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Reading like monks: The death or survival of the love of reading?

Ilkka Mäkinen

Introduction

Reading as a spontaneous, sustained and everyday activity is in danger, or so it is believed. Today's studies and news tell us that the young generation, especially boys and young men, do not read long texts for pleasure (e.g. *Northern Light on PISA 2009*), even if they otherwise use and produce more text than ever.

My aim in this article is to seek historical parallels for today's reading situation. I believe that a better understanding of the historical development of reading can help us place the present situation in a broader context. Even if we believe that history does not repeat itself, historical parallels do bring forth potential scenarios. When we know what has happened before, we can act consciously, or at least, set unnecessary worries aside.

The aim of this article is to make the historical character of the European reading culture more intelligible; especially when it comes to one of its important elements, the supposition that the love of reading exists. In this article I will present a general picture of the historical development of reading, while a more detailed documentation will have to wait for the completion of future studies. When we understand that, among many other things, the love of reading is a historical construction, which has a beginning and development, and which is now on a threshold of something new, we can get a more constructive perspective on the future development of reading, which is currently unfolding. Of course, the thoughts that I will present about the future of reading are more speculative in nature.

There are many types of reading today, but two types deserve special attention. One is a functional, utilitarian type of reading that strives for an efficient acquisition of information. In fact, the goal of this type of reading is to read as little as possible in relation to the desired effects. Modern media is full of small bits of information that can be sought and constructed into new texts

to be used in social communication, work and entertainment. Today's typical reader has no patience for spending too much time on texts that exceed the length of an average Wikipedia entry. The other type, which still exists, but is perhaps declining, is more non-utilitarian. The reader is immersed in the world of a long text, typically a thick novel. One starts on page one and continues reading a linear narrative that totally absorbs his or her mind until the end of the story. The reader loves reading and wants to read as much as possible, if the narrative appeals to him or her. Many of us are afraid that this kind of engaged reading of extensive printed texts with complex narratives, which is motivated by love of reading, is vanishing.

However, this is not the first time we are facing this kind of crisis in reading. A striking example is the antagonism between the scholastic way of reading and monastic reading in the Late Middle Ages. Scholars and students in the scholastic universities that were developing the Late Middle Ages – from the beginning of the second millennium onwards – typically read compilations, i.e., collections of text snippets from the church fathers, Aristotle and other authoritative authors. Reading whole texts from beginning to end was rare in the scholarly world. There was no need for a love of reading; the important thing was to analyse the text and use it for critical discussions. (Hamesse 1999)

But the love of reading existed elsewhere, in the monasteries. Monks, often hermits, were engrossed in the reading of the Bible, the writings of the church fathers, and other spiritual books. They chewed, swallowed, digested, and recited the texts. They had an emotional relationship with the texts, and they had a love of reading.

The intensification of the European discourse on the love of reading

In order to build a theoretical context for what I am going to say, I will briefly describe the larger research project, of which the present article is a part. Since, in another article, I have more thoroughly described the background of the European discourse on the love of reading, as well as the methods and results of my research (Mäkinen 2013a), here I will only present the general results necessary for understanding this article.

One of the crucial questions in the history of reading is whether it is possible to study how and why people really read in the past? Several methods are utilised to study the history of reading in order to penetrate the factual reality, the act and experience of reading, reading styles, genres and quantities, etc. The further back in history we go, the more serious the challenges become for this type of research, because the act or experience of reading often does not leave any visible traces. Another possibility is to study the ways in which reading is spoken about, i.e. the discourse on reading. There is no lack of discussions, opinions, laments, instructions, etc. on the subject of reading.

To some extent, the discourse on reading reflects reality and the ways people really read. However, we must be critical of this information because speakers often set conscious or unconscious norms on how and what people are allowed to read. Therefore, we cannot always conclude what reading behaviour was actually like. However, the important aspect of the discourse on reading is that it expresses the presuppositions, conceptual structures and commitments that the speakers have adopted or accepted, often without realising it themselves. Those who discussed reading in the 18th century may have disagreed totally with each other on many details or principles in connection with reading, but they still shared important presuppositions or concepts about the essence, motivation and effects of reading.

