

# The Practical Impact of Writing

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One of the most important developments of the modern era, according to Philippe Aries, was the advent of written culture in Western society. The spread of literacy, the widespread circulation of written materials whether in printed or manuscript form, and the increasingly common practice of silent reading, which fostered a solitary and private relation between the reader and his book, were crucial changes, which redrew the boundary between the inner life and life in the community.

Between 1500 and 1800 man's altered relation to the written word helped to create a new private sphere into which the individual could retreat, seeking refuge from the community.

This development, however, as I will show, did not totally obliterate earlier practices, nor did it affect everyone who dealt with printed materials. Reading aloud, reading in groups for work or pleasure, did not cease with the arrival of silent and private reading. Different kinds of reading overlapped. But this should not cause us to lose sight of the fact that new models of behavior were being established, models that tell us a great deal about the process of privatization in the early modern period.

## Measuring literacy

Can the extent to which the written word penetrated Western societies in the early modern period be measured? Attempting to do so, historians have counted signatures on documents from parish records, notarial archives, the courts, and tax authorities; using these data they have estimated what proportion of the population consisted of people able to sign [112] their own names. After lengthy debate, it is now widely accepted that, although this figure can be taken as a very rough estimate of a society's familiarity with writing, it cannot be interpreted directly as a measure of cultural advancement. In early modern societies, where the small fraction of children who attended school learned first to read and then to write, everyone who

could sign his name could also read, but not everyone who knew how to read could sign his name.

Furthermore not all signers could actually write. For some, instruction in writing never went beyond learning how to sign their names; for others writing was a skill lost for want of practice, and the ability to sign was merely a relic of that lost skill. Paradoxically, the signature is the mark of a population that knows how to read but not necessarily how to write. It is impossible to estimate what fraction of the signers could actually write, and some people who could read never learned to sign their names. This does not mean that all the data concerning percentages of signers at different times and in different places are worthless. The figures constitute a kind of rough, composite index, which does not precisely measure the diffusion of either writing skills (which the percentages exaggerate) or reading skills (which they underestimate).<sup>1</sup>

## Numbers of readers

With this caveat in mind, it is clear from all the data that between 1500 and 1800 the percentage of signers rose sharply throughout Europe. (For convenience, we may refer to this percentage as the 'literacy rate', bearing in mind that it does not necessarily indicate the percentage of the population that could both read and write.) We possess sufficient data about three countries to permit generalizations on a national scale. In Scotland signatures collected for the National Covenant of 1638 (which affirmed the unity of the Presbyterian churches) and for the Solemn League and Covenant of 1643 (which promised Scottish support to the English Parliament, provided that it established the Presbyterian religion) reveal a literacy rate among males of 25 percent. A century later, signatures collected in the 1750s before the High Court of the Judiciary reveal rates of 78 percent for men and 23 percent for women; corrected to reflect differences between the social composition of the witness group and the general population, these figures suggest literacy rates of 65 and 15 percent, respective-

<sup>1</sup> My interpretation of signature rates therefore differs from that of Françoise Furet and Jacques Ozouf, *Lire et Ecrire. L'alphabetisation des Français de Calvin à Jules Ferry* (Paris: Minuit, 1977), I, 27. After examining, for 1866, signatures on marriage documents, conscripts' educational documents, and cultural data, they conclude that 'the ability to sign one's name corresponds to what we now call literacy, meaning the ability to read and write' and that 'there is a presumption in favor' of the hypothesis that the correlation between ability to sign and complete literacy is valid 'for earlier periods'.

ly.<sup>2</sup> In England signatures collected for the Protestation Oath of 1641 (an oath of allegiance to the 'true religion, reformed and [113] Protestant') for the Vow and Covenant of 1643 (an oath of loyalty to Parliament), and for the Solemn League and Covenant of 1644 (which introduced Presbyterianism) indicate a male literacy rate of 30 percent. In the second half of the eighteenth century the marriage registers of the Church of England, which after 1754 required the signatures of both bride and groom, reflect the progress of the written word: 60 percent of the men signed in 1755 and in 1790, compared with 35 percent of the women in 1755 and 40 percent in 1790.<sup>3</sup> In France, finally, signatures of brides and grooms in the parish registers (recorded in almost all departments by schoolteachers enlisted for the purpose by Rector Maggiolo in 1877) reflect a century of progress: in 1686-1690, only 29 percent of men and 14 percent of women signed; in 1786-1790, 48 percent of men and 27 percent of women did.<sup>4</sup> Thus, over a period of a century and a half, male literacy rates rose by 40 percent in Scotland, 30 percent in England, and 19 percent in France.

In other countries, for which we lack the data to determine the national literacy rate, we find evidence of similar progress in specific cities or regions. In Amsterdam, for example, notarized betrothal agreements were signed by 85 percent of men and 64 percent of women in 1780, compared with 57 percent of men and 32 percent of women in 1630.<sup>5</sup> In Turin 83 percent of husbands and 63 percent of wives signed their marriage contracts in 1790, compared with 70 and 43 percent, respectively, in 1710. And in the province of Turin — that is, in the rural region governed by the city — progress was even more spectacular: the percentage of male signatories rose from 21 to 65, and of female signatories from 6 to 30.<sup>6</sup> In New Castile, in the jurisdiction of the inquisitorial

court of Toledo, witnesses and accused (eight out of ten of whom were men and nearly one out of two a notable), 49 percent could sign their names, more or less, between 1515 and 1600, 54 percent between 1651 and 1700, and 76 percent between 1751 and 1817. The nature of the sample precludes using these figures as an indication of the literacy of the Castilian population as a whole, but the rising percentages suggest that literacy was making steady progress.<sup>7</sup>

The trend was similar in the American colonies. In New England, 61 percent of men signed their wills in 1650-1670, 69 percent in 1705-1715, 84 percent in 1758-1762, and 88 percent in 1787-1795.<sup>8</sup> For women, the comparable figures for the first three dates were 31, 41, and 46 percent, respectively. In Virginia, 50 percent of men signed their wills between 1640 and 1680, compared with 65 percent between 1705 and 1715 and 70 percent between 1787 and 1797.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, there was a widespread and often marked increase in the percentage of men and women able to sign then absolute level of literacy. In Catholic countries, in countryside as well as cities, and in the New World as well as the Old, more and more people were familiar with writing. Large numbers of people acquired cultural skills that previously had been the exclusive possession of a minority. This is not to say that progress was uninterrupted. Although the literacy rate reveals a marked trend upward stretching over centuries, it was not without setbacks and recessions. In England the percentage of signers among witnesses before the ecclesiastical court of the diocese of Norwich shows temporary but significant declines. They affected those who reached their tenth year between 1580 and 1610, especially merchants, husbandmen, and yeomen; as well as the civil war generation, educated in the 1640s, where the decline among yeomen reached 20 percent; or in the period 1690-1710, which saw a particularly sharp decline in peasant literacy, especially among husbandmen.<sup>10</sup>

In Madrid the second half of the seventeenth century witnessed a similar decline in literacy: in 1650, 45 percent of testators signed their wills or declarations of poverty; be-

<sup>2</sup> Robert Allan Houston, 'The Literacy Myth? Illiteracy in Scotland, 1630-1760', *Past and Present* 96 (1982): 81-102.

