

# **What were considered to be good books in the time of popular enlightenment? The view of philanthropists compared to the view of a farmer**

Lis Byberg, Associate Professor, Phd.

Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences

POB 4 St. Olavs plass

N-0130 Oslo

Norway

Email: [lis.byberg@senior.hioa.no](mailto:lis.byberg@senior.hioa.no)

## **Abstract**

The enlightenment movement in Denmark-Norway had a practical/rational orientation, but was also religiously motivated. Towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century a new genre of book was established: enlightenment books, intended for the common man and woman. The farmer Gunder Knutsen Løvslund acquired many of these. In total he had a collection of more than 160 books. At the time attitudes still differed in terms of what farmers should be reading. Many expressed concern that if farmers were given too much knowledge, they might no longer wish to be farmers. On the other hand some of the philanthropists claimed that farmers should have access to more varied and comprehensive knowledge. The Danish Agricultural Society shared this view and compiled a list of books suitable for farmers. This article reviews Gunder Løvslund's book collection and discusses similarities and differences between his books and the Agricultural Society's selection of books. There is extensive concurrence of what constituted good books (i.e. they are useful), however, there are also differences. The philanthropists did not believe that political or socially critical books were appropriate for the common man. Gunder's book collection shows that the philanthropists probably underestimated the interest of the general public in such literature.

## **Keywords**

18<sup>th</sup> century books, popular enlightenment, private libraries, farmers' book collections

## **INTRODUCTION**

Towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century a new genre of book was established: enlightenment books, intended to be read by the common man and woman. Attitudes still differed in terms of what farmers should be reading and the kind of knowledge to which they should be given access. Several members of the clergy and also officials were concerned that if the farmers were given too much knowledge, they would no longer wish to be farmers, and would seek out other, possibly less laborious, professions. Bishop Bech claimed that "each class must be given an upbringing that is appropriate to the special conditions of his/her class". Thus, in his opinion, the general public did not need to know that much. County governor Moltke of the Akershus diocese was among those warning against the farmer obtaining more knowledge than he needed – if he was to remain a calm and contented citizen of the state. He believed

that the subjects the farmer should be educated in were: “(...) religion, morality, writing and arithmetic, and if possible, those sections of economics, which may guide the farmer in improving the cultivation of his ground, and ennobling for his own good and the good of the State, those products nature has bestowed upon him”.<sup>1</sup> Vicar, Gunder Langberg, also highlighted the need for education in the native language. Consequently, children gained access to words and concepts necessary for thinking (12,160). The principal fear was that farmers would take part in a critical debate on social affairs. Bregnsbo, who has reviewed sermon collections from the period 1775-1800, says of the views of the clergy: “The right to criticize the authorities and participate in public debate was not thought to be applicable to farmers” (2,104). However, for some philanthropists, the attitude that the farmer should remain contentedly within his profession became combined with a desire for the farmer to have access to significantly more varied and comprehensive knowledge than was strictly necessary.

The enlightenment movement in Denmark-Norway had a practical/rational orientation, but was also religiously motivated, as Nettum points out. He has established four points which he believes convey the objective of the period's enlightenment efforts:

1. Enlightenment efforts should provide basic knowledge and professional skills, especially within agriculture, in order to create better material conditions.
2. Enlightenment efforts should contribute to a higher level of morality, produce good citizens, as well as counteract tardiness, apathy, drunkenness, begging etc.
3. Enlightenment efforts should counteract superstition, old prejudices etc.
4. Enlightenment efforts should – through an introduction to environmental research – disseminate the concept of God's greatness (14,27).

Someone who may be regarded as having conducted his enlightenment efforts based on these objectives is Bishop Peder Hansen. He belonged to the group of rational clergymen who had studied in both Halle and Jena. During the period that he was bishop of the diocese of Kristiansand, he worked conscientiously on several causes that were close to his heart. Children and parents alike had to develop a thirst for knowledge and virtue. He believed knowledge was to the soul what healthy and nutritious food was to the body. He bemoaned the fact that the farmer saw the sun rise in the morning and set in the evening but yet knew nothing about where it came from or where it went. The farmer sees the rain and the snow but does not know how the creator brings forth these phenomena, and from the farmer's ignorance about nature, suspicion and fear grow, he claimed. The bishop focused on education, the training of teachers, as well as the establishment of reading societies for the farmers in the diocese as the means of securing knowledge for the farmers and their children. He compiled lists to ensure that they chose the right books. Initially these were handwritten, later he had them printed in his journal. On reviewing these lists I had expected that religious literature would dominate but this was not the case. Approximately 7 % of the titles fell definitively into this category (3,119). The listing of books deemed an appropriate measure for the farming profession and this measure was also chosen by the philanthropists of the Danish Agricultural Society. The members of this society (as in the Norwegian agricultural societies) came from the ranks of the official class and the upper-middle class, but the aim was to reach out to the farmers in order to stimulate clearing new ground, drainage, and the construction of stone fences and barns (15). The Agricultural Society had long supported the

establishment of small book collections for the common people, both through giving away books and awarding them as prizes. However, they were dissatisfied with the kind of books that were being procured locally, and remarked that “not all the collectors have been equally fortunate or exacting in their selections”. One problem was that even though many people genuinely wanted to help the farmers gain access to books, they did not always know which titles were the best or the most appropriate within the individual subject areas. Based on their knowledge of the current situation, the Society decided to compile *Fortegnelse over Skrifter passende for den dansk-norske Landalmue* [Catalogue of books suitable for the Danish-Norwegian farming population] (9).<sup>2</sup> The list included circa 290 entries and contained varied offerings, both in terms of subject choice and level of difficulty. That the list constituted a helpful tool at the time is patently obvious.

