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Fourfold Female: Birgithe Kühle's Pioneer Norwegian Journal *Provincial-Lecture* (1794) and Her European Book Collection

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on Birgithe Kühle (1762–1832), editor of the weekly journal *Provincial-Lecture* [*Provincial Reading*] (1794) and the first known female periodical editor in Denmark-Norway. The article discusses her editorial strategies and sources and assesses her dependency on contemporary and past European culture. It also considers the presence of provincial versus central Western European influences, and of male versus female authors in a double decentering of late-eighteenth-century cultural perspectives. It does so by examining the four roles of editor, translator, book owner, and printer-publisher underpinning the production of the periodical, all adopted by women and all but one undertaken by Kühle herself.

KEYWORDS

Female editorship, Norwegian, *Provincial-Lecture*, book collection, translation

This special issue of the *Journal of European Periodical Studies* explores the corners of Europe for a fuller picture of women's editorial contributions in the eighteenth to early twentieth centuries. The north-western one yields the first Danish-Norwegian female editor in Birgithe Kühle (1762–1832).¹ In 1794, Kühle edited the weekly journal *Provincial-Lecture* [*Provincial Reading*] in the Norwegian city of Bergen, a [digitized version](#) of which is available through the National Library of Norway's digital collections. In this article, I study her strategies and sources and assess her dependency on contemporary and past European culture. I also consider the presence of provincial versus central Western European influences, and of male versus female authorship in a double decentring of late-eighteenth-century cultural perspectives. I do so by considering the four roles of editor, translator, book owner, and publisher underpinning the production of the periodical, all adopted by women and all but one undertaken by Kühle herself.

A Female Editor

Birgithe Kühle's life is a remarkable testimony to women's capacities for balancing cultural participation with family responsibilities. Not only was she an editor, translator, and writer, according to one of our very few sources about Birgithe Kühle — a biography of her husband compiled by family members — she also bore twenty-three children between 1779 and 1802, from the age of eighteen to forty.² By 1794, the year she edited her journal, she had a new-born baby and ten previous births behind her and had suffered the loss of at least three of her children — personal circumstances that were hardly conducive to professional writing and editorship. Danish by birth, Birgithe Lykke Solberg was born on 16 January 1762 in Copenhagen, married in 1779, and died on 27 March 1832 in the Danish village of Sønderby. (Fig. 1) However, the family lived in Bergen, Norway for sixteen years, from 1786 to 1802, and this is the period and site of her editorship as well as her childbearing. Now two different countries, Denmark-Norway was approaching the end (in 1814) of a four-centuries-long union, whose official language was Danish and joint capital was Copenhagen. Bergen was then Norway's largest and most international city. It was twice the size of Christiania (now Oslo); but with circa 14,000 inhabitants, it was still of moderate proportions and means.³

The Kühle family records state that 'even though Mrs Birgithe continued to bear a child every year, she did gradually find the courage to contribute to the cultivation of the city'.⁴ Compared to her native Copenhagen, with around 80,000 inhabitants, Bergen was evidently considered 'raw' and in need of improvement. The family records reveal

1 Sweden had already seen its first female editor in 1738–39 when Anna Margareta Momma (1702–72) edited the ten-issue journal *Samtal emellan Argi Skugga och en obekant Fruentimbers Skugga* [*Conversation between the Shadow of Argus and the Shadow of an Unknown Woman*], printed by her husband Peter Momma. In 1772–73, the Swedish Catharina Ahlgren (1734–c. 1810) edited a periodical consisting of sixty-seven issues in total, the three different titles of which can be shortened to *Brefväxling* [*Correspondence*]. For more details on Swedish periodicals for and by women, see Anna Nordenstam, 'Äldre svenska kvinnotidsskrifter' ['Older Swedish Women's Magazines'], *Kvinnohistoriska portaler* [*Women's History Portals*] (Göteborgs Universitet, 2020) [accessed 26 May 2021].