<sup>3</sup> See David Cressy, *Literacy and the Social Order. Reading and Writing in Tudor and Stuart England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), pp. 62-103, for the oaths of 1641-1644, and R. S. Schofield, 'Dimensions of Illiteracy, 1750-1850', *Explorations in Economic History* 10 (1973): 437-454.

<sup>4</sup> Michel Fleury and Pierre Valmary, 'Les progrès de l'instruction élémentaire de Louis XIV à Napoléon III d'après l'enquête de Louis Maggiolo (1877-1879)', *Population* 12 (1957): 71-93, and Furet and Ozouf, *Lire et Ecrire*.

<sup>5</sup> Simon Hart, 'Onderzoek naar de samenstelling van de bevolking van Amsterdam in de 17e en 18e eeuw, op grond van gegevens over migratie, huwelijk, beroep en alfabetisme', *Geschrift ien Getal. Een keuze uit de demografisch-economisch en sociall-historische studien op grond van Amsterdamse en Azanse archivalia, 1600-1800* (Dordrecht, 1976), pp. 130-132.

<sup>6</sup> M. R. Duglion, 'Alfabetismo e società a Torino nel secolo XVIII', *Quaderni Storici* 17 (May—August 1971): 485-509.

<sup>7</sup> M.-C. Rodriguez and Bartolome Bennassar, 'Signatures et niveau culturel des témoins et accusés dans les procès d'Inquisition du ressort du tribunal de Cordoue (1595-1632)', *Caravelle* 31 (1978): 19-46.

<sup>8</sup> Kenneth A. Lockridge, *Literacy in Colonial New England: An Inquiry into the Social Context of Literacy in the Early Modern West* (New York: Norton, 1974).

<sup>9</sup> Kenneth A. Lockridge, 'L'alphabétisation en Amérique, 1650-1800', *Annales ESC*, 1977-N pp. 503-518.

<sup>10</sup> Cressy, *Literacy*, pp. 157-174.

tween [115] 1651 and 1700, this figure dropped to 37 percent.<sup>11</sup> The decline was more marked among men (68 to 54 percent) than among women (26 to 22 percent). Finally, in Provence the generations educated between 1690 and 1740 show no progress in literacy and in some areas suffered a sharp decline, to judge by the percentages of signatures on wills and marriage documents.<sup>12</sup> In general, literacy in Provence increased as it did everywhere else: between the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century, thirteen out of a sample of twenty communities doubled the percentage of signers. Yet this overall progress came in spite of lack of progress or even decline in the intervals between periods of significant advance, which in the case of Provence came between 1650 and 1680 and in the fifty or sixty years after 1740.

Reasons for the lack of progress, which varied from place to place, included deterioration of the schools, influx of less literate immigrants, or setbacks in the economy. The important point is that between 1500 and 1800 the progress of literacy was neither steady nor uninterrupted. It is this perhaps, which distinguishes our period most sharply from the nineteenth century, when the advent of mass education inaugurated an era of steady improvement.

### Unequal skills

Although familiarity with writing increased, it was not shared equally. Certain inequalities stand out, probably the most glaring, of all being the inequality between men and women. Everywhere the male literacy rate is higher than the female, with a gap between the two as high as 25 or 30 percent. Obviously women had less of a role to play in the world of the written word. But the figures do not give an accurate idea of differences in reading ability. In early modern societies learning to read was long considered a part of a girl's education; learning to write was not, for writing was held to be a useless and dangerous skill for women to acquire. In Moliere's *Ecole des femmes*, Arnolphe is eager for Agnes to read so that she can absorb his 'Maxims for Marriage', but he succumbs to despair when he discovers that she knows how to write, especially to her beloved Horace.

Thus, for women even more than for men, the percentage of signers is an inadequate measure of the percentage of readers (especially in the lower classes).

Inequalities existed between people in different occupations and estates. In seventeenth-century rural England the [116] ability to sign (measured by signatures of witnesses before the ecclesiastical courts) was closely correlated with work and social status. Nearly all clerics, notables, and important merchants knew how to write. Skilled artisans (goldsmiths, harness-makers, drapers) and yeomen could write in seven or eight out of ten cases. In most other trades, especially textiles and clothing, only about one in two could sign their names. Next came the village artisans and merchants (blacksmiths, carpenters, millers, butchers, and so forth), of whom only 30 to 40 percent could sign. At the bottom of the scale were building laborers, fishermen, shepherds, husbandmen, and agricultural workers, of whom at most one in four could sign their names.<sup>13</sup> With minor variations this example holds good throughout rural Europe, where the ability to sign one's name was largely determined by such factors as the degree of skill required by one's work and the degree of involvement in nonlocal markets.

In cities too the ability to write depended largely on occupation status, but city dwellers were far in advance of their rural counterparts in absolute percentages. Consider early-nineteenth-century marriage records from the Emilia region of Italy.<sup>14</sup> In the five cities Piacenza, Parma, Reggio, Modena, and Bologna we find that 42 percent of grooms and 21 percent of brides were able to sign their names, whereas in the surrounding countryside the corresponding figures were, respectively, just 17 and 5 percent. The same is true in northern Europe. Seventeenth-century London artisans and merchants were two to three times as literate as their rural counterparts, and domestic servants were two-and-a-half times as literate (in London, 69 percent signed, compared with only 24 percent in rural England).<sup>15</sup> This is one reason why the culture of the modern city was unique: large numbers of city dwellers knew how to write, and the ability to read and write was less unequally distributed than in the countryside.

