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## Buying and Borrowing Books: Book Consumption In Late Nineteenth-Century Sweden<sup>1</sup>

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How did readers in the different social segments of late-nineteenth-century Swedish society acquire reading materials – and who were these readers? What books were on offer in the bookshops and libraries, respectively, and what were the most popular genres? How did the reading preferences of certain groups change over time? And why did the formerly flourishing parish libraries decline? Very little is known about the nineteenth-century Swedish reading public, and questions like these remain largely unanswered. Most of the sources that could reveal individuals' reading patterns have been lost – “the sources fail us,” as one scholar puts it – and hardly any studies have been done on actual historical readers in nineteenth-century Sweden.<sup>2</sup> This article, however, is based on a number of preserved sales' and borrowers' ledgers and receipts from three different institutions – a parish library, a bookshop, and a commercial lending library<sup>3</sup> – all of them from the latter part of nineteenth-century Sweden. These records, humble as they may seem at first glance, allow us actually to follow the trail of a number of readers and to reveal some interesting patterns of book consumption. They have never before been used,

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<sup>2</sup> Sten Torgerson, *J.F. Hallmans lånebibliotek i Uddevalla* (Göteborg: Institutionen för litteratur, idéhistoria och religion, Göteborgs universitet, 2011), 43. This and all subsequent translations from Swedish and Norwegian are my own, including the book titles.

<sup>3</sup> The terms “commercial lending library” and “circulating library” are often used interchangeably. In this article “commercial lending library” refers to a profit-driven library that rents out books to the public, without requiring membership.

and some of them – the borrowers' receipts from the commercial lending library – were found only recently, stowed away in the attic of an almost one-hundred-and-fifty-year-old antiquarian bookshop. (See fig. 1). These sources both make it possible to study reading and borrowing habits of certain strata of the population and to at least begin to answer some of the above-mentioned questions about the Swedish reading public in the nineteenth century.

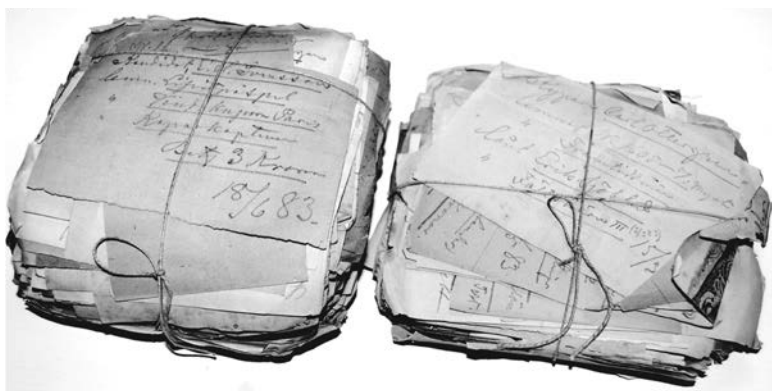


Figure 1. Stacks with borrowers' receipts from Sjöblom's commercial lending library in Lund. Photo by author.

## The Sources

This study is based on borrowers' and sales records from the parish library in Munka-Ljungby, Gumpert's bookshop in Gothenburg, and Sjöblom's commercial lending library in Lund. The two libraries and the bookshop were far from equal literary institutions, but they do represent key elements of the Swedish book trade of the late nineteenth century, and taken together, they can be said to form a crude cross-section of the Swedish book market at the time. The records from the bookshop and the commercial lending library provide insights into the reading habits of the urban population, whereas the borrowers' ledgers from the parish library provide information about the reading habits of the rural population, which constituted the vast majority of the Swedish population.

The surviving receipts from Sjöblom's commercial lending library record almost three thousand loans from the period 1875 to 1885, most of them from 1882 and 1883, by borrowers whose surnames start with

the letters B, O, P, and S.<sup>4</sup> The sources from the bookshop and the parish library are more comprehensive and consist of sturdy ledgers with all transactions recorded. The ledgers from the bookshop list the sales of hundreds of thousands of books between the years 1870 and 1917,<sup>5</sup> while the ledgers from the parish library record some twenty-five thousand loans from the years 1870 to 1888 and 1899 to 1903.<sup>6</sup> While these sources are rich in detail, they pose methodological challenges. All three sources contain some or all of the following details, including transaction dates: title, name, and address of the customer, and author, title, and price of the book. As the titles or professions of the customers generally were recorded, it has been possible to identify the social strata, and in most cases it has also been possible to classify the books, using the Swedish National Bibliography.<sup>7</sup> In the case of the commercial lending library, the material is fragmentary and consists of hundreds of small pieces of scrap paper upon which the details of individual loans are scribbled. Given its limited size, all available material has been examined, and the popularity of individual titles as well as the reading preferences of individual borrowers has been studied. In the parish library's ledgers, the loans are listed according to the borrower's number instead of his or her name. Although several undated membership lists have been preserved, the fact that most members were given new borrower's numbers over the years has made it difficult to trace the loans of more than a few individuals. Hence, the focus of the study, when it comes to this archive, has primarily been on the popularity of books and genres, based on all available loans in the parish library. The Gumpert archive, finally, is very large, and it has been necessary to limit the study to a random selection of 10 percent of the purchases for every second year in the 1880s.

The period this study focuses on is the 1880s, which stand out as a particularly interesting era from a Swedish cultural-historical perspective. The decade was characterized by the literary movement, the "Modern Breakthrough." The movement, with representatives

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<sup>4</sup> The archive of J.A. Sjöblom, LUB-2:0190, Lund University Library. Additional borrowers' receipts are in private hands.

<sup>5</sup> The archive of N.J. Gumpert, GLA/Coo38:1, Regional State Archives in Gothenburg.

<sup>6</sup> The archive of the library board of Munka-Ljungby municipality, SE/Lot8/KA2/108-1, Central Archive of Ängelholm.

<sup>7</sup> Hjalmar Linnström, *Svenskt boklexikon åren 1830–1865* (Stockholm: Hjalmar Linnströms förlag, 1867–1884) and *Svensk bok-katalog för åren 1866–1900* (Stockholm: Svensk bokförläggarförening, 1878–1904).

such as Henrik Ibsen, August Strindberg, and Georg Brandes, marked a paradigm shift in Scandinavian literary history and it sparked debate on issues such as sexuality and religion. It coincided with the modernization of the Swedish book market and a profound change in the size and composition of the reading public.<sup>8</sup>

### Literary Conditions in Nineteenth-Century Sweden

The end of the nineteenth century has been called “The Golden Age of the Book in the West.”<sup>9</sup> The printing industry was modernizing, while at the same time wages were rising, communications were improving, and working hours were slowly becoming more regulated.<sup>10</sup> In Sweden, books were printed in both larger and cheaper editions. During the first half of the nineteenth century, editions of around five hundred copies were common, but as early as the 1860s and 1870s, popular works appeared in editions of ten thousand copies.<sup>11</sup> Socio-economic developments, in combination with new publishing strategies, meant that for the first time, printed materials came within the reach of the vast majority of the Swedish population.

Sweden was still largely a rural society; a mere 15 percent of the population lived in the cities by the late nineteenth century.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, however, it was a literate society. Compulsory elementary schooling had been introduced in 1842, and two decades later 99 percent of Swedish children attended school, although the access to secondary education and university was far from universal, especially

<sup>8</sup> Åke Åberg, “‘Det moderna genombrottet’ i svensk landsort – bokköp och tidningspress i Västerås 1870–1895,” *Samlaren* 116 (1995), 52–74 (52); and Sven Rinman, *Studier i svensk bokhandel: Svenska Bokförläggareföreningen 1843–1887* (Stockholm: P.A. Norstedt & Söner, 1951), 448.

<sup>9</sup> Martyn Lyons, *A History of Reading and Writing in the Western World* (Chippenham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 153.

<sup>10</sup> Rinman, *Studier i svensk bokhandel*, 332–33, 444; and Johan Söderberg and Svante Larsson, “Löner – Reallöneindex 1540–1900,” Sveriges Riksbank, last modified 30 September 2011, <http://www.riksbank.se/sv/Riksbanken/Forskning/Historisk-monetar-statistik/Loner/>.

<sup>11</sup> Rinman, *Studier i svensk bokhandel*, 250–51, 335–36 and 449–50.

<sup>12</sup> Statistiska Centralbyrån, *Bidrag till Sveriges Officiella Statistik: A. Befolkningsstatistik för år 1880. Ny följd XXII: 1* (Stockholm: P.A. Norstedt, 1882), vi; and Bo Öhngren, “Urbaniseringen i Sverige 1840–1920,” *Urbaniseringsprocessen i Norden*, del 3, edited by Grethe Authén Blom (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1977), 261–356 (265).

for women.<sup>13</sup> Widespread reading ability predated the state school system, and already by the end of the eighteenth century, most men and women were able to read.<sup>14</sup> In a Swedish medical book from 1828 it was claimed that “a full-grown person who cannot read is so rarely seen that he or she is regarded almost as a heathen,” and test results from Swedish army recruits collected between 1874 and 1884 showed that 99.8 percent read well, or fairly well.<sup>15</sup> The first parish libraries, the earliest form of public library, were established around 1800, and by the second half of the nineteenth century, they could be found throughout the Swedish countryside in almost half of Sweden’s three thousand parishes.<sup>16</sup> The first modern public libraries were established in cities in the 1860s, but for a long time they were both scarce and modest in size. For the reading public the commercial lending libraries, regular bookshops, reading rooms, and eventually also workers’ libraries were of greater importance.<sup>17</sup> The latter part of the nineteenth century also saw significant growth in periodical literature. Newspapers and magazines were printed in ever larger and cheaper editions, and official reports stated that the reading of newspapers was “increasing considerably.”<sup>18</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Rinman, *Studier i svensk bokhandel*, 334; and Berit Larsson, *Ljus och upplysning äfven för Qvinnan: kvinnors medborgarbildning i den svenska folkskolan 1868–1918* (Göteborg: Anamma, 1997), 29–30.

