

## 11. Translating Enlightenment: European Influences and Danish Perceptions of Identity in the Press in the Later Eighteenth Century.

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As a participant in (and eventually refugee from) the French Revolution, and subsequently king of France, Louis-Philippe, duc de Chartres, had first-hand experience of attempts to formulate collective identities and secure wider political participation. In his *Memoirs* he shrewdly observed that “a nation is a collective body whose composition is constantly changing, which is always scattered and therefore can never be assembled in one place, and of which one could say in a word, as has been said of the divinity, it is everywhere and it is nowhere”.<sup>524</sup> He lived through a period where national and cultural identities were increasingly stridently proclaimed, but rarely defined with any degree of specificity. What he could not have anticipated is that national identity itself might in the long run begin to look like a concept of transient historical significance, an artificial construct which would serve a particular historical phase in the state-building process but might then perhaps seem liable to be relegated as part of a nostalgic heritage. Such a shift is outlined in the final chapter of a recent general account of the history of Denmark by Knud Jespersen, in which he asks whether the Danes are a tribe or a nation. He notes that, according to one historiographical tradition, Denmark is a country whose independence and international role can be said to have slowly eroded, from the time of Christian IV and the disastrous intervention in the Thirty Years War, to the point where (from 1864 onwards) its very survival became dependent on a policy of neutral introversion. Ironically, 1864 was also the point at which Denmark finally lost its traditional ‘supra-national’ status – that fragile composite and multi-lingual identity which was so thoroughly explored, contested and ultimately reconfigured during the late eighteenth century. While one might disagree with Jespersen about precisely what constitutes ‘Danishness’, there is little doubt that some components of that identity now seem unlikely to survive either the European Union or the apparently inexorable process of globalisation.<sup>525</sup>

Identity is of course in the eyes of the beholder – culturally conditioned, but dependent on individual as well as collective social and personal perspectives which are often assumed rather than explicit. In the case of a deferential and conformist nation such as eighteenth-century Denmark, there were common elements shared across most social layers: adherence to the Lutheran faith as promoted through sermons, catechisms and hymns; a common language which (despite dialects) was reasonably standardised throughout the Danish-speaking parts of the kingdom and fairly intelligible to most Norwegians; loyalty to a monarchy and its institutions; and general acceptance of patriarchal authority, with all its assumptions about gender and status. Contingent on these, but more qualified by personal perceptions, were complex and deeply engrained assumptions based on birth, social attainment and connections, family wealth, personal status and means of livelihood. But whatever perspective one might adopt on some of these questions, one point seems inescapable: namely, that eighteenth-century discussions of linguistic and cultural identity really were pivotal in terms of clarifying aspects of both national and personal identities everywhere in the Danish-Norwegian ‘conglomerate state’. Enlightenment thinking gave free reign to formulations of identity which were not only historically and culturally grounded, but also essentially European rather than regional in inspiration. Such formulations were vigorously debated amongst the social and literary elite both at the academy in Sorø and in Copenhagen from the 1750s onwards, with new signposts added in the anti-German reaction against the short-lived ministry of Struensee in 1772, in the law of indigenous rights of 1776, in the so-called German feud of 1789, and in the striking developments in Danish literary output in the early 1790s.<sup>526</sup> Most of these formulations remained confined within the inescapable combination of an entrenched Lutheran pietist tradition and a strongly centralised absolutist state, and writers who exceeded those bounds found themselves vulnerable to prosecution under the deliberately imprecise terms of the censorship legislation of 1770-73 and 1790, and the more repressive legislation of 1799. Nevertheless, the change in conceptual framework during these years is indisputable.

In the process, a number of different views of what we might call ‘national’ identity were aired, from the moderate and pragmatic cosmopolitanism of Tyge Rothe in 1759, to the French-inspired republicanism of Niels Ditlev Riegels or the satirical scrutiny of Malthe Bruun in

the 1790s. The intellectual and literary mood of the 1790s, and the way in which individual Danish works were received by the public, deserve more substantive analysis from a genuinely comparative European framework – as does the style and language of the authors themselves. But that is not the main purpose of this paper: rather, it will attempt briefly to sketch the contours of more traditional and non-elite notions of collective identity in eighteenth-century Denmark, as background for a study of how new types of printed material (especially the main review journals) might have provided readers easier access to current Danish and wider European debates. The paper will also explore some of the methodological problems inherent in the history of print and reception – how ideas might ‘translate’ from one social level to another as well as from one linguistic community to another, and whether the written or printed word can provide convincing evidence for the history of something as elusive as ‘identity’ and ‘community’.

### Common identities?

Spontaneous expressions of identity amongst the ‘lower sorts’ (and hence any patterns of how such notions might have changed during the eighteenth century) are difficult to document reliably. From a western European perspective, it would be natural to start by looking at grievances and demands linked to substantial riots and revolts, where popular expectations become more clearly visible. But in the case of post-1660 Denmark such an approach will disappoint: civil disturbances do occur, but less frequently, and on a much smaller scale, than we might expect from wider European experiences at the time. In urban Denmark they were most often triggered by food shortages (in several parts of the country in 1790 and 1795, in line with European trends), by disputes over wages (notably in Copenhagen, amongst various groups of wage-earners, 1791-95), by incidents relating to the arrest or attempted arrest of beggars, vagrants or prostitutes in the city streets, or (again in Copenhagen) by confrontations between crowds and the thinly staffed police force over incidents which themselves often contained elements of violence.<sup>527</sup> Because of the strong military presence in most towns, and the additional presence in the capital of a well-entrenched central administration and royal court, such relatively minor riots rarely got out of hand, and did not therefore lead to further enquiries to do with the community or the relationship between state and subject. Proto-industrial incidents such as the co-ordinated

action of the journeymen carpenters in Copenhagen in 1794 were similarly limited: little visible support was offered by wage-earners in other trades, so isolated groups of protesters could easily be disciplined by military means. As a result, the authorities may have assumed that broader collective identities in practice would (or should) not diverge significantly from the normative consensus promoted by the government; but in reality, the atmosphere created by the government in the 1790s remained too intimidating to allow distinctively independent collective manifestations to become openly visible in the records.

