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From readers' advisory to literary advocacy – a conceptual exploration

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Introduction. This article departs from an observation that current practices of readers advisory (litteraturformidling) in public libraries tend to prioritize readers' demands, taste, or contextual matters on the expense of literature itself. We ask what it means to put literature first and how research can underpin such practices.

Method. In a conceptual and exploratory study departing from Gerard Genette's work on the paratext we draw inter alia on theory of literature, pragmatic philosophy, and the legislation on public libraries.

Analysis. By way of conceptual inquiries, we analyse what it would mean for the librarian to advocate works, collections, and other cultural artefacts in the library.

Results. We have developed an understanding of literary advocacy foregrounding five methodological devices: 1) listening carefully to literature; 2) talking on behalf of literature by articulating the reading experience; 3) addressing the reader as one that wishes to discover and find new ways of seeing; 4) cultivating the art of selection; and 5) attending to the democratic mandate of libraries and taking a position.

Conclusions. Professional librarianship in terms of literary advocacy would mean to negotiate democratic values relative to the singularity of the work and relative to all the selections the advocate has to make. Our result then points towards a "tool" for professional research on the literary practices of public libraries too.

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Introduction

The topics of bringing books and readers together, of making literature visible or usable, of what, how, where, and for what reason literature becomes available to the public, have always been central to the practices of public librarianship. In this paper, we argue that a reconceptualization of readers' advisory (litteraturformidling) as literary advocacy in the context of public libraries will enable us to rethink professional practice as well as the methodologies for researching such practices.

While current research and practice seem to prioritize readers' needs and demands, we argue that putting the object, the literature first, may give us the required distance to see both the role of the advisor and the reader anew. We see it from field work as well as in our practice as teachers, that written and oral, digital, or analogue practices in libraries or class – in addition to students' exams – are disconnected from, and lack motivation in, the literary texts which they are supposed to say something about. For example, we see how external criteria such as originality or complexity are used without further argument, or that young adult literature is presented exclusively in terms of plot, emphasizing suspense and external drama in a way that makes all texts seem alike.

While several researchers with different projects have touched upon this incongruity (Balling and Grøn, 2012; McKechnie, 2016), we have not seen actual efforts within library research to theorize advocacy as a subjective practice founded in the object: literature itself. Our effort to approach this breach is a conceptual exploration towards a theoretical understanding foregrounding a set of methodological devices for practices and reflection guided by the question of what it means to put literature first.

Literature as a point of departure – a conceptual background

In this article, we depart from an understanding of literature as an artefact that has an objective and material dimension of being present – as hard cover books or texts embedded in digital devices. Book historian Andrew Piper says it neatly. '*Books will always be there. That is what they are by definition. There.*' (Piper, 2012, p. xi). Further, literature refers to how this objective structure demands a subjective reader to be fulfilled (Ricoeur, 2001). This implies an aesthetic mode of reading that includes, but is not limited to, poetry, fiction, and novels. Depending on the reader and situation, other genres may be read aesthetically too. Aesthetic reading involves senses, feelings, thoughts, and memories, as opposed to efferent reading, which typically seeks information to fill a knowledge gap (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 32-33).

In a North American Context, readers' advisory is a *'compact term that has been around for over a century [enjoying] a shared understanding among LIS professionals across the board'* (Dali and McNiff, 2020, p. 1051; 2019, p. 571). Like its Scandinavian counterpart, litteraturformidling, which literally means dissemination or mediation of literature, readers' advisory typically addresses literature asking for an aesthetic mode of reading. While practical scholarly training for public librarianship understood as a broad field of practices enabling books and readers to meet, emerged gradually as public libraries were established, systematic efforts to understand mediation theoretically did not really start up until the beginning of our century.

In Scandinavian research on readers' advisory, sociologist Dag Solhjell's work on the Norwegian institution of art has been influential. He defines mediation as all that which enables contact between, fills in and supplies the space between the work and spectator (Solhjell, 2001, p. 20-40). The core of Solhjell's thinking is the concept of the paratext that literary theorist Gerard Genette explains as all that which surrounds a work and makes it present in the world (Genette, 1997, p. 1). It could be the cover of a book, a discussion, a book-talk, a foreword, a review, or even the author's name (brand). In other words, it is all that which gives attention to, enables, develops, or enhances the understanding and existence of a novel or a poem. In library research, the paratext has come to be understood as that which points at and makes a certain text visible, and that which establishes the context in which the reading takes place (Grøn, 2010; Tveit, 2004; Skøtt, 2018).

