was a lack among the educated people who were in the key position to enhance the promotion of reading and libraries: they could not attribute individual, free and active reading to the common people—or they did not find it suitable. There was hardly anybody, however liberal, who would have considered it possible or suitable for the common man to read as extensively, e.g. novels, as the educated people did. Secondly it was a lack among the common people themselves: they did not know that there existed in themselves an active desire to read.

Acceptable ways to speak about popular enlightenment in the 1840s were unfavorable for the practical implementation of extensive library campaigns or popular enlightenment in general. There were rhetorical blocks against seeing mass schooling or a general provision of libraries for the common people as feasible, not only in principle, but also in practice. Those who advocated primary schools were convincing only in principle, not in practice. The same applies to libraries for the common people: when they were discussed both in the dominant Swedish-language press and the emerging but weak Finnish-language press during the 1840s, there was hardly anybody who opposed them. There was no active opposition, but on the other hand no authoritative backing either.

It was the feared side-effects of reading and practical reasons that were the obstacle. Principal arguments were the poorness of the population and lack of time for reading among the common people. It was a sort of "yes, but" -debate. We can explain some of this phenomenon by pointing to open or silent guarding of economic or social interests, but it can't explain it all.

Through Crisis to a Rhetorical Turn

During the last years of the 1840s the grip of the censorship in Finland tightened as a result of the growing anxiety of the Russian government in front of the revolutionary movements in Europe. Some progressive newspapers were forbidden, clubs and societies were put under a strict control. The most drastic measure was the decree of 1850 signed by the Tsar banning any publishing in the Finnish language of other than religious and economic works. The authorities feared that translating French radical novels into Finnish would contaminate the common people with revolutionary ideas. Fear of the uncontrollable effects of reading were thus visible also behind this political manoeuvre. As a result of the tightening atmosphere the general level of press discussion declined. There was really not room for a genuine confrontation between the progressivists and reactionaries.

But it was not only the Tsar and the higher bureaucrats that caused the deadlock. It was also a generation-gap, which became obvious when young priests propagating Sunday schools and libraries went from the university to their first posts in the countryside; there they met their older, disillusioned colleagues. In principle everybody agreed that schools and libraries were good things, but the conservatives listed so many practical obstacles that it seemed useless even to try to establish schools and libraries. Practical arguments could have been overthrown by practical examples of successful projects, but reports about them were published in small Finnish-language newspapers that did not reach the educated classes, who spoke Swedish. There are clear indications, e.g., in private correspondence that a need to get the debate restarted in prominent newspapers was felt.

One illuminating example is a letter written in 1849 by a young clergyman in the countryside to a colleague in Helsinki, the capital: "You who have the ability to do it should write an article in our Swedish-language newspapers (because the Finnish ones are still, it's a shame to admit, less than eagerly and generally read), where you, for the sake of enlightenment for such parish teachers [priests] who still are blind-eyed and weak in the faith, prove as clear as daylight 1° that Sunday schools do no harm, as true as Christianity does not do harm but good, and that any priest who claims the former suffers from a spiritual glaucoma, and furthermore 2° that the abovementioned schools can be established in all parishes in our land, excepting Lapland, if not in all then at least in most of the villages, and that the pastor who does not want to establish Sunday schools in any village because they for local reasons cannot be established in all of them, is a priest only in name and looks for his own but not for his flock's best." (ÅAB Handskriftsavelning, Diverse Brev 7 Beyrath, Clas Gustaf (sannolikt) till August Cygnaeus, Leppävirta den 14de Maj 1849.)

It was around mid-century that the rhetorical crisis of popular enlightenment in Finland was resolved. There was a decisive turn on the authoritative level in 1856 when the liberal-minded Tsar Alexander II during the last months of the Crimean War came to the throne with a whole reform program for the grand-duchy, including the establishment of a system of primary schools. But the reformist turn was anticipated at least five years before in press debates. The debate on popular education had become livelier in 1849 even under the worst period of tightening censorship. There were some provocative progressivist articles that created a genuine confrontation.