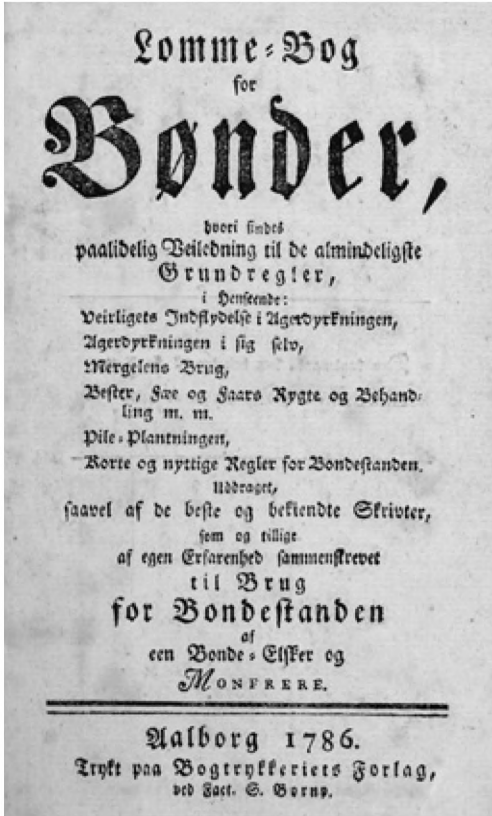
As regards rural Denmark, self-perceptions have been explored more thoroughly by historians, through a wider range of material. Spontaneous peasant writings, such as diaries, have proven so rare that they must be treated as exceptional,<sup>528</sup> and we have to turn elsewhere for representative material. Recent work on village agreements in the German-speaking parts shows more promise, providing insights into communal ideas which may also have validity in some parts of the kingdom proper.<sup>529</sup> But in Denmark the most substantial categories of material relating to rural communities are the judicial records (especially the extensive records that survive from *herredsting* and *birketing* jurisdictions), petitions to the crown regarding economic difficulties or alleged abuses of power in a community,<sup>530</sup> and the more detailed records of the crown-appointed commissions of enquiry which followed major disturbances or crises in the system. Over the last two generations, some of these categories of material have provided the basis for significant new research on the extent to which peasant communities might either obstruct or provoke administrative action, might gain occasional cohesiveness in the face of perceived external threats, and in some instances might exploit the opportunities offered by political change (as in the rural reforms of 1786-92) in order to make their own voice heard.<sup>531</sup> Much of the archival material is of course mediated, in that it is recorded by men in some position of authority, or constitutes the formal statements of peasants when faced with crown enquiries or legal proceedings. Even so, however, there are good grounds for concluding that, as in other parts of eighteenth-century Europe, the rural population did not lack either self-consciousness or political stamina, and could at times be obstinately persistent in pursuing perceived traditional rights that mattered – security of tenure, restrictions on the burden of labour services, acceptable demands for military service, and some protection against the power of individual landowners – presum-

ably in the expectation either that they could wear down their seigneur, or that the crown would recognise their case and arbitrate fairly. Both legal sources and petitions testify to occasional manifestations of collective solidarity in which *bønder* (peasants) saw themselves as the rightful users and beneficiaries of the land, and would appear capable of acting with some degree of common purpose. But, if we are to believe what others recorded, collective rural solidarity in the face of a particular grievance did not necessarily reflect a genuine sense of shared identity: incompatible economic interests and social perceptions continued to divide peasant communities, and regional differences also remained very strong.

We can, however, pursue social fault-lines further, seeking what are essentially negative (exclusive) definitions of identity, by looking at groups or individuals who were deliberately marginalised in, or ostracised from, their community – usually because they failed to conform to expected social norms. In particular, the various initiatives taken around mid-century to establish new provincial workhouses (in Stege in 1737, Viborg in 1741, Odense in 1752, as well as in Norway) give new insights into the nature of community strains. These institutions quickly came to serve multiple purposes both as notional providers of work for those who were unemployed or unable to compete on the open labour market, and as houses of correction for individuals who were regarded either as a nuisance or a threat to the social fabric. Detailed descriptive admissions records, such as the entry book preserved for the Odense Workhouse from 1752 onwards, certainly reveal the impatience of the governors with the variety of ‘disorderly’ conduct alleged against the individuals brought before them – ranging from persistent begging, vagrancy and desertion, and the uniquely desperate cases of infanticide committed by single mothers, through forms of unacceptable behaviour such as drunken violence or persistent fornication, to more deliberate insubordination against landowners, tax collectors or employers.<sup>532</sup> But such records also indicate that those who had official status as parish priests, local officeholders, town clerks or landowners, could in effect commit a person to the workhouse (that is, exclude such a person from the community) with or without a formal judicial hearing, sometimes merely by sending a written report to the governors, who would then interview the new arrival and determine the outcome. Clearly, such records are liable to give a one-sided impression of what had gone wrong, in which the view of the detainee

is totally overshadowed by the moral disapproval of those conducting the hearing. Nevertheless the peculiarly multi-functional status of the workhouse is reflected in the not altogether rare requests for voluntary admission – usually on grounds of homelessness, starvation or other personal misfortune. Those admitted at their own request were free to leave when they so chose, yet do not otherwise seem to have been treated differently amongst the extraordinary mix of unfortunate individuals for whom the early modern workhouse provided some kind of existence. Perhaps here we are confronted with the kinds of problematic collective identities not totally unlike those which might have been in evidence amongst conscripts in the army or the navy.