In a cultural policy perspective, the field of readers' advisory, or literary mediation, grew out of the objective of democratizing culture in bringing people into contact with good or excellent art and literature. It was not before the 70s that readers' interests and values became more of a focal point (Balling, 2009; Vestheim, 1997, pp. 356-358). The broader changes in cultural norms that then took place also challenged literary standards, genres, and values. This included a shift in the attention of public libraries from the works themselves to different readers' and reading groups' needs and demands (Jochumsen and Hvenegaard Rasmussen, 2006). Our claim is that this bias also holds for current research, which emphasises the experience of reading (Balling, 2009; Balling and Grøn, 2012; Rothbauer et. al, 2016) or its effects and benefits for the individual reader as reflected in the growing interest in literature and health issues (Brewster, 2018). This leaves us with a knowledge gap in mediation of literature, not least concerning our question of what it actually means in practice to put literature, not the reader nor the context, first.

However, the picture is of course more complex. In practice as well as research, literature and reader depend on each other. An emphasis on the reader may well involve attention towards literature too. Two short examples may illustrate and nuance our point of departure. First, there is the Readers' Advisory movement that spread in public libraries in line with the theses laid out in Joyce G. Saricks' books (2001; 2005).

Aiming to match book and reader through appeal factors such as kinds of atmosphere or narrative speed, is of course a method based in literature. At the same time, a central device in the method is the ability to skim through a book in ten minutes in order to gain an overview, thereby enabling the librarian to mediate it (Øyrås, 2021, p.44; Saricks, 2005, p. 170). The singularity of the book then tends to be subordinated to its more general appeal factors. Thus, even though the movement is based on knowledge of books too, the hermeneutical and communicative centre of gravity seems, as the term readers' advisory suggests, to be the reader.

Second, there is the growing movement of Shared Reading. This is a practice of reading texts – short stories and poems in particular – aloud in a group under the guidance of a reader leader where the participants also talk about the texts. A central principle is that, despite encouraging participants to share personal experiences, everything said is to be anchored in the text. Even though Shared Reading may be understood both as a social technology (Steenberg, 2016) and as a means to improve psychological health (Billington et al., 2017), it is also a practice of literary advocacy founded in the reading aloud of the literary text itself (Skjerdingsstad and Tangerås, 2019).

Even though shifting the attention from reader to literature is empirically motivated in practice and research, to us it is fundamentally a conceptual twist towards a revised theoretical understanding. As a next step in trying to find out what it would mean to put literature first, we return to Gerard Genette, who argues that the paratext serves the book, offers it to the public and *'presents'* it even in the strongest sense of the verb: *'to make present, to ensure the text's presence in the world, its reception and consumption in the form (nowadays, at least) of a book.'* (Genette, 1997, p. 1).

[T]he paratext in all its forms is a discourse that is fundamentally heteronomous, auxiliary, and dedicated to the service of something other than itself that constitutes its *raison d'être*. This something is the text [...] the paratextual element is always subordinate to its text, and this functionality determines the essence of its appeal and existence. (Genette, 1997, p. 12)

Understanding literary advocacy by the way of the paratext, then, adheres first of all to this radical subordinating functionality of serving. Secondly, as Genette almost apologetically notes, it may also appeal: *'Whatever aesthetic intention may come into play as well, the main issue for the paratext is not to look nice around the text but rather to ensure for the text a destiny consistent with the author's purpose.'* (1997, p. 407) While Genette thus concedes an aesthetic function may also be present, we see this as an unavoidable second-order function to putting literature first. In literary advocacy, there will always be both a representative function pointing at the literary text itself, and a performative aspect which implies a certain aesthetic form (Grøn, 2010, p. 56). In this light, literary advocacy is primarily about serving the text, drawing attention to it through the advocacy itself.

In asking what it means to serve the text, we also need to comment upon how Genette connects it to ensuring the text *'a destiny consistent with the author's purpose'*. As library researcher Rasmus Grøn has commented, it is highly problematic to see the paratext as a mouthpiece for the author (Grøn, 2010, p. 63). It is more meaningful to read the interplay of author and destiny as a metaphor for readers' commitment to the text's intention: an intention towards the relative unchangeable text understood as the letters, sentences, paragraphs, structure etc., and the historical circumstances of its production. As contemporary debates on appropriation and politics of identity clearly reveal, this is neither self-evident nor uncomplicated.

