



UiO • **Institutt for lingvistiske og nordiske studier**
Det humanistiske fakultet

NORINT 0500

Norwegian Literature



Today

- Facts and figures
- A helping hand from the state
- The history of Norwegian literature
 - The 1800s: The golden age
 - 1960 and beyond: Contemporary literature
- Norwegian literature abroad

Some facts and figures

- Do Norwegians read a lot?
 - Yes!
 - 88% of the population read at least one book last year
 - 38% read more than 10 books
 - 25% (age 9-79) read books every day
 - 76% read to their children, daily or more than three times a week

- Do we write a lot?
 - Yes!
 - 310 titles of fiction for adults published in 2017
 - Then we have: children's books, nonfiction, textbooks, etc.
- The collected value of the Norwegian bookmarket is an estimated 5,6 billion (2017)

A helping hand from the state

- **“The Norwegian Purchasing Scheme”**
- Established in 1965, today it covers five different categories of literature. Managed by the Arts Counsel Norway
 - Norwegian fiction: 773 copies (adult); 1550 copies (childrens’s)
 - Translated literature, 130 titles, 542 copies
 - Norwegian nonfiction: 773 copies
 - Norwegian nonfiction for children 25 titles, 1 480 copies
 - Cartoons 1480 copies (adult and children)

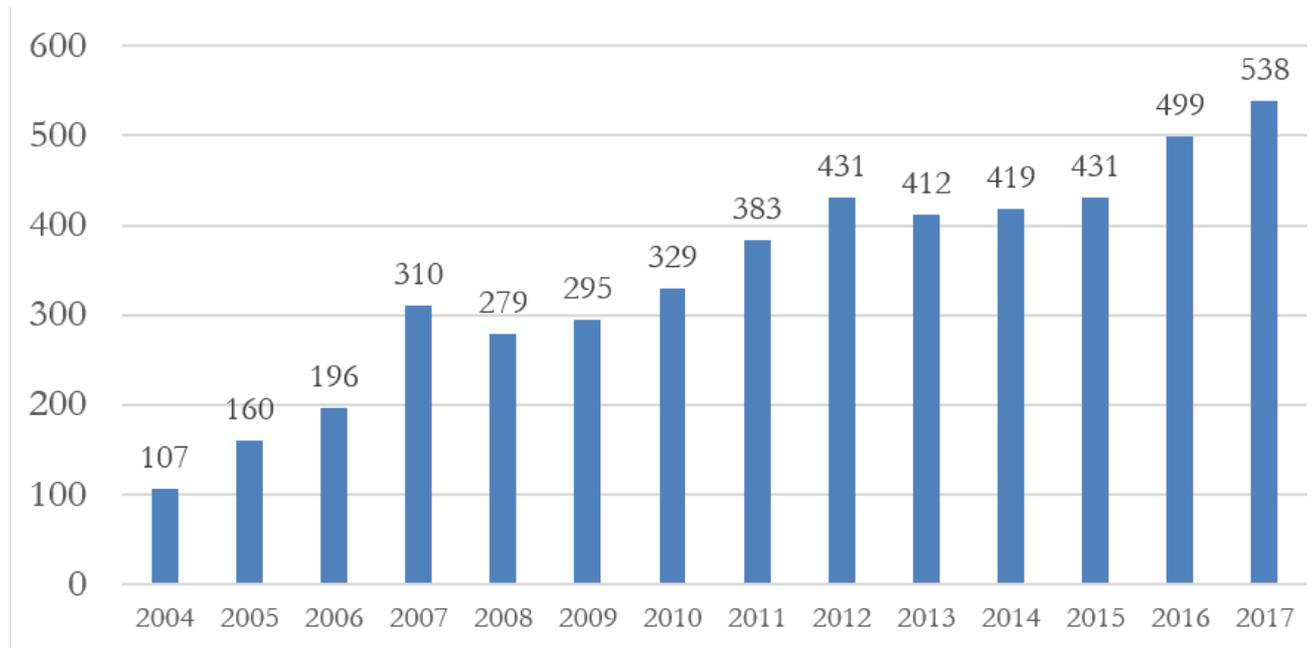
Libraries

- Every Norwegian municipality has to have a public library – 422 municipalities (kommuner) in Norway
- Norway's National library is making all its books available online: More than 250 000 titles currently available
- My local library has given me the keys!
«Meråpent»: I can visit my library from 7 am to 11 pm

NORLA – Norwegian literature abroad

- “Norwegian literature is travelling more than ever before. Between 2004 and 2014 NORLA has contributed funding to the translation of more than 3300 books, into no less than 63 languages. Norwegian is among the 15 most translated languages in the world.” (norla.no)

Number of translations given grants, 2004-2017



The history of Norwegian literature

- Influential literature from a small country
- The Golden Age of Norwegian literature: 1850-1900
- Historical markers
 - 1811: Det Konglige Frederiks Universitet (UiO) established
 - 1814: From Danish to Swedish rule, an independent constitution
 - 1884: Parliamentarism
 - Population: 885.000 (1815) - 2 mill (1890) => Christiania 11.000 (1815) - Kristiania 250.000 (1906)
 - 1905 Independence
- Literature plays part in shaping politics and identity

1850-1900 Realism, fin de siècle

- Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson (1832-1910)
- Important «influencer» in Norway and Europe
- Received the Nobel literature prize in 1903 "as a tribute to his noble, magnificent and versatile poetry" (Wikipedia)
- *Synnøve Solbakken* (1857)
 - A mix of national romanticism and realism: poetical realism. The Norwegian farmer portrayed less idealized – new ideals from the literature
- «Ja, vi elsker» (1864) The Norwegian national anthem

Realism – debate problems!