<sup>14</sup> Loftur Guttormsson, “The Development of Popular Religious Literacy in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries,” *Scandinavian Journal of History* 15, no. 1–2 (1990): 7–35 (30).

<sup>15</sup> C.J. Hartman, *Husläkaren, eller allmänna och enskilda föreskrifter i sundhetsläran samt sjukdomslära, eller korrt anvisning att känna och riktigt behandla de flesta i Sverige förekommande inre och yttre sjukdomar; till bruk för husfäder, pharmaceutici: och alla, som oexaminerade syszelsätta sig med medicinens utöfning* (Stockholm: Zacharias Hæggström, 1828), 5–6; and Rinman, *Studier i svensk bokhandel*, 334.

<sup>16</sup> Anders Burius, “Sockenbibliotek – mellan filantropi och folkbibliotek,” *Nordisk tidskrift för bok- och biblioteksväsen* 81 (1994): 25–54 (29).

<sup>17</sup> Johan Svedjedal, *Bokens samhälle*, vol. 1 (Stockholm: Svenska bokförläggareföreningen, 1993), 39–41; Claës Lundin, *Nya Stockholm* (Stockholm: Gebers förlag, 1890), 357; and J. Viktor Johansson, “Göteborgs biblioteksförhållanden,” *Biblioteksbladet 1916*: 122–24 (123).

<sup>18</sup> Ingemar Oscarsson, “*Fortsättning följer*”: *följetong och fortsättningsroman i dagspressen till ca 1850* (Lund: Liber Läromedel, 1980), 55–57; and Statistiska Centralbyrån, *Kungl. Maj:ts Befallningshafvandes femårsberättelser för åren 1856–1860. Sammandrag* (Stockholm: P. A. Norstedt, 1863), 9.

## Buying or Borrowing Books: A Dividing Line

The Swedish bookshops of the early nineteenth century served a limited audience, mainly consisting of the clergy, teachers, landowners, and civil servants, but from the mid-1800s and onwards, social and economic development brought about an expansion in the reading public, and printed materials were made available for substantial parts of the population.<sup>19</sup> The expansion of the reading public is also discernible when studying the subscribers of Swedish newspapers and magazines. Until the mid-1800s the subscribers primarily consisted of well-educated officials, but over time their numbers were surpassed by middle-class subscribers, and by the 1880s, newspapers reached subscribers even further down the social scale: small business owners, artisans, and farmers.<sup>20</sup> However, at the end of the nineteenth century, the Swedish reading public was still largely divided into those who bought books, and those who only could afford to borrow books. In a Swedish article from 1890, it was claimed that “few people from the book-reading public buy books. ... Novels, magazines and light reading are normally borrowed from the commercial lending libraries.”<sup>21</sup> New books were only slowly becoming cheaper, and for a Swedish manual worker, making on average around 1.33 krona a day in the 1880s, the latest novel by August Strindberg, priced at 1.50 to 3.75 krona depending on length and edition, would have been a considerable expense.<sup>22</sup> By comparison, the annual membership fee at the parish library was often only 1 to 2 krona, while borrowing a single volume from a commercial lending library normally cost from 0.10 to 0.30 krona, depending on the length of the loan. Apart from the financial aspect, there may also have been a psychosocial barrier. In the early twentieth century, a Swedish bookseller, who worked in a bookshop in Motala, stated in an interview that “factory

<sup>19</sup> Claes Krantz, *Från Sillgatan till Gumperts Hörn: 150 års bokhandelshistoria* (Göteborg: Gumperts tryckeri, 1958), 7; and Rinman, *Studier i svensk bokhandel*, 448.

<sup>20</sup> Oscarsson, “Fortsättning följer,” 55; and Eric Johannesson, *Den läsande familjen: Familjetidskriften i Sverige 1850–1880* (Uddevalla: Nordiska museets handlingar, 1980), 137, 210.

<sup>21</sup> Lundin, *Nya Stockholm*, 357.

<sup>22</sup> Ann-Lis Jeppsson, *Tankar till salu: Genombrottsidéerna och de kommersiella lånbiblioteken* (Göteborg: AB Lindquistiska bokhandeln, 1981), 162; and *Svensk bok-katalog jemte musikförteckning för åren 1876–1885* (Stockholm: Svenska Bokförläggare-Föreningen, 1890), 241–42.

workers and their wives and children found the bookshop too posh. Even if they wanted to enter, it was as if they did not really dare.”<sup>23</sup>

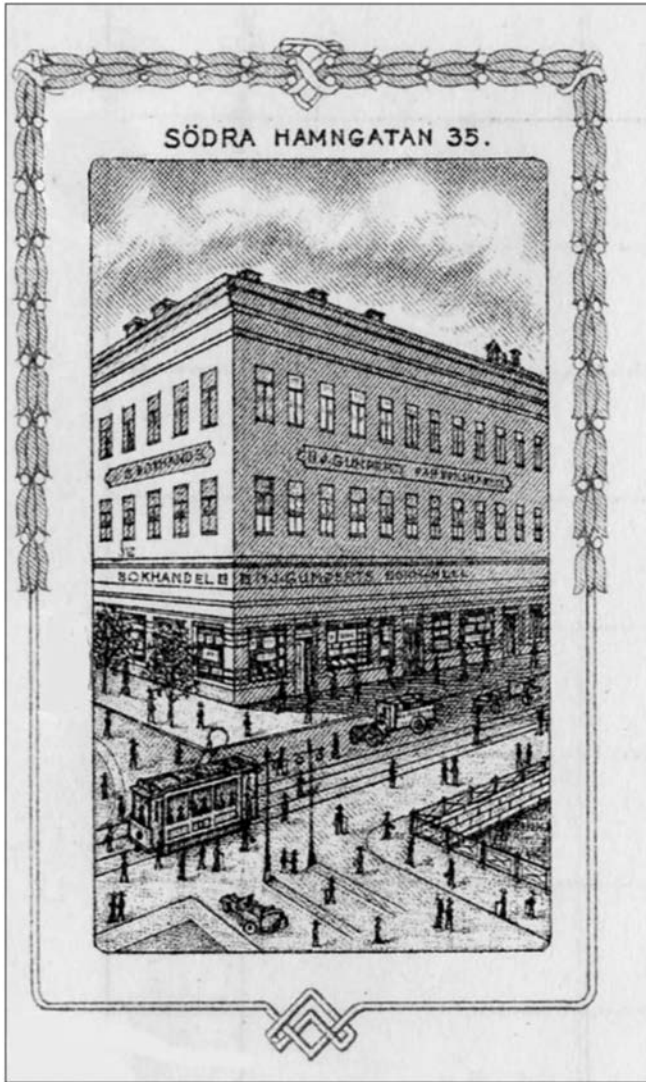


Figure 2. Gumpert's bookshop in 1922. Regional archives of Gothenburg.

<sup>23</sup> Åke Åberg, "Folket läste," in *Den svenska boken 500 år*, edited by Harry Järv and Egil Johansson (Stockholm: LiberFörlag, 1983), 364–400 (379).

## The Bookshop, the Parish Library and the Commercial Lending Library

Gothenburg, Sweden's second largest city, was home to epoch-making liberal and radical cultural movements during the second half of the nineteenth century. Several liberal institutions for art and humanities were established, such as the University of Gothenburg and Sweden's first modern public library, Gothenburg Public Library. A dynamic group of intellectuals, including writers, politicians, and wealthy businessmen, under the leadership of the editor Sven Adolf Hedlund, constituted a powerful cultural force in Gothenburg. The new transoceanic steamer lines were particularly crucial for the expansion of the region's industries, and the city experienced strong growth in both its economy and its population, which in turn aided cultural development.<sup>24</sup> In the nineteenth century, Gothenburg emerged as a cultural centre and a viable alternative to Stockholm, especially in the fields of literature and art.

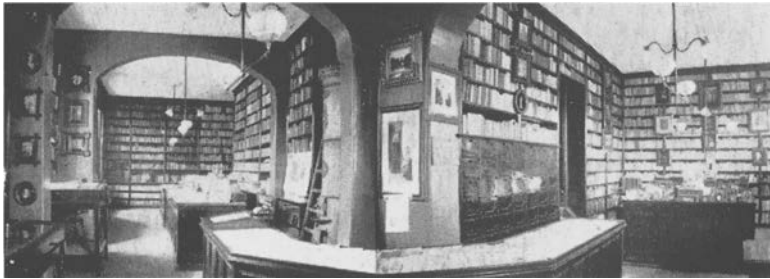


Figure 3. Gumpert's bookshop, ca. 1890. Photograph from Claes Krantz's *Från Sillgatan till Gumperts Hörn: 150 års bokhandelshistoria* (Göteborg: Gumperts tryckeri, 1958).