To further rethink the relation between literature, reader and, in our case, the public librarian, we suggest that advocacy is a useful supplement to advisory. This is in line with how Dali and McNiff point out that advisory is a concept *'way out of sync'* (2020, p. 1051) with current practices. They argue that the term does not catch the diverse form and content of dialogues, discussions, consultations on books, etc. that the librarian manages, or her contemporary function as such a manager. The noun advisory indicates that the real first person is the librarian who, in giving advice, becomes both a gatekeeper and one that is presupposed to know better (Dali and McNiff, 2020, p. 1051; Ross, 1987). While Dali and McNiff also use advocacy as an external characterization of practices of readers' advisory, for us it is the key to opening a conceptual understanding of the advisory process itself.

Advocacy as we use the concept is grounded in everyday language, broadly understanding it as public support for, or recommendation of, a particular cause or policy and *'the profession or work of a legal advocate'*. An advocate is *'a person employed to plead a cause on behalf of another in a court of law'* (Advocacy, 2021). That is, the advocate works in an institutional context and in adherence with certain sets of norms and values. This counts too for movements like Extinction Rebellion that operate outside and in opposition to the established system. They still advocate in accordance with norms and values. Their fight for bringing oil production to a speedy end, is precisely done in accordance with certain values not unlike a librarian is an advocate talking on behalf of literature in a library context. This is underpinned by a short etymological detour.

The etymology of advocacy points back to Roman Law, where it refers to a spokesman. In Latin it means *'one called to aid (another); a pleader (on another's behalf)'*. It further relates to calling upon an adviser or a witness. The act of calling upon relates to invoke, summon, appeal, or plead. This emphasis on the way a message is brought forth (its form, cf. McLuhan's famous dictum *the medium is the message*) comes even clearer if we look at the words behind: *ad* meaning to, and *vocare* and *vox* referring to voice. It means *'to raise one's voice to call attention to something beyond oneself'*. The Latin *advocāre* *'to call for'* even relates to Ancient Greek *paráklētos* which again refers to an intercessor who pleads another's cause in front of a counsel or a judge. (Advocacy, 2022) As an advocate is a lawyer pleading someone's cause and values in court, whose interests and which values are

called upon at whose expense is crucial. Structurally, advocacy connotes fight and strength and willingness to struggle for a cause belonging to someone *else*.

To sum up, then, a literary advocate speaks, acts, and fights, on behalf of literature. For him, literature is the 'case'. He speaks out for and defends works, collections, and other cultural artefacts in the library. He is committed to the works but also to the political mandate he serves. As in court, he is enmeshed in relations of power, be they political, economic, cultural, or symbolic. He also pleads his case not before the judge but before the library user, reader, or potential reader.

Towards a methodology

In the following we foreground five methodological devices for practice in, and reflection on, literary advocacy: 1) listening carefully to literature; 2) talking on behalf of literature by articulating the reading experience; 3) addressing the reader as one that wishes to discover and find new ways of seeing; 4) cultivating the art of selection; and 5) attending to the democratic mandate of libraries and taking a position.

First device: Listen carefully

Literary theorist Anniken Greve discusses how the question of method varies with the research act it should serve (Greve, 2018, p. 52). She foregrounds the ideographical orientation since the research act, she addresses is that of interpretation. Her drive is to respect literature by listening carefully to the particular text (Greve, 2018, p. 53). Even though our research act is different, it shares a similarity that the literary advocate too must pay attention to literature.

In the prolongation of Iris Murdoch's ethical philosophy, Greve develops her methodology for listening carefully to literature based on a conscious avoidance of five overlapping fallacies (Greve, 2018, p. 59 ff.): The first is the selective fallacy. Here she warns against the seductive power of the first impression. Always look twice, ask what lurks in the shadow of the immediate. *'Look closer'*, as says the epigram of Sam Mendes' film *American Beauty* (1999), where videotapes are used to show the beauty of the quotidian, the dance of the wind in what seems to be garbage: a plastic bag in a parking lot.

Second, she identifies the generalization mistake, where the problem is that the singularity of the work gets lost. When making observations and giving attention to certain aspects of a text, it is always easy to forget others and let them count for the totality. As this is an important reminder, it is of course also unavoidable. A book-talk can never do justice to an entire work; not even reading it all aloud is possible without stressing some aspects while leaving others out. The methodological (hermeneutical) consequence is to temper perspectives and passages with the totality. Choosing what to quote bears witness to the reader or advocate's abilities.

Third, the autonomy fallacy describes a danger in reading a text (or listening to a person or understanding a practice) independently of possible determining or influential factors. Literature is also more than an object – the text reaches or stretches out beyond itself (Greve, 2018, p. 60). It is intertwined in economic, social, thematic, and cultural contexts. Advocating literature is to choose from the contexts and distil the relevant. So, there is a danger not only of excluding relevant contextual information, but also of including too much. Thus, the third fallacy must be tempered against a fourth: the heteronomy fallacy, warning against the risk of losing the text in all that could be relevant.