In my doctoral thesis (1997), I studied how one of the central concepts connected to reading, namely the *love of reading* (*lukuhalu* in Finnish, *läselust* in Swedish), was adopted in the discourse on reading in Finland during the 18th and 19th centuries. The concept of the love of reading presumes that reading behaviour is guided by a spontaneous impulse, an inner drive, which can be enhanced or influenced by different actions, but which, in the end, is an unexplained force or drive in a human being. In Europe, the love of reading started to be discussed as a broad social phenomenon during the 18th century.

Of course, other motives for reading exist as well, such as the rational interest in gaining knowledge and educating oneself. Work, status and the salvation of the soul are strong incentives for reading, and are often present when reading is talked about. The love of reading as an alleged motive for reading differs from the other incentives because there is no clear goal for or legitimisation of reading other than personal desire, pleasure and entertainment. Of course, this has aroused suspicions and lots of discussion on the potential dangers and blessings of reading. In my dissertation I studied this discussion in the Finnish and Swedish context (Mäkinen 1997). The present article is part of my research project to study similar phenomena on a broader European scale.

During the 18th century, a new, spontaneous, self-sustaining and extensive reading style seemed to spread like a contagion across all social and geographical boundaries. Reinhardt Wittmann compares the rapid proliferation of reading to a contagious disease that was spread by “a reading bug” starting from a single infection, which “quickly escalated into a collective ‘reading epidemic’”. Other terms used by Wittmann are “reading mania”, “reading fashion” and “new desire for reading”. (Wittmann 1999)

There has been a lively discussion among the historians of reading about whether a reading revolution occurred at the end of the 18th century. This discussion started with Rolf Engelsing’s hypothesis of a revolution of reading in Germany during the late 18th century and early 19th century (Engelsing 1961/1973, 1970/1973). Some scholars, the most notable of them being Robert Darnton, have criticized Engelsing’s theory and claimed that no such revolution took place (Darnton 1988). Others, such as Reinhardt Wittmann (1999),

have come to the conclusion that a revolution of reading was real, not only in Germany but in Europe generally.

Reading behaviour and motivation is described in the major European languages with phrases and terms that refer to crystallised concepts. The most frequently used terms that refer to a spontaneous motivation for reading are the following: *goût de la lecture* in French literature; *love of reading*, *habit of reading*, *desire to read* in English; and *Leselust* in German. By studying the frequency of these terms in printed texts it is possible to follow the quantitative development of the discourse on reading. Google Books, Europeana and other digital services provide millions of books, journals and newspapers for such a study.

French, English and German phrases denoting reading 1500–1830

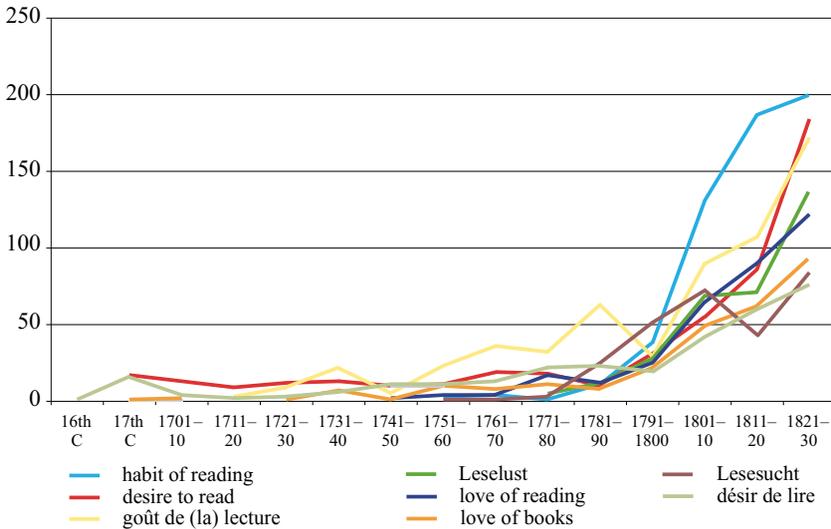


Figure 1. The occurrence of the French, English and German phrases meaning the love of reading (and equivalents) in 1500–1830. Data from Google Books.

Source: Mäkinen 2013a

The debate on the love of reading became tremendously intensified during the late 18th century and early 19th century. This supports the thesis that a reading revolution, or at least a revolution in the discourse related to the love of reading, did really occur (Mäkinen 2013a).