2 Kühle bore fourteen (identified) children in 1780, '81, '83, '84, '85, '87, '88, '89, '91, '92, '94, '96, '99, and 1802. Nine additional, unnamed children are assumed to have died at birth. This information is provided by a biography of her husband Carl Nicolaus Christian von Kühle compiled by members of the Kühle family, whose sources include two short letters from Brigithe Kühle herself. Paul Kühle, 'Carl Nicolaus Chr. von Kühle' (20 May 2004) [accessed 16 October 2019].

3 Aina Nøding, *Claus Fasting: Dikter, journalist og opplysningspioner* [*Claus Fasting: Poet, Journalist, and Enlightenment Pioneer*] (Oslo: Scandinavian Academic Press, 2018), p. 18; Reidun Kvaale, *Kvinner i norsk presse gjennom 150 år* [*Women in the Norwegian Press through 150 Years*] (Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, 1986), p. 19.

4 'Skønt Fru Birgithe stadig hvert Aar fødte et Barn, fik hun imidlertid mod til at gøre sit til Tonens Forbedring.' Kühle, 'Carl Nicolaus Chr. von Kühle'. All translations from Norwegian are the author's.



Fig. 1 Silhouette of Birgithe Kühle (1762–1832), identified by a [family biography](#) as probably made by Franz Liborius Schmitz, c. 1816 in Assens. Lokalhistoriewiki.no

that the Kühle couple were both active participants in the city's cultural life, emphasizing the significance of their joint theatre contributions in particular. At the same time, they underestimate Birgithe's literary and editorial endeavours, concluding that 'the magazine was by our standards very negligible'.⁵ *Provincial-Lecture* ran for fifty-two numbered issues of eight pages each, amounting to 416 pages in total. While no exact dates are preserved, the periodical did not survive beyond its first year of publication. If by 'negligible' the family records refer to the journal's limited lifespan and size, they overlook the fact that most eighteenth-century periodicals were of short duration and consisted of no more than a handful of pages. The most prestigious Norwegian journal, Claus Fasting's *Provinzialblade* [*Provincial Papers*] (1778–81), lasted for four years, which Aina Nøding considers 'quite an achievement', and was the same size as Kühle's periodical.⁶ In England, the most influential journals were published over a mere couple of years, including Richard Steele's *Tatler* from 1709 to 1711 and Steele and Joseph Addison's *Spectator* from 1711 to 1712. The immediacy of these journals and their proximity to their readers as they reported on the current talk of the coffee-houses and latest issues of debate required vivid and flexible forms of publication rather than firmly set and long-running traditions.

Harald Tveterås's chronological list of Norwegian periodicals shows that Birgithe Kühle's end-of-century journal was the thirtieth of a total of thirty-seven titles published between 1700 and 1799.⁷ Even in a small country, before its national independence, the periodical was a prominent medium for the new enlightened public readership, as is also convincingly argued in a recent study by Ellen Krefting, Aina Nøding, and

5 'Bladet var efter vore Forhold meget ubetydeligt.' Kühle, 'Carl Nicolaus Chr. von Kühle'.

6 Aina Nøding, 'The Editor as Scout: The Rapid Mediation of International Texts in Provincial Journals', in *Eighteenth-Century Periodicals as Agents of Change*, ed. by Ellen Krefting, Aina Nøding and Mona Ringvej (Leiden: Brill, 2015), pp. 62–76 (pp. 67, 69).

7 Harald Tveterås, *Norske Tidsskrifter: Bibliografi over periodiske skrifter i Norge inntil 1920. Kronologisk utgave* [*Norwegian Journals: Bibliography of Periodicals in Norway up to 1920. Chronological Edition*] (Oslo: Universitetsbiblioteket, 1984), pp. 7–9.