All of these differences in access to the written word affected the process of privatization in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. The ability to [117] read was

<sup>11</sup> Andre Larquie, 'L'alphabétisation a Madrid en 1680', *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* (1981): 132-157, and 'L'alphabétisation des Madrilènes dans la seconde moitié du XVIIe siècle: stagnation ou évolution?', *Colloque 'Instruction, lecture, écriture en Espagne (XVIIe—XIXe siècle.)'* (Colloquium on Teaching, Reading, and Writing in Spain [16th-19th century]), Toulouse, 1982, mimeographed.

<sup>12</sup> Michel Vovelle, 'Y a-t-il eu une révolution culturelle au XVIIIe siècle? A propos de l'éducation en Provence', *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* (1975): 89-141.

<sup>13</sup> Cressy, *Literacy*, pp. 130-137, esp. table 6.8, p. 136.

<sup>14</sup> Daniele Marchesini, 'La fatica di scrivere. Alfabetismo e sottoscrizioni matrimoniali in Emilia, Sette et Ottocento', in Gianpaolo Brizzi, *Il Catechismo e la Grammatica* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1985), II, 83-169.

<sup>15</sup> Cressy, *Literacy*, pp. 124-125, 128.

an essential prerequisite for certain new practices around which people built their private lives. Personal communion with a read or written text liberated the individual from the old mediators, freed him or her from the control of the group, and made it possible to cultivate an inner life. Solitary reading permitted the development of new forms of piety, which radically altered man's relation to the divine. The ability to read and write enabled people to relate to others and to the authorities in new ways. The greater a person's familiarity with writing, the more emancipated he was from traditional ways of life, which bound the individual tightly to his community and made him dependent on others to read and interpret the divine word and the commandments of his sovereign.

### The geography of literacy

Increasingly private ways of reading and relating changed the nature of European society, but at a different pace in each country. Broadly speaking, northern and northwestern Europe enjoyed higher rates of literacy than other areas. By the end of the eighteenth century 60 to 70 percent of the men in the more literate regions could sign their name: 71 percent in [118] France north of the Saint-Malo-Geneva line, 61 percent in Austrian-dominated parts of the Low Countries,<sup>16</sup> 60 percent in England, 65 percent in Scotland. For women, the figures are 44 percent for northern and northeastern France, 37 percent in the Low Countries, and 40 percent in England. It is harder to gauge the literacy rate in other parts of Europe, where historians have done less research, but various signs indicate that it lagged well behind the rate of the more advanced regions. In Emilia, for instance, the *urban* signature rates were no higher than 45 percent for men and 26 percent for women in the early nineteenth century — a very late date. Hence there is every reason to believe that the literacy rate of the Italian population as a whole, counting peasants as well as city dwellers and the Mezzogiorno as well as the relatively advanced north, most have been lower, probably much lower, than that in northern Europe. In Hungary, in 1768, only 14 percent of the municipal magistrates in villages and towns could sign their names, and the percentage for the peasant population must have been even lower.<sup>17</sup> Finally, in Sweden, only 35 percent of conscripts in the 1870s knew how to write, which suggests

that the literacy rate in the late eighteenth century must have been very low.

On the whole, however, northern and northwestern Europe was culturally more advanced than the rest of the continent: a crude contrast, but undoubtedly correct as far as it goes. Some corrections are called for, however. Between regions where the signature rate was as high as 30 percent in the late eighteenth century and regions where it was as low as 10 or 20 percent, there were transitional zones. Southern France, below the Saint-Malo-Geneva line, was one: on the eve of the Revolution, 44 percent of men and 17 percent of women signed their marriage papers.

Furthermore, even within the relatively backward zone, we can distinguish between areas where people could neither read nor write (as may have been the case in Italy and Hungary) and those where many people who could read were unable to write. In mid-eighteenth-century Sweden, for example, few people could write but 80 percent could read. With the promulgation of the Church Law of 1686, the Lutheran Church, backed by the state, had launched a campaign to teach people to read and see with their own eyes what God ordered and commanded through his sacred word. The parish clergy subsequently took charge of teaching reading. Periodically, parishioners were examined to test their reading skills and knowledge of the catechism, and those who could not read [119] and did not know their catechism were prevented from receiving communion and marrying in the church. The campaign, which reached a peak of intensity between 1690 and 1720, left an enduring mark on the populations of Sweden and Finland, where everyone knew how to read (having been trained to do so by the clergy for religious purposes) but only a narrow elite knew how to write.<sup>18</sup>

Such a situation was probably not peculiar to Sweden. It may also have been true of Denmark, where the gap between reading and writing at the end of the eighteenth century seems to have been quite marked. It was surely true of Scotland, one of the most literate countries in Europe. According to evidence gathered in 1742 by the evangelical pastor of Cambuslang, a parish at the center of the religious revival then shaking the Church of Scotland, every man and woman in the parish claimed to be able to read, but only 60 percent of the men and 10 percent of the women said that they knew how to write.<sup>19</sup> Many said that they had learned to read in order to

<sup>16</sup> Joseph Ruwet and Yves Wellemans, *L'Analphabétisme en Belgique* (XVIII—XIXe siècle) (Louvain, 1978), p. 22.

<sup>17</sup> Kalman Benda, 'Les Lurnières et la culture paysanne dans la Hongrie du XVIIIe siècle', *Les Lumières en Hongrie, en Europe centrale et en Europe orientale*, proceedings of the 3rd Colloquium of Matrafired (1975) (Budapest, 1977), pp. 97-109.

<sup>18</sup> Egil Johansson, 'The History of Literacy in Sweden', in H. J. Graff, ed., *Literacy and Social Development in the West: A Reader* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 151-182.

<sup>19</sup> T. C. Smout, 'Born Again at Cambuslang: New Evidence on Popular Religion and Literacy in Eighteenth-Century Scotland',



avoid the 'shame' of not being able to participate fully in religious assemblies. Thus, in some Protestant countries, the ability to read was universal, regardless of the 'literacy rate' measured by counting signatures.