This raises questions about perceptions of the individual in early modern society in relation to collective identities such as those provided by town, village and household. Concepts of the individual seem to have been formulated (if at all) primarily in religious, especially Pietist, terms. But we can gain some impression of the physical context of the individual from other types of source material created as a result of the later eighteenth-century enthusiasm for accurate quantitative data – sources which may fundamentally standardise and formalise social relationships almost beyond recognition, but which can nonetheless be informative. For example, data in the aggregate census of 1769 and, in more detail, in the records of the comprehensive census of 1787, reveal some significant structural features – notably, that the pre-industrial household, both in rural and urban communities, was typically much bigger and more composite than has been the norm in recent times, often combining under one roof a nuclear or extended family with a significant proportion of non-relatives who were bound not by kinship ties but by the function of the household as the basic economic unit of production. Many of these non-relatives were comparatively young and fairly mobile – a feature confirmed in those parishes where detailed registers of marriages and deaths have survived, revealing individual life-histories notable both for geographic mobility and for the relatively high rate of change in actual family structures (through re-marriages, fostering arrangements, and other major events).<sup>533</sup> The early modern household was thus surprisingly changeable, and highly dependent on external links and personal networks which are bound to have made it more accessible to changing external influences, in ways that the source material rarely reveals.



[Pors Munk] *Lommebog for Bønder*, hvori findes paalidelig Veiledning til de almindeligste Grundregler i Henseende: Veirigtets Indflydelse i Agerdyrkingen, Agerdyrkingen i sig selv, Mergelens Brug, Bester, Fæe og Faars Rygte og Behandling mm., Pile-Plantningen, korte og nyttige Regler for Bondestanden. Uddraget, saavel af de beste og bekiendte Skrifter, som og tillige af egen Erfarenhed sammenskrævet til Brug for Bonde-Standen af een Bonde-Elsker og Monfrere. Aalborg 1786. (Pocket book for peasants with a guide to the most common rules concerning the influence of the weather on agriculture, agriculture itself, the use of marl, about the care of beasts, cattle and sheep &c, planting of willows, short and useful rules for the peasantry. Drawn from the best and well-known writings and compiled with personal experience for the benefit of the peasants by a friend of the peasantry and monfrere).

It used to be taken for granted that printed matter rarely, if at all, impinged on the eighteenth-century world of craftsmen, small traders, peasants and labourers. When a *Pocket Book for Peasants* was published in 1786, a leading Copenhagen journal, the *Lærde Efterretninger*, greeted it with the comment that

To write for peasants is not so easy a matter as many may imagine. The large mass of people, who without cultivating their intelligence, grow up in the dark night of ignorance, and, like speechless creatures, follow their habits and instincts, scarcely know any other writings than their almanac and their books of Christian instruction. Were they to try reading other books, they would find even their mother-tongue unintelligible; and they get little or no benefit if the subject-matter is not very briefly put, in a clear, common and simple-minded style ....<sup>534</sup>

Such patronising definition of a stereotype ‘other’ is understandable in a society which adhered with almost religious devotion to the minutiae of social rank, precedence, hierarchy and deference,<sup>535</sup> and expected education to correspond closely to social status. But in an age where language was a vivid marker of status, and a seemingly major obstacle to effective communication across horizontal social barriers,<sup>536</sup> such comments are not likely to have been entirely well-founded. Reassessment of the evidence on popular reading skills indicates that, at least in some regions, both rural and urban children (including girls) had better access to elementary schooling, and were less isolated from print culture, than was once assumed. Popular reading material may have consisted predominantly of religious, moral, and edifying texts unlikely to have encouraged anyone to challenge accepted social values – and if the authorities are to be believed, the resulting perceptions of identity were predictably traditionalist – but we should not assume that change was impossible. It is perhaps particularly revealing that some rural pastors were prepared to argue that even peasants could be made into more productive and more engaged members of the community if given adequate incentives and if treated properly – a developmental process where deferential authority and compulsion might be replaced by educated self-interest, and where the rural population would be able to make their own decisions on the basis of an understanding of new methods in agriculture, practical guidance on veterinary and botanical issues, and reliable information on grain prices and overall



market conditions.<sup>537</sup> Such an optimistic point of view was typical of contemporary European ideals in agrarian improvement – a view also shared by the more liberal members of the Rural Reform Commission of 1786 – and justifies a closer look at print culture in order to identify both traditional and innovative perceptions of identity purveyed through texts.

### A growing market for print

In recent years, an impressive amount of research on different aspects of print culture in eighteenth-century Europe has revealed much about content, production and distribution. But linking types of printed output to definable social categories of readers has proved more difficult: demonstrating that a particular work sold well does not tell us who the buyers and/or readers were, what their priorities or disposable income might have been, or what they expected from their reading. Even apparently obvious conclusions could be misleading: thus, whilst there is little doubt that expensive and large-format books were bought only by the elite, any simplistic social demarcation breaks down when we note that cheaper, small-format publications and abridgements ostensibly intended for popular consumption also routinely found their way into the collections of the rich (as amply demonstrated in the personal libraries of prominent members of the nobility in later eighteenth-century Denmark). But purchase was not the only option: new methods of market distribution, such as the lending libraries, commercial libraries and book clubs which proliferated in Denmark from the 1770s, ensured greater opportunities, for those who lived in larger towns, to gain access to print without necessarily incurring the relatively heavy costs of ownership.

There was a clear development within the printing trade itself: the number of independent printing workshops in Copenhagen increased steadily from the later seventeenth century onwards, and each workshop on average also accounted for a rising number of presses and workers. Outside Copenhagen growth was slower, but a printer was established permanently in Odense by 1730, and by 1794 eight provincial towns had their own presses.<sup>538</sup> Precisely what the output consisted of, however, is slightly more difficult to ascertain. Low-quality paper and cheapness has tended to militate against the preservation of more ephemeral kinds of print; reprints, variants or imitations of

successful publications can also be difficult to identify, because of customary workshop and distribution practices during the eighteenth century. The Royal Library in Copenhagen was granted its first copyright entitlement in 1697, but it took time before publishers accepted the obligation to surrender such copies routinely. Later bequests, and the reorganisation of major collections, have helped to identify reprints and variant editions, but it seems unlikely that national collections of ephemeral or unauthorised printed material for the period up to the abolition of censorship in 1770 will ever be regarded as definitively complete. Nonetheless, innovative recent research has added immeasurably to our knowledge of the wider contours of the popular market for print in early modern Denmark, both in terms of actual reading ability amongst broader sections of the population, and of the early development and overall shape of book production and distribution across the kingdom.<sup>539</sup>