"The desire to read in the countryside"

I take one of the most prominent and most popular Swedish-language newspapers, "Helsingfors Tidningar" [or News from Helsinki, abbr. HT] as my concrete example. With its circulation of 1200 copies it was the second largest newspaper in the country. Finnish-language newspapers were dwarfs compared with it. Its goal was first and foremost to be a general newspaper, not a proponent of any party or group. It was even criticized for its lack of depth or line, but its lack of political colour was partly explained by the fact that it had to be careful with the censorship. The editor, the later famous writer Zacharias Topelius, evidently was a pro-reformist, who wanted to have some progressive material in his newspaper to show on what side the paper stood.

Some of the progressive articles were published by a young member of the university of Helsinki, H. A. Reinholm (later to be remembered in the first place for his folklore collections). His first article in February 1850 is a fine example of the new emerging rhetoric. Its title is already revealing: "Läslusten i Landsorten" [The desire to read in the countryside] (HT 12/9.2.1850).

In the beginning of his article Reinholm presents the arguments he intends to prove false. He asks, why, in spite of efforts of progressive newspapers to prove the necessity of Sunday schools and parish libraries, their number is still all too small. The reason, he believed, was that the conviction of their usefulness was not generally established. Although nobody dares publicly to oppose the cause of popular education, indifference is nevertheless a clear indication of attitude. First he waves aside an old argument concerning the alleged "half-education" threatening peasants that get some amount of school education.

Reinholm continues his attack by stating that the importance of popular education has been accepted; there are counter-arguments only on practical grounds. Some say that priests have too many duties, clerical and administrative, and that is why they do not have time for schools; or else: "parish schools are impossible to implement"; and lastly: "the common people have no interest or desire for such things". Reinholm refutes one by one the arguments he has listed. According to him the real call of the priest is his parishioners' enlightenment and ennobling, clerical duties are only secondary. Using modern equipment the priest must not only teach his parishioners but also arouse a desire for learning on their own. This he can do by acquiring useful books. As soon as the parish school is functioning properly, all that is needed is to have a selection of books for everybody to choose.

Reinholm then describes the necessity of the parish school and the need and benefit of the parish library as a corollary to the school. To show that scepticism concerning the desire for education among the common people is baseless, the writer quotes a letter from the countryside. In a remote corner of the country a parish library had been established by a priest. According to the letter there was a burning desire to read [läslust] among the common people in the parish in spite of the darkest season of the year. All the books of the library were lent out during Christmas.

The phrase "desire to read" (läslust) had been used before in the Swedish-language press, but not with such an emphasis as in this article, where it and its synonyms appear several times.

The article supposes that there is a potential desire to read in the common people, a desire that can be awakened. The existence of this desire was a proof that the common people—even those who spoke only Finnish—were capable of the same intellectual functions as the Swedish-speaking educated classes. (It should be reminded that the class-distinction was not

solely based on language, because there was a considerable Swedish-speaking rural population in the country that was more or less in the same position as the Finnish-speaking majority.) According to Reinholm, the awakening of the desire to read or for knowledge is a professional and moral duty of the priest, because he was the only one to represent an educational authority in the parish. Parish priests were often called "teachers".

Desire to read and the library

It is especially important that the "desire to read" appears in connection with the parish library. This connection was going to be a regular feature of the reading rhetoric during the following decades. The "desire to read" is an abstract concept that cannot be perceived directly. It must have concrete indicators. The frequency of use of the parish library would hereafter be the main indicator of the level of the collective "desire to read" in a parish or a village. Reinholm's article in a way describes a methodology to identify and to evaluate the desire to read. His article was at the beginning of an endless series of articles, "letters from the countryside", reporting on the condition of the "desire to read" in the common people throughout the country. The "desire to read" or its more rational but also more conformist corollary the "desire for knowledge" became tools for the advocates of popular education and Finnish nationalists.

