

Knowledge Making and Authorization Strategies

A Study of an Eighteenth Century Norwegian Manuscript Culture

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How do you treat gout or a toothache? What is the procedure for making ink? How do you get a woman to love you? What components are needed for making the colour yellow? Or how do you protect your livestock against witchcraft or treat a bewitched cow? These were among the many questions which preoccupied Norwegian households during the early modern period and thus led to the production of domestic manuscripts containing remedies, recipes and formulas solving the needs and challenges of everyday living. From the recovery of over hundred individual manuscripts from all over Norway dated between 1650-1850 and written by people from highly different social and cultural backgrounds ranging from parish ministers, military personnel, non-educated medicine practitioners to peasants, these works illuminate not only what was considered important and valuable knowledge to acquire but also what type of knowledge was actually circulating among Norwegians during this period.¹ The specific manner in which these manuscripts were manufactured, the variations in subjects and content along with the titles they were given are all elements contributing to making them a specific type of literature. That they commonly were entitled *Kunstbog* (Art Book), *Cyprianus Konstbog* (Cyprian's Art Book) or *Svarte bog* (The

1 Many of these manuscripts are digitalized and are available through the *Witchcraft in Norway* database developed by the Department of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages at the University of Oslo, see: <http://www.hf.uio.no/ikos/tjenester/kunnskap/samlinger/norsk-folkeminnesamling/trolldom-i-norge/svarteboeker/>, 27.02.2013.

Black Book) or even a combination of these titles in one and the same work indicates that the writers were well aware of the genre in which their work belonged.²

When comparing the different manuscripts, a specific *modus operandi* of knowledge making appears from the material which seems to have governed the production from the choice of material to the paratextual apparatus. How were the manufacturers making sense of the knowledge they presented? What strategies were utilized in the authorization of the works? This article argues that the *modus operandi* was far from contingent but served as a key strategy in the authorization of the knowledge presented. The manufacturing mode of these works illuminates how their makers relied on norms and conventions belonging to the printed medium in the choice of format, writing styles, and authorship.³

Before turning to the Norwegian manuscripts and the questions of sense-making and authorization strategies, a historical contextualization is needed. The implicit and explicit literary references made in the Norwegian material point towards a relationship with specific genres of printed literature which circulated in Europe during the early modern period and which were decisive for the form and content the manuscripts received. This literary relationship contributed to form the content of Norwegian black books. Furthermore, specific conditions for the Danish-Norwegian printing press were decisive factors for the construction of black books as a specific manuscript culture.

The Printing Press and Books of Arts

The fact that the introduction of the printing press in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century had a huge impact on the distribution of books and of knowledge in Europe during the early modern period has repeatedly been stressed.⁴ Print spread texts at a speed and in quantities that defeated and outnumbered script. The diffusion also made texts available to new groups of readers, expanding previous social and geographical boundaries. The new availability was closely linked to the fact that printed books in vernacular languages appeared on the book market, making it possible to offer new readers literature formerly restricted to the privileged and learned groups. Accordingly, the printing press is often regarded as a “revolution

2 In the following, I will generally refer to these works as black books.

3 These topics are treated more extensively in OHRVIK, 2012, p. 71-151.

4 See e.g. FEBVRE/MARTIN, 2010, p. 216-332; EISENSTEIN, 2005; WALSHAM/CRICK, 2004, p. 1-26.

in communication”.⁵ The new communication medium became an important tool for the development and diffusion of both traditional and new knowledge.

A branch of this new book market was the production of vernacular technical handbooks, books of recipes connected to the household, various crafts, medicine, and natural philosophy which can be seen as the earliest versions of “popular science” in printed form. Italian and English *Books of Secrets*, German *Kunstbüchlein* and European *grimoires* were all genres exposing this type of knowledge which now were directed towards a broader and more diverse group of readers.⁶ The first Italian book of this kind was *Opera Nuova intitolata Dificio di ricette* (A new work entitled the house of recipes), printed in 1525, containing general household recipes. Others, such as *Opera nova nella quale ritroverai molti bellissimi secreti* (A new work in which you will find many very fine secrets), a book of medical recipes published in the 1540s, points to what many of these books claimed to hold, namely secrets, hence the term *books of secrets* which was commonly given to them.⁷ These books took advantage of the associations connected with the term “secret” by claiming in the titles that the books contained knowledge previously hidden to the public. Their primary goal was to make available tools and eventually increase self-education in “how to”, exploring the practical field of knowledge.⁸ As such, the books had a conventional structure and format for the recording of the technical processes, and they usually consisted of a recipe, a list of ingredients followed by a set of instructions describing the procedure. With a focus on practical knowledge, these books contained numerous recipes for whatever one would need in domestic management: making medicine, preparing ink, colour, cosmetics, food, and chemicals in addition to, for instance, alchemical recipes.⁹