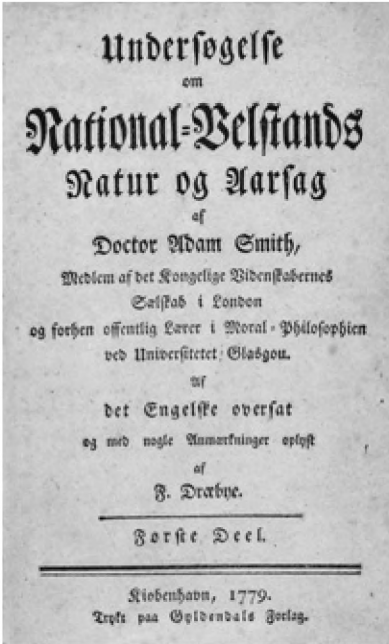
Bibliographical data on surviving eighteenth-century Danish printed material is substantial but not yet fully consolidated, so quantitative analysis of overall trends in output is complicated, and many conclusions have to be treated with great caution.<sup>540</sup> That said, there is no doubt that total print output in Denmark increased enormously in the course of the eighteenth century: a simple count of the total number of separate items (books, pamphlets and ephemera) indicates at least a four-fold increase in Danish-language material between 1725 and 1785, whilst over the same period the output of material in Latin from the Copenhagen printers remained fairly constant (output in other foreign languages is more difficult to quantify because of ambiguous publication data). Significantly, the physical shape of printed material also changed: in 1725, only around a quarter of the total number of Danish publications ran to more than 24 pages, but by 1785 half did, many of them several hundreds of pages long. Equally striking is the extent to which the most common format became octavo (a term usually applied to texts with effective page sizes of around 12 x 18 cm, but in the Danish data often used generically for smaller formats): octavos represented less than half the total output in 1725, but more than 90% in 1785. The trend towards a smaller (and cheaper) format is visible in nearly all subject areas, but, as we would expect, official and specialist academic publications (aimed at a fairly elitist market) were more resistant. Admittedly, classification by subject is fraught with problems, nowhere more so than when dealing with those texts – religious, devotional, moral

and edifying – that appear to have been most widely disseminated, and hence may potentially be the most relevant in identifying the impact of print on collective identities. Even so, the bibliographical data used here, and other more incidental types of evidence,<sup>541</sup> indicate that the market for popular devotional texts remained buoyant: the strong demand for cheap publications in this field may even have provided the economic foundations for the growth in the print industry as a whole, at least until the last decades of the century. In addition, the demand for publications that we can loosely classify as fiction and entertainment increased significantly during the century, particularly from the 1770s onwards. By comparison, the trends in topography, travel and history remained more constant. Conclusions about material relating to law, the state and public affairs are more problematic, because of the changing political climate itself, but there are indications that this type of output seems to have shifted from predominantly formal (in part even ceremonial) publications to a more diverse range of material which could have appealed to different readerships. This was no doubt in part the result of the major shifts in censorship policies linked to the political changes of 1770-72 and 1784.

Amongst the elite a reasonable knowledge of French was of course essential, and Copenhagen acquired at least two specialist French bookshops in the later eighteenth century. Overall, however, a much greater proportion of eighteenth-century Danes are likely to have been able to cope with German texts in the original language – there were, after all, two German-speaking subjects of the Danish king for every three Danes and three Norwegians, and the formal command language in the Danish army was German until 1772. Not surprisingly, therefore, publishers offered a significant number of German-language books (some of them by major German authors) which, by carrying a joint imprint of Copenhagen and a German city, not only presumably avoided import controls but may also have attracted a bigger market. More significant in the present context, however, is the kind of European material actually translated into Danish. This included devotional and morally edifying reading (at first translated mostly from German), as well as more serious scholarly work, but once again there are clear signs of change. Collected editions of popular comedies and tragedies published from the mid-1770s onwards indicate a broadening demand amongst theatre-going audiences in Copenhagen and other bigger towns – including translations of many well-known French plays (Molière, Beaumar-

chais and Voltaire prominent amongst the authors), musical comedies (Marmontel), plays from other parts of Europe (Lessing, Goethe, Shakespeare, David Garrick), alongside original Danish plays by Charlotta Dorothea Biehl, Johan Evald, and the authors who took part in the theatre controversy (the so-called German feud) of 1789.<sup>542</sup> Other types of fictional literature, however, seem to have been slower in making inroads on the market. Despite widespread enthusiasm for translations, abridgements and imitations of for example the Robinson Crusoe genre, popular novels did not gain a solid foot-hold until relatively late during the eighteenth century: Richardson's *Pamela* appeared in a Danish translation already in 1743-46, and Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* in 1749, but it seems as if Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* was not published in Danish until 1768, whilst Rousseau's *Héloïse* had to wait until 1797. Goethe's *Werther* was – famously – to have appeared in Danish in 1776, but the translation was suppressed. The market for original Danish fiction and poetry also seems to have developed relatively late, mostly from the time of the national reaction of the 1770s onwards.<sup>543</sup> Even the genre of satire and gossip, though blossoming briefly during the volatile period of Struensee, once more became fairly subdued from 1773 until the late 1780s.<sup>544</sup>