But the question remains: what caused the discourse on the love of reading?

Scholastic reading

Let us take a closer look at the reading situation in the Late Middle Ages. At that time, the main characteristic related to reading was the scarcity of books. Every book had to be written by hand, which was expensive and time-consuming. Although some progress was made in replication techniques, such as the *pecia* system, there was a serious bottleneck in the production of books, while the demand was growing rapidly as the result of the expansion of universities and other schools. There simply were not enough books at a reasonable price for every reader (Hamesse 1999, see also Friedenthal 2013)

On the other hand, the pedagogical methods also did not favour individual reading. The goal of learning was to collect useful arguments for scholastic argumentation. These were acquired, more or less, by rote learning. Both the lack of books and the characteristics of pedagogical and scientific practices favoured the use of compilations rather than the complete original texts. Compilations, where bits of text are taken out of their original context, do not make for very inspirational or spiritual reading. The analytic methods of scholasticism were well developed. Reading was a way to analyse the text, and tear it apart in order to use it in an oral discussion. It was necessary to find the useful parts of the texts quickly and easily.

A preliminary step was restructuring the text of the Bible, the basis of knowledge, in order to better manage the important information. The typography was refined and the text was organised in a more efficient way. The text was divided into more comprehensible and controllable sequences, paragraphs and verses, which were marked with numbers; chapters were given titles; concordances, tables of contents and alphabetical indexes were compiled (Hamesse 1999: 103–104).

The second step was producing abridgments and compilations chosen from the original theological and philosophical works. Most of the students, as well as many teachers and scholars, did not consult the original works when learning or teaching (Hamesse 1999: 113). The scholars wanted to use their time as effectively as possible. There was no point in recopying other people's works, when tools were available that made learning and remembering texts quick and easy, and helped you find the information you were looking for (*ibidem*).

Another reason for preferring compilations was that they ensured that the correct interpretation of the important texts would be hammered in the minds of the readers, who might draw the wrong conclusions if they read the original texts (*ibidem*: 116).

As Jacqueline Hamesse says, "In the Age of Scholasticism, the acquisition of knowledge became more important than the spiritual dimension of reading." (Hamesse 1999, 118). One could rephrase this as follows: The strictly utilitarian aspect of reading was preferred to more adventurous reading styles. If one only reads to find exactly what one is seeking, there is no need for a love of reading. In fact, the goal of rational reading is to read as little as possible. Once you have found what you're looking for, you can stop reading. In this case,

reading is a function of information retrieval. The important thing is what we do with the acquired information in discussions and social media.

The scholastic type of reading is rational and controlled. The reader is always in charge of the situation. From this point of view the more engaged type of reading, which is characterised by a love of reading is suspicious, because when you innocently reads a narrative, you relinquish some of your self-determination and follow the path indicated by the text. It can lead you anywhere, and this is not rational. When you read the complete, original texts, you have to plough through long passages without exactly knowing what you are seeking, and you could find something that you had not been intentionally seeking. And, above all, time is being wasted.

Monastic reading

The scholastic way of reading was not originally the dominant one in the Christian world. We could say that scholastic reading was a novelty, an innovation, and the way of reading called monastic reading was more fundamental. The traditions of monastic reading dating from Christian Late Antiquity were “forgotten” during the Age of Scholasticism. These traditions were hibernating in the monasteries and were revived by the mystics of the High Middle Ages.

Jacqueline Hamesse provides a good characterisation of monastic reading (Hamesse 1999: 104), but the most extensive description and explanation can be found in the books by Jean Leclercq (especially: Leclercq 1993). He traces the ideals of monastic reading to the mystical views of St. Augustine and St. Gregory. St. Gregory seems to play an important role in the vocabulary that was later used to describe monastic reading (Leclercq 1993: 30).

While scholastic *lectio* (reading) was typically oriented towards *quaestio* (inquiry) and *disputatio* (discussion), or knowledge and science, monastic reading aspired to *meditatio* and *oratio* (prayer), or wisdom and appreciation (Leclercq 1993: 72). The relation of the monastic reader to the text was not detached and analytic, but close and rather physical, even muscular. It is often described with the word *rumination*: “It meant assimilating the content of a text by means of kind of mastication which releases its full flavour” (Leclercq 1993: 73). The reader is supposed to love what he is reading, taking the text into his heart and understanding its full meaning internally. “It means, as St. Augustine, St. Gregory, John of Fécamp, and others say in an untranslatable expression, to taste it with the *palatum cordis* or *in ore cordis*” (*ibidem*). The literal translation of *palatum cordis* might be something like the palate or taste of the heart, and *ore cordis*, the ear of the heart.