Mona Ringvej.⁸ Yet, while *Provincial-Lecture* had many predecessors, and new journals providing popular reading matter proliferated, it is the only eighteenth-century periodical in Norway (or Denmark, for that matter) known to have been edited by a woman. It was, however, part of a larger trend where, in the words of Hilary Brown and Gillian Dow, 'women across Europe were becoming increasingly involved in cultural life in this period and would have been affected by the new cosmopolitan trends too'.⁹

Women's earliest involvement with the Nordic press was as owners in the seventeenth century, when widows inherited their husbands' publishing houses. Although women started to contribute actively to the press from the eighteenth century onwards, they did not become fully-fledged journalists until the mid-nineteenth century.¹⁰ Kühle is sometimes considered the first woman journalist in Norway, since she not only assembled her material, but also edited, rewrote, and translated it, and presented it for her readers in a personal voice. However, she was not the first Norwegian female journalist in the modern sense of a reporter or correspondent — this was rather the novelist and travel writer Marie Colban (1814–84), who wrote articles from Paris for Norwegian newspapers from 1856. Instead, Kühle's method, like her immediate forerunner Claus Fasting's, was 'cut-and-paste' journalism, to 'write with scissors', selecting and collating material from various sources for use in her own journal.¹¹

Despite being a pioneer woman editor, Birgithe Kühle did not, in fact, reveal her gender in *Provincial-Lecture*, nor did she target an exclusively female readership. Her name does not appear on the title page, or anywhere else in the journal, and she signed her foreword 'udgiv.' ['the editor'].¹² If anything, the publication bears a credible male mask, since the editor's persona, editing strategies, educational purposes, and reliance on 'cut-and-paste' journalism are all in line with the tradition established by Kühle's male forerunners. This anonymity is rather to be expected in the eighteenth-century press, as anonymous and pseudonymous publication were widely practiced strategies for hiding authorial and editorial identity and creating a public voice.¹³ Kühle's predecessor, Fasting, and their joint sources, Addison, Steele, and Jonathan Swift, were likewise anonymous editors with a strong editorial voice. However, Kühle was not elsewhere averse to publishing in her own name, as two poetry volumes published in 1800 and 1802 are both signed.

A Female Translator

Although Reidun Kvaale's 1986 history of women journalists discusses Birgithe Kühle only as editor, she refers to an earlier student paper documenting that Kühle not only rewrote her sources to fit the format of *Provincial-Lecture*, but also translated much of

8 Krefting, Ellen, Aina Nøding, and Mona Ringvej, *En pokkers Skrivesyge: 1700-tallets dansk-norske tidsskrifter mellom sensur og ytringsfrihet* [*A Heck of a Writing Disease: Eighteenth-Century Danish-Norwegian Journals between Censorship and Freedom of Expression*] (Oslo: Scandinavian Academic Press, 2014), p. 10.

9 Hilary Brown and Gillian Dow, eds, *Readers, Writers, Salonnières: Female Networks in Europe 1700–1900* (New York: Peter Lang, 2011), p. 2.

10 John Chr. Jørgensen, *Da kvinderne blev journalister* [*When Women Became Journalists*] (Copenhagen: Københavns Universitet, 2012), pp. 15–16.

11 Aina Nøding, 'Fastings metode' ['Fasting's Method'], *Prosa*, 1 (2012), 56–60 (p. 60).

12 'Udgiv.', short for 'udgiver', can mean both 'publisher' and 'editor' in Danish. In this context, it clearly means 'editor'.

13 The practice of anonymous editing and the ensuing problems of identification are considered in Anna Nordenstam, 'Åldre svenska kvinnotidsskrifter' ['Older Swedish Women's Magazines'], *Kvinnohistoriska portaler* [*Women's History Portals*] (Göteborgs Universitet, 2020) [accessed 26 May 2021]. John Mullan's monograph on the history of anonymity gives many examples of the different motives for hiding; see John Mullan, *Anonymity: The Secret History of English Literature* (London: Faber and Faber, 2007).

the content herself.¹⁴ *Provincial-Lecture's* fifty-two issues contain material translated from at least three languages, English, French, and Swedish. While we do not know for certain what foreign languages Kühle mastered, we have several indications from which to infer her linguistic skills. The first is her professed enjoyment of foreign reading, by which she likely meant in the original languages.¹⁵ The second is her surprising preference for English journals, which stands in contrast to the predominance of French and German among educated Norwegian men of the period. Boys who received an education, such as Claus Fasting, would learn Latin first and modern languages later, and English was not necessarily one of them.¹⁶ English would only gradually gain ground as a first foreign language over the following century, primarily in trade and maritime rather than in academic contexts.