At face value, therefore, European literary trends do not seem to have made as substantial an impact on the Danish book-trade as we might have expected. Translation of non-fiction also appears to have been quite selective. Despite having enthusiastic readers amongst the Danish intelligentsia, Montesquieu's *De l'esprit des lois* had to wait over twenty years for a full translation (1770-71) – and significantly, his more accessible *Lettres persanes* never had a full translation.<sup>545</sup> By contrast, Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* of 1776 appeared within four years (1779-80), perhaps because fewer could read English. A broader choice of major enlightenment texts became available to monolingual Danes only in the 1790s: thus Rousseau's *Du contrat social* finally appeared in 1795 alongside some of his other major works, and Beccaria's *Dei delitti e delle pene* also had to wait for more than thirty years (published in Danish 1796-98). Paine's more recent *Rights of Man* appeared in Copenhagen solely in a German version, in 1793, and (no doubt significantly) was shadowed not only by a rebuttal (published in French and in Danish) but also by a report (in German) of the trial proceedings against the author in England – texts printed in Copenhagen for what one must assume was meant to be a restricted bilingual readership. Woll-



Adam Smith *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) was translated into Danish by Frederik Dræbye as *Undersøgelse om National-Velstands Natur og Aarsag*, 2 vol. (Copenhagen 1779-80).

stonecraft's *Vindications of the Rights of Women* was delayed for a decade (1801-02), and then translated not from the original but from an annotated German edition. Raynal's *Histoire des deux Indes* was delayed until 1804, whilst readers waited in vain for translations of the more radical texts by La Mettrie, Mercier, the baron d'Holbach or David Hume.<sup>546</sup> No doubt some of the more educated readers already had sufficient command of the original language not to need a translation; others may have welcomed the caution of the printers and book-sellers, or even shared the anxiety expressed already in 1759 by bishop Brorson in Ribe, who reported with obvious concern that, as superstition dwindles amongst parishioners, "it is replaced, more than earlier, by contempt for God's word and for the authority of the teacher..."<sup>547</sup>

### The periodical press and public debate

Whereas the history of books has for a long time figured prominently in enlightenment studies, the rapid evolution of the periodical press has received less systematic and analytical treatment. Journals have a number of significant characteristics which make them relevant in the

present context. The success of a periodical necessarily depends on meeting the demand of the biggest number of readers, ensuring enjoyment and thus encouraging regular purchase or (better still) subscription – and this in turn favours editorial policies that seek out relatively safe common ground, some lightness of touch, and good entertainment value. In order to stay in business, eighteenth-century journal editors also required a good sense of what was politically acceptable, or at the very least what could be said without incurring government reprisals: unlike the authors of pamphlets, journal editors had to have a known address for correspondence, and a predictable frequency of publication that would encourage regular customers, but such familiarity also made them vulnerable to external interference. It is not unreasonable to assume, therefore, that early modern journals, aware of the spectacular success of ventures such as *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* in England from 1709, would be more conscious of the need to appeal to common values, and to some extent reflect shared identities, than authors of separate works designed to make an impact on their own.

Various papers appeared in Copenhagen after 1660, many of them relying on German or Dutch prototypes both in terms of format and content. By the early eighteenth century there was sufficient demand to sustain different types of papers on a fairly permanent basis. Some of these (such as the *Extraordinaire Relation* launched by Joachim Wielandt with a royal privilege in 1720, or successive variants of *Kjøbenhavns Post-Rytter*) established themselves, as elsewhere in Europe, with safe material such as official court news, digests of foreign news, and commercial information, to which a limited amount of formal domestic reporting was gradually added (for example quoting new legislation). By the later eighteenth century, the most significant papers included the long-running successor to the *Extraordinaire Relation*, published by Ernst H. Berling and known by various titles including *Kjøbenhavnske Danske Post-Tidender* (later *Berlingske Politiske og Avertissementstidende*); the more commercial *Adresse-Contoirs Efterretninger* which initially prioritised advertisements and trade information, although soon adding personal columns, property listings, lost & found, commentaries and local Copenhagen news (but not much national news); and from the time of the fall of Struensee onwards, the more popular and independent *Kjøbenhavns Aftenpost*, carrying mostly local news, fiction, letters to the editor, and gossip. Although several papers developed to become more frequent than weekly, none could sustain daily production.<sup>548</sup>

Some secured wider circulation through postal delivery, but, as far as we can judge, print-runs seem to have been fairly small, with the 2000 subscribers acquired by *Adresse-Contoires Efterretninger* by 1785 likely to be more than what most editors could normally aspire towards.