The fifth fallacy concerns the danger of being blinded by theory or other preconceptions. Of course, a tendency towards projection will always be there, and the advocate's own values and preconceptions are just as impossible to avoid as they are productive and necessary in constructing meaning or engagement. In methodological practices, this is a question of self-reflection, but more precisely – and summarizing this first device – it is a question of trying not to make demands on the text.

Second device: Talking on behalf of – articulating experience

Greve gives advice in listening to serve the text, but putting literature first also implies presenting its case in the sense of speaking on behalf of it. For the literary advocate, as for the reader and the researcher, the literary work is only accessible through experience. Experience itself involves a huge, complex field of thoughts, associations, memories, knowledge, senses, affects and feelings, as well as perceptions of the immediate environment. Considering the cognitive and bodily nature of experience, we argue that, in practices of advocacy, speaking on behalf of the text means to articulate what the pragmatic philosopher John Dewey names a consummate, holistic experience. In our context, this experience comes from the reading of a book.

For Dewey, the experience starts out from a situation of equilibrium and balance characterized by a consistent quality or mood which is developed through a resistance in the work. Through the experiencing process, the reader goes through similar processes as those of the artist or writer in her creative process. In working through and overcoming the resistances, the reader assimilates the experience and makes it her own. (Dewey, 2008). Of course, exactly how you speak about your experience also depends on the material at hand. A professional reader evaluating a novel for the Norwegian Arts Council can provide an example:

I feel ambivalent about this style. One moment I think it gives me a lot of resistance, while other times it is very effective. Eventually I realize that the style has made me read as slowly as I perhaps should. It is interesting to discover that a style that annoyed me, a little, made me slow down. Eventually I started to appreciate it. There is something about this text – it creates a certain presence. (Oterholm, 2019)

Here, the style of the novel fills the reader's mind and body with a feeling of uncertainty as to how it should be assessed, which is the goal guiding his reading. He is not only uncertain as to how the novel should be judged; since the resistance, which the style creates, has both positive and negative aspects, he also feels it must be understood better. Here, an understanding of the style and its effect gradually arises in the reader. The style, which initially seemed an obstacle to the effect of the text, its progress and meaning, eventually leads to both progress and meaning, fulfilling the text, and making the experience a consummate one. The novel is assessed positively. *'Eventually I started to appreciate it'*. Through the articulation, we see how the reader approaches a faithfulness to the literary text, that is, speaks on behalf of it.

With Dewey, we can say that advocating literature means to work through the reading experience by means of words. *'The experience has to be formulated in order to be communicated. To formulate requires getting outside of it [...]. [O]ne has to assimilate, imaginatively, something of another's experience in order to tell him intelligently of one's own experience.'* (Dewey, 1997 pp. 5-6) This working-through is concerned about connecting the physical experience with the closest possible words (likeness, similarity) and carving out the deictic qualities. *'There is something about this text – it creates a certain presence.'*

As Dewey puts it, articulation is a work of imagination where the self-sufficient is transported over to the communal. It is this complex interplay of reduction (words only cover part of the experience) and addition (words also reconfigure the experience) that Dewey describes as an art: *'All*

communication is like art' (Dewey, [1997](#), p. 6). We assume his formulation also to hold true for the art of speaking on behalf of the work through experience. Even if the experience exists as a subjective quality at a lower level of consciousness before it is articulated, for example as a sense of atmosphere, it is through articulation that it becomes collective and social: conveyable. In the example above, the novel is listened to, and the formulation of the experience is a defence of the rhythm of the text – the text's ability to persuade us to read as slowly as we should. This results in the creation of presence. This case of defence could not convince without the articulation of a consummatory experience.

If speaking on behalf of literature is about articulating a consummate experience, it is, as Genette noted, not only a secondary, but a deeply aesthetic (intensifying, increasing) enterprise. Speaking on behalf of is articulating an experience to make an impression which refers back to the work. A court of law is frequently compared to a stage where lawyers play their parts as actors: bodies performing. When a librarian advocates a book, what she says, or adds, and what she does not say, or omits, has to replace the book in a new entirety: an entirety which should be understood aesthetically and ethically. And even though the subject here is the advocate librarian, we cannot understand her independently of the potential reader or listener that makes its judgment by picking up the book or moving his attention onto something else.