Gumpert's bookshop, established in 1833, was one of Gothenburg's most prominent businesses and one of Sweden's largest bookshops

<sup>24</sup> Lars Lönnroth, "Vad rätt du tänkt: Viktor Rydberg och Göteborgsliberalismen ca 1850–1895," in *Den Svenska Litteraturen: De liberala genombrotten 1830–1890*, edited by Lars Lönnroth and Sven Delblanc (Uddevalla: BonnierFakta Bokförlag AB, 1989), 160–77 (161–63); Ivan Lind, "Göteborgs handel och sjöfart sedan 1860," in *Göteborg: en översikt vid trehundraårsjubileet 1923 över stadens kommunala, kulturella och sociala förhållanden samt viktigaste näringsgrenar*, edited by Nils Wimarson (Göteborg: Elanders boktryckeri, 1923), 656–88 (656–64); and Ingrid Atlestam, *Fullboktat: Göteborgs folkbibliotek 1862–1997* (Borås: Göteborgs stadsbibliotek, 1997), 41.



at the time, with an annual turnover of over one hundred thousand krona.<sup>25</sup> The store was situated in the same building for almost a hundred years, at the busiest intersection in Gothenburg, and the square in front of the bookshop was a frequently used meeting-point, often referred to as “the bachelors’ square.” (See fig. 2).<sup>26</sup> The bookshop was equipped with both a printing office and a music lending library; it also sold toys, photographs, antiquarian books, and tickets for the theatres and societal dinners. Occasionally, the bookshop even served as a public polling station. The opening hours were 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m., and it was staffed by ten shop assistants, a dozen delivery boys, and a female cashier. The accounts and diaries of former employees and customers offer further details: most of the stock was crammed into the shop’s bookcases, stretching thirteen shelves high from floor to ceiling. (See fig. 3). A grand iron stove in the middle of the store, which belched out smoke every now and then, heated the bookshop, and reeking and unreliable gas lamps lighted it.<sup>27</sup> For decades, there was only one other bookshop in Gothenburg, but by the 1880s the number had increased to ten.<sup>28</sup> According to correspondence between Gumpert’s bookshop and the Danish publishing house Gyldendal in 1882, the book trade in Gothenburg was characterized by fierce competition. When a new bookshop was about to open in Gothenburg, the proprietor of Gumpert’s tried to dissuade the Danish publisher from entering into commercial relations with the new colleague, claiming that “the competition will only cause substantial losses for both of us.”<sup>29</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Gunilla Lind, *N.J. Gumperts bokhandel 1808–2008: 200 år av bokhandelshistoria i Göteborg* (Göteborg: Akademibokhandeln, 2008); August Hånell, *Liber Librarium: Bokhandlarnas bok* (Göteborg: Svenska Bokhandlareföreningen, 1920), 47; and Rinman, *Studier i svensk bokhandel*, 259.

<sup>26</sup> Krantz, *Från Sillgatan till Gumperts Hörn*, 25.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 18, 31.

<sup>28</sup> *Festskrift med anledning af Svenska Bokförläggareföreningens femtiårs-jubileum*, 248–59; and *Göteborgs adress- och industrikalender för år 1882* (Göteborg: Fred. Lindberg, 1882), 21.

<sup>29</sup> Letter from M. Kindal, proprietor of Gumpert’s bookshop, to Gyldendal’s publishing firm in Copenhagen, 22 March 1882, Det Kongelige Bibliotek, Gyldendalske Boghandel, Nordisk Forlag A/S arkiv, Korrespondence B.3.c. 1876–84.

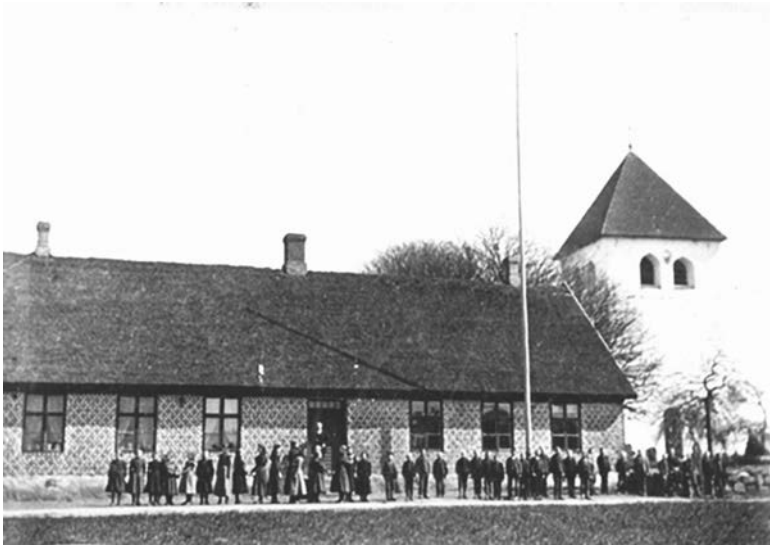


Figure 4. The school in Munka-Ljungby on graduation day in 1899.  
Courtesy SPF Seniorerna Munka.

Munka-Ljungby was a small parish in southern Sweden with the church as a central point, surrounded by fertile lands and home to a number of small industries. The parish library was established in 1859 on a local initiative. Initially, it had seventy-five members and was administered by a board consisting of four members and a librarian, who also served as a school teacher. The annual membership fee was 1 krona and opening hours were on Saturdays from 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. The loan terms changed over the years. At first, members could borrow an unlimited number of books, upon the condition that they were returned after a week, but after a couple of months the allowed length of the loan was extended, first to two, and finally to four weeks, and the allowed number of books was set at three. For practical reasons, the opening hours were eventually limited to every second Saturday. The book collection was housed in the school, next to the church. (See fig. 4). During the library's first fifteen years, a single bookcase was enough to accommodate the library's collection, but by the late 1870s a second one had to be acquired. The bookcases were fitted with glass doors and the collection was insured to a value of one thousand krona. Little by little the number of members grew, and in 1882 they had to be divided into two equally sized groups, in order to avoid congestion. Members with borrower's number 1-70 were

allowed access on the second Saturday of the month, and those with a number of 71 or higher were welcome on the last Saturday of the month. The library still exists as the public library of Munka-Ljungby.



Figure 5. Jacob Albert Sjöblom (1849–1922). Photograph from William Lengertz's *Min kulörta bok* (Malmö: Lengertz, 1940).

Lund was already by the end of the nineteenth century an old university town. The population was diverse, with a large proportion of academics and students, but also many labourers and artisans. The proprietor of the commercial lending library, Jacob Albert Sjöblom (1849–1922), was said to have been something of a character, and half-truths and myths about him flourished among generations of school boys and students in Lund. Sjöblom started buying and selling used school books in 1867, and eventually he expanded his business with a commercial lending library. Apart from books, Sjöblom traded in stationery, old coins, antiques, and stamps. The venue has been described as “a sight for the gods, with leaning bookshelves and piles of books everywhere ... narrow passages and hardly a single place to put your foot down, catacombs of books, the like of which has never before been seen!”<sup>30</sup> Sjöblom’s combined antiquarian bookshop and commercial lending library was a place constantly bursting with activity. The generous opening hours, Monday to Saturday from

<sup>30</sup> William Lengertz, *Min kulörta bok* (Malmö: Lengertz förlag, 1940), 146.

8:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m., proved a stark contrast to most public libraries. One of Sjöblom's customers, who moved to Lund from the small village of Bosarp as a boy, describes how utterly uninteresting and modest he found the parish library in Bosarp, once he had discovered the treasures of Sjöblom's lending library.<sup>31</sup>

### Who Were the Users?

Gumpert's bookshop in Gothenburg had around twelve hundred regular customers – a rather narrow section of the city's eighty thousand inhabitants. Like most bookshops at the time, they primarily served the needs of the highly educated and well-to-do.<sup>32</sup> The mayor of Gothenburg, bishops, military, doctors, engineers, academics, and some of the foremost Swedish writers and literary critics of the time were among the bookshop's customers, and nearly a quarter of the customers consisted of *grosshandlare* (wealthy merchants or wholesale distributors). But among the bookshop's clientele were also a handful of tailors, shoemakers, and carpenters. The proportion of women with their own account in Gumpert's bookshop was small but growing, almost tripling from 1876 to 1893. (See table 1).

The parish library in the village of Munka-Ljungby served readers from a very different social background: 75 percent of the members were farmers. The second largest group consisted of widows, closely followed by blacksmiths, agricultural workers, shoemakers, tradesmen, maids, bookbinders, and tailors. Among the members of the library were also a number of farm workers called *statare*. They only received payment in kind, and belonged to the poorest segment of the Swedish population. Nearly 10 percent of Munka-Ljungby's two thousand inhabitants – a high figure even by international standards<sup>33</sup> – were members of the library by the end of the nineteenth century. A handful of women, close to 10 percent of the members, had their own accounts, but in most cases the *paterfamilias* was the account holder, and the entire household used the same account. Given the average size of a Swedish household at the time, as many as half the population of Munka-Ljungby may have been able to access the library.

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<sup>31</sup> Frank Heller, *På detta tidens smala näs* (Stockholm: Albert Bonniers förlag, 1940), 89.

<sup>32</sup> Åberg, "Det moderna genombrottet i svensk landsort," 52.

<sup>33</sup> Richard D. Altick, *The English Common Reader* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963), 236.