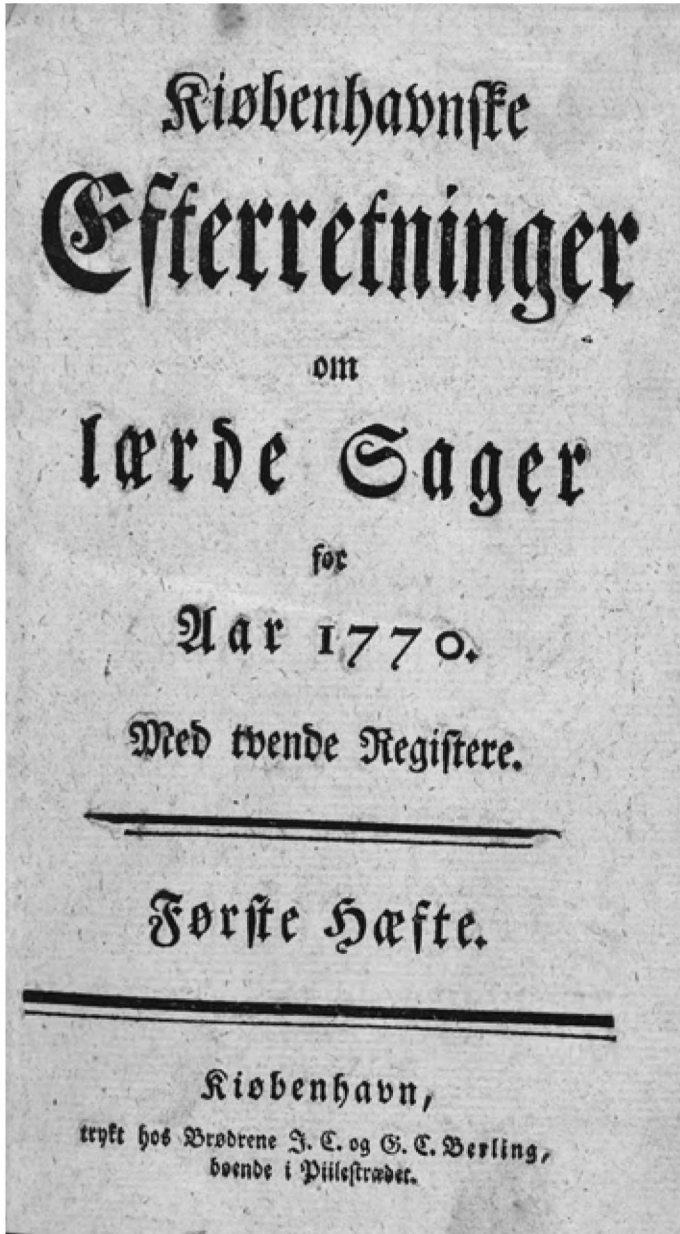
As the market became more diverse in the last decades of the century, new categories of readers could be sought. The *Morgenposten*, launched in 1788, deliberately aimed to widen its readership (beyond the initial 350 subscribers) by providing short editorials on contemporary issues, including more serious and philosophical issues “written with sufficient clarity and lightness such that an inexperienced [*ubevandret*] reader can still readily understand” – its readership later categorised by a rival journal as “non-learned, women, children, and the lowest class of the reading public...”<sup>549</sup> At the other end of the scale was the monthly *Minerva*, launched in July 1785 and quickly becoming a platform for the liberal and enlightened elite who supported the reforming government of A.P. Bernstorff from 1784 to his death in 1797 – the 535 names in its expanding subscription lists (autumn 1785) prominently headed by a bulk subscription of no less than 41 copies for the royal family itself (presumably including the inner circles of government). *Minerva* carried systematic summaries of international news as well as short accounts of domestic events given under the general title of ‘history’. It also carried reviews of the arts and of topical publications such as the provocative pamphlet published in 1785 by C.A. Fabricius, entitled *Whose condition is the happiest: that of the Danish peasant tenant, or that of the Mecklenburg serf?* – where the reviewer, in concluding that there was not much difference, probably helped to reinforce a message which was becoming conveniently resonant with the emerging reform agenda of the government itself.<sup>550</sup> When violence broke out in France in 1789, however, the journal took a predictably cautious line condemning the violence and expressing concern about the feasibility of some of the new reforms, whilst at the same time hinting that Louis XVI himself had not been sufficiently observant. Even so, it remained firmly in favour of domestic reform, and the official protection which it enjoyed was underlined by contributions written by leading government officials such as Colbjørnsen. In May 1791 *Minerva* could even comment on the resistance encountered in some parts of the country to the on-going rural reforms, noting that the critical reception in Schleswig-Holstein might in part be attributed to the fact that an influential German-language paper had blatantly mistranslated key parts of the recent legislation.<sup>551</sup>

Such journalism ensured that the studied caution of earlier publications now seemed unduly timid and unnecessary. *Minerva* has long been recognised as a valuable means of access to high-level political debates in Denmark after the change of government in 1784. Other journals joined the fray, including specialist literary review journals such as *Kritik og Antikritik* (a weekly of 16 pages, launched in Oct. 1787), alongside more provocative ventures such as Malthe Bruun's *Vækkeren* (Aug. 1794), which was immediately suppressed by the government. Publications of this kind clearly allow the historian to gain an impression of contemporary concerns and topics of debate<sup>552</sup>; but they also challenge the modern reader to de-code what can nowadays appear as ambiguous and no doubt ambivalent allusions to personalities and incidents which are no longer clearly identifiable. Since, however, these journals grew out of the ferment in the years immediately before and after 1789, they may not be representative of the wider changes in public perceptions amongst the reading public over a longer time-span in the later eighteenth century. For that, we need a journal with a longer track-record and perhaps a more neutral editorial policy.

### The Copenhagen *Lærde Efterretninger*

Using a literary review to plot public opinion seems, at face value, a rather narrow and exclusivist strategy. But the journal normally known as the *Lærde Efterretninger* (Learned News) has a number of important strengths in the present context. It was launched in 1720 and published continuously from 1722 until 1810, displaying a consistent but evolving approach throughout this long span.<sup>553</sup> It was edited by a sequence of Copenhagen men of letters, latterly including the librarian and professor Rasmus Nyerup (through most of the 1790s), and it was printed by two firms (Wielandt until 1748, then the Berling family), both benefiting from prior experience from several of the successful general newspapers in Copenhagen which we noted earlier. This context ensured that the journal soon broadened its remit. At first it did adopt an explicit and exclusive academic agenda, concentrating on theology, philosophy, history, philology, politics and travel – and even briefly (early in 1721) abandoning Danish in favour of Latin as the language most suitable for its intended readers. Already by 1725, however, it included poetry and fiction, printed popularised science complete with diagrams, and even ventured into discussions of outdoor weather-





The title page of the journal *Københavnske Efterretninger om Lærde Sager* (Copenhagen Learned News) from 1770.

proof lamps and new designs for ploughs. In the second half of the century it can be described as a general literary review with a broader social engagement: whilst never a popularising journal, it remained accessible in style at least until the return of tighter censorship in 1799. At first printed fairly crudely in the black-letter type characteristic of the time, it became markedly neater and easier to read after mid-century, and also acquired a proper index for ease of access.

