

## **Supporting Norwegian Friends in their struggle for religious freedom: correspondence between English and Norwegian Quakers, c.1840-1870.**

This paper considers the wealth of written material –particularly letters - preserved in Norway and the UK, which reveals the long-distance, numerically dense and long-term communication networks between Norwegian and English Friends in the mid-C19th, and especially between South West Norway and North East England, maintained in the main through regular written correspondence, the circulation of the same amongst Friends, and occasional visits over a relatively long period of time in order to preserve the initially tiny community of Norwegian Friends and also, arguably, to offer Anglophone Friends a spiritually inspiring window into a group of recent converts with the poverty and simplicity of the earliest English Quaker converts. The research from which this paper arises includes, then, analysis of a wider body of letters dating from the 1810s, when the first Norwegian prisoners of war, during the Napoleonic Wars, contacted English Friends to signal their interest in Quakerism, to the 1870s; several hundred have been transcribed so far. Key players include Stavanger teacher, translator and abstinence campaigner Asbjorn Kloster, stalwart Stavanger Friend Endre Dahl, Northumberland minister George Richardson, and Elias Tastad, former prisoner of war and very early Quaker convert.

Intriguingly, other than for genealogical research the material has been little used in Anglophone research, excepting David Adshead's pioneering work. This seems to reflect a lack of attention to Norwegian Quakerism perhaps because in many other parts of the world C19th Quakers were no longer an oppressed minority and instead were positioned at the moral vanguard of society, especially regarding the abolition of slavery. However, as I outline towards the end of my paper, it would be useful to use larger scale quantitative analysis to consider how, if at all, C17th and C19th English-language Quaker works in circulation in Norway affected Norwegian Friends' self-representation and distinctive identity, and this paper offers initial qualitative findings in this area.

So as part of my consideration of the letters' role in maintaining Norwegian Friends through periods of hardship, economic, spiritual and political, I will consider the usefulness of discourse analysis as an investigative tool. Whilst some scholars, such as the sociologist

Jorge Ruiz Ruiz, underline its role in offering insights into how discourse – any practice by which individuals imbue reality with meaning – functions<sup>i</sup>, others, most notably the polymath Michel Foucault, criticised its use, although by careful interpretation of Foucault's work scholars such as the psychologist Derek Hook have offered Foucauldian versions of discourse analysis<sup>ii</sup>, some of which I draw upon in this paper. Whilst I do not agree with Foucault's insights as a whole regarding C18<sup>th</sup> and C19<sup>th</sup> Quakerism<sup>iii</sup> application of his work to discourse analysis, specifically in relation to religion, is helpful. In particular, analysis of links between the verbal – in this instance, letters - and material – the physical suffering of those gaoled or impoverished due to persecution - helps in reflecting on ideas of what discourse is, and how it goes beyond the verbal and shapes the lives of those engaging in it.

Therefore this paper also seeks to consider how English, as well as Norwegian Friends, engaged in a form of discourse analysis and criticism when they provided alternatives to the hegemonic depiction of religious dissenters offered by the Lutheran church and to the church's sometimes violent responses to the Quaker minority. In relation to this, it offers insights into Friends' self-representation and self-construction gleaned from the correspondence, which draws on, for example, Foucault's assertion that both the historical and the material should be considered; certainly, in his *Archaeology of Knowledge*, published in 1972, he acknowledged a need to recognise historical context, in this instance of the letters: 'the conditions in which the function that gave a series of signs... an existence... can operate'<sup>iv</sup> and of course, as I suggested earlier, in addition to written evidence of belief, Friends historically have suffering physically for their faith.

By drawing on such scholarship this paper focuses on 3 main themes relating to the conference as a whole: freedom of belief, intellectual freedom and freedom of conscience - through which Norwegian Friends' self-representation as a 'small and poor community', suffering in adversity, will be analysed. For English Friends too, awareness of Norwegian sufferings helped them reflect on their privileged position in a nation which no longer persecuted them for meeting, or for refusal to baptize their children, and, furthermore, enabled them to define themselves as champions of suffering Friends overseas. How, then, were the letters part of a discourse which 'imbued reality with meaning', in Ruiz's term, allowing Quakers writing them to construct their ideas of what it meant to be Quaker, or

perhaps, using Foucault's idea of discursive formations that reinforce established identities, to reiterate them and thereby support recent converts?