Third device: Addressing the reader judge – discovering

The lawyer pleads before the court. His task is to convince by enabling judge and jury, authorities and peers, and people of different social positions to see how evidence underpins his argument. He has to be able to show how evidence and arguments that may point in different directions are places (topoi) where something may be discovered. In the act of literary advocacy, the reader is the ultimate judge, and the advisor must act as a rhetor, appealing to the reader's sense and sensibility. The reader, however, must also be understood as a twofold position, since the first reader is the advocate himself. The methodological question that then arises is how to advocate literature in a way that leaves the (potential) reader with the impression of he too being able to discover for himself. Our argument here is twofold: first, the actual advocacy must leave something unsaid to allow for imagination; second, as the general and abstract do not provide anything to hold on to, there must be a certain specificity in the advocacy: there must be a connection to the singularity of the text.

So, while using experience to advocate literature, the advocacy should also encourage others to experience. Extrapolating from Dewey, Richard Shusterman argues that *'experience implies to radically recognize uninterpreted realities, experiences, and understandings as already perspectival, prejudiced, and corrigible – in short, as non-foundationally given.'* (Shusterman, [2000](#), p. 121). So, yes there must be something left out, but there must also be traces that indicate this. This can be formulated as giving form to the experience while at the same time communicating a sense of openness. This may be stimulated, for example, through that which is not explicit or that which signals there may be other perspectives.

In this discourse, openness could be understood as a basically material quality. Cultural Sociologist Richard Sennet leads our attention towards the presupposition that we commit ourselves to things we can change. This holds true for the craftsman who works with materials but also for the reader: what we hope for when we are addressed by an object, and in our terms a book or a literary advocate, is that it, or she, speaks to us in the 'richest possible' way. (Sennet, [2009](#), p. 120). There must be a material plurality that enables the reading (or listening) subject to see the possibilities for some kind of change: to turn the object around, discover other sides, to sense aesthetically that there is *more* to it. Conversely, the unambiguous or unequivocal addresses a different, specific need and intention, which echoes with Rosenblatt's efferent mode of reading: looking for something specific in accomplishing a task or attaining a goal (Rosenblatt, [1995](#), p. 32).

The ideal of facilitating for discovery has a long tradition in the history of public libraries. However, the act of discovering is conditioned by something specific working as an agent for seeing possibilities, including possible changes. A general approach to facilitating discovery may act counterproductively. For example, when libraries in their practices try to reach out to more people – new user groups – by simplifying their recommendations and impartation, the question as to how people who are not familiar with the subject or work are enabled to connect with such general descriptions arises (Skøtt, [2018](#)). Libraries' practices must contain something that attaches to the life and experience of the addressee: a form so concrete and tangible that it allows the potential reader to grasp it. After all, experiencing demands that there is actually something there. Literature is of course *'not just a matter of conveying information, but also of experiencing transformation'* (Felski, [2011](#), p. 585). As we have argued, that counts for advocacy too. Advocacy is about enabling others to experience a possibility for change or transformation.

Of course, we know in practice that loaners often want librarians to be more knowledgeable than themselves and to offer advice. Our intention is certainly not to do away with such a position – a position which may indeed put literature first in a normative sense: *This is the book you should read!* Literary scholar David Attridge shows how, for us, the advocate must do his first-order reading by *'attending to that which can barely be heard, registering what is unique about the shaping of language, thought, and feeling in this particular work'*. Reading then becomes an *'attempt to respond fully and responsibly to the alterity and singularity of the text'*, which again implies *'to work against the mind's tendency to assimilate the other to the same'* (Attridge, [2004](#), p. 80). The methodological (though lamentably general) point is that discovering is the opposite of reducing and only possible through the dynamic interplay between an object allowed to display its own diversity and a curious gaze that is able to look in different ways and with varying perspectives. In some sense the qualitative utterances of a novel, for example, best speak for themselves.

Fourth device: The art of selection

The availability of books in organized collections is the precondition of the practice of literary advocacy, which inevitably begins with the selection of a book (Grøn, [2010](#); Tveit, [2004](#)). Listening to literature, experiencing, articulating, and talking on behalf of it, reaching out and discovering, presupposes not only a book but a collection of books. Literary advocacy is meaningless unless there are more books, that is to say collections of *'books behind books behind books'* as the deceased Austrian film director Michael Glawogger expressed it in his visual tribute to the Russian National Library ([2013](#)). As Glawogger makes clear, books are the heart and blood of the library, nourishing its regular, pulsing rhythm of life. He also shows us how books need to be nourished by other books, just as the Bible is defined in terms of its collection of books related to each other. It is impossible to imagine a world with only one book. As a prolongation of this, advocacy could be conceptualized as the art of selection – first on the level of collection and subsequently on the level of the singularity of the work.