The fact that philanthropists, not least within the clergy, established book collections for farmers, or reading societies such as those started by Bishop Peder Hansen in the diocese of Kristiansand,<sup>3</sup> should also be regarded as indicative of the interest in bookish knowledge that existed among the farmers. Both Apelseth (1) and Eide (6) have shown that several farmers also built up their own more varied book collections, some of which achieved unanticipated dimensions. In my own research, I encountered two farmers in Southern Norway who possessed book collections that Bishop Hansen described in glowing terms (11). In this article, I will concentrate on one of these farmers: Gunder Knutsen Løvslund. The Bishop was satisfied with Gunder’s choice of books: “That the man has not collected inappropriately is evidenced by some of the titles which I will here name from his collection which comprises 98 works”(11, 249). Gunder would continue to purchase books until his death around ten years later, at which point his collection comprised some 160 titles. This made closer study of Gunder’s collection an interesting proposition. The fact that the Bishop spoke so highly of him and his books caused me to assume that enlightenment literature would dominate the collection. The collection would therefore distinguish itself significantly from Fet’s principal finding which was that farmers predominantly owned religious literature.

In order to assess the extent to which Gunder’s opinion on what constituted good books corresponded with what someone from the ranks of trendsetting enlightenment men thought farmers should be reading, I chose to carry out a comparison with the Agricultural Society’s list. Today this list is the most comprehensive and systematic source we have in terms of the general consensus on what farmers should read and the kind of knowledge they should acquire. A previous smaller study has demonstrated clear similarities both in terms of subject choice and, to some extent, title choice, between the books in Hansen’s reading society and the books on the Agricultural Society’s list (3, 122).

This article begins with a brief history of farmer Gunder followed by a review of his book collection. Discussion of the similarities and differences between Gunder’s and the Agricultural Society’s selection of books forms the final section of the article.

## **FARMER GUNDER AND HIS CHOICE OF BOOKS**

Allow me to briefly introduce Gunder before proceeding to a discussion of his books. To this end I am primarily dependent on sources from local history.

## A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

Gunder was born in 1744 in the parish of Finsland in the far south of Norway. He was well established locally, having inherited the farm from his father (Gunder's grandfather originally owned the farm). Upon his father's death in 1770, Gunder, the eldest son, took over. He married Ragnhild, the daughter of the neighbouring farmer, and they had nine children. When Gunder died aged 65<sup>4</sup> in November 1809, his eldest son Knud took over. Knud died three years later and the farm passed on to the second-eldest son Kristen (13).

I mention this line of succession for two reasons. Firstly, the sequence of events demonstrates that we are talking about a freehold, which is inherited within the family. Secondly, the probate records that were written at the time of each death give us an insight into the value of the farm. At the time of Gunder's death, the farm was valued at 350 riksdaler (rdl); his personal chattels, including his books, were valued at 406 rdl. When the second-eldest son took over the farm following his brother's death, he had to pay his brothers' widow an inheritance of as much as 550 rdl. According to the Norwegian historian Ståle Dyrvik, the farms of the wealthiest farmers were valued at 800 rdl or more in 1802 (5,189). This group comprised 11 % of farmers. The next group, which represented 27 %, Dyrvik calls "prosperous", and their farms were valued at between 300 and 800 rdl.<sup>5</sup> Gunder's farm clearly belongs in this group. Gunder was a prosperous farmer, but one who could not be described as being amongst the richest farmers in the country. According to Dyrvik, the valuation of a farm was directly related to the ability of the farmer to have money to spend on things other than purely practical objects. In this context, we need to regard books as 'impractical'.

## THE BOOK COLLECTION

From the knowledge we have of Gunder, we know that he genuinely put considerable effort into obtaining the kind of books that interested him. He was by no means content to deal with peddlers or travelling book agents. He kept up to date with new books by reading the *Berlingske Aviser* [a newspaper published by the Berlingske publishing house] in Copenhagen] (11, 248). It is unknown whether or not he had a subscription, or whether he had an agreement with someone in the village, such as the local vicar, whereby he inherited the newspaper after it had been read by everyone at the vicarage. This would indicate a high probability that the books he purchased were recent books. The fact that the collection increased from 98 books in 1799 when the Bishop made his acquaintance (11, 239) to approximately 160 titles, according to the official probate certificate that was issued in 1810,<sup>6</sup> further indicates that the books were relatively new. It would seem that Gunder's book procurement increased significantly after the Bishop clearly indicated that the books he was purchasing were good books. We should not exclude the possibility that a number of the books he owned may have been bought at a local auction. However, I believe that he also bought relatively new books there too, because a book sold at auction does not necessarily mean that the book is old. My own research has shown that where auction catalogues provide information on the year that books were printed, there is a high probability that some books are only 10 years old, and not 100 years old (3).