5 HELLINGA, 2009, p. 207.

6 For a comprehensive presentation of these genres, see the works of EAMON, 1996; KAVEY, 2007; DAVIES, 2009.

7 In Italy they were also referred to as *libri di ricette*, *ricettari* (recipe or “receipt” books), or *rimedi* (remedies), all terms indicating what kind of knowledge the books contained and how this knowledge was presented.

8 In addition numerous booklets were printed and reprinted and sold in the piazzas of the major cities. For a more comprehensive list of Italian booklets of secrets between 1520 and 1643, see the list provided in EAMON, 1996, p. 361-65.

9 For a closer look at how these books were structured in addition to what kind of knowledge they presented, I recommend the online and searchable database developed by Dr. Tessa Storey and hosted by University of Leichester, see <https://>

Likewise, German printers made available technical handbooks with craft recipes which revealed previously unavailable knowledge. Commonly called *Kunstbüchlein*, the German handbooks set out to remove the traditional preconditions for possessing the secrets of the arts: namely, membership of a guild or a formal apprenticeship. Now, literacy and the means to buy a copy of “a book of arts” was, in principle, the main obstacle to knowing “how to”. The first *Kunstbüchlein* appearing in 1531 was entitled *Rechter Gebrauch d’Alchimei* (The proper use of alchemy) and of the original *Kunstbüchlein*, altogether four books were printed between 1531 and 1532 offering practical knowledge of various kinds.¹⁰

Both English *Books of Secrets* and European *Grimoires* shared the same interest in natural philosophy and magic. Unlike Denmark-Norway, other European countries like France and Germany experienced a peak in the printing and dissemination of magic books during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Books like the *Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses* flourished on the German book market, first as copied manuscripts, later as printed works. In France, the number and variety of chapbook *grimoires* exceeded that in most European countries, and books such as *Le grand Albert* and *Le petit Albert*, *Grimoire du Pape Honorius*, *La chouette noire*, and *Abracadabra monumentissima diabolica* were published in huge numbers for a hungry market.¹¹ A shared feature of the *grimoire* literature was the diversity in the content which they encompassed. The books presented knowledge about how to arm people against witches and evil spirits; they revealed secrets about how to succeed at cards and other activities, how to heal illnesses, how to get people to love you, how to alter one’s destiny and much, much more. The similarities in content to the black books are evident, and testify to the very close relation between the printed *grimoires* and the Norwegian manuscripts.

The desire to reveal arts and crafts also reached the Northern countries. The concrete influence of the Italian *Secreti* literature and the German *Kunstbüchlein* is quite obvious when one looks at the copies of art books appearing in print in Denmark during the seventeenth and eighteenth century. Particularly interesting is the series of eight books called *Oeconomia Nova* which were translated from German to Danish and offered recipes, advice, and guidance comprising topics such as housekeeping and farming, cooking, herbs, how to prepare dye and ink, how to succeed in fishing, and how to prepare vinegar, beer, and candy.¹² The books were

ira.le.ac.uk/handle/2381/4335, 07.03.2013. For a detailed description of the database, see the online article by STOREY, 2008.

10 EAMON, 1996, p. 114.

11 DEVLIN, 1987, p. 165-171.

12 See e.g. HAKE, 1648; JUGEL, 1648.

obviously popular and filled a need on the book market and were reprinted along with other books that sought to fill yet other subject fields within the “know-how” literature.

Apart from the medical literature and the Danish art books mentioned, the printing press in Denmark-Norway never produced art books similar to the Italian and English books of secrets or grimoire genre. In more than one sense, it is fair to say that it was the handwritten black book which most resembled these genres and were obviously inspired by these genres.¹³ The question of why these genres of books, which received great popularity in the rest of Europe, did not reach the printing presses in Denmark-Norway needs to be answered.