The nature of the collection as Glawogger conveys it – an abundance of books, shelves, art, and maps – also bears an unavoidable sense of something left behind, hidden, or lost. Choosing a book appears impossible because the possibility of making a different choice is always so apparent. And, as book historians as well as phenomenologists have taught us, a choice is never purely rational, but utterly complex and based on multisensory impressions – the feeling of the cover, font, graphic set, paper quality, thickness, format, media, screen, etc. (Piper, [2012](#)) Choosing, therefore, displays a certain powerlessness, also on behalf of literature. Allowing one book to speak leaves others in silence. Taking a book from a shelf leaves a figurative wall of silence. When a literary advocate speaks on behalf of a book, he silences other books as well as the majority of the books' other voices. Choosing also implies rejection. The organisation of the collection immediately becomes a machine that not only displays but also excludes. (Foucault, [1996](#))

Digital libraries encourage other choices because such collections have a radically different materiality. Naturally enough, they are also differently organized, although similar differences also account for the variation between physical libraries in the way they manifest or break with different principles of knowledge organisation. Independent of the material, one could also conceptualize the materiality of the library as *making* books available: the materiality is that which makes literature visible and usable; it is the what, how and where literature becomes available to the public.

However, as Attridge underlines, every work calls for a subjective refashioning, which is also different for every subject. For Attridge, every reading event is unique and singular: the words' meaning that a work contains, how the words address the subject reader, the time and place of the reading event, will be different every time the work is read by a different reader or a second time by the same reader. Together, these factors constitute 'the ungeneralizable relation between this work and this reader' (Attridge, 2004, p. 81). Given the relational materiality of the library, speaking on behalf of literature is already to speak about this ungeneralizable relation. This means that the art of selecting in some sense is a denial or refutation of prediction. This refutation is formulated by Jens Thorhauge as an ethical demand: in the library you can 'never mechanically determine the individual's reading' (Thorhauge, 1989, p. 104).

To advocate implies both to possess and demonstrate an attitude in giving attention to literature in a context for someone. This manifests itself in choosing one book or quoting one passage rather than another, emphasizing the family drama or one of the minor characters' psychological developments, talking to him rather than her, in this style or that. As advocacy thus means selection on a variety of different levels, addressing the singularity and otherness of literature, implies taking a position.

This is also reflected in the specific institutional frame that guides the choosing of material, words, and requests of advocating literature. The librarian responds to the singularity of a work through time and place, his ethos and professional persona, but also as a representative of the institution. Singularity in libraries therefore must be negotiated with a commitment to the democratic mandate. That is the professional ethos.

Fifth device: Institutional commitment – taking a position

The art of selection then is to temper between the singularity of literature and commitment to the institution. The Norwegian Law on Public Libraries states that public libraries should be an independent meeting place and emphasize 'kvalitet', 'allsidighet', and 'aktualitet' (quality, plurality, and actuality), (Folkebibliotekloven, 2014, § 1). As these values should be recognizable for libraries in other countries too, a short explanation can help us see how practices of literary advocacy are bound by work in concordance with the mandate – how they depend on acts of valuation negotiating between the singularity of a work, its passages, and other works on the one hand, and the democratic and political mandate on the other. Of course, such practices in turn are both contextually dependent (directed by institutional values and framework) and dependent on the first-person perspective.

What marks judgement generally and more specifically in relation to quality in libraries, is its implicitness. In contrast to the critic, who is committed to make explicit value judgements per se, the librarian's judgement operates implicitly and precisely through various selection processes (Grøn, 2010, p. 50; Oterholm, 2019). Valuation by the library is performed in a public-participatory context (Nielsen, 2006; Hvenegaard Rasmussen, 2015) and is therefore never concerned with aesthetics alone (in a narrow sense). Election, evaluation, and advocacy will also address general values such as Bildung, the individual person's possibilities in a democratic society, or the individual reader's development through aesthetic experience. (Nielsen, 2006; Secher, 2006, p. 61).

Further the concept of 'aktualitet' may refer to that which has current interest. It may be associated with news and contemporality, but also with the Aristotelian idea of realizing immanent possibilities. Thus, on the one hand it draws towards that which is of a broader and social interest in the here and now – Covid, for example, at the time of writing - and on the other towards developing that which is most relevant for the subject to become, so to speak, what he was meant to be. (Oterholm and Skjerdingsstad, 2015) 'Allsidighet', in turn, might be variously translated as diversity, multiplicity, many-sidedness, or plurality. The core of the matter is that libraries are obliged to present a wide range of material to a wide range of people. The concept may be specified as demanding variety on a series of professional levels such as variation in genre, form, collection, ways of reading, target groups etc. (Skjerdingsstad, 2020).