The probate records provide us with the most comprehensive overview of Gunder's books; my review of his collection is therefore based on these records.<sup>7</sup> I found it expedient to divide Gunder's books into the same 14 subject categories used by the philanthropists of the Agricultural Society in their *Fortegnelse over Skrifter passende for den dansk-norske*

*Landalmue* [Catalogue of books suitable for the Danish-Norwegian farming population]. The subject categories are also discussed in the same sequence as they appear in the Society's list.

### **Religious and edifying books**

Gunder had several books that fall into this category. Besides editions of the Bible, he had several books of sermons: Luther's and Gerner's *Huspostiller* [Homilies], as well as Andersen's *Ungdommens Huspostill* [The Young Person's Homily]. He also owned *Pontoppidans forklaring til Luthers katekismus* [Pontoppidan's Explanation of Luther's Small Catechism]. One would expect Norwegian farmers to own the abovementioned titles. He had two books by Balle on reading the Bible, and a range of edifying works, among them works by Bastholm, such as *Viisdoms og Lyksaligheds Lære* [The Study of Wisdom and Happiness], and a book entitled *Den bedende Hyrde* [The Praying Shepherd]. Gunder also had Johann Arnd's *Lyset i Mørket, eller Fire Bøger om Den sande Christendom* [Light in the Darkness, or Four Books on True Christianity] a puritanical text, popular among Norwegian farmers according to Jostein Fet (8). On the other hand, there were certainly far fewer farmers who owned Ludvig Holberg's *Almindelige Kirke-Historie* [General Church History]. We should assume the same is true of the two books listed as *Kirkeritual* [Church Rituals] and *Betragtninger over Kirke-Skikke* [Reflections on Church Rites].

### **On the moral obligations of man**

Based on the Agricultural Society's list, we would expect to find ethics; obligations to oneself, other people and, not least, animals in this subject category. Among the books included in Gunder's collection, I mention Hans Jørgen Birch's *Dydelære for Børn i Tankevers og bibelske Sprog* [Ethics for Children in verse and Biblical language], as well as Bastholm's *Betragtninger over Selvmord* [Reflections on Suicide]. He also purchased a book entitled *Medlidelighed blant Menneskene* [Compassion in Human Beings]. However, the most well-known book is probably Laurits Smith's *Forsøg til en fuldstændig Lærebygning om Dyrenes Natur og Bestemmelse, og Menneskets Pligter mod Dyrene* [Attempt at a Complete Course of Instruction on the Nature and Condition of Animals and Human Obligation towards Animals]. This was a book that strongly opposed the mistreatment of animals. The author explains the reason for the existence of animals in the world and God's intentions for them, and argues passionately that animals should be treated with dignity. My analysis of book auctions in Norway shows that the book was also popular among the official and middle classes of the day.

### **On world events**

Stories and biographies of famous men were to be found on the Agricultural Society's list. Gunder's collection includes several biographies, among them *Kong Carl den 12: Levnet*; [The Life of King Carl XII], *Friederich den Store af Preussen, hans Levnetsbeskrivelse* [Frederick the Great of Prussia, a Description of his Life] and *Buonapartes Levnet og Bedrifter, samt hans Dagbog over Felittoget i Egypt* [Bonaparte's Life and Works and his Diary of the Egyptian Campaign]. The latter must be regarded as having been a highly current

work at the time Gunder purchased it. It is obvious that war piqued his interest; he bought *Historisk Dagbog om Kriger* [*A Historical Journal of Wars*] as well as *Om de fiendtlige Langang paa England* [*On the hostile landings in England*] by Nyegaard. His interest in biographies was all-encompassing. He purchased *Mærkværdige Mænds Levnetsbeskrivelser* [*Lives of Remarkable Men*] by Salzman, which discussed the lives of Franklin, Egede, Columbus and Penn. Gunder's interest was not limited to famous men; we find in his collection Holberg's *Adskillige Heltinders og navnkundige Damers sammenlignende Historier* [*A Comparative History of Several Heroines and renowned women*]. More general historical works also appealed to Gunder, such as *Kongeriget Dannemark, Norges og Hertugdømmet Slesvig Holstens Historie* [*The History of the Kingdoms of Denmark, Norway and the Duchy of Schleswig-Holstein*] in four parts and Werfel's *Almindelig Verdens Historie* [*General History of the World*].

### **On bringing up children**

Several books on child-rearing were published at the end of the 1700s, among them the hugely popular *Peder Jensen eller Anvisning til en fornuftig Børneopdragelse* [*Peder Jensen or Instructions for Sensible Child-rearing*] by Salzman. The book was commonly known as "Peder Jensen", with no specification of its author; everyone was familiar with the book in question. Gunder did not have this book in his collection, or indeed any other book on this subject. This is surprising because books on child-rearing enjoyed a wide readership within the population. Could the explanation for this be that the book had already been passed on to one of his sons? Or perhaps Gunder believed he and his family could successfully navigate this area without the aid of literature.