From 1536-37 to 1814 Norway was under Danish rule with succeeding Danish kings as head of the union and with Copenhagen as the governing capital of the kingdom. This also included the establishment of printing presses in the sixteenth century which were exclusively connected to Danish parts of the kingdom and first and foremost Copenhagen. The first printer documented in Norway established his printing press in Christiania – now Oslo – in 1643, but it was not until the 1660s that Christiania received its first permanent printing house – which makes Norway particularly late in a European context.¹⁴ Apart from one other temporary printing press in Fredrikshald, the next press established was in Bergen in 1721. In the decades to follow, a few more presses were established in Trondhjem and Christiansand which – in theory – made printing possibilities somewhat more accessible. This was theoretical since the censorship connected with the printing in Denmark-Norway during most of the early modern period was strict. The censorship of printing was put in effect as a result of the Reformation in Denmark-Norway in 1536-1537. Catholic beliefs and practices along with religious teaching promoted by the Catholic Church were banned. As one of the effective means to control the implementation of the new reformed church a monitoring of the new communication medium – the press was created. By the Church Ordinance of 1537-1539 this control was given a concrete tool which, among other things, required that no books in Latin, Danish or German could be published before they had been subjected to thorough perusal by the theologians at the University of Copenhagen or the bishops in the kingdom.¹⁵ The publishers had to submit to the rules since their royal privileges were tied to the prohibition of printing any material that in any way

13 Recent studies of what types of printed works that were circulating among different social and cultural groups in Norway show both variety in genres and a strong influence of German speaking literature, see DAHL, 2011.

14 BASTIANSEN/DAHL, 2003, p. 31-39; FET, 1995, p. 45-46, 304.

15 BASTIANSEN/DAHL, 2003, p. 54.

went against the true Christian Religion, the Ordinance or other given decrees. The regulations were obviously effective against any statements that could be interpreted as religious or political resistance, and were also reinforced and strengthened by a new regulation in 1667 instructing once again all potential books for print to be censored in Copenhagen. It is a fair conjunction that most black books simply would not have passed the censors in Copenhagen with these strict regulations. Even though they contained art inspired by printed literature such as the German *Kunstbüchlein*, Italian *Secreti* books and medicine books revealing prosaic recipes for making colors and ink and curing stomach diseases, they also reflected magical beliefs and practices that would not sit well with the theologian in Copenhagen. This, I believe, were the main motivations for making black books as manuscripts and the reasons for the development of a specific Nordic manuscript culture.

The Manufacturing of Black Books

In understanding the *modus operandi* in the manufacturing process of the Norwegian material and which authorization strategies the makers employed, the essential question is how these manuscripts present themselves as works of knowledge. As such, the concept of paratexts developed by the French literary theorist Gerard Genette can be a fruitful approach. According to Genette, paratexts are “what enables a text to become a book and to be offered as such to its readers and, more generally, to the public”.¹⁶ The elements that facilitate the text in this process are those verbal or other products which surround and extend the text, not only in order *to present* it, but *to make present* the text. Paratextual elements such as titles, author’s name, introduction, preface, diaries etcetera constitute what Genette labels:

an ‘undefined zone’ between the inside and the outside, a zone without any hard and fast boundary on either the inward side (turned toward the text) or the outward side (turned toward the world’s discourse about the text), an edge, or, as Philippe Lejune put it, ‘a fringe of the printed text which in reality controls one’s whole reading of the text’.¹⁷

As such, paratexts are “an array of liminal forms”, as Helen Smith and Louise Wilson points out.¹⁸ In addition to those textual features Genette includes in his

16 GENETTE, 1997, p. 1.

17 IBID., p. 2.

18 SMITH/WILSON, 2011, p. 2.

paratextual apparatus, he also highlights the appearance and effect of the material construction of the book as equally contributing to present and make present a book.¹⁹ Genette's concept of paratexts thus serves a double purpose in this context; as a guide in the reading of the Norwegian material and as a directive towards the function and meaning of what the material holds.

From the basic standpoint that meaning is produced both in the manufacturing of form and when an object is met by an observer or potential user of the object, it is interesting to see what characterizes these books and investigate the possible motivations for giving them the form they received. Here, both the format of the books, their binding and the writing styles applied in them all serve to identify the black books *not only as proper books* – but also to *determine the response mode* within the literary context. The material form and the visual aesthetic qualities of the black books are what first meet a potential reader of the book and are all contributing to determining the response.