Generally speaking, 'kvalitet', 'allsidighet', and 'aktualitet' are vague and complex concepts. As guiding principles, they embed a broad range of possible uses which begs the question of whether and how they could be translated into the methodologies on, and practices of, literary advocacy. Departing from the articulation of the singular experience, we conclude that the key to unlocking this challenge for professional literary advocates is the trained ability to articulate the experience through the mandate, i.e., through the tripartite relation between quality, diversity, and actuality. In other words, that we can see and recognize these values or virtues as (implicitly) giving form to the practices of literary advocacy.

While our whole argument thus far for putting literature first has, ironically enough, avoided literature with but one exception, we now turn to a quote from a library blog which actually manages to talk on behalf of literature, in this case the novel *Singing (Syngja)* by Norwegian author Lars Amund Vaage:

Vaage writes himself deep into my soul, tears it up with the keyboard, then sews it back together in such a way that the scars long remain visible. Scars have to stroke time and time again to sense if the wounds can give me the courage to unite the painful with the good. Courage to include that which wounds in one bright hope for the future. This deeply personal book about Vaage's autistic daughter must be digested in long drafts, and it is worth every intake of breath. (Merete, 2012)

In this passage, the novel speaks through the articulation of the librarian's reading experience. The dynamic between the writing's upsetting, but also healing and transformative power on the reader, can be described as an immediate aesthetic experience where the soul – the inner – is transformed into outer signs, scars, and experiences that she can read on her own body. As the metaphor 'digested' suggests, the reading experience has needed time to be absorbed and almost understood by the body. Read this way, the literature makes this librarian and advocate visible to herself, almost from the outside. The literature is thus the initial facilitator for the act of advocacy that the librarian performs.

If, on the one hand, we assume that Vaage's book was discovered and chosen for advocacy because it has given the librarian an aesthetic experience, on the other the blogpost also reflects a legitimation for choosing this book and writing about it in the library context. This corresponds with how publishing editors assess manuscripts: first in a phase of open exploration where the goal is to discover and, so to speak, set the text free in an aesthetic mode; second in a phase where the chosen book or manuscript is tempered against context, goals, framework, etc. more in accordance with a means-end scheme, i.e., an efferent reading mode (Fürst, 2011, p. 5-7).

While there is little doubt that the librarian in the blog conveys and advocates a highly personal experience, there is equally as little doubt that the communication articulates certain 'objective' qualities pertaining to the novel. Even if this is not done by means of explicit comparative assessment, it nevertheless occurs through a rendering of the novel's intention: in a sense, the work's tone, rhythm, and quality are paraphrased in the way the experience is articulated and given form. A deep sense of quality is tempered in the articulation of this experience.

The passage quoted makes it obvious that the reading of the work took place at a time when the librarian herself was in an existential condition that allowed her to feel and perceive the vulnerability of the work. Communicating this affect in a corresponding form suggests that this book could address or echo any current feelings of hurt those potential readers may have. As such, the advocate conveys that the book is something that may be useful to you.

Choosing one thing in preference to something else points towards certain values. Through the act of pointing, moreover, the literary advocate legitimizes the qualities which are pointed at. In this, he is equal to the rhetorician that establishes himself 'as an ethical body of expression (by

creating its own ethos) [that] contributes [...] to creating the public space, the square where democracy is challenged and recaptured' (Fehr, 1996, p. 103). Thus, articulating the reading experience becomes an act where values are not only pointed at but brought to the public through a body that guarantees or stands for these values. Speaking on behalf of literature in practices of literary advocacy, therefore, is political in the sense of taking a position in line with the mandate. It is one way of establishing the library as an independent meeting place and the librarian as a person that takes a position on behalf of literature. Professional librarianship in terms of literary advocacy means having the ability not only to negotiate these values relative to the singularity of the work and relative to all the selections the advocate has to make, but also to reflect on and communicate these – as in articulating her experiences.

In conclusion – advocacy as practical judgment

The modern public library as it was formed in the early 20th century, was based on a culture of counselling, and advising people. The objectives, through enlightenment, education, and knowledge, were Bildung and the enablement of citizens to participate in modern democratic society (Emerek, 2001, p. 110). Even if advisory is largely associated with dialogical consultation, it nevertheless indicates the capacity and power to 'offer suggestions about the best course of action to someone' or to 'inform (someone) about a fact or situation in a formal or official way' (Stevenson, 2010a). Advisory still carries a set of connotations related to this historical background. Given the role of the librarian adviser as a representative of state and book culture, a man of letters, advisory carries symbolic power invoking a hierarchy, a top-down situation steering the communication towards telling someone what they should believe, do, or think: advisors know better and transfer their knowledge to prospective readers. (Dali and McNiff, 2020, p. 1051; McNicol, 2016, p. 9). Furthermore, an expectation that advice given should be followed will always be present. (Advice may be ignored, but one usually prefers not to do so.) This more or less implicit direction to follow the advice, inherent in the structure of giving or asking for advice, may be equally strong for both the adviser and the person being advised. (Tveiten, 2019, p. 21 ff.) Moreover, the nature of the advisory exchange also places demands on the text to 'fulfil' the advice.