Table 1. Total number of customers, and number of women with their own account in Gumpert's bookshop

Year	Number of customers	Number of women	Percentage of women
1876	1,043	46	4.41 %
1877	1,105	55	4.98 %
1878	1,118	56	5.00 %
1879	1,183	68	5.75 %
1880	1,233	67	5.43 %
1881	1,378	93	6.75 %
1882	1,443	99	6.86 %
1883	1,336	85	6.36 %
1884	1,301	100	7.68 %
1885	1,276	89	6.97 %
1886	1,201	80	6.66 %
1887	1,199	90	7.51 %
1888	1,144	96	8.39 %
1889	1,145	92	8.03 %
1890	1,175	113	9.61 %
1893	1,053	134	12.73 %

The lending library in Lund served a socially diverse clientele. For many years, the library was situated opposite Lund Cathedral School, and school boys were a particularly important customer group.<sup>34</sup> According to Sjöblom's own categorization, the single largest category among the members of his lending library was unmarried women and girls, followed by young men, university students, married women, unskilled labourers, farmers, book-keepers, carpenters, shoemakers, and maids. A large proportion, almost every second member, consisted of labourers and artisans, and around a quarter of the customers were female. The library had at least five hundred regular users around 1880, at a time when Lund had fourteen thousand inhabitants.

### Books in the Bookshop and the Libraries

If we compare the books sold in the bookshop with the books available in the libraries, a generational gap is indicated. Gumpert's bookshop

<sup>34</sup> Henning Hansen "Bokläsning i Lund omkring 1880," *Biblis* 67 (2014): 50–57 (54).

kept its customers up to date with all the latest books through weekly advertisements in the biggest newspaper in Gothenburg, and for a few years, circulars offering new titles were even sent to customers every month, free of charge.<sup>35</sup> By contrast, many books in both Sjöblom's lending library and the parish library in Munka-Ljungby corresponded rather well to what could be found in the bookshops a whole generation earlier, such as the writings of Frederick Marryat, and Victor Hugo (see table 2), and some of the copies in the two libraries were decades old.<sup>36</sup> A majority of the works of fiction sold in Gumpert's bookshop were written by contemporary authors, and Alphonse Daudet, Leo Tolstoy, Henrik Ibsen, and Émile Zola were among the best-selling fiction authors. The overall bestselling fiction author was August Strindberg. In 1878, Strindberg himself expressed his astonishment at the great popularity that Daudet and other foreign authors enjoyed in Sweden: "People talk about Daudet as though he were a native of Stockholm, and they know much more about his latest works than those by any Swedish author."<sup>37</sup> For the customers of Gumpert's bookshop, the charm of novelty seems to have been an important factor, and when shipments with books particularly in demand arrived in Gothenburg's port or at the railway station, the delivery boys from Gumpert's competed with delivery boys from other bookshops to be the first bookshop to offer their customers the new book.<sup>38</sup> When Henrik Ibsen's *Et Dukkehjem* (*A Doll's House*) and August Strindberg's *Röda Rummet* (*The Red Room*) were published in 1879, most copies sold within weeks, many presumably on the very day they arrived in Gothenburg.

<sup>35</sup> Bernhard Lundstedt, *Sveriges periodiska litteratur III: Landsorten 1813–99* (Stockholm: Iduns Kungliga Hofboktryckeri, 1902), 91.

<sup>36</sup> Elisabeth S. Eide, "Reading Societies and Lending Libraries in Nineteenth-Century Norway," *Library & Information History* 26, no. 2 (June 2010): 121–38 (138); and Altick, *The English Common Reader*, 17–18.

<sup>37</sup> August Strindberg & Hans Sandberg, *August Strindbergs samlade verk 4: Ungdomsjournalistik* (Stockholm: Norstedts förlag, 1991), 342. First published in the January issue of *Finsk tidskrift* in 1878.

<sup>38</sup> Krantz, *Från Sillgatan till Gumperts Hörn*, 32.

Table 2. The most popular fiction authors from the parish library in Munka-Ljungby (1870–1888 and 1899–1903), Sjöblom’s commercial lending library in Lund (loans made by customers with surnames starting with B, O, P, or S, ca. 1882–1883), and Gumpert’s bookshop in Gothenburg (10 percent of the sales from 1880, 1882, 1884, 1886, 1888, and 1890)

Munka-Ljungby	Titles	Loans	Sjöblom’s	Titles	Loans	Gumpert’s	Titles	Sales
C. G. Starbäck	29	934	E. Flygare-Carlén	25	164	August Strindberg	17	98
Zacharias Topelius	5	519	Frederick Marryat	17	121	Zacharias Topelius	6	56
A.L.O.E.	8	363	Paul de Kock	19	117	A. Hedenstierna	6	37
Victor Hugo	5	309	Alexandre Dumas	15	86	Alexander Kielland	14	32
H. Beecher Stowe	4	264	Jules Verne	14	65	Henrik Ibsen	8	29
E. Flygare-Carlén	3	244	Marie S. Schwartz	21	63	Émile Zola	17	26
Pehr Thomasson	4	208	Henrik af Trolle	10	43	Carl Snoilsky	4	24
Marie S. Schwartz	4	192	Eugène Sue	13	42	Jonas Lie	11	23
G. H. Mellin	3	188	Zacharias Topelius	3	41	Alphonse Daudet	9	23
J. & W. Grimm	2	162	Ponson du Terrail	5	41	E. Flygare-Carlén	6	23

Another noteworthy difference between the books in the bookshop and the libraries was the availability of books in foreign languages. Since the introduction of elementary schooling in 1842, basic education was compulsory for all children, but only a small minority were ever given the opportunity to study foreign languages. German and French were introduced in private schools during the early nineteenth century, and by the end of the century English gained ground at the expense of Latin. As no foreign languages were taught in elementary schools, where 90 percent of the Swedish population was educated, the average person only knew Swedish.<sup>39</sup> It was symptomatic that all books in the parish library and the commercial lending library were written in Swedish, except for a few odd volumes in Danish and German that were found in the lending library. In Gumpert’s bookshop, approximately every fourth book sold during the 1880s was written in a foreign language, and shipments arrived from publishers in Germany, Britain, and France every week.<sup>40</sup> German was the most popular language, followed by English, Danish/Norwegian, and French. The founder of Gumpert’s bookshop, the publisher C.W.K.

<sup>39</sup> Hans Albin Larsson, *Mot bättre vetande: en svensk skolhistoria* (Kristianstad: SNS Förlag, 2011), 44; and Gunnar Richardson, *Svensk utbildningshistoria: skola och samhälle förr och nu* (Odder: Studentlitteratur, 2004), 61–67.

<sup>40</sup> *Göteborgs Kalender för 1873* (Göteborg: Handelstidningens tryckeri, 1873), 1.

Gleerup, was the first one to introduce the Swedish audience to books in foreign languages on a large scale in the 1830s.<sup>41</sup> The sales of foreign works continued to be a vital part of Gumpert's business, and between 1873 and 1884 the sales of this category of books more than doubled.

Language barriers aside, why did the libraries not offer the same books as the bookshop? Only a handful of books by the best-selling fiction authors in Gumpert's bookshop were, for example, available in the two libraries. Even though new books generally were more expensive, this is not the sole explanation. In the case of the parish library, the restricting factor may have been that the library board was reluctant to incorporate books that could in any way be perceived as radical or offensive. Among the longstanding members of the board of the parish library in Munka-Ljungby were the dye manufacturer Helmer Nore Hansson, the yeomen Janne Andersson and Anton Ebbesson, and the teacher Frans Linnell, who also served as librarian. According to the statutes of the parish library in Munka-Ljungby, the library should acquire "useful and interesting books for the level-headed reader," and for a long time, books that would educate and enlighten, rather than entertain, were prioritized. Lists of recommended books for parish libraries offered guidance as to which books should be acquired. Two such lists were more widespread than others: one compiled by the politician P.A. Siljeström in 1859 and one issued by the School Inspectorate in 1870. The two lists differed in several aspects, not least when it comes to fiction. Siljeström stressed the importance of acquiring "entertaining and amusing books," while the School Inspectorate's list did not contain any fiction whatsoever.<sup>42</sup> As for the books in the parish library in Munka-Ljungby, the proportion of fiction, around 20 percent, was in line with Siljeström's recommendation. (See table 3 and chart 1). However, the proportion of religious books, around a third of the holdings, was larger than both Siljeström's and the School Inspectorate's recommendations of 10 and 16 percent respectively. Generally, the parish libraries' holdings could vary greatly, according to contemporary reports,<sup>43</sup> and the library in Munka-Ljungby seems to have been more independent and liberal than others. Although mainly inoffensive and edifying books were acquired, new novels by Jules Verne, for example, were

<sup>41</sup> Rinman, *Studier i svensk bokhandel*, 105–06.

<sup>42</sup> Knut Tynell, *Folkbiblioteken i Sverige* (Stockholm: Norstedts lilla bibliotek, 1931), 53, 61; and Verner Söderberg, *Sveriges sockenbibliotek* (Stockholm: P. A. Norstedt & söner, 1901), 12, 19–20, 24.

<sup>43</sup> Söderberg, *Sveriges sockenbibliotek*, 8.



occasionally bought, and in early 1882 even one of Strindberg's works, *Svenska folket*, published in 1881–82, was added to the library shortly after its publication. In general, most libraries shunned Strindberg.<sup>44</sup> A substantial proportion of the religious works in the library were written by authors of the revivalist movement, such as the preacher and editor Carl Olof Rosenius and the vicar Bernhard Wadström. Rosenius was the overall most well-represented author in the library, with over fifty works. The revivalist movement faced opposition from the Swedish state church,<sup>45</sup> and its publications could not be found in the lists with recommended books for parish libraries. The presence of such books in the library of Munka-Ljungby indicated a local interest in the revivalist movement. Over the course of the 1890s, there was a change in the purchasing practices of the parish library in Munka-Ljungby as more contemporary fiction was incorporated into the collection. Individual board members increasingly participated in the acquisition of new books, and by the turn of the century, two young elementary-school teachers, Nils Persson Berner and Ola Persson Sahlin, became involved in the library. The purchase of contemporary fiction dates to this period of increased board interest in book procurement.