From the investigation of 51 individual Norwegian black books a total of 42 works appear in either quarto or octavo formats, placing the Norwegian black book in the larger formats of books in general. As book historian Charlotte Appel points out, the use and intended readership were decisive factors when formats were chosen for printed books in Denmark during the seventeenth century.²⁰ For instance, books intended as handbooks, such as psalm books, prayer books, and catechisms and often produced for women during the seventeenth century were printed in huge numbers in small formats in accordance with the needs defined by the reading situations as “books at hand”, which were easily transportable. Learned works comprising subjects such as history, theology, and medicine would in most cases be printed in the larger formats of octavo, quarto or even folio, indicating their more stationary use.²¹ Judging from the quite consistent choice of larger formats in black books, a reasonable interpretation is that the choice of format communicates what type of book their makers wanted to produce or the category they perceived they were. Presenting knowledge in octavo or quarto formats communicates an affinity to the stationary, more expensive and learned works which accordingly could supply authority to the works.

The somewhat costly and ornamented binding given some of the black books communicates in similar ways what value the owner put on their books and what material status they wanted to give them. Even though only a handful of the 51 books studied have the binding intact, it is interesting to observe that those books

19 See GENETTE, 1997, p. 16-36 for a more detailed discussion on this topic.

20 APPEL, 2001, p. 613-635.

21 HORSTBØLL, 1999, p. 273-354.

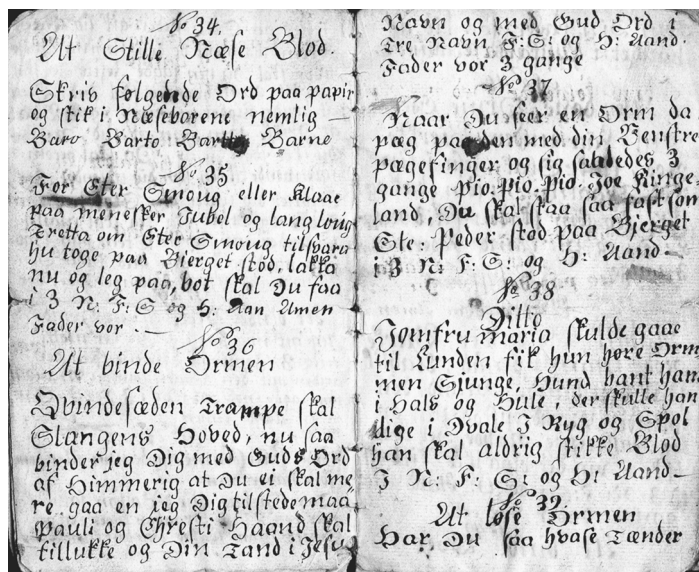
which received a professional binding signal an upgraded material status and an explicit affinity with other literary works. This is, however, even more self-evident in the few cases of material where the manufacturer in all probability was without the means to upgrade the book in a professional binding technique, consequently applying uneven and simple sewing in the spine to bring the papers together and decorating the front covers with illustrations found in printed books resembling a costly relief embossing. Also here we find an explicit affinity to other literary works and possibly a desire to upgrade the works in order to authorize its content.

The last and final point in this context is the writing styles applied in the books. Even though the books demonstrate conventionalized handwriting styles connected to the different periods – from older to younger gothic, from the late sixteenth century onwards to the Latin style in nineteenth century – the books also show extensive use of fracture (or fraktur), a version of the gothic style belonging to the printed medium. When studying the paragraph headings in the black books, almost all books use fracture in their headings. There are also some books written exclusively in fracture. What were the writer's reasons for mixing these styles, and what did they want to accomplish by using fracture?

The use of fracture was highly uncommon in other Norwegian manuscript productions during the early modern period. Even though there are cases in other types of manuscripts where a writer applied fracture in his or her manuscript, it is chiefly connected with a lack of reading or writing skills in the gothic style either in the writer or intended reader. However, insufficient writings skills are probably not a suitable explanation for the application of a conventional style used in printed literature as the combination between gothic and fracture occurs in most black books. Based upon the sum of material and textual similarities between black books and printed books, it is my opinion that the fracture style was applied out of a desire to produce literary works. The use of fracture was not a mere expression of "imitation", but an active part of an authorization strategy which was meant to help the books ascend on the literary ladder. It is obvious that the writers and manufacturers of the black books intended to make books. Observing the application of fey features belonging to the printed book, it challenges our very notion of "what a book is" and how we expect books "to behave".²²

22 See Margaret Ezell's discussion of "Invisible Books" in EZELL, 2009, p. 53-69. Ezell observes that in several modern works in book history "print" and "book" exists as interchangeable nouns.