Certainly, analysis of the frequent use of the term 'poor Friends' by both Norwegian and English Quakers in the mid-C19th reveals a range of meanings relating to group identity but also the practicalities of C19th Norwegian life. For example, when writing to George Richardson in Spring 1842, Ener Rasmussen of Stavanger emphasized that 'we may not see each other in this life, but believe I have fellowship with you, in Spirit.' Indeed, he expanded fellowship from the personal to the collective, stating that 'The Love, and Respect, which thou hast shown to the poor Friends in Norway, convinces me, that we are one Spiritual Family, when one Member, feels for the other'. '[P]oor Friends' may refer to the literal, material poverty of Norwegian Quakers – and later examples of the term suggest this – but also perhaps spiritual poverty in comparison to Anglophone Friends. Regarding the former, when collecting subscriptions for Norwegian Quakers 6 years later, in summer 1848, Richardson described them as 'poor Friends', reflecting their financial status, whilst details of the sufferings of Norwegian Quakers at the hands of the Lutheran church – undoubtedly encouraging Anglophone Friends to draw parallels between C17th England and C19th Norway - were disseminated by Norwegians such as Endre Dahl, who writing to Richardson 4 years later, in Spring 1852, outlined how Quakers in a rural area had been distraised for non-payment of school tax, because 'The Priest in that place is very envious, and likes to see those poor Friends brought entirely to poverty'. Dahl seems to have used 'poor Friends' to mark material poverty but it also reveals Norwegian Friends' self-representation as 'poor' in other ways; as pitiable because of their sufferings. Tellingly, though, rural Quakers are '*those* poor Friends', not '*our* poor Friends', distanced from Stavanger Quakers and, especially given Rasmussen's comments on Quakerism as a spiritual family, this may suggest a greater bond felt by some Stavanger Friends to English Quakers than fellow Norwegians.

In later examples, Stavanger Friends most commonly depicted themselves as both materially and spiritually limited. In early 1853, Tastad wrote on behalf of Norwegian Friends to the Meeting for Sufferings in London, asserting that he believed they would be capable of judging 'the present state and condition of our small and poor community', which frequently faced spiritual trials such as 'lust for the Egyptian delicacies', presumably a

reference drawing on the Old Testament and referring to a selective acceptance by the Israelites of some aspects of worldly behaviour with a parallel selective forgetting of the oppression experienced by them because of the same.<sup>v</sup> This led, in his view, to ‘a condition of poverty – if it were a poverty of the true kind, we ought to rejoice’, revealing a desire perhaps for yet greater material poverty in order to escape spiritual poverty stemming from idleness. Writing the following summer, 1854, to George Richardson, Tastad expressed his gratitude for his Friend’s continued support, ‘keping up the crospondence at so Long a Time by the poor Friends at Norway’. Richardson’s support was not, of course, purely financial, or rather, the financial support he organised served spiritual purposes, such as helping to provide Quaker literature in Norwegian. Similarly, in an undated letter to Richardson, Tastad noted the former’s ‘dear and tender Concern of Love to the poor friends of Norway... you have yet seen verry litle fruit of it.’ Richardson’s was not a financial investment, but rather spiritual speculation, and Tastad seems aware of the distinctive status of his fellow Norwegian Quakers in contrast to Anglophone Friends.

Later in the century, the term moved from a description of all Norwegian Quakers, to individuals identifying themselves in contrast to English Friends. This was especially the case for Asbjorn Kloster, who had been introduced to Richardson as ‘as a young friend which we ough[t] hope the best of about’, and who in Spring 1862 wrote to the Middlesbrough Friend Isaac Sharp, thanking him for ‘the confidence thou still retained in thy poor friend’ in asking Kloster to undertake another missionary journey, whilst contrasting himself to ‘my dear young friends R & E Dixon’; Kloster sent them greetings ‘from their poor Norwegian friend.’