Table 3. Holdings from the parish library in Munka-Ljungby, 1870–88 and 1899–1903

Genres	1870–76	1876–81	1881–88	1899–1903
Biographies and stories	105 (18.7 %)	173 (22.7 %)	202 (23.3 %)	306 (24.8 %)
Geography, nature and travel	106 (18.9 %)	122 (16 %)	130 (15.1 %)	109 (8.9 %)
History	50 (8.9 %)	63 (8.3 %)	66 (7.6 %)	73 (5.9 %)
Household and farming	61 (10.9 %)	72 (9.5 %)	79 (9.2 %)	102 (8.2 %)
Magazines	54 (9.6 %)	59 (7.7 %)	65 (7.5 %)	86 (7 %)
Miscellaneous and unidentified	20 (3.5 %)	29 (3.8 %)	32 (3.7 %)	148 (12 %)
Religious works	166 (29.5 %)	244 (32 %)	292 (33.6 %)	410 (33.2 %)
<b>Total</b>	<b>562 (100 %)</b>	<b>762 (100 %)</b>	<b>866 (100 %)</b>	<b>1234 (100 %)</b>

<sup>44</sup> Johan Personne, *Strindbergs-litteraturen och osedligheten bland ungdomen* (Stockholm: Carl Deleen, 1887), 16, 21; and Söderberg, *Sveriges sockenbibliotek*, 34.

<sup>45</sup> Gunnar Hallingberg, *Läsarna: 1800-talets folkväckelse och det moderna genombrottet* (Stockholm: Atlantis, 2010), 41–43.

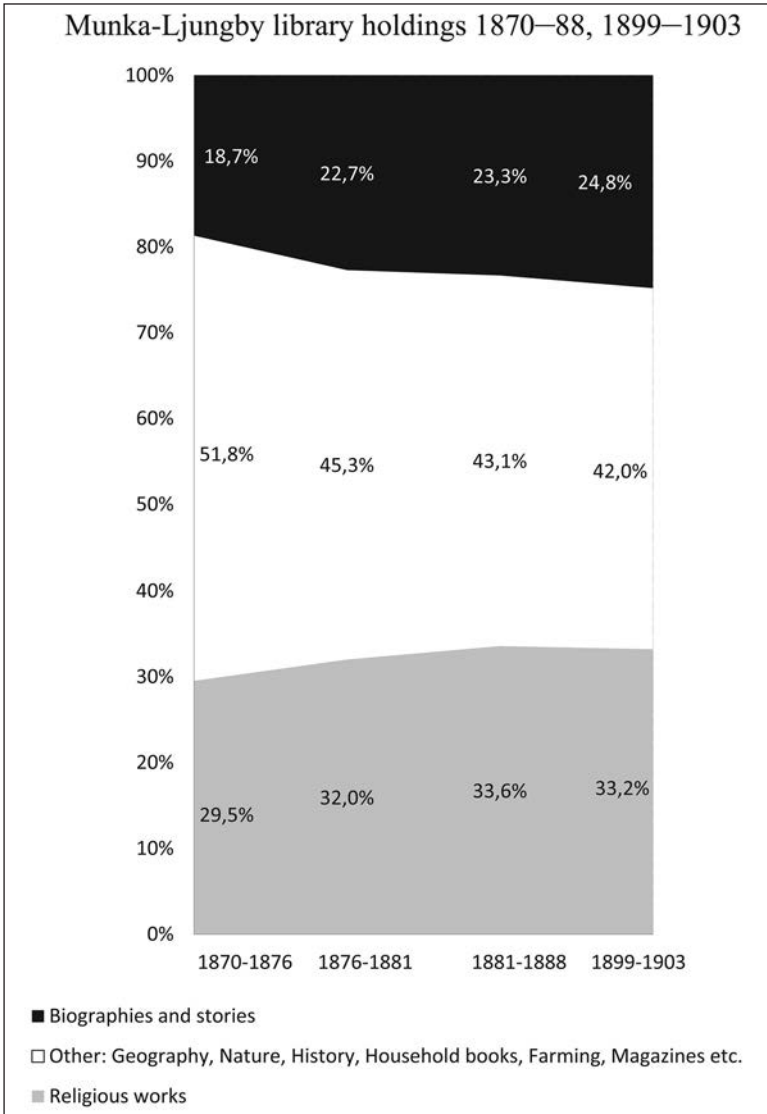


Chart 1. Holdings from the parish library in Munka-Ljungby, 1870–88 and 1899–1903

In the commercial lending libraries, the selection of books was seldom influenced by any political, moral, or religious agendas, but was rather made with the aim of earning the greatest possible

profit. Many lending libraries adapted their holdings to the general reader's tastes and devoted their libraries almost entirely to books that people wanted to read, but not necessarily own – novels, in particular. Sjöblom's library consisted mainly of novels, except for a few magazines, and the business was even advertised as a "novel-lending library." Two thirds of the books were translated from foreign languages, notably from French, English, and German.<sup>46</sup> Among the most frequently borrowed books were sensation and mystery novels and gothic and romantic stories, such as books by the French authors Paul de Kock, Ponson du Terrail, and Eugène Sue. This literature was often criticized and occasionally even made the subject of political debate. In 1877, Sven Adolf Hedin, a member of the Swedish parliament, expressed particular concern regarding the translated novels: "These horrible, illustrated robber novels ... and 'Mysteries' from the European capitals ... are heaps of pure immorality, which are spread to even the lowest sections of society."<sup>47</sup> Most lending libraries primarily offered contemporary fiction.<sup>48</sup> In this respect, Sjöblom's lending library was a little different, as it contained both old and new books. Niels Juel-Hansen's *Erik Sjöblad, den svenske Robinson* and Émile Zola's *Bättre slödder (Pot-Bouille)* could be borrowed from Sjöblom's library in 1882, the same year as they were published. By contrast, a number of older books were also available in the library, such as Lady Morgan's *Flora Macarthy (Florence Macarthy)*, published in 1828, and Heinrich Zschokke's *Alamontade eller galerslafven (Alamontade der Galeerensklave)*, published in 1834. Even though many books in Sjöblom's library were a little dated, the generational gap was less pronounced than at the parish library. If we only consider the first date of publication, roughly 50 percent of the books available from Sjöblom's library in the period from 1882 to 1883 were published before 1870, and 50 percent of the books were published in 1870 and later. The only preserved printed catalogue from Sjöblom's library dates from 1895 and comprises a total of 1,864 works. The catalogue lists many new books, such as the latest works by Rider Haggard, Selma Lagerlöf, and Arthur Conan Doyle, but in terms of number of titles, the Swedish authors Marie Sophie Schwartz, Jon Olof Åberg, and Emilie Flygare-Carlén are in the top,

<sup>46</sup> Hansen, "Bokläsning i Lund omkring 1880," 53–54.

<sup>47</sup> Rinman, *Studier i svensk bokhandel*, 248–49.

<sup>48</sup> Jeppsson, *Tankar till salu*, 71–74 and Torgerson, *J. F. Hallmans lånebibliotek*, 35–42.

followed by Walter Scott, Oskar Meding, Frederick Marryat, and Jules Verne. The dividing line between Sjöblom's two businesses, the antiquarian bookshop and the commercial lending library, seems to have been vague, as is indicated by a letter sent to Sjöblom from a customer in 1888: "What is the price for the copy of *Anna Karenina*, that my mother borrowed the other day? I would very much like to buy it."<sup>49</sup> On the rear of the card Sjöblom has scribbled a short reply and stated the price "2,75 krona." Apparently, it was possible to buy books from the library, and if such sales were common practice, the composition of the collection would naturally be affected.

### Bestsellers and Reading Preferences

Although both Gumpert's bookshop and Sjöblom's commercial lending library probably had certain moral standards, the two businesses were first and foremost based on commercial interests. In contrast, for the parish library board a recurring dilemma was having to choose between the books they thought were best for the readers, and the books the borrowers preferred to read. In many cases, the use of the library seems to have been directly linked to the amount of fiction the library offered.<sup>50</sup> Loan statistics from public libraries in Paris, Berlin, Boston, Manchester, Vienna, and Milwaukee from the 1880s and 1890s indicate that the proportion of fiction among the borrowed books varied from 55 to 90 percent.<sup>51</sup> Although some librarians and library boards stressed the importance of acquiring entertaining books, many Swedish parish libraries offered only a very limited amount of fiction.<sup>52</sup>

Between 1870 and 1888, and 1899 and 1903, over twenty-five thousand loans were made from the parish library in Munka-Ljungby. The great popularity of the "biographies and stories" section, which

<sup>49</sup> Letter to Sjöblom from the lawyer Gustaf Angelo Broomé, 18 July 1888, the archive of J. A. Sjöblom, LUB-2:0190, Lund University Library.

<sup>50</sup> Altick, *The English Common Reader*, 231–33.

<sup>51</sup> E. Reyer, "Hvad folk læser," in *Samtiden* (1892) 465–73 (464); and Martyn Lyons, "New Readers in the Nineteenth Century: Women, Children, Workers," in *A History of Reading in the West*, edited by Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier (Cambridge: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), 313–44 (335).