### **On our knowledge of the world**

Gunder was extremely interested in information about other countries in the form of geography books such as Kierulf's *Geographie for Ungdommen* [*Geography for Young People*], Holberg's *Geographie eller Jordbeskrivelse, ziiret med behørige Land-Kortet af Nicolai Jonge* [*Geography or a Description of the World, illustrated by associated country maps by Nicolai Jonge*] or Hübner's *Geographie* [*Geography*]. A book such as Lytchen's *Om Staternes Echonomi* [*On the Economy of States*] demonstrates the same kind of interest. He also read accounts of more specific locations closer to home, such as Haubert's *Beskrivelse over Kiøbenhavn* [*Copenhagen Described*] or *Beskrivelse over Christiansborg* [*Christiansborg Described*]. Travel literature was very popular and Gunder purchased Campe's *Nyeste reisebeskrivelser* [*Modern Travelogue*]. This work comprised 17 parts and was an unexpected find in a farmer's book collection.

### **Mathematics and biology**

According to the Agricultural Society's list, this subject category encompasses arithmetic books and astronomy; Gunder owned books from within both these genres. He had purchased one arithmetic book: Christian Cramer's *Aritmetica tyronica eller en grundig Vejvisning practice at lære ald fornøden Huus- og Handels-regning* [*Aritmetica tyronica or a*

*comprehensive practical Guide to essential Budgeting for Household and Commerce*]. Several farmers owned this book. Jostein Fet came across three copies of *Cramers Regnebog* [*Cramer's Arithmetic Book*], as it was commonly called, in his investigation of the administration of the farmers' estates. Additionally, Gunder had Søborg's *Stjerne Catechismus* [*Catechism of the Stars*].

## Natural history

Books about plants and animals fall into this subject category. It appears that Gunder had just two books: Hammer's *Flora Norvegica* [*Norwegian Flora*] and Esaias Fleischer's *Forsøg til en Natur-Historie, indeholdende vor Klodes Udvikling ved Adams Skabelse, og den dermed ved Syndflodens foretagne Forandring* [*Attempt at a Natural History including the Development of our Earth upon the Creation of Adam and through the Changes brought about by the Bygone Flood*]. The latter of these two titles consisted of 13 volumes, so we can nonetheless assert that this subject category constituted a significant proportion of the collection.

## Rural households

This is a subject category which understandably was especially relevant for farmers. Here we would expect to find books on such topics as agricultural law, land cultivation, housekeeping for girls or recipes for housewives. Economic issues pertaining to agriculture also fall into this category, together with books on fruit cultivation, forestry and animal diseases.

A number of Gunder's books belong in this category, although perhaps not as many as I had anticipated. Here we find *Bog om det norske Skogvæsen*, [*Book on Norwegian Forestry*] Wamberg's *Hauge Dyrkning* [*Garden Cultivation*] and Abildgaard's *Dansk Heste- og QvægLæge, eller Haandbog for Bondestanden til Vejledning ved de almindeligste Sygdomme hos Heste, Hornqvæg, Faar og Sviin* [*Danish Horse and Cattle Doctor, or a Handbook for Farmers with Guidance on the Most Common Diseases in Horses, Horned Cattle, Sheep and Swine*]. A book that promised to increase the farmer's income was Carl Gust Bøge's *Sikre Erfaringer og paalidelige Raad til Velstand og Formue. Eller den ved mange Aars egne Forsøg erfarne Svenske Landmand* [*Solid Experience and Reliable Advice on Wealth and Fortune. Or the Swedish farmer's Own Attempts Over Many Years*].

There are several legal books in Gunder's collection; some are especially intended for the farmer, others are more general. Both *Kong Christian den Femtis Norske Lov* [*King Christian V's Norwegian Law*] and Svend Stenersen's *Nyttig lovkundskab for den norske Landmand* [*Useful Legal Knowledge for the Norwegian Farmer*] were included in the collection. He had also purchased an unspecified *Dansk Lovbog* [*Danish Law Book*] together with a two-volume edition of Hagerup's *Dansk lovkyndighed* [*Danish Legal Proficiency*]. I am uncertain as to whether this could be the same *Den norske Bondes juridiske Pligter og Rettigheder* [*Legal Obligations and Rights of the Norwegian Farmer*] by Matthias Hagerup, of which Jostein Fet discovered two copies in his investigation of farmers' probate records (8,364). It is well known that Norwegian farmers owned legal books and availed themselves of the legal system to promote their own interests. What is unusual, however, is that Gunder owned so many books of this type.