British Quakers too, though, sought to reiterate their religious and national, and possibly also class, identities when discussing Norway. The London Quaker Peter Bedford, writing to Richardson in late 1854, asserted his interest in ‘our Norwegian Friends’, particularly ‘the dear little flocks at & around Stavanger’ which he contrasted to a lack of progress in Christiansand although its tiny group of Friends demonstrated ‘much feeling & correct views’, and he thereby positioned himself, and English Quakers in general, as fit to judge Quaker orthodoxy. Norwegian Quakers were, on average, of a lower social status than Friends in the UK, as the work of Trond Sviland on C19th Norwegian Quaker emigration, when compared with the work of, amongst others, Liz O’Donnell on C19th Newcastle

Friends, suggests, although direct comparison has not to date been undertaken. Certainly, those Friends from the North-east of England with whom Stavanger Quakers maintained much of their overseas correspondence tended to be of higher social status, so it must be considered, therefore, that descriptions such as 'dear little flock' may have reflected a nostalgia for the British Quaker past, including perhaps a perceived Norwegian simplicity stemming from poverty meaning that Norway's Friends were seen as being in particular need of assistance to supply their material needs whilst maintaining their spiritual purity.

In relation to this, English Friends also explored their identities through correspondence with Norwegians. Writing to Dahl in early 1854, Richardson noted that he was 'sending six copies of *The Rise and Progress of Friends in Norway*', and suggested Dahl might 'find opportunity to send one to places where you have travelled to such... as can read English'. He also advised Dahl to 'best proceed immediately to print fresh Editions of the most useful of those tracts of which you have satisfactory translations' adding that although 'it is the judgement of some of *your* Friends that the next books you translate for printing should be judicious selections from the *Memorials of Friends*', Dahl should not 'print the whole of any of these'. Positioning himself as a spiritual, and to some degree financial, advisor, Richardson stood for English Quakers, although as an individual, Dahl was Richardson's 'fellow labourer.'

Bearing in mind their perceived spiritual poverty, it is also appropriate to consider if Norwegian Friends' letters reveal evidence that they enjoyed spiritual freedom through correspondence with English Quakers. Certainly, in writing to Isaac Sharp in Autumn 1861, Kloster praised young English Friends 'giving their hearts to the Lord' although he criticized his own presumption in commenting upon them, asking Sharp to 'excuse... my simplicity and freedom'. However, we see Bedford using the term 'freedom' in a similar fashion, referring not only to spiritual freedom but also to something closer to politeness, in a letter to Richardson in early 1854 in which he queried Dahl's financial status and hoped Richardson would 'excuse my freedom' in asking, suggesting further research is required in this respect when considering the extent to which middle class English Friends such as Bedford represented themselves to other English Friends as well as to Friends overseas, possibly drawing on a wider middle-class culture of 'equipoise', appropriate and balanced modes of

behaviour in politics and personal life, as well as English self-identification as a 'polite people' from at least the late C18th.<sup>vi</sup>

Related to this, as I outlined earlier, it is useful to ask if C19th British Friends were critically engaging with hegemonic Norwegian Lutheran discourses, such as those against dissenting churches, in order to offer support to Norwegian Quakers and prospective Quakers.

Certainly, according to Richardson's *Rise and Progress of the Society of Friends in Norway*, first published in 1849, in 1841 he had written to Stavanger authorities 'on behalf of my fellow professors of the same faith, your countrymen'.<sup>vii</sup> Drawing a parallel to oppressed Lutherans in Prussia in it, he described how many Lutherans had travelled to New York via Newcastle, and had been visited by Friends, yet Stavanger's Friends were oppressed by Lutherans. More broadly, his history of Norwegian Friends, in which the letter was reproduced, served to demonstrate Anglophone Quaker criticism of hegemonic Norwegian Lutheran discourse, thereby acting as a blueprint for Norwegian Friends, not only to better understand the past but also to be skilled in dealing with oppression in the present.

Norwegian Quakers too demonstrated the illegitimacy of their oppression: on one level this was by emphasizing their honesty, such as their Answers to the Queries of the Two Months' Meeting held at Stavanger for 5<sup>th</sup> of the 4<sup>th</sup> Mo. 1850, which noted that 'Friends have been clear of defrauding the King of his customs'. It may also, though, be possible that Norwegian Friends were undertaking early discourse analysis by discussing and rejecting, in political and religious terms, hegemonic discourse, including its material forms: violence and oppression. As Richardson noted in the *Rise*, in 1830 Iver Halversen wrote 'a letter of remonstrance' to the government and king to explain his dissent from public worship: 'many thousand persons are permitted to dwell quietly under their respective governments, who have embraced the same truth as we have'. Fourteen years later, in 1844, Tastad addressed 'Justices, and Priests at Norway', criticising those 'who drive & cherish an envious Spirit against all who separate from you & your Church of State... in that spirit the High Priest & the Scribes finished their murderous action'. He then asserted that Magistrates were used as 'Instruments... to plunder & imprison & kill the innocent' because 'the above named spirit of wickedness, has been Ruling or dominating in and about Stavanger, this many years persecuting the people called Quakers'. Tellingly, he added that 'I love you & all men &