Moreover, with regard to Kühle's work as a translator, there appears to have been a synergy between her periodical editorship and another cultural role that she took on during these years, namely the forming of a pioneer Norwegian theatre. It is likely that she translated for both these channels simultaneously. In 1794, the year in which *Provincial-Lecture* appeared, Birgithe and Carl Kühle became the driving forces behind the establishment of the Bergen Dramatic Society; he as founder and director, she as leader of the participating ladies.¹⁷ The 1988 *Norsk kvinnelitteraturhistorie* [*Norwegian Women's Literary History*] describes Birgithe Kühle as 'en uredd og initiativrik kvinne' ['a fearless and resourceful woman'] because she was the instigator of a female rebellion in the dramatic society to have women's names added to the exclusively male membership list.¹⁸ According to the entry on 'Norsk teaterhistorie' ['Norwegian Theatre History'] in the *Store norske leksikon* [*Great Norwegian Encyclopedia*], the society had four hundred female and two hundred male active members in 1795. By 1800, it had its own building, and in 1850 Bergen Theatre became Det Norske Theater [The Norwegian Theatre], later Den Nationale Scene [The National Stage], the first national theatre in Norway.

The repertoire started locally with the Bergen playwright (later bishop) Johan Nordahl Brun, but quickly became international, with plays harvested primarily from German bourgeois drama and light French comedies. The first foreign play was August von Kotzebue's notoriously successful *Das Kind der Liebe* (1780), performed as *Elskovsbarnet* in Bergen in March 1794.¹⁹ Notably, this was four years before its London production in Elizabeth Inchbald's translation *Lovers' Vows* (1798), now remembered for its pivotal role in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* (1814).²⁰ Whereas Inchbald's name appeared on the title page of *Lovers' Vows*, the Norwegian translator of Kotzebue's play was not named, which was common for translators regardless of sex. However, Kühle is a candidate because she was an active translator who probably selected this piece with her husband and other leaders of the theatre group. She was not the sole female translator in Denmark-Norway, although they were often either unnamed or sometimes

14 Kvaale, pp. 18–20; Marianne Gunnarsjaa, 'Kvinnen i norsk pressehistorie 1794–1902' ['Women in Norwegian Press History 1794–1902'] (unpublished student paper, Norsk Journalisthøyskole, 1983).

15 *Provincial-Lecture*, 1 (1794), 3–4 (p. 3).

16 Nøding, *Claus Fasting*, p. 59.

17 Kühle, 'Carl Nicolaus Chr. von Kühle'.

18 Kari Gaarder Losnedahl, 'Teater for en lukket krets. De dramatiske selskaper i Norge 1800–1830' ['Theater for a Closed Circle: Dramatic Societies in Norway 1800–1830'], in *Norsk kvinnelitteraturhistorie* [*History of Norwegian Women's Literature*], ed. by Irene Engelstad, Jorunn Hareide, Irene Iversen, Torill Steinfeld, and Janneken Øverland (Oslo: Pax forlag, 1988), pp. 41–46 (p. 42).

19 Kühle, 'Carl Nicolaus Chr. von Kühle'.

20 *Ibid.* For an analysis of the relationship between the two texts, see Marie Nedregotten Sørbø, *Irony and Idyll: Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice and Mansfield Park on Screen* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2014), pp. 228–30.

even appeared with male signatures.²¹ For instance, Conradine Aamodt Dunker's (1780–1866) translation from the German of August Lafontaine was credited to her husband, and Marie Colban's (1814–84) translation of Eugène Sue's *Mathilde* similarly bore the initials of her husband, N. A. Colban.²² We do not have direct evidence that Kühle translated Kotzebue, but it is a reasonable hypothesis that she was translating for both stage and page in 1794. In any case, her leading role in the Bergen Dramatic Society suggests close involvement in the society's efforts to appear continental and not provincial in taste and mores — a mission quite similar to the one she pursued as editor of *Provincial-Lecture*.