### Writing and the Reformation

A high rate of literacy was not a necessary effect of Protestantism, however. In Germany, as early as the third decade of the sixteenth century, Luther abandoned his insistence that every Christian should know how to read the Bible. Instead he emphasized the importance of preaching and catechism, that is, the role of the pastor as teacher and interpreter of the holy text. In Lutheran states there was a marked difference between the education offered to the pastoral and administrative elites and popular religious instruction, which, being mainly oral and based on memorization, was quite compatible with illiteracy.<sup>20</sup> In the Rhineland, in the second half of the sixteenth century, religious examiners found that many people could recite texts that they did not understand and that they responded to questions with answers learned by heart and not always appropriate, proving that catechism classes taught formulas by rote and did not seek to foster a personal interpretation of the Bible.<sup>21</sup>

It was not until the so-called Second Reformation initiated by Pietism at the end of the seventeenth century that all the faithful were expected to learn what was in the Bible and [120] develop a personal interpretation. To that end, Protestants first taught one another in religious conventicles. Later the government issued ordinances governing the course of instruction to be offered in the elementary schools. This changed the very status of the Bible. In sixteenth-century Germany it had been a book for pastors, students studying for the ministry, and parish libraries; by the early eighteenth century it had become a book for everyone, mass-produced and sold at a low price. This may account for the steep increase of literacy among German Pietists: in eastern Prussia the percentage of peasants capable of signing their name rose from 10 percent in 1750 to 25 percent in 1756 and to 40 percent by the end of the century.<sup>22</sup> Pietism,

not Lutheranism, spread the ability to read in Germany.

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### Medieval advances

The progress of literacy and diffusion of reading were major factors contributing to change in Western man's idea of himself and his relation to others. The magnitude of the phenomenon can be measured, however, only for the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, because series of documents suitable for such techniques as counting signatures did not become available until the very end of the sixteenth century, and often much later. The cultural state of Europe in the late Middle Ages and even in the sixteenth century therefore remains largely unknown, and it is probably incorrect to assume that literacy rates were low everywhere and that only the clergy knew how to write. In Flanders, for example, various signs suggest that ordinary people could read, write, and count. In the cities 'Latinless' schools taught the basics to common folk. There were probably more than twenty of them in Saint-Omer in 1468, and Valenciennes, a town of 10,000 inhabitants, had twenty-four such schools in 1497. Another sign is the presence of texts on church frescoes and paintings. Still another is the high percentage of signatures — of the order of 70 percent — found in receipts of all sorts (for rents, supplies, and labor) collected by the accountants of the aldermen and hospitals of Saint-Omer in the fifteenth century. Many merchants and artisans seem to have been literate, and only laborers and haulers appear in the majority to have been unable to sign their names. In the countryside the situation was no doubt different, but the keeping of poor-table records, community and charity registers, and tax rolls suggests that writing was a widely shared ability, and the posting of tax rates suggests that at least some people could read them.<sup>23</sup>

Medieval Flanders was by no means unique in its ability to read and write. In Italian cities, as early as the fourteenth century, many people, even among the lower orders, were able to write. In Florence, in 1340, 45 to 60 percent of children between the ages of six and thirteen attended city elementary schools; since far more boys than girls attended school, the percentage of boys receiving an elementary education must have been very high.<sup>24</sup> In some places the ability

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*Past and Present* 97 (1982): 114-127 (which cites Markussen and Skovgaard-Petersen's study on Denmark).

<sup>20</sup> Richard Gawthrop and Gerald Strauss, 'Protestantism and Literacy in Early Modern Germany', *Past and Present* 104 (1984): 31-35.

<sup>21</sup> Bernard Vogler, *Vie religieuse en pays rhénan dans la seconde moitié du XVIe siècle (1556-1619)* (Lille, 1974), II, 796-799.

<sup>22</sup> Rolf Engelsing, *Analphabetismus und Lektüre. Zur Sozialgeschichte des Lesens in Deutschland zwischen feudaler und industrieller Gesellschaft* (Stuttgart, 1973), p. 62.

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<sup>23</sup> Andre Derville, 'Vanalphabetisation du peuple a la fin du Moyen Age', *Revue du Nord*, special issue, *Liber amicorum. Mélanges offerts a Louis Trinard* nos 261-262 (April—September 1984): 761-776.

<sup>24</sup> Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, 'Le chiavi fiorentine di Barbalit: l'apprendimento della lettura a Firenze nel XV secolo', *Quaderni Storici* 57 (1984): 765-792. The reason for the variation in

to write was an accomplished fact by the end of the Middle Ages. Accordingly, the spectacular and widespread advances that occurred in the period 1600-1800 should not be taken to indicate that only a very few people knew how to read and write between 1400 and 1500. [122]

### The rejection of writing

The progress made should not be allowed to obscure a persistent hostility to writing and its dissemination. Shakespeare dramatizes this resistance in *Henry VI, Part 2* (whose quarto edition dates from 1594), in the treatment of Jack Cade's rebellion. In scene 2 of act 4 Cade and his men decide to kill 'all the lawyers' and for their first victim choose the clerk of Chatham. Their social animosity is fed by a threefold rejection of writing. First, writing is the medium in which the decisions of the authorities are couched. Cade's reference to 'parchment scribbled o'er' and sealed undoubtedly alludes to royal writs, which since the twelfth century had been used to record complaints submitted to the king and to convey decisions of the royal courts to local sheriffs. (Cade had been sentenced to having his hand burned for stealing livestock.) Second, writing was used to record the obligations of the poor, whence the reproach leveled against the clerk of Chatham: 'He can make obligations and write court-hand', which is to say, he records debts in the cursive script used in notarized documents. Third, writing was thought to have magic and evil powers. The clerk of Chatham has 'a book in his pocket with red letters in't', in other words, a book of witchcraft with rubrics or titles in red ink, possibly associated with his Jewishness, as indicated by his name, Emmanuel, whose epistolary significance is understood by Dick, one of the rebels: 'They use to write it on top of the letters.' The ability to write is thus a tool of the authorities, a method of domination, whether by law or magic, employed by the strong against the weak, hence the sign of a rejection of communal equality. Thus, Cade asks the clerk: 'Dost thou use to write thy name, or hast thou a mark to thyself, like an honest plain-dealing man?' The mark, which anyone can make, is proof of respect for man's original equality, whereas the signature, which sets apart those who know how to write, indicates rejection of the common rule.