With Reinholm's article the concept of "desire to read" of the common people in its Swedish-language form became established in the progressive rhetorics, but an equally important step was its introduction into the Finnish-language press. The concept itself was known before, but it lacked a short and generally used form. An enthusiast for the Finnish language and an eager creator of words for the emerging literary Finnish, Wolmar Schildt, known by his pen-name Kilpinen [Finnish "kilpi", Swedish "sköld" = shield], had invented a compact form for the concept already in 1845: "lukuhalu" (literally "desire to read"), but it seems that it became widely used only after Reinholm's article.

An important step in introducing the word both in Swedish and Finnish and consolidating the concept in the public mind was a short but informative notice about the first soldier's library in Finland, an early one even internationally. There already existed since the 1830s several reading societies among the officers of the small Finnish army, a distinct unit in the imperial army, but in the end of the year 1849 a new type of library was established for enlisted men and noncommissioned officers in the Grenadier Sharpshooters Battalion stationed in Turku. The notice was first published in 1851 simultaneously in two newspapers in Turku, one Swedish and the other Finnish. Both versions include a phrase evaluating the "desire to read" of the soldiers and even in a formulation that indicates that there was a public debate on the "desire to read" going on in the press: "Concerning the desire to read among the men it is noteworthy that...[etc.]". The good fruits of the library were seen in the men's more refined manners. (Sanomia Turusta 4/1.4.1851, p. 55-56. Åbo Underrättelser 1.5.1851.)

But this was not all. In a few days the notice began its wider circulation in both the Swedish-language and Finnish-language press. Almost all newspapers in Finland published the notice either in its original form or at least parts of it. Usually the notice was published together with another notice about a library in another part of the country (Hollola) (first in Borgå Tidning 25/29.3.1851). This other notice included a phrase that was to serve as a pattern for hundreds of "library reports" in the coming decades: "The desire to read is said to be increasing...".

The phrase "desire to read increasing/diminishing" became a standardized part especially of those "letters from the countryside" that were typical for Finnish-language newspapers during the latter part of the 19th century. The level of the desire to read was like a

thermometer reading showing the level of education in a village or a parish. The "letters from the countryside" were like a continuous stream of answers to Abbé Grégoire's inquiry. One of the most influential newspapers, "Suometar" (Finland's Maiden), even published a set of questions that the "letters from the countryside" should give answers to, including questions concerning parish libraries, schools and the level of literacy (Suometar 2/14.1.1853).

Conclusion: Desire to read until the present day

Popular or public libraries and the "desire to read" have been closely connected until the present day. Reading has characterized modern man and the public library has been an institution *par excellence* of free and democratic societies, hand in hand with mass education. Until now the voluntary and spontaneous reading habit, desire to read, has been conquering more ground.

There were concerns, though. In Finland the period, during which the chief target was simply to awaken the "desire to read" in the great masses, was short. Soon the already existing fears of uncontrolled reading became actual again. The state censorship was in the long run almost totally abandoned, printing statistics went up and the common man became in touch with the commercial book market. The seriously-minded nationalists opposed a more rationalistic "desire for knowledge" to the simple "desire to read". Frivolous reading should not tarnish the shining façade of the "national awakening" and popular enlightenment. Of course, it was a hopeless fight as soon as there was a total freedom of press, but at least authoritative institutions, such as the primary school and public libraries, were kept as free as possible from low-quality reading stuff.

The same concern was of course felt in other countries, when mass education became general and the common people were drawn into the commercial book market. As far as the majority of the people is concerned, this became reality during the last decades of the 19th century (cf. concerning France: Discours sur la lecture (1989) and Thiesse 1984). Since then reading as a popular pastime and a means of self-education progressed everywhere in the world, especially in the industrialized countries; its expansion was a self-evident fact until the 1960s when the new media began their invasion. Reading printed texts seems to be threatened in the post-modern era, but we must consider the phenomenon without prejudice in the new media context. There we see no end to the "desire to read or to be in contact with the media".

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