A Female Book Owner

The first issue of *Provincial-Lecture* opened with an address to the readers in which the editor claimed to have assembled a book collection from which materials for the journal would be harvested:

I, who at great cost have procured myself a collection, not only of English, but even French and Swedish journals, and hereby learnt to distinguish the best, have decided to publish a weekly magazine of Danish translations, under the name of Provincial-Lecture, which is to emulate the English journals.²³

Although the address emphasized the editor's personal effort ('I'; 'at great cost'), Kühle was most likely adopting another male mask, that of the book owner. Few Norwegian women at the time could build their own book collections. Book historian Elisabeth S. Eide points out that there is little documentation that women of the bourgeoisie were book-buyers, stating cautiously that Kühle was 'a well-read lady, but whether she owned a book collection of her own is not known'.²⁴ If she did, it is unlikely that she was the sole owner of a private library; we must assume it was a library that she owned jointly with her husband. The collection would therefore have been as much a testimony of his taste as hers, although the spouses evidently shared the same interest in theatre and cultural life.

Because the collection has not survived and there is no inventory, we do not know for certain what books and periodicals the Kühles owned, how many, and in what genres and languages. The contents of *Provincial-Lecture*, however, gives us some idea of the diversity of the materials to which Birgithe Kühle had access. The periodical encompassed popular science, travelogues, fiction, poetry, practical household advice, letters, and miscellaneous other texts. It is an amalgam of texts, often translated and recycled without explanations or references. It is tempting to try and discover the sources of the translations, in order to shed light on how they were imported into a Scandinavian context and, in particular, on the periodical's indebtedness to English models. In what follows, I situate this process of textual transfer on three axes: local-global, old-new,

21 Others were Dorothea Biehl, Birgithe Kaas, Ditlevine Feddersen, Birgitte Lange, Mette M. Kyhnel (see Nøding 'Syndfloden kommer', p. 218).

22 Losnedahl, p. 44.

23 'Jeg, som med stor Bekostning har forskaffet mig en Samling, ey allene af engelske, men endog af franske og svenske Journaler, og derved lært at kjende de beste, har besluttet, i dansk Oversættelse at udgive et Ugeblad, under navn af Provincial-Lecture, som skal efterligne de engelske Journaler.' 'Til Læserne!' ['To the Readers!'], *Provincial-Lecture*, 1 (1794), 3–4 (p. 3). Kühle wrote in Danish not only because she was Danish by birth, but primarily because Danish was the official language of the political union of Denmark-Norway.

24 'en lesende dame, men om hun eide en egen boksamling, vites ikke'. Elisabeth S. Eide, *Bøker i Norge: Boksamlinger, leseselskap og bibliotek på 1800-tallet* [*Books in Norway: Book Collections, Reading Groups, and Libraries in the Nineteenth Century*] (Oslo: Pax, 2013), p. 162.

and male-female. Did Kühle, for example, mix domestic and foreign sources? Is there a preference for historical or recent authors? Are there traces of female pens among the male?

As for the local-global axis, the concept of the 'provincial' is worth considering. In the context of the eighteenth-century Norwegian press, 'provincial' on the one hand reflects the distance from Denmark and the joint capital, Copenhagen, where most periodicals were published. It is in this sense of the word that Elisabeth Aasen finds *Provincial-Lecture* a 'et dristig eksperiment' ['daring experiment'].²⁵ On the other hand, 'provincial' may also refer to the local market targeted by the periodical. *Provincial-Lecture* was a journal for the Norwegian provinces, from the most important city of Bergen. While professing provincialism, Kühle's periodical also maintained an explicitly international profile, much like Fasting's journals, *Provinzialblade* [*Provincial Papers*] (1778–81) and *Provinzialsamlinger* [*Provincial Miscellanies*] (1791). Whether either of them had in mind Blaise Pascal's *Lettres Provinciales* [*Provincial Letters*] (1656–57) is uncertain, but Pascal's influential example shows that the term was neutral and factual rather than derogatory. Moreover, the provincial focus of the title is balanced out on the title page of *Provincial-Lecture* with a motto borrowed from the more recent French philosopher Voltaire and quoted in the original language:

Au parnasse on se bât, pour un peu de fumée,
Pour un nom, pour du vent, et je conclus au bout,
Qu'il faut faire son mieux et se moquer de tout.²⁶

[On Parnassus we fight for a bit of smoke,
For a name, for some wind, and I conclude, in the end,
That we must do our best and laugh at it all.]