In scene 7 the rebels, having gained control of London, give free rein to their hatred of written culture. They attempt to destroy the places where that culture is transmitted ('others to th'Inns of Court: down with them all'), its ancient monuments (burn all the records of the realm'), its tech-

niques of reproduction (Lord Say is accused of having constructed a paper mill and introduced printing), and its lexicon of description (another charge against Lord Say being that he is surrounded by men 'that usually talk of a noun and a verb, and [123] such abominable words'). Against these oppressive and corrupting innovations Cade sets forth the claims of a traditional culture, based on speech and signs: 'My mouth shall be the parliament of England'. He thus alludes to the ancient conception of law, according to which its force stems from its oral proclamation. Instead of books and printed materials, Cade prefers the ancient practice of recording private debts by making notches on pieces of wood: 'the score and the tally'. In fact, Jack Cade's rebellion took place in 1449, twenty-seven years before the introduction of printing into England. In writing about a rebellion that occurred a century and a half earlier, Shakespeare was able to incorporate into his play the fundamental tension between two cultures: one increasingly based on recourse to the written word in both the public and the private spheres; the other based on nostalgic and utopian esteem for a society without writing, governed by words that everyone could hear and signs that everyone could understand. Whatever his intention in depicting a popular uprising as foolish and bloody and the rebels as dupes manipulated by others, it is clear that the underlying cause of the rebellion is hostility to writing, which is blamed for the upheavals that are transforming the society.

If Shakespeare depicted hostility to writing as a sentiment of the lower classes, that sentiment had a more literate counterpart in the rejection by the educated of printed books, a common reaction around the turn of the sixteenth century. In Venice, for example, a Dominican named Filippo di Strata proposed an argument against Gutenberg's invention that was accepted by a large part of the Venetian Senate. Printing, he maintained, was guilty on several counts: it corrupted texts, which were circulated in hastily manufactured, faulty editions composed solely for profit; it corrupted minds by making available immoral and heterodox works over which the ecclesiastical authorities had no control; and it corrupted knowledge, which was debased by being divulged to the ignorant. Whence the judgment: '*Est virgo hec penna, meretrix eat stompcata*' (The pen is a virgin, the printing press a whore).<sup>25</sup>

More than a century later echoes of di Strata's argument can be heard in Lope de Vega's *Fuenteovejuna*, published in Madrid in 1619. In act 2, lines 892-930, a peasant, Barrildo,

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the percentage of children in school has to do with varying estimates of the Florentine population in the period 1330-1340.

<sup>25</sup> M. J. Lowry, *The World of Aldus Manutius. Business and Scholarship in Renaissance Venice* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979), pp. 26-41.

and a licentiate of the University of Salamanca, Leonelo, discuss the merits of printing. The learned Leonelo reveals his doubts about the usefulness of Gutenberg's invention. To be sure, it preserves valuable works and assures their wide [123] distribution, but it also causes errors and absurdities to circulate, allows those who would ruin an author's reputation to usurp his identity and distribute nonsense in his name, and confuses people's minds with an overabundance of texts. Far from contributing to the progress of knowledge, printing may well have added to the sum of ignorance. When Barrildo says that the growing number of printed books has made it possible for every man to think of himself as a scholar, Leonelo curtly replies: '*Antes que ignoran mas*' (No, they are more ignorant than before).

The advent of written culture in the West had to contend with the persistent notion that dissemination of knowledge was tantamount to profanation. The growing number of those who could read and write and the proliferation of printed matter caused disarray among 'clerks' (lay as well as ecclesiastical), who had hitherto enjoyed a monopoly of the production and discussion of knowledge. In the Christian tradition, only clerics were authorized to interpret the secrets of God, nature, and the state. With the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century, the ancient taboos and limitations on access to knowledge were lifted, but only for a small minority, the *respublica litteratorum*, whose members were held to be the only people capable of pursuing knowledge without danger to religion, law, and order. At a time when Icarus and Prometheus became emblems of a knowledge without limits, people were also reminded that knowledge must remain the exclusive province of the new clerks: the intellectuals.<sup>26</sup>

Two motifs were indissolubly linked: the idea that the lower orders rejected written culture because they saw it as an instrument of domination and a threat to the social fabric, and the idea that the educated resisted appropriation by the vulgar of knowledge that had been theirs exclusively, hence also of the keys that gave access to that knowledge. Before the written word could find a place in Western society, it had to overcome both of these representations.

## Reading practices

### Silent reading

Between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, as growing numbers of people learned to read, new ways of reading became popular. The most novel of these, as Philippe Aries has noted, was private reading in a quiet place away from other people, which allowed the reader to engage in solitary [125] reflection on what he or she read. This 'privatization' of reading is undeniably one of the major cultural developments of the early modern era.

What conditions made it possible? First of all, people needed to acquire a new skill: the ability to read without pronouncing the words as they were read. Otherwise the reader remained subject to communal constraints while reading in a library, say, or a room where others were present. Silent reading also made possible the immediate internalization of what the reader read. Reading aloud was slow, laborious, and externalized; silent reading was faster, easier, and more immediate in its impact on the inner self. Apparently, during the Middle Ages, one group of readers after another mastered the technique of silent reading. The first were the copyists working in the monastic scriptoria. Then, around the middle of the twelfth century, scholars in the universities acquired the ability. Two centuries later the lay aristocracy learned to read silently. By the fifteenth century silent reading was the norm, at least for readers who also knew how to write and who belonged to segments of society that had long been literate. For others, who belonged to groups that slowly learned to read and for whom books remained strange, rare objects, the old way of reading no doubt remained a necessity. As late as the nineteenth century, neophytes and maladroït readers could be identified by their inability to read silently. In Labiche's play *La Cagnotte* (1864), the farmer Colladan replies to a person who loses patience when he reads a very private letter out loud: 'If I read out loud, it's not for you, it's for me... Whenever I don't read out loud... I don't understand what I'm reading.'

Silent reading opened new horizons for those who mastered it. It radically transformed intellectual work, which in essence became an intimate activity, a personal confrontation with an ever-growing number of texts, a question of memorization and cross-referencing. It made possible a more personal form of piety, a more private devotion, a relation with the sacred not subject to the discipline and mediation of the Church. The spirituality of the mendicant orders, the *devotio moderna*, and even Protestantism, all of which presuppose a direct relation between the individual and God, relied heavily

<sup>26</sup> Carlo Ginzburg, 'High and Low: The Theme of Forbidden Knowledge in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries', *Past and Present* 73 (1976): 28-41.



on silent reading, which enabled at least some people to nurture their faith on private reading of spiritual books or the Bible itself. Finally, silent, secret, private reading paved the way for previously unthinkable audacities. In the late Middle [126] Ages, even before the invention of the printing press, heretical texts circulated in manuscript form, critical ideas were expressed, and erotic books, suitably illuminated, enjoyed considerable success.<sup>27</sup>

Although the invention of printing was indeed a 'revolution' in that it made it possible to produce a large number of identical copies at a cost much lower than that of copying by hand (even at a time when print runs were small and printing costs quite high), it should not be credited with intellectual and psychological changes that were really the result of a new method of reading, regardless of whether the text was printed or manuscript. By the sixteenth century, the 'other revolution' — the revolution in reading — was already accomplished, although it had only recently made its impact felt on laymen and remained incomplete, since large numbers of readers who had not yet mastered writing were incapable [127] of reading silently. There seems to have been a clear division between those for whom reading was a private act and those for whom it remained a communal act, perhaps even an act of class solidarity.