<sup>52</sup> Nils-Åke Sjösten, *Sockenbiblioteket – ett folkbildningsinstrument i 1870-talets Sverige* (Linköping: Linköping Studies in Education and Psychology, 1993), 17–19, 24.

includes most of the library's fiction, is striking. The craving for fiction seems only to have increased as the years passed. By the turn of the century, the proportion of fiction in the library's holdings had increased from 18.7 percent in the early 1870s to 24.8 percent, and the increase in loans was even greater, from around 30 to 35 percent of all the loans in the 1870s and 1880s to over 65 percent between 1899 and 1903. (See table 4 and chart 2). During these early years of the new century, almost every second book in the library was not borrowed even once. A majority of these books consisted of religious works and out-dated household and farming manuals. Although the members' reading interests became increasingly secular over the years, religious books constituted a considerable share of the loans and the proportion increased between 1870 and 1888. Missionary books, religious stories, and magazines were particularly popular. For a long time, the revivalist Rosenius was the most borrowed writer. The library's over fifty copies of his works were borrowed 1,545 times between 1870 and 1888 in the wake of the revivalist movement.<sup>53</sup> Between 1899 and 1903, however, his books were borrowed only forty-eight times, and by then, the most borrowed authors were all writers of fiction; Zacharias Topelius, Ragnar Pihlstrand, Carl Georg Starbäck, Georg Ebers, and Jon Olof Åberg.

Table 4. Loans from the parish library in Munka-Ljungby, 1870–88 and 1899–1903

Genres	1870–76	1876–81	1881–88	1899–1903
Biographies and stories	2204 (29.2 %)	2872 (37.2 %)	2563 (36.2 %)	1961 (65.2 %)
Geography, nature and travel	1333 (17.6 %)	1015 (13.1 %)	896 (12.6 %)	151 (5 %)
History	560 (7.4 %)	690 (8.9 %)	587 (8.3 %)	109 (3.7 %)
Household and farming	490 (6.4 %)	361 (4.7 %)	323 (4.6 %)	141 (4.7 %)
Magazines	754 (9.9 %)	277 (3.6 %)	288 (4.1 %)	108 (3.6 %)
Miscellaneous and unidentified	300 (4 %)	429 (5.6 %)	310 (4.4 %)	55 (1.8 %)
Religious works	1938 (25.5 %)	2076 (26.9 %)	2105 (29.8 %)	482 (16 %)
<b>Total</b>	<b>7579 (100 %)</b>	<b>7720 (100 %)</b>	<b>7072 (100 %)</b>	<b>3007 (100 %)</b>

<sup>53</sup> Hallingberg, *Läsarna*, 151–60.

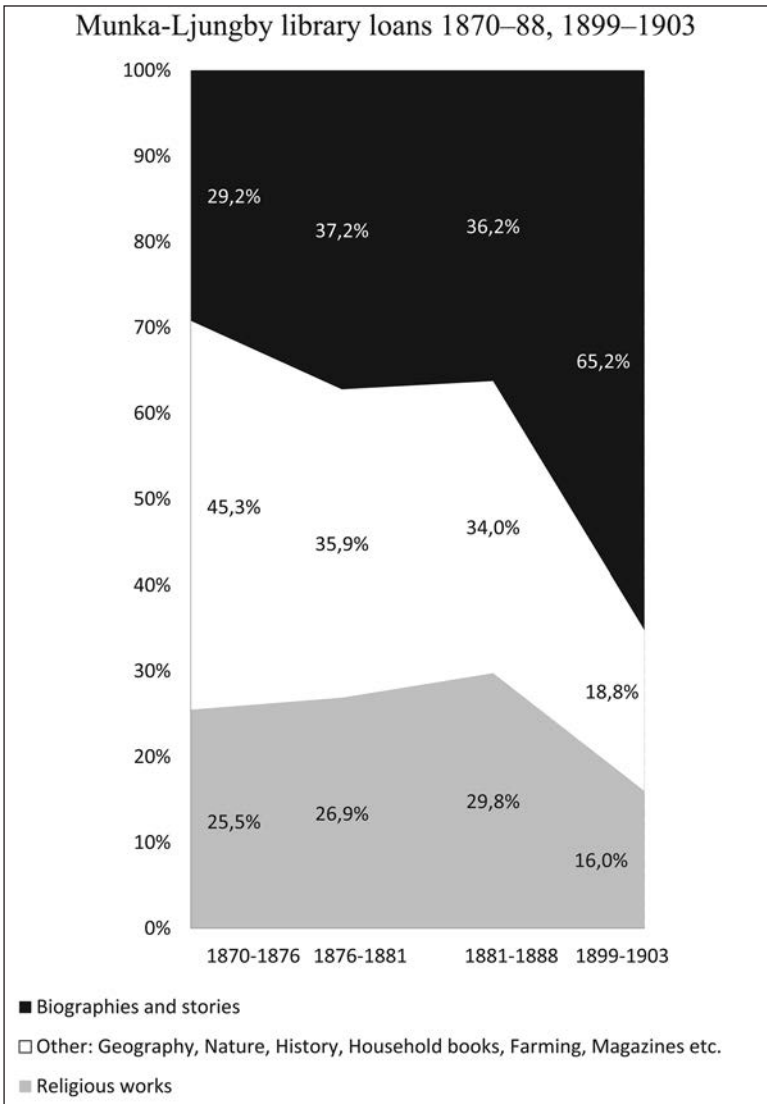


Chart 2. Loans from the parish library in Munka-Ljungby, 1870–88 and 1899–1903

Profit-seeking commercial lending libraries' holdings often reflected the public's reading preferences better than other literary institutions, and the loan records from Sjöblom's library are of particular interest

as they reveal that different sub-groups among the library's customers had different literary preferences.<sup>54</sup> Table 2 offers an overview of the library's most borrowed authors. Emilie Flygare-Carlén was – by a large margin – the female customers' preferred author, followed by Marie Sophie Schwartz and Zacharias Topelius. Flygare-Carlén was also the labourers' and artisans' favourite, followed by Frederick Marryat and Ponson du Terrail. The students, an important customer group in a university town like Lund, borrowed many books by Paul de Kock and Alexandre Dumas, followed by Schwartz and Eugène Sue. School boys preferred the books by Marryat, Jules Verne, de Kock, and Thomas Mayne Reid. A few patterns stand out. The books by Marryat, the most popular author among the male customers, were scarcely ever borrowed by female customers, and the same goes for the books by Dumas and de Kock. The lack of interest in Marryat's books is also noticeable among the students' loans, and they also shared the women's interest for Schwartz's books, mainly so-called "tendency novels," which dealt with issues such as women's emancipation and social injustices.<sup>55</sup> Among the labourers, artisans, and school boys, Schwartz' books evoked little or no interest. They preferred the adventurous stories by authors such as Verne and Ponson du Terrail. For some customers, borrowing books from Sjöblom's library was not without complications. One customer, the author Frank Heller (1886–1947), provides an account of his interactions with the library around 1895, which tells us a little of the school boys' reading preferences and how the reading of novels was regarded by some:

Sjöblom's library was a remarkable attraction, overflowing with books in all three dimensions ... I had managed to become acquainted with Rider Haggard, Rudyard Kipling, and Conan Doyle before fate intervened. So far, I had only brought home volumes that could easily be mistaken for schoolbooks. But on this particular night, I borrowed a far more voluminous book, Alexandre Dumas' *The Three Musketeers*. I was absorbed in reading when my aunt suddenly demanded to know what I was reading. ... 'It's a book I've borrowed. A historical novel.' I wanted to imply that it was a history schoolbook, but my aunt was not easily fooled. ... She confiscated the book and did not return it until its due date

<sup>54</sup> Jeppsson, *Tankar till salu*, 73, 160; and Staffan Björck, "Den första bokfloden: om 1800-talets romanserier och lånbibliotek" in *Studiekamraten* nr 4–5 (1972), 64.

<sup>55</sup> Gunlög Kolbe, "Marie Sophie Schwartz, August Strindberg och det moderna genombrottet," *Personhistorisk tidskrift* (2004:1): 24–35 (25–27).

... A few weeks later, I borrowed *The Count of Monte Cristo*, and the same scene was repeated ... Henceforth, my aunt would read the books first, to see if they contained anything inappropriate.<sup>56</sup>

Table 5. A random selection (10 percent of the purchases) from Gumpert's bookshop in 1880, 1882, 1884, 1886, 1888, and 1890.