## On various arts and processes

Gunder had two books on brewing beer: *Malms om Øllbrygning* [*Malms on Brewing*] and *Om Brændeviin og Øllbrygning* [*On Distilling and Brewing*]. He also had two books about colour dying: *En Fuldstændig Farve-Bog* [*A Complete Guide to Dying*] and Werfel's *Nye Farvebog for Fruentimmer* [*New Book on Dying for Women Housewives*]. Furthermore, a certain *Maler- Forgylder og Lakerbog* [*Painting, Gilding and Varnishing Book*] was included in his collection. He also owned a *Fiskerbog* [*Fishing Book*] and, somewhat more surprising, Molberg's book *Om Salt Vands Fiskerie* [*On Salt-Water Fishing*]. This is surprising because Gunder definitely did not live on the coast, but lived a considerable distance inland and thus far away from saltwater. The fact that he nonetheless bought this book is yet more evidence that his thirst for knowledge was not limited to things that were close and useful to him.

## On the mother tongue

Anyone in Norway around 1800 who used the term “mother tongue” in connection with books and learning to read, was referring to the Danish language. Even though one spoke in one's local dialect, one wrote and read in Danish. Gunder had Jens Leth's *Danske Glossarium* [*Danish Glossary*], as well as two textbooks, both Rasmussen's *Læsebog* [*Reading Book*] and Morten Hallager's *Forsøg til en Læse-Øvelses-Bog* [*Attempt at a Book of Reading Exercises*] in his collection. Formula books were popular at the time. These books demonstrated how to draw up contracts, wills and commercial documents, and also letters for occasions such as weddings, funerals and baptisms. Gunder had one such book, which was given the brief description of *Formularbok* [*Formula book*] and which comprised information on the administration of estate documents.

## Health books

By the end of the 1700s there was an increased knowledge of medical treatment at a time when access to doctors was extremely limited. Various types of medical handbook were popular – not least with Gunder. He purchased both updated health journals such as Thode's *Sundheds-Journal*, [*The Journal of Health*] published in two volumes in Copenhagen 1794-1797, and other general medical works such as Fauste's *Sundheds Catechismus* [*Catechism of Health*] and Smith's *Lægebog* [*Medical Handbook*]. The majority of the books in the collection are of a more general nature but there are also examples of other books that address specific diseases, such as Mangor's *Underretning om Radesyakens Kiendetegn, Aarsag og Helbredelse* [*Information on the Symptoms, Causes and Cure of Rade Disease*]. In the first instance, it would be easy to assume that Gunder had Rade Disease (a serious form of syphilis) but at the same time it should be borne in mind that a large number of books on precisely this disease were published towards the end of the 1700s. The disease could even be said to have been “fashionable” at that time. It is just as likely that Gunder purchased a book on the subject because he was an informed individual who wanted to learn and possibly spread knowledge about the disease. Perhaps he also wanted to help restore to health somebody close to him who suffered from the disease. That Gunder regarded moral conduct as a contributing factor to good health can also be deduced from the fact that he had also purchased *Sundheds Sædelære* [*The Ethics of Health*].

Two other genres popular at the time were guidance on the treatment of individuals who were apparently dead, and books for pregnant and birthing women. Neither appears to have been of interest to Gunder, as I did not find any books on these subjects within his collection.

### **General information and pastimes**

On the Agricultural Society's list, this group encompasses vastly different kinds of books from guidance on eradicating superstition, tales of life in villages, various dialogues and narratives, entertaining anecdotes, as well as books we would characterise as fiction.

Several of Gunder's books fit easily into this category. Two titles by Morten Hallager, *Hjelpemidler til Overtroens Udryddelse og Forstandens Oplysning [Guidance on the Eradication of Superstition and the Restoration of Reason]* and *Om Hexemestere, Troldqvinder, [On Witchmasters, Troll women]* were popular, but probably not as popular among Norwegian farmers as the author may have wished.<sup>8</sup> That said, the author had aroused Gunder's interest. I think this can be traced back to the influence of Bishop Hansen in Kristiansand, since these were books he promoted in his reading societies (3, 176). I also believe that the Bishop's influence was behind the purchase of *Loland Læseselskab [Loland Reading Society]* and *Biskop Hansen om Skolevæsenet [Bishop Hansen on the Educational System]*. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that the parish priest Hans Strøm's essay collection *Tilskueren paa Landet [The Countryside Observer]* was included in Gunder's collection since Strøm wrote about a completely different part of Norway, Northwestern Norway. Gunder purchased several books for entertainment purposes, such as Salzman's *Constants curiøse Levnet og besynderlige Fataliteter [Constant's Curious Life and Peculiar Misfortunes]*. *Skinderhans Levnet [The Life of Skinderhans]* also sounds somewhat amusing. The collection also included several books by Ludvig Holberg: *Niels Klims Reise under Jorden [Niels Klim's Underground Travels]*, *Jeppe på Bierget [Jeppe of the Hill]*, *Comedier og Epistler [Comedies and Epistles]*. Comedies were apparently also popular among sections of the farming community, not solely within the middle class and the civil service, since Gunder had purchased two additional comedies: *Wandahl's Moderen, eller hun som ikke kan vælge [The Mother, or She who cannot Choose]* and *Stedmoderen [The Stepmother]*. Petter Dass' *Nordlands Trompet [The Trumpet of the North Country]* was also found in the collection. Gunder liked fables; he owned both *Æsops Fabler [Aesop's Fables]* and C.F. Gellert's *Fabler og Fortællinger [Fables and Tales]*. Of course, fables were entertaining for children too, as in Hallager's *Nytaarsgave [New Year's Gift]*, or as conveyed by the comprehensively entitled: *Smaa muntre Historier og Fotællinger, blandede med fornøielige Samtaler, indrettede efter Børns Fatte-Evne for at opvække deres Læselyst, og tilligen at vænne dem til Dyd, og en artig Opførsel baade hjemme og i Selskab med andre Børn [Short, Cheerful Stories and Narratives, Combined with Amusing Dialogues, Adapted for the Comprehension of Children in order to Awaken their Love of Reading as well as to Accustom them to Virtue and Good Behaviour both in the Home and in the Company of other Children]*. Gunder had his own children's reading in mind when he purchased books.