The monks’ reading (*lectio divina*) was divided into two categories: *lectio super mensam* and *lectio privata*. Reading should never cease. That is why, when the monks gathered for a common meal, one of them stood at a pulpit and read aloud to the others. This is *lectio super mensam* (Negrone 1621)

But the more typical, time-consuming reading (*lectio privat*), took place in the monks' cells. It was a continuous activity. It was done silently, but more often in a low voice, by muttering or murmuring the text. It was reading with passion, feeling the text affectively, because, after all, one was reading the Bible or another important text. There was an emotional relationship with the text. It was not extensive reading, but rather slow, repetitive, and contemplative reading. (Leclercq 1993)

It was essential that the monks read the original, unabbreviated works: the Bible, the books of the church fathers, and lives of the saints. New books were even created for this kind of reading. The most famous is *Imitatio Christi* by Thomas à Kempis, the masterpiece of medieval mysticism. Another work, lesser known outside Germany, was *Die Theologia Deutsch* or *Der Frankfurter*, presumably written in the 14th century. It was first printed by Martin Luther (http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theologia_deutsch).

When the ideals of monastic reading were explained, there were frequent references to St. Augustine and St. Gregory. Other representatives of Late Medieval mysticism were also mentioned especially St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153) and Bonaventura (1221–1274). Reading was associated with the mystic union between man, God and Christ.

For example Giulio Negrone, a Genoese Jesuit, cites Bonaventura: "*In lectione itaque, si qua sibi permitti contigerit, non magis quærant scientiam, quam saporem.*" The goal of reading was not so much acquiring knowledge but the taste (*sapor*) of what one is reading. (Negrone 1621: 142)

gorium, vt ibidem docui, quærebat. Addatur
S. Bon. p. 1,
spec. disci-
p. 1. c. 7. idem S. Bonaventura, qui hæc habet in speculo:
In lectione itaque, si qua sibi permitti contigerit, nõ ma-
gis quærant scientiam, quam saporem. Qui loquen-
di modus legitur quoque in alio speculo, quod S.
S. Ber. in
spec. mona-
ch. Bernardo tribuitur: *Post lectionem, inquit, est o-*
randum; & si ad lectionem accedat, non tam quærat
scientiam, quam saporem. Hunc saporem haurie-

Negrone also uses the expression *gustus lectionis spiritualis* (taste of spiritual reading) to describe the proper attitude to reading (Negrone 1621: 144, the extracts are from the books digitised by Google Books):

144 De Lect. Libr. Spirit. Tr. V.
attenti. Ex hac coniunctione oritur voluptas, seu
delectatio. In gustu spiritualis lectionis, sapor est,
vt dixi, perfectio illa superioris ordinis, quę in-
verbis sensisque rerum sacrarum ac diuinarum,
inest. Sensus interior, seu facultas est palatum,
cordis, quo corde superiorem animę partem in-
tellectu ac voluntate instructam intelligo, vt ali-
bi probatum est. Bona dispositio palati huius est
donum Sapientię. Doceor ab eodem Guilielmo,

When the mystics write about reading, their vocabulary is very corporeal.

The Black Death and the renaissance of the love of reading

As mentioned above, the scarcity of books in the Middle Ages was the dominant factor that influenced reading practices and the attitude toward reading. There were too many readers compared to the number of available books. A change in the situation was caused in a macabre way. The Black Death created havoc, especially in the European cities, where most of the readers, students and professors lived. After the catastrophic epidemic, more books were available for the surviving readers. Jacqueline Hamesse says: “Books were accessible again, and the university people, who had, to some extent, lost their taste for reading during the preceding century in their pursuit of a more utilitarian contact with knowledge, rediscovered reading.” (Hamesse 1999: 119) Consequently, the humanists started to collect and search for classical texts, and reintroduce them into circulation. Printing was introduced in Europe in the middle of the 15th century, which further increased the availability of books. During the Renaissance a more aesthetic relationship with literature also became apparent. Here and there, the practices of monastic reading started to be adopted by the lay people as well. (Hamesse 1999: 119)

Reading becomes a tool in religious disputes

Despite a certain rebirth in the individual love of reading after the Renaissance and the invention of printing, the number of people who were actively reading

remained small. The Catholic Church did not favour the individual reading of the Bible, and was opposed to vernacular translations of the Sacred Scriptures. More secular reading was also not encouraged. The kind of rhetoric used to describe monastic reading was not intended for the masses. Until the beginning of the 16th century, the discussion on the ideals and practices of reading was conducted in Latin.