Genre	Number of books	Percentage
Fiction	1893	19 %
Magazines and calendars	1822	18.3 %
School books	1642	16.5 %
Professional literature	1122	11.3 %
Religion & philosophy	643	6.5 %
History	465	4.7 %
Travel books, geography & maps	382	3.8 %
Miscellaneous	292	2.9 %
Children's books and picture books	231	2.4 %
Dictionaries & encyclopaedias	225	2.3 %
Music	133	1.4 %
Art books	120	1.2 %
History of literature	101	1 %
Cooking- and household manuals	81	0.8 %
<i>Unidentified</i>	787	7.9 %
<b>Total:</b>	<b>9939</b>	<b>100 %</b>

In Gumpert's bookshop fiction was the best-selling category, closely followed by magazines and school books. (See table 5). The interest in contemporary literature, the school of naturalism in particular, was strong, but a few long-established writers like Topelius and Flygare-Carlén were also bestsellers. Even though fiction sold in larger numbers, in economic terms the sales of magazines and journals were more important for the bookshop. The bookshop offered over eight hundred foreign and Swedish journals and magazines, and many customers who otherwise only bought non-fiction or school books purchased magazines. The Swedish literary calendar *Svea* sold the most copies, closely followed by the

<sup>56</sup> Heller, *På detta tidens smala näs*, 90–92.



illustrated German magazines *Fliegende Blätter*, *Über Land und Meer*, the fashion magazine for women *Freja: illustrerad skandinavisk modetidning*, and the radical cultural magazine *Ur dagens krönika*. School books were one of the trade's most profitable genres,<sup>57</sup> and Gumpert's bookshop eventually started publishing textbooks. Just like in Sjöblom's library, the literary preferences differed among the various customer groups. Women bought fiction to a greater extent than men and preferred Tolstoy, Topelius, Alexander Kielland, and Ibsen, over Strindberg. Women also bought more school books and children's books than men, whereas men bought more non-fiction and magazines. A growing number of independent female customers, among them unmarried women, teachers, and writers, bought literature on women's emancipation, such as the radical magazine *Framåt* ("Forward"); Otto Møller's Danish play *Hun vil ikke gifte sig* ("She Will Not Marry"), published in 1886; Emil Svensén's *Spörsmål 1: Kvinnofrågan* ("Question 1: Women's Liberation"), published in 1888; and Urban von Feilitzen's *Ibsen och äktenskapsfrågan* ("Ibsen and the Question of Marriage"), published in 1882. Since it was often noted in the accounts who exactly purchased a particular book, we can see that the children of the account holders also bought books in Gumpert's bookshop. They mainly purchased school books, and here the differences in educational opportunities according to gender become very apparent: the sons bought almost seven times as many school books as the daughters. The sales in the bookshop were characterized by seasonality. The wholesaler Herman Josephson's (1838–1930) purchases in 1880 are rather typical: a few annual volumes of magazines in May, half-a-dozen school books in September, and a number of novels and children's books just in time for Christmas. The sales peaked during the Christmas season, with on average 20 to 25 percent of all books being sold in December alone, but also the beginning of each semester, September in particular, could be hectic. In his diary, one of the bookshop's employees described the long working days during early September 1888 as "worse than I have ever seen before."<sup>58</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Svedjedal, *Bokens samhälle*, 88–90.

<sup>58</sup> The diaries of the bookshop assistant Johan Lundgren 1883–1903, in the archive of N.J. Gumpert, GLA/Coo38:1, Regional State Archives in Gothenburg.

## The Rural Population and the Parish Library

“Try travelling ten miles outside the city. You have been a famous author in the capital for ten years. Do you think that even a single farmer knows your name? Not at all! Not even the books you’ve written specifically for him. If he knows your name at all, it is only through insulting writings in the newspapers. Oh, we authors, who think that we write for the people!”<sup>59</sup> Although Strindberg was probably exaggerating, this quote from 1884 may well indicate the dividing line between the availability of books in the towns and the countryside.<sup>60</sup> For decades, substantial parts of the population, the peasants in particular, were reliant upon the parish libraries for their everyday reading.

Most parish libraries had to get by on a very small budget, and by the end of the nineteenth century, many had deteriorated.<sup>61</sup> In this respect, the parish library in Munka-Ljungby was not any different, and the average number of annual loans dropped from fourteen hundred in the early 1870s to one thousand in the mid-1880s, and to just over six hundred at the turn of the century, despite the fact that the number of books and members more than doubled during the same time span. (See table 6). It is hard to tell whether the members were able to satisfy their reading interests elsewhere, or if the declining number of book loans reflects a decreasing interest in reading in general. Some claimed that the reading of newspapers made the parish libraries superfluous, while others blamed the peasants’ long working days.<sup>62</sup> The late nineteenth century was a time of intensive urbanization and migration – around one million Swedes emigrated to the United States – and the parish libraries eventually had to compete with public and workers’ libraries in the cities for funding.<sup>63</sup> The poor selection of books in most parish libraries, particularly the lack of fiction, may also have affected the members’ borrowing habits. This reality goes in line with the author Carl Larsson i By’s statement: “If you ask a librarian in the countryside whether the peasants borrow

<sup>59</sup> August Strindberg, *Likt och olikt I: sociala och kulturkritiska uppsatser från 1880-talet* (Stockholm: Albert Bonnier, 1913), 130.

<sup>60</sup> Altick, *The English Common Reader*, 252; and Jeppsson, *Tankar till salu*, 18.

<sup>61</sup> Åberg, “Folket läste,” 387; and Tynell, *Folkbiblioteken i Sverige*, 64–78.

<sup>62</sup> Johannesson, *Den läsande familjen*, 132; and Söderberg, *Sveriges sockenbibliotek*, 12.

<sup>63</sup> Carl Larsson i By, “Böndernas avtagande läslust,” *Biblioteksbladet 1920*: 127–30 (129); and Tynell, *Folkbiblioteken i Sverige*, 65.

any books, they respond that it occurs rarely, and when it happens it's mostly for recreational reading."<sup>64</sup> The media landscape, even in a rural setting like Munka-Ljungby, had changed profoundly since the establishment of the library in 1859. Commercial lending libraries had been established in nearby towns, books from the closest bookshop in Ängelholm had become less expensive, two local newspapers had emerged, and book auctions were arranged in Munka-Ljungby once a year. By the beginning of the twentieth century, reading materials were easier to come by and cheaper than ever before, and the parish libraries had to adapt, or face closure. The library in Munka-Ljungby was among the parish libraries that actually managed to adapt. The library was larger than most parish libraries and new books were acquired on a fairly regular basis, eventually even contemporary fiction. Out-dated books were culled, and in 1905 the library fee was halved. For a fee equivalent to one seventh of the cost of an annual subscription of the largest local newspaper, *Engelholms tidning*, the members could access over one thousand books. The new strategy paid off. After a low of around six hundred loans annually, the numbers eventually tripled by 1910 and the longstanding trend of decreasing numbers of loans was reversed. (See table 6).

Table 6. Number of books, members, and loans in the parish library in Munka-Ljungby 1860–1910. (Blanks indicate missing information.)

Year	Books	Members	Number of loans
1860	–	77	–
1861	–	77	–
1862	–	80	–
1863	–	85	–
1864	–	91	–
1865	–	95	–
1866	–	–	–
1867	–	96	–
1868	–	97	–
1869	351	99	–

<sup>64</sup> Larsson i By, "Böndernas avtagande läslust," 127–28.

1870	386	102	
1871	—	103	
1872	—	108	9,870 loans 1870–1876
1873	—	111	<i>(1,410 loans annually on average)</i>
1874	512	117	
1875	553	122	
1876	651	123	
1877	659	—	
1878	708	132	7,710 loans 1877–1881
1879	741	135	<i>(1,542 loans annually on average)</i>
1880	760	142	
1881	782	144	
1882	792	149	
1883	795	150	
1884	797	152	7,070 loans 1882–1888
1885	798	154	<i>(1,010 loans annually on average)</i>
1886	808	158	
1887	844	159	
1888	869	161	
1889	—	166	—
1890	—	173	—
1891	—	175	—
1892	—	184	—
1893	—	195	—
1894	—	201	—
1895	—	202	—
1896	—	204	—
1897	—	210	—
1898	—	213	—
1899	1,102	213	
1900	1,116	215	3,007 loans 1899–1903
1901	1,151	217	<i>(601 loans annually on average)</i>
1902	1,169	218	
1903	1,187	222	
1904	—	—	—
1905	—	—	—
1906	1,017	—	665
1907	1,080	—	1,177

1908	1,172	–	1,256
1909	1,239	–	1,690
1910	1,377	–	1,859

Some members never ceased borrowing books from the library. Johannes Persson in Kroppåkra (1847–1909), a farmer and father of eleven, joined the library as a young man and remained an active member for decades. Persson borrowed books from a wide range of subjects: agriculture, geography, history, and fiction, but mainly books such as number 211: part 3 of a collection of sermons by the American evangelist Dwight L. Moody, published in 1876. (See fig. 6). As is indicated by Persson's borrower's number (3), he borrowed the book on 23 February 1878 and a second time on 27 November 1880, only returning it after four months. Persson borrowed many books by Moody, Rosenius, and even Martin Luther. Persson's neighbour, the farmer Anders Nilsson in Kroppåkra (1819–1903) was also a longstanding and active member of the parish library, with the borrower's number 1. Unlike Persson, he borrowed primarily novels and travelogues, and a few books on farming, but few if any religious books. On 23 February 1878, the same day as Persson borrowed Moody's sermons, Nilsson took out book number 212, "Over Egypt," and a few months earlier he had borrowed book number 213, *En resa kring jorden* ("A journey around the world"), a novel by G. H. Mellin that was published in 1851. Naturally, we must keep in mind that these books might have been intended for someone else in Persson's or Nilsson's households, but the fact that Persson joined the library as a bachelor, and that he already by then was a keen borrower of sermons and edifying works, and that Nilsson continued borrowing novels even when he lived alone as a widower, makes it likely that they read many of the books themselves.

### The Discerning Readers

The findings of this study suggest that the different social classes that frequented the parish library, bookshop, and lending library had their own particular literary tastes. While an article published in 1885 stated that the common Swedish reader favoured the older, well-established authors, and that the upper classes read foreign authors in the original language,<sup>65</sup> this study shows that not only class but

<sup>65</sup> Åberg, "Det moderna genombrottet' i svensk landsort," 54.