### **Songs and ballads**

Gunder had a long list of relatively modern songbooks. He had both *Catechismus Sange [A Catechism of Songs]*<sup>9</sup> and *Evangelii Sange [Gospel Songs]*<sup>10</sup> by Petter Dass. These books were very popular with farmers. Jostein Fet found 257 and 195 copies respectively of these

two titles in the probate records he investigated (8). That Claus Frimand is represented through the inclusion of two songbooks is also not unexpected. Other songbooks had titles such as *Selskabs Sange; Sange til Tidsfordriv for Danske og Norske Borgere* [Society Songs; Songs for the Pastimes of Danish and Norwegian Citizens] or *50 nye Viser* [50 New Ballads]. Here too were older titles such as Anders Sørensen Wedel and Peders Syv's *Kjempebog* [Big Book], which had the full title of *Et hunderede udvalde Danske Viser om allehaande merckelige Krigs-Bedrifter, som sig her udi Riget ved gamle Kemper, naffnkundige Konger oc ellers forneme Personer begiffuit haffuer* [One Hundred Selected Danish Ballads about a Multitude of Intriguing Wartime Events Carried out by Great Warriors, Well-known Kings and other Prominent]. The book described as *en gl. Bog 300 Hester er kaldet* [an old book called "300 Horses"] probably also belongs in this category.

### Education of the Intellect and the Application of General Knowledge

Gunder owned a couple of textbooks which deserve a place in this category. One of them by Hallager is a book for schools and, as the title states "the life of the middle classes": *Kort Begreb af de Menneskelige Færdigheder og Kundskaber. Indeholdende en kort Udsigt over Menneskets Naturhistorie, dets borgerlige Indretninger, Næringsveie og Trang, samt hvorledes denne afhjelpes ved Kunster, Haandverker og Haandarbeider* [A Concise Summary of Human Skills and Knowledge. Containing a Brief Overview of Man's Natural History, his Social Status, Sustenance and Basic Needs, as well as how these are nourished by Arts, Crafts and Handiwork.]. The book provides a great deal of practical knowledge and goes beyond traditional farming. Perhaps he bought this book out of curiosity, to gain a personal insight into new arenas, or perhaps he bought it as a textbook for those of his sons not destined to take over the farm. As previously mentioned, his was a freehold farm, which meant that the farm would be passed down to the eldest son; the other sons would have to find alternative ways to earn a living.

### DID GUNDER AND THE PHILANTHROPISTS SHARE THE SAME OPINION OF WHAT CONSTITUTED A "GOOD" BOOK?

The utility value of the book appears to have been a key factor for both parties, but were they preoccupied with the same subject areas? We can make a comparison and, once again, the Agricultural Society's catalogue of books represents the view of the philanthropists (9).

Let us first compare the relative distribution of books over the individual subject areas in Gunder's collection in relation to the Agricultural Society's recommended list:

Subject area	Agricultural Society	Gunder Knudsen Løvsland
Religious and edifying books	(4) 9.5	(1) 17.9
On the moral obligation of man	6.9	3.7
On world events	8.7	(2) 13.0
On bringing up children	3.6	-
On our knowledge of the World	(3) 10.2	6.2
Mathematics and biology	5.5	3.7
Natural history	4.0	1.2

Rural households	(1)	19.6	(4)	10.5
On various arts and processes		4.4		4.9
On the mother tongue		1.5		2.5
Health		3.6		6.8
General information and pastimes	(2)	16.4	(2)	13.0
Ballads and songs		2.9		8.6
Education of the intellect and the application of general knowledge		3.3		1.2
Uncategorised				8

The subject area “Religion and edifying works” is clearly the largest in terms of Gunder’s collection, while “Rural households” is the largest subject area for the Agricultural Society. From Fet’s investigations, we know that religious literature was the dominant genre in the probate records of farmers (8). For Gunder too these books constitute the largest subject category. That “Rural households” forms the largest subject category for the Agricultural Society is not particularly surprising. The last of the three subjects that make the top four for both parties is “General information and pastimes”. The last of the top four subjects is however a different matter. Where the Agricultural Society has “On the state of the world” as one of its top four subjects, Gunder has “On global events”. Here, it is Gunder’s interest in history and biography that is the decisive factor. The Agricultural Society lists several books on geography and travel. Gunder owned a travelogue in 13 volumes, which demonstrated his interest in this subject.