Figure 1



The picture shows a Norwegian black book from Fron in Oppland County from the last half of the eighteenth century written exclusively in fracture. As is the case with many black books, it has few provenance records and no traces to who wrote the book or owned it. The manuscript is incomplete and lacks both beginning and end. The book is part of the Moltke Moe collection at Norwegian Folklore Archive, University of Oslo.

Attributing Authorship

Another striking feature of the Norwegian black books is how they make use of the author's name. The determination of who the sender of a text, an utterance, is enables a reader to place a text historically, socially and individually, and to understand and interpret it.²³ Despite critics within modern literature theory of the role and relevance of authorship, especially that instigated by Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault in the late 1960s and which challenged interpretations of texts associated with authorial voices because of the potential of undermining

23 GUNDERSEN, 2008, p. 226.

the words and the language of texts, I believe that the origin of the texts, its authors or the notion of the author is essential for the understanding and interpretation of the Norwegian black books.²⁴ The way in which the authorship is explicitly underscored and repeated indicates an understanding where the origin of the text has been perceived as particularly important in relation to how those who wrote the books wished them to be read, understood, and interpreted. As books of knowledge, the references to the origin of the texts have thus played a key role in the authorization of this knowledge.

The use of an author's name is, as Gerard Genette points out, linked to the credibility of the testimony given, or of its transmission. The degree of importance of this function rests on the identity of the witness or the person reporting it.²⁵ In those cases where writers of the black books identify themselves by name in the books, they never claim authorship. Expressions such as "compiled", "correctly copied from", "correct copy", and "written together" are frequently found in the titles or introductory statements, and signal that regardless of whether or not their names are explicitly given, the writers take on a compiler function and a role as mediators between the alleged originator(s) and the actual black book text. As such, the black book writers take on the classical roles of *scriptor* and *compiler*.²⁶

The mediator role is sometimes multiplied by additional names in the books in what can be viewed as an authorial hierarchy, such as the following title from a late eighteenth century black book:

A little book of Arts
Or a
Summary of Cyprian
which was written by bishop
Johanes Sell of Oxford
in England
AD. 1682.²⁷

24 For a discussion of the author's role, see *IBID.*, p. 222-260; BARTHES, 1988, p. 167-172; FOUCAULT, 1988, p. 197-210.

25 GENETTE, 1997, p. 41.

26 Cf. GREPSTAD, 1997, p. 82.

27 "En Liden Kunstbog/ eller et/ Udtog af Selve/ Sybrianus,/ som var skreven af biskop/ Johanes Sell til/ Oxford/ udi England/ A:a: 1682.-", see RUSTAD, 1999, p. 1.

In this title, the name Johanes Sell functions as a mediator between the alleged original source of Cyprian and that of the writer which is the last authorial voice in the textual mediation process.²⁸ Evidence that can explain why Johanes Sell appears in the title can be subtracted from the title itself. The title implies that he was a bishop in Oxford, probably around 1682, and searching for him in records yields a very interesting find: From 1676 a man named John Fell (1625-1686) served as Bishop of Oxford. Not only was he a man of the church, he was also a productive writer, and in 1682, fully and correctly referenced in the black book, Fell published the book *Sancti Caecilii Cypriani Opera recognita* in collaboration with a colleague. Why he appears as a mediator in the black book as the compiler of a work by Cyprian leads us to the final and most important authorial voice in the authorization of the black book. Fell's book, which was a learned book written in Latin portraying the holy martyr St Cyprian's life and work resembles next to nothing of what the black book actually contains. However, the fact that Fell had published a book about Cyprian nevertheless gives credibility to the testimony that the black book actually stems from Cyprian even though, in all probability, it is quite a different figure with contradictory qualities that the writer of the black book had in mind, namely the sorcerer Cyprian.