desire your temporal & eternal peace, which none can attain to till the envious Spirit is destroyed' so leading, until the hegemonic discourse of violence was rejected, to the love of God 'and your fellow men... the true sign or stamp of Christianity.' As my final example, five years later Tastad and other Friends addressed King Oscar, seeking freedom from church and school tax and to be considered as genuine in rejecting them rather than displaying 'obstinate behaviour', so the king was asked to lessen 'the burdens of the oppressed'.

Norwegian Friends were additionally active in offering critical responses to their representation in the press. In a letter of Autumn 1843 Richardson noted that 'Endre Dahl informs me that Friends and their views are often adverted [?] to in the Provincial Newspapers – and much that is injurious is mixed up with such notices.' A comment immediately following this, that Norwegian Friends had no works by George Fox, may have perhaps unconsciously identified the usefulness of a C17<sup>th</sup> account of the oppression of British Friends to Norwegian Friends 2 centuries later. In the early 1860s in Christiania, Kloster had similar problems. After his eventual success in finding a venue for temperance meetings, 'Some of the clergy... indicated some regret & alarm... &... warned the people, even in the Newspapers, against associating with me... One of the Papers... say ... Our town has of late been pretty much *visited*' – at this point Kloster emphasizes the negative connotations of the vocabulary in Norwegian - 'by Sectmakers... Now has the factic (real) leader of the Quakers in this country... Asbjorn Kloster, come hither... and invites to "Total abstinence in meetings" &c and then he' – the journalist – 'goes on to warn of the dangers.' Kloster, though, continued with meetings and his own publication, *The Philanthropist*, which offered a critical response to the hegemonic suspicion of Quakerism.

Certainly, the letters demonstrate that Norwegian Friends on occasion viewed themselves as a minority in relation to other Norwegians and other Quakers. As Kloster noted of his initial difficulty finding a venue, 'it could not be obtained by a "dissenter, like me"'. In the same letter he wished English readers might 'see it right to come over to the "Norwegian Macedonia and help us," (I mean particularly to Christiania & thereabouts where comparatively little has been done by travelling Friends)'. His reference to Macedonia is nuanced; formerly part of the Ottoman Empire, like Norway it too was developing its national identity although a lack of distinctive contemporary literary and linguistic identity

hampered such efforts.<sup>viii</sup> More telling yet is Kloster's echoing of Acts 16:9, 'come to Macedonia and help us!' from those who had heard of Christianity but had not been visited by missionaries.<sup>ix</sup> We may perhaps almost see him, then, as positioning English Friends as apostolic, certainly as religious leaders, in contrast to oppressed Norwegian Quakers.

In conclusion, then, it is useful to consider how the voluminous correspondence aided Norwegian and other Friends in creating and maintaining a distinctive identity. On one hand, C19th Norwegian responses to oppression mirror those of English Friends, both those written to support their co-religionists in the early C19th, and also those in, for example, Joseph Besse's *Sufferings* of 1753, in which C17th examples of letters and petitions to oppressors were reproduced.<sup>x</sup> However Norwegian Friends were teetotal, an aspect of identity not shared by all English Friends, although, of course, drunken excess was unacceptable. What is apparent, however, is a need for further analysis into Friends' use of language, especially amongst those writing in English to Anglophone Friends who supplied them with a range of classic Quaker texts. Although they were translated for wider dissemination, it seems pertinent to consider if Friends like Kloster took on the colour of C17<sup>th</sup> as well as C19<sup>th</sup> English when expressing their experiences, both material and spiritual.