Thus, giving advice on what to read is radically different from talking on behalf of literature. There is a difference between leading someone in a specific direction and handing over something so that potential readers may be encouraged to make the experiences their own. This shift in attention and attitude forms the basis of our argument in this article. We have tried to sketch out a way towards an experience-based, subjective practice where the reinstalling of the object functions not as a guarantee but at least as insurance against falling back into pure subjectivism. In short, we propose a method of advocacy founded in listening carefully to the text and where being able to select among the works in a collection and choose what to take from them – and from what perspective etc. – is central. This is crucial to be able to articulate the experience in a way that maintains contact with the object. The advocate has to be able to convey her experience of the work in a form that enables the reader, or judge, to see that he can make his own discoveries. The librarian advocate carries an ethos which brings values and norms to the fore; she is bound by a mandate to take a position. Her ethos is her own, but she also represents the public library.

Although we suggest exchanging readers' advisory for advocacy of literature, we do not subscribe to a dichotomic conceptualization of the two; and even though we have taken a position towards the object, this turn towards literature relies on advocacy as a fundamentally relational concept. This relational understanding runs through all our devices:

To listen carefully is meaningless if you do not listen both to yourself (the inner impress made by the object and the reader alike) and the literature. To listen carefully to the object or world in front of us means a submission to openness, means finding the balance between immediacy and distance when communicating your experience, the general and the specific when selecting something, the text and contextualization when seeking relevance, and the preconceptions and perceptions of the work given when assessing it. This all points back to the acknowledgment and recognition of the experience that the object constitutes in the subject and vice versa.

When we have argued for the advocate's use of her own experience, it is with an awareness of experience as a complicated term. From early hermeneutics we find a tension between experience as Erlebnis and experience as Erfahrung, that is a tension between subjective and objective dimensions of the concept. Sennett (2009) underscores that 'these two meanings should not be divided [...] The first names an event or relationship that makes an emotional inner impress, the second an event, action, or relationship that turns one outward and requires skill rather than sensitivity' (Sennett, 2009, p. 288). The craftsmanship which he explores is primarily focused on the object but not unaware of the experience's subjectivity.

The advocate is not the judge, so addressing the reader as judge, as we have suggested, opens the hierarchy between authority and autonomy, sets them free from being possible antonyms. (Sennett, 2009, s. 54) Ultimately, the autonomy of the reader must be respected as if it were objective. The advocate serves the reader too. All the same, as an advocate, you cannot recuse yourself from being a reader (subject) and perceived expert, i.e., one that is asked to help. What you can do is shape your experience, so it is possible to understand and respond to it, to make your experience 'intelligible to others who do not know the same people [...] or lived through the same events' (Sennett, 2009, p. 289), in other words to facilitate discovery. And as long as the power relation between the advisor and the reader is dealt with 'face-to-face' it needs to include a self-awareness of when you are advocating literature and when giving advice. The reader may benefit from either or both.

Being skilled in the art of selection is the literature advocate's job. The act of selection includes taking on the role as both the first subject reader, who chooses something, and the second subject reader – having some ideas as to how the book, as a gift delivered, will be received. Attending to which quote, poem, or book to choose, and which not, depends on this double reading: as the advocate reads through a text, he must be a subjective and objective reader at the same time. This is what enables him to perform his advocacy with aptum *appropriateness* in mind.

I have read a lot. But what I have learned from working in a library is to respect other people's reading habits. Never be judgmental. But it is also about trusting my own taste and daring to be personal (Oterholm, 2019, p. 270)

Drawing on her experience, a librarian formulates the intention underlying her practice as a literary advocate. Advocacy in public libraries, whether it is performed as a professional working inside the institution, or as a researcher coming in or looking on from the outside, is about respect. As the librarian here suggests, respect first means acknowledging other people, and secondly, but perhaps more profoundly, respecting one's own judgements. We argue that both these forms of respect depend on putting literature first, which means respecting the object. The art of advocacy, by reading and articulating your experience, is one of intention. The office you hold will form this intention and the respectful execution of it in an outward move towards readers from literature itself.

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