A radical change occurred with the Reformation that increased individual reading in the 16th century to a great extent. Martin Luther and other reformists stressed the need for everyone to personally acquaint themselves with the Holy Scriptures. For the first time, the Bible and other spiritual books were printed in the vernacular in large quantities. Reading became the centre of religious life, something that had previously not been true for common believers.

The Catholic Church felt threatened by the advances of the Reformation and launched a counterattack – the Counter-Reformation, which was supposed to support the inner religious life of the individual members of the church and their personal attachment to Catholic doctrine. This could be accomplished best by reading the appropriate books, and the Catholic Church started to massively distribute texts that supported its positions (Julia 1999). But there was one problem: how to make people read these texts, when the habit of individual reading had not previously been encouraged among the believers. The solution was simple: a love of reading had to be implanted in the people!

The Catholic clergy recommended religious reading in the vernacular to the members of the church. The ideals of this new reading were borrowed from the tradition of monastic reading. Here is a random example from France that was a very decisive battleground between the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation: *Exhortations Monastiques du R. P. Estienne des Francois Xavier, Provincial des Carmes de la Providence de Touraine, sur la Regle de l'Ordre de la B. Heureuse Vierge Marie du Mont-Carmel*, printed in 1687. It probably was meant for nuns, who could not read Latin.

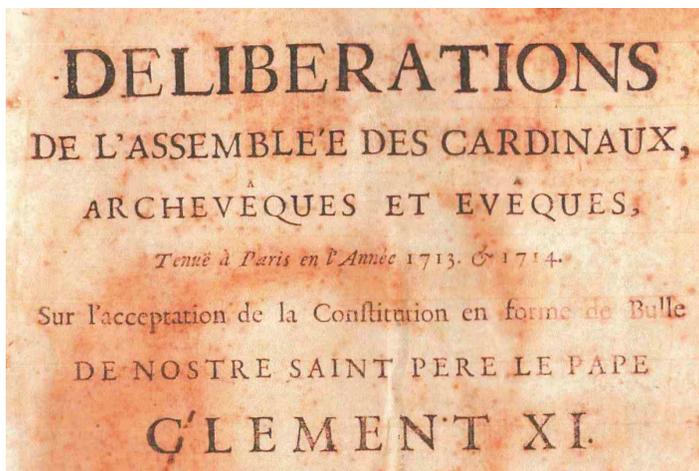
EXHORTATIONS 337380
MONASTIQUES
 DU R. P. ESTIENNE
DES FRANCOIS XAVIER
 PROVINCIAL DES CARMES
 DE LA PROVINCE DE TOURAINE,
 SUR LA REGLE
 DE L'ORDRE DE LA B. HEUREUSE
 VIERGE MARIE DU MONT-CARMEL.
 REVÊUES ET IMPRIMÉES PAR LES
 soins du R. P. PLACIDE DES. IOSEPH, Vicaire,
 Général des Religieuses Carmelites de Rennes
 & de Ploërmel.

Again, the text contains references to and citations from medieval mystics, especially St. Bernard, but now the French text is most important: “Saint Bernard avoit cette pensee quand in disoit qu’en lisant il ne faut tant chercher la science & la connoissance, qu’il faut désirer le goût, le sentiment & la douceur intérieure. *Si ad legendum accedat non tam quærat scientiam quam saporem.*” (Exhortations 1687: 355)

pour le perfectionner. Saint Bernard avoit cette pensée quand il disoit qu’en lisant il ne faut pas tant chercher la science & la connoissance, qu’il faut désirer le goût, le sentiment & la douceur intérieure. *Si ad legendum accedat non tam quærat scientiam quam saporem.*

In this way the rhetoric of the love of reading began to migrate from Latin into French and other vernacular languages.