[...]

By the eighteenth century the correlation of reading with privacy was firmly established, as though reading defined the limits of the inner life. Evidence for this can be seen in Chardin's painting *The Amusements of Private Life*. Commissioned in 1745 by Louise Ulrique of Sweden to paint two works, one on 'Strict Education' and the other on 'Gentle, Insinuating Education', Chardin chose to paint two different subjects: a woman surprised while reading a book covered with colored paper resting on her knees, and a woman recording her household expenses. The diptych thus contrasts leisure time with time spent in the chore of family administration. The second painting was called *The Administrator* and the first, *The Amusements of Private Life*. The latter name was acquired early in the history of the work, because the Swedish ambassador to Paris used it in a letter dated October 1746, after the work was shown at the Salon; an engraving made in 1747 used the same name<sup>28</sup> This is, so to speak, a pictorial synecdoche: the part (reading) stands for

the whole (private life). A single practice, that of reading, stands for the whole range of private pleasures in the time left free after family chores and obligations.

In this portrait of a woman reading, contemporaries recognized a classic theme: the reading of romantic fiction. Consider two descriptions of the painting. In his *Reflections on Some Causes of the Present State of Painting in France* (1747), Lafont de Saint-Yenne saw it this way:

He [Chardin] has given this year a piece that represents a pleasant but idle woman in the guise of a lady casually if fashionably dressed, with a rather striking face wrapped in a white bonnet tied under the chin, which hides the sides of her face. One arm lies on her lap, and her hand casually holds a brochure. Beside her, a little to the rear, is a spinning wheel set on a little table.



One year later, the painting, now referred to as *Amusements of the Tranquil Life*, was described in these terms in *Observations on the Arts and Some Paintings Shown at the Louvre in 1748*:

It represents a woman nonchalantly seated in an armchair and [145] holding in one hand, which rests on her lap, a brochure. From a sort of languor in her eyes, which gaze out toward a corner of the painting, we divine that she is reading a novel, and that the tender impressions it has made on her have set her dreaming of someone whom she would like to see arrive at any moment.

<sup>27</sup> Paul Saenger, 'Silent Reading: Its Impact on Late Medieval Script and Society', *Viator Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 13 (1982): 367A-14.

<sup>28</sup> Concerning these two paintings, see the notices in the catalogue *Chardin, 1699-1779* (Paris: Editions de la Reunion des Musees Nationaux, 1979), pp. 278-283.



Thus, Chardin’s painted act of reading is characterized in two ways: in terms of objects and in terms of postures. The objects situate the reader in a comfortable apartment, a setting of some wealth. The reader’s armchair is a high-backed bergère with a thick cushion and stuffed armrests, which allow the chair’s occupant to relax with feet raised on a small footstool. Other styles of furniture — the chaise longue and the duchesse — permitted the reader to stretch out and relax even more. The casual if fashionable clothing worn by the woman [146] is a warm but lightweight indoor garment known as a *liseuse* — a dress for reading rather than for show or seduction. The book she holds in her hand is a ‘brochure’, a book that is not bound but held together by a paper cover. On a low cabinet in a corner of the room, several bound books, larger in size than this brochure, are ranged against the wall.

For the commentators, the woman’s posture is one of abandonment: she sits ‘nonchalantly’ and ‘casually’ holds the brochure; her gaze is languorous. These signs suggest that she is reading a novel, which fills her mind with disturbing images and sentiments and arouses her senses. From this description a modern spectator has some difficulty recognizing Chardin’s painting, which shows, seated in a comfortable but austere room, a woman who is not languid at all and whose eyes by no means convey emotional turmoil. In fact, the descriptions [147] seem to refer to other paintings, to Baudoin’s *Reading*, for instance, which depicts, in a highly eroticized representation, a young woman in a state of total abandonment. The comments reveal the power of an association between female reading and idleness, sensual pleasure, and secret intimacy. More than the painting, which is deliberately estranged from the *topos*, the commentators’ remarks reveal how eighteenth-century men imagined the act of reading by women, which by then had become the quintessence of private activity. Without the painter’s intrusion it would have remained shrouded in silence.

## The spoken text

In the eighteenth century the iconography of reading is exclusively female and secular, whereas previously it had been almost entirely male and religious — think of Rembrandt’s readers, hermits and philosophers who have withdrawn from society in order to meditate over a book. Yet painting does not yield an exhaustive catalogue of early modern reading practices. Between 1500 and 1800 reading aloud, whether among friends or chance companions, was an essential ingredient of social life, even among the elite. Thus, the *corrector de la impresion* (editor of the revised edition)

of *La Celestina*, published in Toledo in 1500 as *La Comedia de Calisto y Melibea*, specifies how it ought to be read in an octet that he appends to the work. It is entitled *Dice el modo que se ha de tener leyendo esta tragicomedia* (he indicates the manner in which this tragicomedy should be read). The lector (reader) to whom these instructions are addressed is advised to vary his tone, assume the part of every character, speak asides between clenched teeth (*cumple que sepa hablar entre dientes*), and make use of the *mil artes y modos*, the thousand ways and means of reading so as to capture the attention of his listeners, *los oyentes*.

Like the Latin and Humanist comedies, *La Celestina* was written to be read ‘theatrically’ but by a single voice before a limited if select audience. In a prologue added to the Saragossa edition of 1507, which alludes to contradictory opinions about the work, the author accounts for the diversity of opinions by invoking the conditions under which the work was read:

So, when ten people gather to hear this comedy, in which, as is always the case, there are so many different humors, would anyone deny that there are grounds for disagreement about things that can be heard in so many different ways?

Ten listeners choose to come together to hear a text [148] read aloud; the book becomes the center of a cultivated society of friends or acquaintances.