One set of stories tells of the powerful magician and sorcerer Cyprian of Antioch who lived around 200 AD., and who had made a pact with the Devil in return of earthly powers in the black arts. Upon meeting with the pious woman Justina, whose Christian faith was so strong that she found the power to reject his advances, Cyprian freed himself from his diabolic pact, was received into the Church and later became a bishop.²⁹ This legend has probably later been mixed up with the historical bishop Cyprian of Carthage who lived at the same time and suffered martyrdom approximately 258 AD. The question of why Cyprian is attributed not only this particular book but most Norwegian black books still remains to be answered.

28 This type of mediation can be compared to Richard Bauman's oral mediation model which he calls "Mediational Routine" and which function is to highlight a specific type of communication process where the message itself is received and communicated forward, by replication, through mediators to the recipient(s), see BAUMAN, 2004, p. 133.

29 BUTLER, 1993, p. 87-91.

Figure 2



This black book from the mid-eighteenth century clearly illustrates the attribution practice where Cyprian is given the ultimate authoritative voice. At the bottom of the title page, the text even claims that the book is “printed in Stavanger in Norway in 1699.” Stavanger did not have a printer at this time and the book is handwritten and not printed but the fact that the book claims it illustrates what inspirations and aspiration their manufacturers had. The book is part of the manuscript collection at the National Library in Oslo.

Generally, this attribution practice is based on a widespread practice from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, where the attribution of books to well-known theologians and scientists as well as legendary figures was quite common within certain genres. To some extent it was looked upon as homage to whomever the work was attributed. The main function of attribution, however, was the significance these particular names gave the work in which they appeared. They served to provide legitimacy to the work due to the reputation they had already acquired. The formerly mentioned grimoire and secreti books were printed genres which made extensive use of attributions during the Early Modern Period and ascribed works throughout Europe to both legendary figures such as Faust and historical persons such as Albertus Magnus (1193/1206-1280), Philip von Hoenheim/Paracelsus (1493-1541), and Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa (1486-1535).³⁰ When Cyprian is thus attributed the Norwegian black books, it can be seen as an *authorization strategy* where the writers seek to benefit from the associations and qualities linked to Cyprian. As such, we can identify a classic attribution to a mythical sorcerer whose identity first and foremost was shaped by legends circulating throughout the Middle Ages as well as the Early Modern Period. The connection made to Cyprian not only communicates the form and content of the black books as containing magical knowledge and the black arts, but also points to the magnitude of power of the knowledge.

Authorizing Knowledge by Time

Following the paratextual scheme of the Norwegian black books, another common component to that of the attribution to Cyprian is how the titles are formulated. Or rather, the title narratives which occur in the majority of the books and are crucial for the understanding of how the writers valued the knowledge presented. Through a specific allegorical “biography” of the knowledge, the knowledge is positioned in time, space and in connection with material features. With minor variations, it is presented in the following manner:

30 DAVIES, 2009, p. 44-70.

the Black Book
 Was first found at the Wittenberg
 Academy
 in the year 1529
 in
 A Marble Chest written on
 Parchment.³¹

This title narrative contributes to be able to situate the book and its knowledge by connecting the origin of the knowledge to a specific geographical locality (place), history (time), and to link the book to particular material objects. When appearing as it does in many books, the title can be seen as a traditional formula specifically tied to the Norwegian black book genre. Furthermore, and more importantly, the title serves what Genette labels a designating function by symbolically connecting to the book's subject matter.³² As such, the title does not primarily represent a factual designation but rather creates a symbolic relationship where the main purpose is to situate the knowledge in a landscape where the past and present is illuminated and past wisdom and practice can – through the book – be reactivated and become functional.

When the books connect to Wittenberg as the primary location of the book and the black art containing it, it might be explained by the connotations this place produced as an old and traditional place for knowledge and teaching linked to the University of Wittenberg. Wittenberg University was – for obvious reasons – an important training institution for the Protestant students of Northern Europe. Due to the lack of a Norwegian university, which was not established until 1811, Wittenberg was, in addition to the University of Copenhagen also the preferable choice for Norwegian students during the sixteenth and early seventeenth century.³³ As the place where the great reformer Martin Luther resided as professor, Wittenberg undoubtedly received a special religiously symbolic position in Protestant Norway, especially among those in charge of executing Lutheran reforms. More importantly, however, was the reputation Wittenberg received as a “city of magic”. It was fueled by the connection made between the legendary Dr. Faust and the city portrayed in the anonymous work *Historia von*

31 ”Sortbogen/ Blev först funden paa/ Wittenbergs/ Ackademie/ Aar 1529./ i/ En Marmorsteens Kiste skrewen paa/ Pergament.”, see NB Ms 4 1819 in OHRVIK, 2012, p. 117.