In 1767 the *Lærde Efterretninger* listed 487 regular subscribers (including members of the royal family and the governing elite, some churchmen, but also individuals described as *Studiosus* (student), military personnel, some brewers and merchants, a hatter, a builder and a *Land-physikus* (rural physician). How many copies were sold loose, without subscription, is not known, nor can we make any informed guess as to how many readers on average would have seen each copy.<sup>554</sup> Our best guide to the likely readership may therefore come from the language and style of the journal itself, and the type of material it included. Here again we note a clear pattern of evolution – from what was initially a typical European format consisting of descriptive reports summarising news from the Republic of Letters in each major European city in turn, to a more varied presentation which gave prominence to developments within the Danish-Norwegian kingdom itself, and which from mid-century evolved towards full reviews of individual publications as well as debate on topical issues. Its immediacy is emphasised in those issues where the quantity of material needing inclusion<sup>555</sup> resulted in the adoption, in the last page or so of the issue, of a smaller and more compact type-face; or where the overflow was solved by adding supplementary sheets which allowed discussion of certain topics in much greater depth than the normal format would allow. That the journal engaged a real audience is also revealed in letters to the editor – genuine ones, judging both from the signatories, and from the occasional angry rebuttal inserted in a rival journal (or published separately as a pamphlet) by an offended author.<sup>556</sup>

The *Lærde Efterretninger*, however, did not deliberately court controversy. The reports and reviews were invariably published anonymously, so we cannot now be sure how many individuals could be counted as regular contributors, or who they were. Like most of its eighteenth-century counterparts, the journal tended to describe and summarise the text being reviewed, rather than to take issue or criticise. But as

we would expect from a journal where survival was of paramount importance, the *Lærde Efterretninger* sometimes distanced itself very clearly from material which might be deemed subversive. It is significant that, in the case of some of the major foreign works which (as we have already noted) might have been deemed too radical to risk translating into Danish, the journal did note their first appearance amongst the news from abroad, but was visibly reticent and brief. Thus La Mettrie's *L'homme machine* of 1747 was mentioned two years later as an "ungodly piece" (its author not yet known), and the *Lærde Efterretninger* promised to bring reviews of works which gave a full rebuttal of its dangerous arguments.<sup>557</sup> The controversy surrounding Rousseau's *Héloïse* was noted in 1762, and Malebranche's *Traité de l'infini* discussed briefly in 1771, with some reservations. The *Système de la Nature* (attributed to 'Mirabaud' since the baron d'Holbach's authorship had not yet been established) was mentioned as a notorious atheist tract, but solely in the context of specific counter-arguments against it published by none other than the ageing Voltaire himself.<sup>558</sup> Even Montesquieu's *De l'esprit des lois*, already welcomed in 1749 in its original French version, received another review when it was translated into Danish in 1771: no doubt influenced by the exceptional Danish political context, the reviewer concentrated exclusively on the relatively short passage in the book where Montesquieu described the moral qualities attached to different forms of government.<sup>559</sup> Interestingly, Mercier's *L'an deux mille quatre cents quarante*, itself banned in France and published ostensibly from London in 1771, is discussed at greater length, noting how its imaginative concept effectively brings out criticisms of current conditions in France, and of despotic government, in ways that can apply equally to other countries.<sup>560</sup> Clearly, readers without access to foreign-language material would not be much the wiser about the detailed arguments put forward in these untranslated books, but would at least know that such arguments existed, and would become aware of just how radical some French writers could be.

Whilst we can demonstrate the potential impact of European influences on those who chose to read this journal, it is not so easy to define the extent of actual changes in Danish self-perceptions during the later eighteenth century. One obvious aspect of Danish identity was the near-universal adherence to orthodox Lutheran beliefs, but even here we can detect some creativity in the style of reporting offered by the *Lærde Efterretninger*. It used a whole issue in 1763 to discuss whether

humanity needed a divine saviour, citing Biblical authority and contemporary publications in some detail, and clearly giving its blessing both to those who spoke out, and those who reflected on these matters fully.<sup>561</sup> A few years later there is a cautionary note attached to a review of a recently published introduction to the New Testament, indicating that the author had in a few places ventured opinions tending towards newer religious ideas becoming prevalent in England, without specifying precisely what these were.<sup>562</sup> Nevertheless, in 1771 a volume by Joseph Priestley on non-conformity was broadly welcomed. A lighter touch was introduced, that same year, when a pamphlet entitled *Fandens Liv og Levnet (The Life and Times of the Devil)*, attributed to Doctor Faustus, noted that the devil's grip had loosened since the removal of press restrictions the previous year.<sup>563</sup> But that there was still work to be done is underlined by a passing remark, in connection with a new Danish translation of Milton's *Paradise Lost* published in 1790, stating that "an English poet of the 17<sup>th</sup> century could say, at minimal risk, things which his translator now will hardly dare to express ....".<sup>564</sup>

The journal did not hold back in terms of reviewing material on Denmark itself. In 1760 it had another special supplement, this time devoted to the Danish language and its recent literature. In 1767 the journal commented on the relatively low output of books in Danish, explaining this partly in terms of caution and lack of experience, partly in terms of the minority status of the language which encouraged readers, even the 'unlearned', to rely on a foreign language.<sup>565</sup> When Holberg's *Journey of Niels Klimt to the Underworld* was published in a new Danish translation in 1789 (the first for more than 40 years), the caution of the author in issuing it originally in Latin was ascribed to the desire to avoid controversy since "regrettably, we were at that time still bound by the chains of slavery of censorship".<sup>566</sup> Books on Danish history are given full coverage, even when dealing with the period since 1660, and from the 1760s the journal clearly became committed to the full debate on economic reforms and agrarian improvement gradually taking shape. Although the political upheavals in 1772 and 1784 were not mentioned specifically as news items, the journal clearly welcomed the gradual liberalisation which followed the second of these changes. It gave very full coverage to the lively and wide-ranging public debate surrounding the Rural Reform Commission of 1786 – reviewing scores of books and pamphlets issued in that connection, placing the discussion in a wider northern-European and cameralist context, and bringing

the first phase of the debate to a suitable conclusion when it welcomed the publication of the official minutes of the Commission itself.<sup>567</sup> The journal acknowledged other indications of relative openness in government in the late 1780s and early 1790s – noting for example how the official release of reliable information and statistics of national significance might ensure a better-informed citizenry as well as clearer accountability by the crown's servants.<sup>568</sup>

There is more in the *Lærde Efterretninger* than such examples can convey, more about the whole process of cross-national communication, and more about newer expressions of patriotic allegiance. The journal ranged from such matters as the role of national costumes in public ceremonies, or the increasing trend in suicides, to the distinctive interests of Norway, Schleswig and Holstein, or the perceived threats of German cultural imperialism. The careful balance required in commenting on the more extreme developments in France in the years 1792-95 no doubt made for some difficult and sensitive choices. Even so, the journal retained close links with liberal opinion in the capital, and engaged actively in the discussion of key domestic issues such as enlightened educational reform and the proper use of restraints on freedom of expression. In 1795 it even took the risk of publishing some sharply critical comments on the authoritarian implications of prosecuting a group of radical authors and publishers in Copenhagen on charges of sedition,<sup>569</sup> and it followed the trial of Thomas Muir in Scotland with great interest.