The overriding impression after carrying out the above comparison is that the farmer, Gunder Løvsland, had built up a private library which, in terms of subjects, demonstrated a high degree of convergence with what prevailing philanthropists recommended as relevant reading material for the rural peasant. We are referring here to the enlightenment agents who wanted farmers to have access to a higher level of knowledge than was strictly necessary.

In addition to the similarities described above, a degree of divergence is also apparent. On one point in particular, Gunder’s selection of books differs significantly from what the philanthropists of the Agricultural Society considered appropriate reading for farmers.

### **Political literature**

Gunder’s book collection contained several titles which today we would classify as contemporary social literature, perhaps even “political” literature. *Politisk Arbejde Ite Samling* [Political Work, First Collection] is to be found among his books. So too *Politisk Haandbog med den lette Regnekunst* [Political Handbook of Simple Arithmetic]. A book by Holberg that also falls naturally into the category of social literature is *Dannemarks og Norges geistlige og verdslige Staat eller Beskrivelse nu anden gang forandret efter nærværende Tidens Tilstand* [The Clerical and Worldly State of Denmark and Norway, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition Adapted according to the Current State of Affairs]. Holberg argued passionately for freedom of expression and against censorship. This is also seen in *Niels Klim*, which can be read as an indirect critique of King and Government, according to Anne-Hilde Nagel.<sup>11</sup> Gunder had also purchased Barth and Franklin’s book *Om Trykkefriheden* [On the Freedom of the Press]. Many Danish people were sceptical of the allodial rights system, among them Thyge Rohe.<sup>12</sup> Rohe argued fiercely against the conception of a “native country” as being the

country in which one was born, whose language one spoke, and with whose past one was familiar. On the contrary, he believed that King and Country needed a large number of immigrants or “strangers”, as he called them. His standpoint was “my native country is where I live”. The allodial system was an obstacle (7,163). It is therefore interesting to see that Gunder had purchased a book entitled *Om odelsretten [Concerning Allodial Rights]*. He also had books on the relationship between Denmark and Norway such as *Norske Lands Pligte og Rettigheter [The Obligations and Entitlements of the Nation of Norway]*. Similarly, he had a book entitled *Tilstandens Bedømmelse [Assessment of the Current Situation]* and one on neutrality whose title is indecipherable from the records, resulting in my only being able to identify only this one word - neutrality. One of the books is registered as *Om Fortigelses Commisionen [Concerning the Conciliation or Arbitration Courts]*.

In terms of “political” books, I have found only one on the Agricultural Society’s list: *Niels Klim*. We can safely say that it was this book’s other characteristics (apart from its social criticism) that resulted in its inclusion. Those compiling the list either did not register Holberg’s scepticism or they judged that the farmers would not detect the criticism and would simply read the book as an entertaining novel, since farmers were not supposed to discuss political matters or the actions of the authorities (this was the preserve of the middle class and the civil service). The Society’s list reflects the type of knowledge that it thought the rural peasantry should have access to. The majority of people continued to believe that rural peasants should not be given access to knowledge that could cause them to become dissatisfied with their lot. The Agricultural Society undoubtedly had this in mind when they compiled their list, but I remain uncertain as to whether or not the list should be regarded as a censorship device. The fact that more socially critical subjects are excluded is probably more an expression of the prevailing consensus that such subjects were not suitable for farmers.

On this point the authorities were out of step with the opinion of part of the farming population. Looking at this section of Gunder’s book collection we get an impression of a farmer who concerned himself with decisive principles in society, one that is interested in seeing an issue from different perspectives and one that is open to new ideas. Gunder comes across as someone who possibly had a critical view of certain issues and who therefore purchased books to learn about the opinions of others even though these may be books that the authorities deemed inappropriate reading material for farmers.

## WAS GUNDER PART OF A FARMERS’ REVOLT?

The pietistic lay reader, Hans Nielsen Hauge, visited Southern Norway around 1800. Hauge was hugely critical of the rationalistic clergy, and consequently of the authorities. Could Gunder’s interest in socially critical literature have had any connection with the Haugean movement? I believe we can safely discount this. Three factors support my view. Firstly, the combination of books in Gunder’s collection testifies to a thirst for knowledge within a wide spectrum of subject areas, to a reader who reads copiously and expansively. This is in contrast to Hauge’s followers, who engaged in intensive reading of religious texts in order to internalize them.<sup>13</sup> The fact the Bishop praises Gunder so unreservedly also rules out such a connection, as does Gunder’s positive attitude towards the Bishop. Bishop Hansen was to a large extent representative of the rationalistic clergy whom Hauge opposed. If Gunder had had ties to the Haugean movement, this would have ruled out a mutually respectful

relationship between himself and the Bishop. In 1804 the Bishop sent a letter to the chancery in which he raised the issue of Hans Nielsen Hauge.<sup>14</sup> The Pietists later claimed that Hansen's letter was a contributing factor in Hauge's arrest.<sup>15</sup>

I was also unable to find any links between Gunder and the farmers' rebellion in Agder in the 1780s. However, this does not exclude the possibility that he had heard about it and that it aroused an interest in gaining insight into social issues. The fact that he had purchased a book on the freedom of the press could perhaps be connected to the introduction of significant limitations on the freedom of the press in Denmark-Norway in 1799. His relatively large collection of legal literature could have been built up to ensure the required level of legal knowledge to protect against potential encroachments on the part of the local officials. In this, he is part of a long tradition: Norwegian farmers have always known to safeguard their interests through the legal system.