Indeed, copies of Fox's journal were seen as crucial for the development of Norwegian Quakerism; in summer 1843 Richardson commented to the committee of the Meeting for Sufferings that there were no translations of Fox. Seven years later, in Spring 1850, works sold in Stavanger included Fox's journal, probably translated by Dahl, as well as various other C17<sup>th</sup> works including those of Robert Barclay, William Penn and Thomas Lurting. Two years later, in Spring 1852, Dahl assured Richardson that Kloster was translating Fox whilst other works such as Penn's *Rise and Progress*, a history of early Quakerism first published in 1694, were planned. By Spring 1853, Kloster could send Richardson an account of 'our stock of books & tracts', which included Penn's work, Fox's journal in an abbreviated form, and Barclay's *Apology*. The influence of Fox's work on Kloster is certainly apparent: he noted how 'schools and teaching are in very little esteem among us, compared with among you; so that I know not that I have received a single word of encouragement... I must say, as G Fox often says in his Journal, "The Lord's power was over all, blessed be His Holy Name!"' At this stage it is difficult to determine who the 'us' and the 'you' are; possibly Norwegian and



English nationals, but it seems likely that Kloster was distinguishing between different groups of Quakers, and drawing on Fox's work for comfort, as well as on the support of living English Friends for, as he concluded, 'Next to God, I cannot be thankful enough to my dear friends in England for their many consoling & encouraging remarks'.

The perceived importance, in English Quakers' view, of Fox's journal and core early works in general in maintaining Norwegian Quakerism is apparent in James Backhouse's summer 1853 letter to Richardson from Trondhjem, in which he notes how 'English seems to lose little in effect when interpreted into the simple Norsk by a man such as Endre Dahl whose heart is in the work'. Indeed, in the winter of the same year (1853), Dahl sent Richardson 100 copies of Fox's journal, noting that 'they [sic] have been one Copi left behind in every plase wher we have been and in many instances it have served to save frends traveling expences as manny kindly disposed people would take no ting for meat &c have then had a praesent of a Copi of Geo Fox', whilst a year later, in early spring 1855, Dahl informed Richardson that Norwegian Friends had responded to Lutheran anti-Quaker rhetoric by publishing 'Extracts out of several Books of Friends Writings, from Approved Doctrine', including Barclay and Fox as well as JJ Gurney's *Observations on the distinguishing views and practices of the Society of Friends* and Henry Tuke's *Principles of Religion*, both early C19th. The focus upon orthodox recent, and early, English Quaker works leads to several questions: certainly, further analysis of the language used by Quaker Norwegians may help in determining which aspects of Quaker history were of most use to those oppressed and seeking their own identity as a distinctive minority group during such a turbulent period of national and religious history.

## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> J. Ruiz Ruiz (2009), 'Sociological Discourse Analysis: Methods and Logic', *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 10(2), p.2. <http://nbnresolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs0902263>

<sup>ii</sup> D. Hook, (2001), 'Discourse, knowledge, materiality, history: Foucault and discourse analysis' [online] London: LSE Research Online, Available at: <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/archive/956>

<sup>iii</sup> M. Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation* (1961) pp.231-4.

<sup>iv</sup> M. Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972) p.122.

<sup>v</sup> Although these comments pre-date its publication, the 1866 work by the biblical scholar James Floy, *Literary Remains: Old Testament Characters Delineated and Illustrated* (1866) reprinted in 2013 by Forgotten Books (pp.142-3) reflected his similar interests in the account and its implications, suggesting that such biblical passages may have been utilised by other religious minority groups when seeking to create a sense of identity in order to survive.

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<sup>vi</sup> See e.g. W. L. Burns' 1964 work *The Age of Equipoise* and also P. Langford's 1989 work *A polite and commercial people: England 1727-1783*.

<sup>vii</sup> G. Richardson, *The rise and progress of the Society of Friends in Norway* London: Charles Gilpin (1849) pp.64-5.

<sup>viii</sup> V. Friedman, 'Macedonian Language and Nationalism During the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries', *Balkanistica 2*, 1975. 83-98. Reprinted in *Macedonian Review*, 16.3, 1976: 280-292.

<sup>ix</sup> L. S. Nasrallah and M. Johnson DeBaufre 'Beyond the Heroic Paul: Toward a Feminist and Decolonizing Approach to the Letters of Paul', *The Colonized Apostle: Paul through Postcolonial Eyes* ed. Christopher Stanley. Pp. 161-174. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011.

<sup>x</sup> See e.g. J. Besse, *A collection of the sufferings of the people called Quakers* vol. II (1753) p.85, Worcestershire 1683, letter to Assize Judges from Friends gaoled for meeting for worship and refusing to swear.