The quotation helped Kühle establish the periodical in a male-dominated international tradition: it conveyed a certain ironic distance from worldly matters, an attitude that was also seen as fitting for periodical editors at the time.

Provincial-Lecture's motto may be in French, but the first topic discussed by the editor is English. The opening address entitled 'Til Læserne!' ['To the Readers!'] praises the 'qualities of the English journals' which the periodical seeks to emulate, arguing that 'anyone who knows [...] their excellent value will soon realize the great usefulness of such writings, and the general enlightenment of the English nation is the happy effect of them'.²⁷ Kühle's clear preference for English sources is a novel occurrence compared to her most important predecessor, Claus Fasting. It suggests that the Kühle library must have been decidedly more oriented towards England than Fasting's was fifteen years earlier. Fasting's book collection, which unlike the Kühles' has been preserved and is currently held by the University of Bergen Library, contained only a few English titles; many more were French and German. Moreover, Fasting evidently preferred to read English works in German translation, which at the time would have been more easily accessible than the originals.²⁸ Her cultural orientation also extended to other

25 Elisabeth Aasen, *Kvinnens spor i skrift* [*Women's Traces in Writing*] (Oslo: Det Norske Samlaget, 1986), p. 43.

26 Title page, *Provincial-Lecture* (1794), [1].

27 'Enhver, som kiender de engelske Journalers Egenskaber og deres fortrinlige Værd, vil snart indsee den store Nytte, slige Skrifter føre med sig, og den engelske Nations Almeenoplysning er den lykkelige Virkning deraf.' 'Til Læserne!' ['To the Readers!'], *Provincial-Lecture*, 1 (1794), 3–4 (p. 3).

28 Nøding, *Claus Fasting*, p. 170

parts of Europe like Russia and Spain, but there is no indication that she selected texts from domestic Norwegian sources.

As for the old-new axis, the topics and style of *Provincial-Lecture* bear witness to early-century Enlightenment ideals more than to 1790s revolutionary ideas. There is no Mary Wollstonecraft, although *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) had been published only two years earlier. The closest Kühle gets to contemporary revolutionaries is Benjamin Franklin, who had died in 1790, and whose self-composed epitaph she includes, in translation, in the penultimate issue.²⁹ Kühle's frame of reference is not Samuel Johnson's journal the *Rambler* (1750–52), but the earlier pioneers Richard Steele and Joseph Addison, who would serve as models for so many eighteenth-century editors. Kühle's references to a multi-volume work suggests that she had access to the *Tatler* through one of the many editions of *The Lucubrations of Isaac Bickerstaff, Esq.*, a collection of the *Tatler* essays.³⁰

Richard Steele is a ubiquitous unnamed presence in the journal, the shadow looking over the editor's shoulder. He is one of the authors most often quoted, yet he is almost invariably identified by means of his famous *nom de plume*, Isaac Bickerstaff. Kühle thus accepts and reinforces the authority of Steele's alter ego, believed to be the first example of a consistently employed editorial persona. His real name appears only once in *Provincial-Lecture*, in connection to 'Mrs Steele', in a piece on the life and occupations of 'Isaac Bickerstaffe [*sic*] the younger', described as the son of the editor of the *Tatler*.³¹ The piece was part of a serial that ran across several issues, interrupted by other material, demonstrating the fluid demarcations between factual and fictional prose in the periodical.

Joseph Addison, by contrast, is often mentioned by name in reports of the friends' activities and conversations.³² Likewise, other English literary figures, like Alexander Pope, Lord Bolingbroke, and Jonathan Swift, make their appearances, as does the seventeenth-century French writer Boileau with his reflections on the concept of courage.³³ However, the highest admiration is expressed for the life and works of William Shakespear [*sic*], 'one of the rarest of human beings ever living in the world', who 'in invention as well as power of mind and expression seemed inexhaustible'.³⁴ (Fig. 2) The second instalment of the series on Isaac Bickerstaff the Younger also discusses a performance of Colley Cibber's adaptation of *Richard III* attended by 'Mr Bickerstaffe', 'i Selskab med Addison' ['in the company of Addison'].³⁵ While the source was evidently Steele, Kühle did add a footnote comparing Shakespeare's comedies to those of the Norwegian playwright Ludvig Holberg (1684–1754).³⁶

29 'Doctor Franklin', *Provincial-Lecture*, 51 (1794), 407.