211		212		213		214		215	
Fondrag af Madag 3 delar		Kvæter Egypten		Reca kring for alting i Nas bogst.		Ett år i Sverige fallsk.		Luniska seder i Nas bogst.	
Utg.	Ink.	Utg.	Ink.	Utg.	Ink.	Utg.	Ink.	Utg.	Ink.
7 1/2 77	24 1/2 77	29 1/2 76	36 1/2 80	31 1/2 77	19 1/2 77	7 1/2 77	11 1/2 76	11 1/2 76	11 1/2 76
5 1/2 77	14 1/2 78	17 1/2 77	14 1/2 78	18 1/2 78	11 1/2 77	11 1/2 77	11 1/2 77	11 1/2 77	11 1/2 77
3 1/2 78	3 1/2 78	12 1/2 77	12 1/2 77	11 1/2 77	11 1/2 77	11 1/2 77	11 1/2 77	11 1/2 77	11 1/2 77
8 1/2 78	12 1/2 78	12 1/2 77	12 1/2 77	11 1/2 77	11 1/2 77	11 1/2 77	11 1/2 77	11 1/2 77	11 1/2 77
8 1/2 78	12 1/2 78	12 1/2 77	12 1/2 77	11 1/2 77	11 1/2 77	11 1/2 77	11 1/2 77	11 1/2 77	11 1/2 77
8 1/2 78	12 1/2 78	12 1/2 77	12 1/2 77	11 1/2 77	11 1/2 77	11 1/2 77	11 1/2 77	11 1/2 77	11 1/2 77
3 1/2 78	12 1/2 78	12 1/2 77	12 1/2 77	11 1/2 77	11 1/2 77	11 1/2 77	11 1/2 77	11 1/2 77	11 1/2 77
7 1/2 78	12 1/2 78	12 1/2 77	12 1/2 77	11 1/2 77	11 1/2 77	11 1/2 77	11 1/2 77	11 1/2 77	11 1/2 77
5 1/2 80	12 1/2 80	12 1/2 78	12 1/2 78	11 1/2 77	11 1/2 77	11 1/2 77	11 1/2 77	11 1/2 77	11 1/2 77
3 1/2 80	12 1/2 80	12 1/2 78	12 1/2 78	11 1/2 77	11 1/2 77	11 1/2 77	11 1/2 77	11 1/2 77	11 1/2 77
3 1/2 80	12 1/2 80	12 1/2 78	12 1/2 78	11 1/2 77	11 1/2 77	11 1/2 77	11 1/2 77	11 1/2 77	11 1/2 77
3 1/2 80	12 1/2 80	12 1/2 78	12 1/2 78	11 1/2 77	11 1/2 77	11 1/2 77	11 1/2 77	11 1/2 77	11 1/2 77

Figure 6. Borrowers' ledger from the parish library in Munka-Ljungby with the loans and returns for five books (211-15). Central Archive of Ängelholm.

also gender, occupation, and location affected what books a reader might buy or borrow. Books like the “city mysteries,” by Eugène Sue, for instance, could be found in both Gumpert’s bookshop and Sjöblom’s lending library, but were less popular in the bookshop than they were in the lending library. Conversely, several of the best-selling contemporary authors in the bookshop were also represented in Sjöblom’s lending library, such as Zola, Strindberg, Daudet, and Turgenev, but their books only appealed to certain sections of the clientele; students, clerks, and doctors. Apart from the painter Anders Olsson (born in 1861) who borrowed Zola’s *Ett blad ur kärlekens bok* (*Une page d’amour*) and *Nana*, published in Stockholm in 1879 and 1880 respectively, not a single labourer, artisan, or farmer borrowed books by these authors. In the late 1890s, when Strindberg had attained something of the status of a national writer, the parish library in Munka-Ljungby finally acquired a copy of one of his novels, *I vårbrytningen*, published in 1880. The book was borrowed thirteen times in the course of five years, more than most novels, but still,

Strindberg, the best-selling author of the bookshop, was surpassed in popularity in the parish library by a number of ten to sixty-year-old historical novels and adventure stories.

In the parish libraries, the members' reading habits were certainly restricted by the choices that the library boards made, and at least in the early years of the parish libraries, the members were desperate for reading materials, and many books were constantly on loan. In an interview, a Swedish woman from Kronoberg County, born in the late nineteenth century, recalls how she would read anything, "as long as it contained words."<sup>66</sup> Still, the members of the parish library in Munka-Ljungby had individual literary preferences and the selection of books was evidently sufficient to cater to the diverse literary interests of the two neighbours Persson and Nilsson in Kroppåkra. The members' literary interests stand out particularly clearly by the end of the century when the loans of fiction increasingly dominated and the loans of religious works fell sharply.

The importance of religion and morality leaves its marks on the book consumption in several ways. Hardly a single vicar or cleric – one of Gumpert's most important customer groups – ever bought the bestselling books of the "Modern Breakthrough." The issues raised by this literary movement offended the church, and one book, Strindberg's *Giftas* (*Getting Married*), published in 1884, was even charged with blasphemy. Most clerics seem to have avoided novels altogether. The only exception among Sjöblom's customers was the vicar Erik Berlin (1832–86), who borrowed some novels by Schwartz and Georg Ebers. In Munka-Ljungby, the great popularity of the revivalist books with readers like farmer Persson was part of a larger popular religious movement, which permeated Swedish society.<sup>67</sup> Even in a small village like Kroppåkra in the parish of Munka-Ljungby, with only ninety inhabitants, an independent church was established in 1883.<sup>68</sup> In Gothenburg, the revivalist movement faced opposition from the strong state church, and the first nonconformist churches in Gothenburg mainly attracted labourers and artisans.<sup>69</sup> Among the clientele of Gumpert's bookshop the sales of revivalist books were negligible: one copy of one of Rosenius's books was sent to the Swedish pastor Hult in Scandia, Minnesota, and one copy of

<sup>66</sup> Åberg, "Folket läste," 367.

<sup>67</sup> Hallingberg, *Läsarna*, 339.

<sup>68</sup> Stig Edenfur, "Ortnamn i Munka Ljungby socken," <http://www.hembygd.se/munka-ljungby-tassjo/files/2012/11/Ortnamn-Munka-Ljungby.pdf>.

<sup>69</sup> Hallingberg, *Läsarna*, 282–92.

Paul Peter Waldenström's translation of the New Testament was purchased by the vicar Christian Torin (born in 1837).

## Conclusion

Although a handful of studies have been devoted to the Swedish reading public, this article is the first to attempt to study a cross-section of the readers' book market at the end of the nineteenth century, and possibly the only one to examine loans from a commercial lending library. Further research is warranted in order to get a fuller picture, especially of the subscribers of newspapers and magazines, and loans from other kinds of libraries, such as workers' libraries and the libraries of the temperance movement in Sweden. Still, this study confirms earlier research and contributes new information about the reading public in Sweden during the late nineteenth century.

The reading public was largely divided into two audiences: those who borrowed books and those who bought them. Different institutions primarily served certain segments of society and the dividing line between the urban and rural areas was particularly evident. Different sub-groups among the libraries' and the bookshop's customers also had different literary preferences. The literary school of naturalism, in particular the "Modern Breakthrough," was popular among the well-educated customers of Gumpert's bookshop and Sjöblom's lending library. The labourers and farmers that borrowed books from the lending library and the parish library preferred the books authored by an earlier generation of writers, for example Topelius, Flygare-Carlén, Marryat, and Dumas. Men and women also preferred different authors. The female customers rejected the men's favourites (Strindberg and Marryat) in favour of Tolstoy, Flygare-Carlén, and Schwartz. Many women, and even some men, came into contact with the ideas concerning women's emancipation through their reading. Readers' tastes also changed over time. Over the years, the customers of Gumpert's bookshop bought more and more books in foreign languages, and the members of the parish library were in a few decades transformed from omnivorous book consumers to discriminating readers, craving fiction above all else.

In some ways, the end of the nineteenth century marked the beginning of a new era. The interdependence between a largely new reading public on one side, and libraries and bookshops on the other, led to the development of a dynamic book market that eventually



allowed all sections of Swedish society – from the counts, bishops, and engineers in the bookshop, to the children, peasants, and labourers in the library – to access books in one way or another.

## RÉSUMÉ

Qui lisait quoi dans la société suédoise de la fin du dix-neuvième siècle? Quels livres étaient disponibles dans les librairies et les bibliothèques? Quels titres étaient les plus populaires? En se basant sur les registres et les archives de trois des institutions littéraires les plus populaires de l'époque, à savoir une bibliothèque paroissiale, une librairie et une bibliothèque prêteuse, l'auteur de cette étude propose des réponses préliminaires à de telles questions. À la fin du dix-neuvième siècle, un marché du livre dynamique était en plein essor en Suède. Il était alors possible pour tous d'avoir accès, d'une façon ou d'une autre, à des livres. Le lectorat était, *grosso modo*, divisé en deux groupes: ceux qui empruntaient des livres et ceux qui les achetaient. Différentes institutions répondaient alors aux besoins des groupes et des classes sociales. Qui plus est, l'écart entre les régions urbaines et rurales était considérable. Par cette étude, l'auteur montre que les différents sous-groupes de lecteurs d'alors avaient des préférences littéraires distinctes. Ainsi, les écrivains contemporains étaient populaires auprès de la frange instruite de la société, tandis que les ouvriers et les agriculteurs préféraient les écrits d'auteurs plus anciens, notamment ceux de Victor Hugo et d'Alexandre Dumas. De plus, les hommes comme les femmes accordaient leur préférence à des genres distincts: alors que les premiers privilégiaient les récits d'aventures, ces dernières, pour leur part, lisaient plutôt des romans engagés faisant la promotion d'une cause, quelle qu'elle soit, ainsi que des livres relatifs à l'émancipation des femmes.