The dilemma of the Counter-Reformation was that once people started reading, there was risk that they would read things that weren’t appropriate for them (even Martin Luther and the other Reformists were aware of this risk, see Gilmont 1999). The Bible itself contains much that was seen as dangerous for an uneducated, uncontrolled reader, and the same applied to other books. Therefore, meetings of the clergy were organised to formulate instructions for the readers. Such meetings took place in Paris in 1713 and 1714. The results of the discussion at the meeting were printed in 1714 as *Délibérations de l’Assemblée des Cardinaux, Archevêques et Evêques, Tenue à Paris en l’Année 1713 & 1714. Sur l’acceptation de la Constitution en forme de Bulle de Nostre Saint Père le Pape Clément XI* (Paris 1714).



When the principles of religious reading were established, the clergy could, with good conscience, recommend reading to the believers: “Nous y exhortons les fideles, qui se trouvent dans ces religieuses dispositions, heureux, si nous pouvions augmenter en eux le goût de cette sainte lecture; & si nous les voyions mettre à profit les grandes veritez, & les divins precepts, qui y sont renfermez.” (Délibérations 1714: 49)

Nous y exhortons les fideles, qui se trouvent dans ces religieuses dispositions; heureux, si nous pouvions augmenter en eux le goût de cette sainte lecture; & si nous les voyions mettre à profit les grandes veritez, & les divins precepts, qui y sont renfermez.

The secular love of reading

After the vernacular languages were adopted as vehicles of the discourse on reading, it was easy to streamline the phrase *le goût de cette sainte lecture* into *le goût de lecture* or *le goût de la lecture*, or similar phrases in other languages, and transport the discourse on reading and the love of reading into a totally secular domain. This happened more and more starting in the late 17th century in three major European languages – French, English and German. As we have seen (Figure 1), an explosive growth in the use of phrases describing the love of reading in all these languages took place during the late 18th century (Mäkinen 2013a).

One of the prominent figures that may have bolstered the use of the phrases related to the love of reading was Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who praised *le goût de lecture* of the people of Geneva in his *Julie ou la Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761). He also developed a pedagogical theory in *Émile* (1762) that was well suited to the understanding of the individual love of reading (although in the book he did not use the phrase *goût de lecture*). His greatest influence in this matter appeared in his *Confessions* (1782–89), where he speaks at length about reading and talks about his tremendous *goût de la lecture* in his youth. (Mäkinen 2013b, longer version in Finnish: Mäkinen 2013c)

By the end of the 18th century, a consensus seemed to have developed about certain characteristics of the love of reading:

The love of reading

- is an inner drive;
- may be inspired at the right age, in suitable circumstances;
- if not inspired, it may remain latent;
- is difficult to control when unleashed, everyone must find the right balance themselves;
- is part of a complete modern personality;
- reflects the level of education of an individual, group, city, or nation. (Mäkinen 2013a)

Some aspects of this new kind of extensive reading disturbed people at the time. It seemed to imply a threat of an uncontrollable urge to read that might even threaten the health of the reader, and at least his or her social functions. In some cases, the surge in the habit of reading was so dramatic that it made the establishment nervous. This happened particularly in Germany in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, when a feverish debate sprung up in the press and literature about the potential dangers of reading, as new groups of people, such as women, young people and the lower classes, all seemed to be abruptly starting to read actively and daily. At its worst the phenomenon looked pathological and many alarming words were used to describe it, such as *Lesewut* (reading rage), *Lesesucht* (reading lust), and *Leserei* (reading mania). (Wittmann 1999, Mäkinen 2013a)

The death or survival of the love of reading

Despite the dramatic debate on the malignant forms of reading, which was especially vehement in Germany, it is clear that, from the viewpoint of the general historical picture, in the long run, a moderate love of reading was accepted as one of the fundamental features of a modern personality.

Still, until the late 20th century, there was a residual suspicion of reading – it contains a threat. People who read can succumb to the allures of an enthralling text and lose their self-determination. Institutions of modern popular enlightenment, such as the public library, were used to direct people to acceptable literature. Only a few decades ago public libraries were careful to select only some books, and not others, because they were seen as harmful for people's intellectual development. Detective stories, romantic novels for women, and the endless series of juvenile fiction and comics were condemned by critics, librarians and people in the establishment.