The example of the *Lærde Efterretninger* indicates how far a journal could mould and transcend the limitations of its own ostensible remit. In the hands of imaginative editors, a journal which had been launched in the early eighteenth century as one of many publications intended for the European republic of letters – concentrating on up-market literary reviews for the gentleman-scholar – had transformed itself into something with a more overt social and political agenda. Unlike such scholarly journals as the prestigious *Göttingische Anzeigen von gelehrten Sachen*, the *Lærde Efterretninger* seems to have cultivated a more inclusive public, acquiring a light touch in its selection of material with wider social resonance, and tailoring the style and length of its reporting in order to maximise its engagement with current issues. It never became a newspaper in the recognised modern sense; but we learn a great deal from its pages about the emergence of critical and enlightened debate

outside government circles in the later eighteenth century. It was also able to alert its readers to at least some of those more radical enlightened publications from France and Britain which, either because of formal restrictions or because of self-restraint amongst publishers, never appeared in Danish translation. It is surely legitimate to argue that by the 1780s and 90s it helped to sustain a reading public whose interests had been significantly broadened through exposure to European currents.

## Conclusion

Establishing reliable reference points for an analysis of identity amongst the broader levels of eighteenth-century Danish society is difficult, not least because of the quite heavily controlled political environment which persisted throughout this period. Absolutism and public debate did not sit comfortably together, and the system was not designed for any real dialogue other than that conducted through traditional (largely controlled) channels. The deeply deferential and normative language of petitions from all levels of society, for example, emphasises the extent to which the monarch was set apart, able perhaps to intervene when the system had gone wrong, but unlikely to welcome any genuine dialogue. The political elite had their own channels of communication, and could exploit their access both to power and to print in order to clarify and refine their world view, but such expressions of identity obviously cannot be regarded as representative of the whole.

For the great majority of the population we have to rely on types of source material that understandably tend to become increasingly problematic the further down the social scale we go. Extensive Danish research on eighteenth-century peasant communities, and on the impact of rural reforms, has demonstrated the resilience and independence of those who were excluded from the formal provincial power structures; but systematic exploitation of either the petition material or the judicial records, for purposes of understanding common perceptions of identity and how they were expressed, has only just begun. With some notable exceptions, urban communities have also been neglected in this respect – understandably so, perhaps, given the difficulties associated with effective use of certain archival collections such as the substantial Copenhagen police records from the 1770s onwards.<sup>570</sup> Overall, the vast bulk of extant administrative and literary source material

is bound to be one-sided, and it cannot adequately compensate for the dearth of more authentic expressions of common identity.

The attempt here, to seek out that section of the population likely to have engaged in a significant amount of reading of new books and journals, is also inherently problematic. Circulation figures for the Copenhagen journals were respectable by comparison with the likely size of print-runs for most categories of Danish books, but inevitably seem modest by comparison with the estimates we have for journals which served the much bigger linguistic communities south of the border or in western Europe. How many readers were genuinely outside government circles, and what significance can we attach to any expressions of identity which we may be able to trace through these pages? Even if we adopt an optimistic view of diffusion and reading-access, can we assume that textual evidence of change in the later eighteenth century matches the scale and approximate direction of changing perceptions amongst readers themselves? There are good grounds for hesitation, but perhaps we should also note some contra-indications. First, it is clear that we should not, on the basis solely of the delay in the translation of major works, draw conclusions about the slowness and selectivity with which broader European ideas seem to have reached monolingual Danes: a resilient review journal such as the *Lærde Efterretninger* was able to navigate the hurdles of crown censorship controls so successfully that its readers were able to gain a significantly wider perception of European ideas than reliance on the book market alone would have allowed. Equally, journals, more than books, carry clues about the evolution of different strategies of communication, the changing use of keywords and concepts, and the orientation of interests amongst readers – their dependence on a volatile market in itself fostering skills of imaginative communication with groups of readers, some of whom clearly were outside the charmed circles of government officials and well-educated gentlemen scholars.

Despite their importance in this respect, journals constitute an under-exploited resource for the systematic study of public opinion – both for Denmark and for the rest of Europe. In the expanding but fiercely competitive market for print in the later eighteenth century, journals had to rely on a good network of contributors and correspondents. As historians of French-language journals have noted, editors also needed even more political dexterity than pamphleteers in order to survive

in a highly unpredictable environment.<sup>571</sup> Political life in Denmark was no doubt far less complicated than in France, but the arguments surrounding restrictions on print were much the same. The main Copenhagen printers were far too conspicuous, even in a city of 100,000 people by the end of the century, to go into clandestine production – and quite possibly their readers would not have wished to follow them there. Instead, they had to impose self-censorship, partly curtailing or neutralising comments on dangerous publications at least to such an extent that the authorities had nothing substantive to complain about, partly phrasing their observations such that readers would have to exercise their own judgment. Journals may have had to adopt a moderate stance in order to survive, but if they succeeded, they had the great advantage both of continuity and of active engagement with the reading public. The example of the *Lærde Efterretninger* shows how reviews of the international enlightenment could be used systematically and consistently to nurture domestic awareness. No doubt the whole process involved a degree of imaginative adaptation and reworking of key ideas, for the benefit of readers who did not belong to the originating linguistic and cultural milieu – but then such creative use of ideas is surely at the very heart of the European enlightenment itself.