## CONCLUSION

Gunder Knutsen Løvslund was a farmer who owned a relatively large and well-run farm in an area that was deeply rooted in tradition. He lived here with his wife and nine children. He took a great interest in books and reading. In terms of the amount of money he devoted to his book collection, we could perhaps go so far as to call this interest a passion. Sources show that he passed on his interest in books to his children. We know this because his children bought one third of the books at auction after his death.<sup>16</sup>

The era in which Gunder lived was characterised by enlightenment efforts aimed at farmers and common people. Although many believed the farmers should only be given access to a limited amount of knowledge, others, such as the Danish Agricultural Society and Bishop Hansen, believed that farmers needed knowledge in many areas, such as natural history, geography, history, songs and poems, and of course books on the cultivation of soil and farm management. This would appear to correspond to a large extent with Gunder's interests. His choice of books has clear similarities with the Agricultural Society's recommendations. There were differing views on the kind of knowledge farmers should acquire but also a general consensus on the importance of farmers remaining satisfied with their profession. Farmers should not take part in social debate or criticism of the authorities. Nevertheless, Gunder purchased books on both social relations and contemporaneous political issues such as the allodial rights system and freedom of the press. On this point and in terms of scope and other content, his book collection differs from Fet's discoveries pertaining to the kinds of books owned by farmers.

There is therefore extensive concurrence between the respective assessments of the philanthropists and Gunder the farmer of what constituted good books that were worth reading, and that justified their expense. However, there were also differences. The philanthropists did not believe that political or socially critical books were appropriate for the common man, but perhaps they underestimated the interest of the general public in such literature. On the other hand, the philanthropists were not so preoccupied with religious literature. They prioritized other genres; the farmers continued to read religious books without raising concerns among the philanthropists. In conclusion, and in response to this article's opening question concerning what constituted good books, the general answer is, broadly speaking, *useful* books.

## Notes:

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Parts of this article have earlier been published in Norwegian in *Heimen*, nr. 2, 2011.

<sup>1</sup> Riksarkivet. Cancellibreve 1795, pakke: 4. Kvartal, legg: oktober, nr. 4811. Citation from Solerød, (16,18).

<sup>2</sup> Published in Copenhagen 1807.

<sup>3</sup> Bishop Hansen, background and activity in Kristiansand diocese is described in-depth in Byberg 1997 (3). See also Byberg 2007 (4), for discussion of the Bishop's involvement in the establishment of schools in Kristiansand.

<sup>4</sup> Statsarkivet I Kristiansand. Skannet Ministeralbok A1/2, Finsland sogn I Bjelland prestegjeld, 1793-1815.

<sup>5</sup> Dyrvik divides the farms into two additional groups based on valuations: "the middle group", 32%, 150 to 300 rdl., and "the poorest", 30% less than 150 rdl.

<sup>6</sup> Statsarkivet I Kristiansand. Mandal skifteprotokoll, nr. 14a, fol. 307-313.

<sup>7</sup> Here we must allow for the possibility that certain books may have been excluded from the administration of the estate. Wife, Ragnhild, died in 1818, even though administration of the couple's joint estate took place in 1810. I have been unable to locate any later records pertaining to the administration of her estate.

<sup>8</sup> Fet did not find any of them in the probate records he investigated.

<sup>9</sup> *D. Morten Luthers lille Katekismus, forfattet i beqvemme Sange undr føielige Melodier. [D. Morten Luther's Small Catechism]*

<sup>10</sup> *Epistler og Evangelier sangvis, forfattet udi beqvemme Melodier, componeret.* Epistlerne af Sten Wirtmand. Evangelierne af Petter Dass.

<sup>11</sup> Lecture: *Tanker om demokrati på 1700-tallet.* De norske historikerdagene, **Telemark** University College, 19 June 2010.

<sup>12</sup> See e.g. *Danemark og Norges Fordringer til hverandre, or Tanker om Kærlighed til Fædrelandet.*

<sup>13</sup> See Trygve Riiser Gundersen's informative article on this form of reading Gundersen 2011 (10).

<sup>14</sup> Christiansands bispearkiv, Biskopens Copiebog 1801-1814, s. 253. Here cited from Byberg 1997 (3).

<sup>15</sup> I disagree. See Byberg 1997 (3, 59ff.)

<sup>16</sup> Statsarkivet I Kristiansand. Mandal sorenskriveris auksjonsprotokoll nr. 4 (1807-1812), fol. 200b.

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