- Henrik Ibsen (1828 – 1906)
- Norway's best known writer, controversial in his day, renewed drama
- Method: a person meets the consequences of past actions
- Contemporary dramas (Nutidsdramaer) (1877-1899)
- *A Doll's House* (1879)
 - Helmer's wife, Nora, is driven to question her role in society and family as wife and woman

Fin de siecle – «Nyromantikk» 1890-1900

- Knut Hamsun (1859 -1952)
- Was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1920
- Criticized Ibsen for creating literary “cardboard types”
- *Hunger* (1890) – early modernism. Focused on the sensitive narrator’s intricate emotional respons to the world around him, Hamsun sat out to describe the innermost life of the estranged modern subject
- Stream of consciousness
- Thomas Mann, Franz Kafka, Maxim Gorky, Stefan Zweig, Henry Miller, Hermann Hesse, Ernest Hemmingway and Isaac Bashevis Singer

And the women?

- Camilla Collett (1813-1895): *Amtmandens døtre* (1854-1855)
- Amalie Skram (1846-1905) - Perhaps Norway's most prominent naturalist writer: *Hellemyrsfolket* (1887-1898)

Contemporary literature

- 1960s – The birth of contemporary writing
- Profil – literary magazine at the University of Oslo. Taken over by radical students in 1966
- Jan Erik Vold, Dag Solstad, Tor Obrestad, Espen Haavardsholm, Eldrid Lunden, Liv Køltzow, Paal-Helge Haugen, Einar Økland and Stein Mehren
- Opposed to symbolistic poetry and realistic novels
- 1970s – radicalization

Dag Solstad

- Writer, born in Sandefjord, Norway, September 16 1941
- Published about 30 books in different genres
- Received numerous literary awards and prizes
- Outspoken communist (?)
- Considered by many to be the greatest living Norwegian author

Solstad at his best? The 90s

- A chronicler of modern day Norway
- Minimalism
- Desillusion
- Solstad publicly express' the same pessimistic critique of society as we find in his novels.
- *Genanse og verdighet, 1994 – Shyness and Dignity*

90s – International breakthrough

- Jostein Garder *Sofie's World* (1991): International success! Has been translated into 59 languages
- Has sold more than 40 million copies world wide
- The most sold book in the world in 1995
- A door (and eye) opener: *Sofies verden* (1991), *Sofies Welt* (1993), *Sophie's World* (1995)
- Is it a good book? Does it belong in the canon?

More 90s

- Erik Fosnes Hansen *Psalm at Journey's End* (1990)
- Erlend Loe *Naiv.Super.* (1996)
- Jon Fosse *And Never we'll be Parted* (1994)
- Hanne Ørstavik *Love (Kjærlighet)* (1997)
- Linn Ullmann: *Before you sleep* (1998)

Translations and literary export

- Per Petterson (49 languages), Jon Fosse (40 languages and more than 1000 productions), Åsne Seierstad (40 languages +) Karl Ove Knausgård (30+ languages)
- Scandinavian Noire (Jo Nesbø: 50 languages)
- “Suddenly it’s all about Norway. Everywhere.”
Thus [tweeted](#) Pamela Paul, editor of the *NY Times Book Review*, a few weeks ago. Tomorrow, the [Norwegian-American Literary Festival](#) comes to New York, featuring the grand old man of Norwegian literature, Dag Solstad, and four promising younger writers, plus a musical performance by Norwegian-of-the-moment Karl Ove Knausgaard. (May 19 2015 <http://lithub.com/five-great-norwegian-writers-not-named-knausgaard/>)

Now

- Documentarism
 - Åsne Seierstad: *The Bookseller of Kabul*
(Norwegian: 2002 English: 2003)
- Biographical novel
 - Karl Ove Knausgård: *My Struggle*
 - Nikolai Frobenius: *Teori og praksis*
 - Thomas Espedal: 13 books, since 1996
 - Vigdis Hjort: *Wills and testaments* (2016)

Sources

- Arts Counsel Norway
https://www.kulturradet.no/innkjopsordningen_e
- Facts and figures:
<http://bokhandlerforeningen.no/leserundersokelsen-2018>
- <http://www.medienorge.uib.no/statistikk/medium/boker>
- Norway's National Library
<https://www.nb.no/en/the-national-library-of-norway/>