30 She refers to chapters and volumes of a book version. See for instance 'Isaac Bickerstaffe den yngres Levnet og Tidsfordriv' ['The Life and Pastimes of Isaac Bickerstaff the Younger'], *Provincial-Lecture* 43 (1794), 337–44 (p. 341).

31 'Isaac Bickerstaffe den yngres Levnet og Tidsfordriv' ['The Life and Pastimes of Isaac Bickerstaff the Younger'], *Provincial-Lecture* 17 (1794), 132–35 (p. 133).

32 A search for 'Addison' (spelled 'Addifon') in the digitized version of *Provincial-Lecture* yields 22 results.

33 'Tapperhed, grundet paa Guds frygt' ['Courage, Founded on Fear of God'], *Provincial-Lecture*, 5 (1794), 33–40 (pp. 33–38). Searches in the digitized version of *Provincial-Lecture* yield the following results: 5 hits for 'Pope', 7 hits for 'Bolingbroke' and 'Bolingbrok', and 1 for 'Swift'. The results may vary with spelling and printing and are indicative only.

34 'et av de meest sieldne Mennesker, som nogensinde fandtes i Verden [...] saavel i Opfindelse, Tankestyrke, som Udtryk, syntes udtømmelig' 'Mr William Shakespears Levnet' [Mr William Shakespeare's Life], *Provincial-Lecture*, 25 (1794), 193–98 (p. 193). A search for 'Shakefpear' in the digitized version of *Provincial-Lecture* yields 10 results and another for 'Shakeipear'.

35 'Isaac Bickerstaffe den yngres Levnet og Tidsfordriv' [Isaac Bickerstaff the Younger's Life and Pastimes], *Provincial-Lecture*, 24 (1794), 185–88 (p. 187).