32 GENETTE, 1997, p. 76-81.

33 KOLSRUD/VALKNER, 1962, p. 88f.; HELK, 1987, p. 40-44.

D. Johann Fausten which was published in 1587 and saw numerous editions and was further strengthened by oral legends placing the origin of magic books such as the Sixth and Seventh Book of Moses in the heart of the city.³⁴ Whether the choice of Wittenberg was grounded in educational connotations, or whether it was the occult and esoteric qualities which gave the city its place in the Norwegian books is hard to determine. What unites these qualities is nevertheless the attention placed on knowledge. Be it religion or occult, Wittenberg serves as *the* place for the origin of knowledge where wisdom could be obtained. Placing Wittenberg in connection with the knowledge presented in the black books thus serves as the ultimate quality assurance.

When the title historically links the knowledge to a specific time, in this case to 1529, I believe this to be first and foremost a symbolic construction. The different manuscripts present a number of different dates apparently without any internal or external consistency and point towards an understanding where the actual year is of a lesser importance. Instead, the year chosen in the text contributes to place the books in the past where the year itself represents *time*. By pointing backwards in time, age itself serves to legitimize and qualify the knowledge presented, a wisdom which at the same time has survived and become a symbol of time. As such, the writers do not intend to refer to specific events connected to specific years because the idea is to connect past knowledge to present reality, making time a more *fluid* state. Thus, the black book and the knowledge it holds does not represent *a* past but *the* past. Under this aspect, past is created as a place to which the book gives the reader access. The “Marble chest” serves as a similar symbol in this way. As an object connected with storage, preservation, and constancy it plays a key role in the interpretation of how past knowledge has survived the spans of time and can still be accessed. When the knowledge is rediscovered in the chest of marble we are witnessing a rebirth and reactivation of the wisdom.

We know from history that age, “the past” and tradition have served as important qualifying elements when people have valued the importance of knowledge. Most notable is probably the European rediscovery and translations of “ancient” texts in the fifteenth and sixteenth century, especially connected to the discovery of *Corpus Hermeticum* which allegedly was ancient wisdom from the Egyptian Hermes Trismegistos.³⁵ In our context, however, it is quite surprising to find age and tradition used as means in the authorization strategy of the books, especially considering the fact that many of the books were written during the

34 BUTLER, 1998, p. 5; HERMUNDSTAD, 1961, p. 93.

35 See e.g. YATES, 2001, p. 30-41.

last half of the eighteenth century. The Enlightenment – generally characterized by defending common sense instead of faith and tradition, and emphasizing science and philosophy as the right means to true enlightenment – is contrasted by the universe of knowledge in the black books. Instead of pointing forwards when authorizing the knowledge – they point backwards – leaning symbolically on old authorities and time itself.

Conclusion

The first Danish-Norwegian black book to actually be printed was *Sybrianus P.P.P.* which reached the book market in 1771. It comes as no surprise that this happened during the three years of freedom of the press during the short reign of the personal physician of King Christian VII, the German Johann F. Struensee (1737-1772). By that time, numerous handwritten black books had been produced during the centuries in both Denmark and Norway, where bookish and traditional knowledge regarded as valuable and useful had been interpreted, adopted, and given a physical and textual form as black books. And in this adoption of texts and ideas, the very expression of the books, how the knowledge was ascribed, and the situating of the knowledge was crucial for how the writers wanted their works to be received. Essentially, this process was a cultural exchange of knowledge and illuminates what Peter Burke calls “the ‘cultures of translation’” revealing the rules, norms or conventions governing the translation process.³⁶ The strict censorship in Denmark-Norway was one of the initial motivations for the manuscript production of black books; the specific genre of books of knowledge circulating in Europe served as inspirations while specific norms and conventions connected to the printed book governed the manufacturing process and the attribution of authorship. As this article shows, the norms and conventions applied to the black books were, however, not merely replications or imitations of the printed medium but expressions of a specific communication mode enhancing the authorization of the knowledge presented. The writers of black books were simply making books!

36 BURKE, 2007, p. 11.

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