It is a historical irony that these ideas were totally subverted at the end of the 20th century. Laments about the wrong kinds of reading were quickly replaced by laments about the death of the love of reading. The books that were condemned a few decades earlier would now be welcomed with open arms, if only people would read them.

Today the problem is not the scarcity of books. We live in a reader's paradise. What we are lacking now is the time and intellectual capacity to take advantage of everything that the world has to offer. The response to this challenge is in many ways similar to the situation in the late Middle Ages. We have developed techniques that help us cope with the situation. At the same time we are worried that a part of our cultural traditions may become endangered. Reading a long narrative with a complex story is one of those traditions.

I believe that the comprehension of the historical character of the love of reading can help us view the possible future scenarios more calmly. Something existed before the modern mass reading culture, and something will follow it.

Many people sense there may be a threat of mediocrity, banality and pure consumerism, if the traditional reading of printed books should disappear. This kind of fear is a recurrent theme in the history of reading and the media in general. However, what history can probably teach us is that total decadence will not result. During the last five hundred years, the number of people who read and the time spent reading, as well as the diversification of the reading material, has continually expanded. However, the average level of sophistication has probably not declined, quite the contrary.

There have always been people who want to read extensive narrative fiction, in whatever form it is available, and they want to read original books in their entirety, just like the monks a thousand years ago. Is it possible that the polarity between these monkish readers and others will be sharper than before? It could happen, but I don't believe it. On the other hand, it seems that popular books are becoming thicker and thicker.

The digital and tablet revolution makes it more convenient than ever before to access reading material, even traditional long narrative texts. There will probably be more readers of narrative fiction than ever before, if the price and the technology are right. The seamless technology itself can create new readers and kindle a new love of reading.

It is also generally believed that people's ability to concentrate has diminished. Many of my students share this belief and say that they have observed it in themselves. I don't doubt their observations, although I suspect that they have been influenced by the current alarmed discussion, especially in Nicholas Carr's book *Shallows*, which many of them have read. People read texts in small bits and then move on to another website, Facebook update or tweet. Is there any coherence in what people are reading and doing? The lack of concentration, as well as the deterioration of memory that many also lament, is probably an illusion. Our world is extremely complex and various media demand our attention: it seems that we are doing quite well, and when the need arises, we can concentrate if the matter requiring attention is important to us.

Do we need the ability to read extensive fiction? Many believe that people cannot learn to read properly if they do not read long fiction at some point in their lives, and that there is a danger that technically bad readers will not develop total reading ability and be cast aside in society.

This concern is at the root of the revival of the discussion on the love of reading. This is exemplified by the Finnish *Lukuinto – läslust* Project, the name of which contains the term "love of reading" in both Finnish and Swedish. The goal of the project is to "strengthen the interest and ability of children and juveniles related to versatile reading and writing" (<http://www.lukuinto.fi/>). Another example is the European project ADORE – Teaching Struggling Adolescents Readers in European Countries. The goal of ADORE is to find ways to support the reading motivation of weak and struggling readers. It is essential to understand that reading is not self-sustaining if a person does not have a personal

desire to read or an inner love of reading. In the background, there are theories of “engaging reading” – another expression for the love of reading. Reading is not only a cognitive operation, but is also affective to a great degree (Garbe & Holle & Weinhold 2010, Guthrie & Wigfield 2000, Guthrie & Davis 2003, Linnakylä & Arffman 2007, and Puksand 2012).

There are other researchers who are more up-to-date on the current trends in reading. In general, I believe that there is no need to expect that all of today’s trends will continue and develop into dominant ones. New trends and memes can appear at any time. Everything is in flux, nothing is certain, but this also means that the future is also not cast in stone.

The modern love of reading is a product of the print culture. What was the situation before the mass production of texts, even before (or simultaneously with) writing? Can there be intelligent life without extensive reading? Can we expect anything better than a return to the Athens of Ancient Greece (if we disregard the slavery, the suppression of women and many other ugly features)? In Athens the production of literature was at a high level, but what about the consumption? In fact, the Athenian plays, poems and philosophy were more oral and virtual than textual. The Athens of Pericles was a buzzing beehive of social media and public discussion. Is that where we are heading?

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