Along with *La Celestina*, other texts, particularly pastorals and novels, were favored for such gatherings, in which the written word was mediated by the spoken voice. Cervantes refers to this practice in *Don Quixote*, first by dramatizing, in chapter 32 of part 1, the reading of the *Curioso impertinente* by a priest to a small group of avid listeners gathered at an inn. And as title for chapter 66 of part 2 he chose: ‘Which treats of that which he who reads will see and that which he will hear who listens to a reading of it.’<sup>29</sup>

In the seventeenth century people frequently listened to books read aloud. In the army in the field, such activity whiled away the time, strengthened friendships, and provided food for thought. As an ensign and, later, lieutenant in the Normandy Regiment between 1635 and 1642, Henri de Campion described in his *Memoirs* reading in the military:

I had my books, which took up a portion of my wagon’s load, and frequently spent time with them, sometimes alone but most of the time with three friends from the regiment, intelligent and studious men. The Chevalier de Sevigne, a Breton and captain of the corps, was one.

<sup>29</sup> Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *Don Quixote de la Mancha*, trans. Samuel Putnam (New York: Modern Library, 1949), p. 943.

He was by nature a studious man, had read widely, and from birth had always been at war or at court. Le Breuil-Marcillac, a Gascon, brother of the lieutenant colonel and my captain, was the third member of our group. He had studied until the age of twenty-eight, his parents having destined him for the Church, which he quit in order to take up the sword, having spent well his time in school and later at the Sorbonne. He was a mild man, accommodating, with nothing of the rudeness of military men. D'Almivar, from Paris, a lieutenant and my close friend, was the fourth party to our studious commerce. He had a polished wit, was agreeable in conversations of all sorts, and quite sociable.

Reading, listening to, and arguing about books established a strong and lasting friendship among the four men:

Those were the three men with whom I spent my hours of leisure. After reasoning together about the subjects that came up, without bitter dispute or desire on the part of one to shine at the expense of the others, one of us would read some good book aloud, and we would examine the finest passages in order to learn to live well and to die well, in accordance with morality, which was the principal subject of our study. Many people enjoyed listening to our discussions, which, I believe, were useful to them, for nothing was said that was not [149] conducive to virtue. Since then I have found no society so comfortable or reasonable; it lasted seven years, during which I served in the Normandy Regiment.<sup>30</sup>

Thus, different ways of reading defined different but related social practices: solitary reading encouraged personal study and intellectual interchange; reading aloud, combined with interpretation and discussion of what was read, fostered friendship; and these friendly study groups could attract a wider audience, which benefited by hearing the texts read and discussed.

Similar 'convenient' and 'reasonable' societies existed in the cities. Before official academies came into being, people came together over books, which they lent to one another, discussed, examined, and read aloud. In 1700 a *petite académie* was founded in Lyons. Seven scholars and friends met in the home of one of their number: 'The place where we hold our meetings is the study of one of our academicians. There we gather amid five or six thousand volumes, which constitute a library as choice as it is large. That alone provides ready and agreeable assistance to our scholarly conferences' (letter from Brossette, one of the founders and an *avocat* at the court known as the *présidial*, to Boileau, 16 July 1700). Sometimes a friendly visit could lead to discussion of books. Laurent Dugas, [150] president of the *Cour des monnaies* and one of the seven 'academicians', gives a

number of examples of this in his correspondence. On 12 January 1719:

Yesterday in my study I spent a good part of the evening with Father de Vitry and Father Follard, regent of rhetoric. I gave them chocolate. We spoke of M. de Cambrai and we argued about literature. Father de Vitry wanted to look at the new edition of Saint Clement of Alexandria, which the bishop of Oxford has published and which I own, to see if the editor remarked upon passages he had noted.'

27 March 1731:

Cheinet spent the evening and had supper with me. We read some letters of Cicero and complained about the ignorance of the public, by which I mean the want of taste on the part of our young people, who amuse themselves reading new and often frivolous or superficial books and neglect the great models that might teach them to think well.

23 March 1733:

M. de La Font, gentleman-in-waiting to the queen, arrived and told me that he thought I would enjoy hearing a reading of a new work by M. de Voltaire entitled *The Temple of Taste*. If I were agreeable, however, we would await the return of my son who had gone that morning to Brignais and was expected at any moment. He arrived a half-hour later and took the role of reader. The reading lasted an hour and a half. My wife who came in at seven o'clock, heard three-quarters of it.'

Thus, people listened to readings, read to each other, talked about books, and conversed in their libraries: all were common practices, which depended on the existence of readers who often read alone but who sometimes used books as the basis of social occasions.<sup>31</sup>

Travel provided another opportunity for reading. On 26 May 1668 Samuel Pepys returned from Cambridge to London:

Up by 4 a-clock; and by the time we were ready and had eat, we were called to the coach; where about 6 a-clock we set out, there being a man and two women of one company, ordinary people, and one lady alone that is tolerable handsome, but mighty well spoken, whom I took great pleasure in talking to, and did get her to read aloud in a book she was reading in the coach, being the King's Meditations [the meditations of Charles I prior to his execution]; and the boy and I to sing.

Here, reading is a way of establishing a temporary and friendly bond between traveling companions who had not known each other previously. An anonymous, ephemeral

<sup>30</sup> *Mmoires d'Henri de Campion* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1967), pp. 95-96.

<sup>31</sup> See *Correspondance litteraire et anecdotique entre M. de Saint-Fonds et le président Dugas* (Lyons, 1900), and Roger Chartier, 'Une academie avant les lettres patentes. Une approche de la sociabilite des notables lyonnais a la fin du règne de Louis XIV', *Marseille*, no. 101, *Les Provinciaux sous Louis XIV* (1975): 115-120.

community is bound together by reading, conversation, and song, helping make the journey more agreeable for all. 'We [151] dining all together and pretty merry', Pepys notes, recording the felicitous consequence of his initiatives.

Reading influenced privatization in several ways. It contributed to the emergence of a sense of self, as the reader scrutinized his own thoughts and emotions in solitude and secrecy. It was also a group activity, which made it possible 'to avoid both the boredom of solitude and the crush of the multitude', as Fortin de La Hoguette put it in his treatise *On Conversation*. There are numerous eighteenth-century images of these small groups bound together by reading. In 1728 Jean-Francois de Troy painted *Reading Moliere*. In a rococo salon, at 3:30 according to the clock, five women and two men, comfortably seated on low armchairs, listen to one of the company reading a bound book, which he holds in his hands. The door is closed and a screen has been opened to protect the little group, gathered in a circle around the reader, from the rest of the world.

A year earlier Marivaux had written for the stage a play [152] entitled *Love's Second Surprise*. One of the characters, Hortensius, is presented as a 'pedant' who has been hired by the marquise to direct her reading and read to her:

Two weeks ago I took on a man to whom I have entrusted my library. I do not flatter myself that I will become a scholar, but I am eager to occupy my time. He reads me something every evening. Our readings are serious and reasonable. He establishes an order that instructs as it amuses me. (act 1, scene 7)

But Hortensius' readings are not reserved for his mistress alone. The marquise invites her visitors, such as the chevalier in scene 8 of act 2: 'Chevalier, you are master if you wish to remain, if my reading pleases you.' In both the painting and the play, listening together by no means precludes private sentiments. De Troy suggests them through the play of glances: eyes meet, glances are averted, people avoid looking at one another. Marivaux has the chevalier react strongly against what he hears being read, which is a way of stating his incipient love for the ironic and flirtatious marquise.

## Family reading

Reading aloud was a way of structuring family life. Husband and wife read to each other. On 22 December 1667 Pepys's wife had taken to her bed:

After dinner, up to my wife again, and who is in great pain still with her tooth and cheek; and there, they gone, I spent the most of the afternoon and night reading and talking to bear her company, and so to [153] supper and to bed.

Three days later, on Christmas Day, she does the reading: 'And all the afternoon at home, my wife reading to me the history of the Drummer, of Mr. Monpesson, which is a strange story of spirits, and worth reading indeed.' Fathers and sons read to each other. Dugas of Lyons gives several examples: 'I spent considerable time with my son reading Greek and some odes of Horace' (22 July 1718); 'I read with my eldest son Cicero's *Treatise on Laws*, and with my second son I read Sallust' (14 September 1719); 'At night I play chess with my son. We start by reading a good book, that is, a book of piety, for half an hour' (19 December 1732).

Sometimes the entire family gathered around the reader, especially when the family was Protestant and the book the Bible. Protestant books of domestic instruction often described such compulsory reading. Justus Menius' *Oeconomia Christiana* shows, on the title page of the 1554 Regensburg edition, a father reading to his wife and children on his right and his servants in another corner of the room. On the table we see a heavy Bible, another, smaller book (perhaps the *Oeconomia* itself), a pair of eyeglasses, and a sandglass.<sup>32</sup> Although such Bible-reading was not always practiced in Protestant families, it is attested in a number of places from sixteenth-century Switzerland (where Felix Platter remembered from his youth that 'my father was in the habit, before we went to church, of reading the holy Bible and preaching from it') to eighteenth-century New England.

## Popular customs

Conviviality, family and domestic intimacy, and individual retirement were the three aspects of life in which books and reading played a major role—and not only for the educated elite. Among the lower classes too printed materials fulfilled a variety of functions, but those materials were seldom books. Those who could read well usually read aloud to others who read less well or not at all. This was true in the cities and in the fields, at work and at leisure, among strangers or fellow workers. Reading matter ranged from 'books of portraiture', that is, collections of models and patterns used in sixteenth-century workshops, to placards posted on city walls, from religious texts (as in Swabia, where peasants gathered in the late eighteenth century to listen to the reading of the Bible) to mass-circulation books such as those in France's 'Bibliothèque bleue' or Blue Library, which were read in family gatherings or by people who shared a common

<sup>32</sup> Gerald Strauss, *Luther's House of Learning: Indoctrination of the Young in the German Reformation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), pp. 108-131, engraving p. 114.

life, such as [154] early eighteenth-century shepherds in Lorraine, according to the testimony of Jamerey-Duval.<sup>33</sup>

In sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spain, popular audiences gathered to hear a variety of works read aloud, novels of chivalry foremost among them. They were listened to by the common folk in the cities, according to Juan Arce de Otorala (1560): 'In Seville they say that there are artisans who, on holidays and in the evening bring a book and read it on the *Grades*', that is, in front of the cathedral.<sup>34</sup> Peasants also listened, at least in *Don Quixote*, according to the chapter cited earlier (part 1, chapter 32). In describing the novels of chivalry that he keeps in his inn, the innkeeper says:

As far as I can see, there is no better reading in the world. I myself have two or three of them along with some manuscripts, and they have been the very breath of life, not only to me, but to many others as well. For in harvest time the reapers gather here in [156] large numbers on feast days, and there are always some among them who can read. One of them will take a book in his hands and thirty or more of us will crowd around and listen to him with so much pleasure that we lose a thousand gray hairs.<sup>35</sup>

Gathered to hear *Don Circongilio of Thrace* or *Felixmarte of Hircania*, the peasants and the innkeeper's family, including his daughters, never tire of listening: 'We could go on listening day and night', says the master of the house. Other texts suitable for reading aloud included the *pliegos sueltos* or *pliegos de cordel*. Related by format (quarto volumes of two to sixteen sheets) and poetic form (generally octosyllabic, assonant *romances*), these plays were written to be read aloud. Their titles, always similar in structure, could be shouted out by those who sold them, usually blind hawkers who belonged to confraternities; the texts lent themselves to being spoken or sung to a public that related to the written word by way of the ear rather than the eye.

The common folk also had other access to written literature. Between 1500 and 1800 writing insinuated itself into the majority of households in the form of printed materials on which people set a high emotional value because they were associated with important moments in the life of the family or individual. In certain dioceses marriage charters

were part of the marriage ritual; the husband handed the charter to the [157] wife, and its text and images served as reminders of the ceremony. Certificates were distributed to pilgrims as proof that they had completed their journey and accomplished their religious duty. Confraternities gave certificates attesting to membership and fidelity to a heavenly protector. Whether displayed on a wall or kept in a safe place, such documents, which always included images along with the text, could be deciphered in a variety of ways. They played a fundamental role as aids to memory and self-affirmation, thus helping to constitute a private life that was at once intimate and on exhibit. [...]

<sup>33</sup> David Sabeau, 'Small Peasant Agriculture in Germany at the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century: Changing Work Patterns', *Peasant Studies* 7 (1978): 222-223. Valentin Jamerey-Duval, *Memoires. Enfance et Education d'un paysan au XVIIIe siecle* (Paris: Le Sycomore, 1981), pp. 191-193. On the reading of Blue books, see Roger Chartier, 'Livres bleus et lectures populaires', *Histoire de l'édition française*, II, 498-511.

<sup>34</sup> Cited by Maxime Chevalier, *Lectura y Lectores en la Espana de los siglos XVI y XVII* (Madrid: Turner, 1976), p. 91.

<sup>35</sup> Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, trans. Putnam, p. 275.