36 *Ibid.*

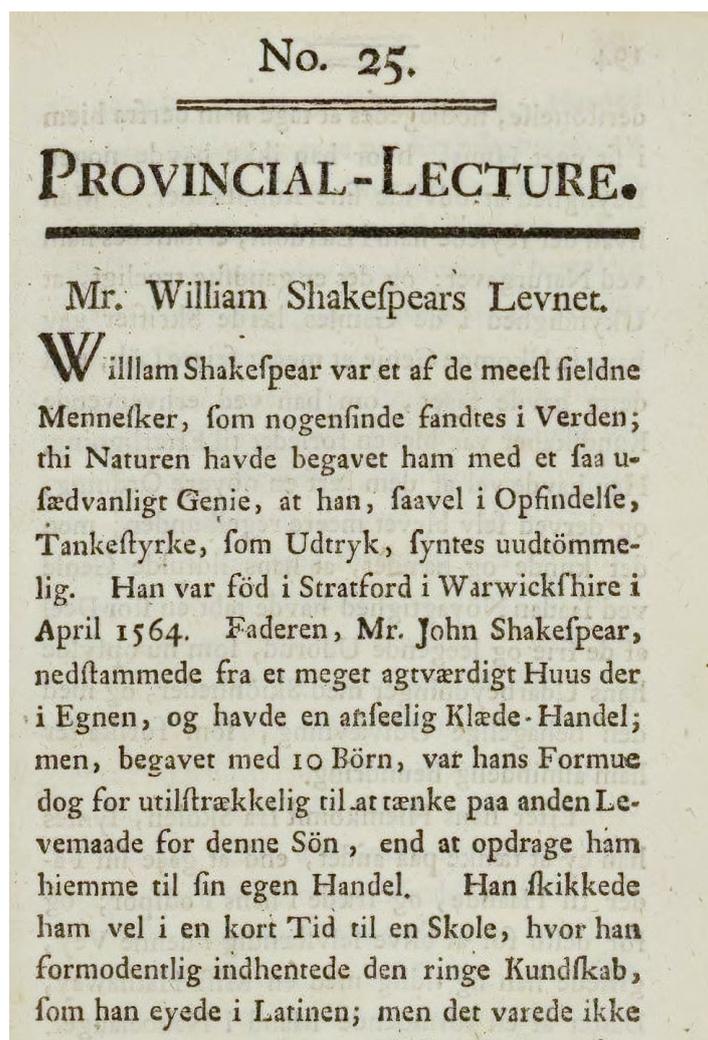


Fig. 2 An article on the life of William Shakespeare on the title page of *Provincial-Lecture*. National Library of Norway digital collections

Although most of the texts in *Provincial-Lecture* are anonymous, there are occasional examples of signed pieces, such as one by the seventeenth-century writer 'Mr Walwyn' (William Walwyn, c. 1600–81).³⁷ The rest of the named authors are mostly contemporaries of Kühle's, not least of whom was Thomas Bellamy (1745–1800), who, like her, tried his hand at editing periodicals. He was the author of a piece called 'Hazard-Spilleren' ['The Gambler'].³⁸ A two-part account of Emperor Julian the Apostate's 'Caractair og sidste Timer' ['Character and Final Hours'] by the historian 'Mr Gibbon' (Edward Gibbon, 1737–94) also belongs in this group, as does the single line quoted from the popular mid-century poet 'Young' (Edward Young, 1683–1765).³⁹ While the pastoral idylls of Swiss writer Salomon Gessner (1730–88) hark back to a distant past, other pieces represent a newer world.⁴⁰ A translated piece by the Italian physician and botanist Domenico Cirillo (1739–99) about the manna ash most likely stems from one

37 Mr. Walwyn, 'Fortvivlelsens Huule' ['The Cave of Despair'], *Provincial-Lecture*, 23 (1794), 177–83 (p. 177).

38 Thomas Bellamy, 'Hazard-Spilleren' ['The Gambler'], *Provincial-Lecture*, 28 (1794), 217–24.

39 Mr Gibbou [sic], 'Keyser Juliani Apostatas Caractair' ['The Character of Emperor Julian the Apostate'], *Provincial-Lecture*, 7 (1794), 49–53; Young, 'Woes cluster', *Provincial-Lecture*, 18 (1794), 140.

40 Gesner [sic], 'Thyrsis. Idylle' ['Thyrsis. Idyll'], *Provincial-Lecture*, 34, 35 (1794), 265–75.

of his publications between the early 1770s and early 1790s, and the German-British astronomer William Herschel (1738–1822), whose life and works are discussed in the final issue, was likewise a living, modern scientist at the time of publication.⁴¹ Lord George Gordon (1751–93) represented recent politics in an account of the anti-Catholic riots of 1780 in London.⁴² The assumption that Gordon was still in prison suggests that Kühle translated the account from a source that was published while Gordon was still alive and that she was unaware of his death the year before.⁴³

The rest of the periodical was a mixture of informative pieces and prose fiction. Potentially life-saving advice was offered in an article about reviving a strangled or suffocated person, accompanied by a story of an unhappy nurse who found a lifeless child.⁴⁴ Other pieces informed readers on how to bleach linen and how the telegraph worked.⁴⁵ Because of the short format of the journal, the fiction is usually serialized, with a promise of continuation in the next issue, sometimes simply in the form of a casual 'Resten følger' ['The rest will follow'] or 'en anden Gang' ['some other time'].⁴⁶ There is, for example, an epistolary story with an English setting published in eight instalments and consisting of a series of letters between 'Frederic' and 'Louise'. In a note heading the first instalment, the editor claims that the letters 'ved en Hændelse' ['accidentally'] came into the possession of a certain 'G. M.', who vouched for their authenticity despite admitting that the authors' names were fictional.⁴⁷ Another anonymous tale is called 'Velgiørenhed: En østerlandsk Historie' ['Charity: A Story from the East'] but this spanned only two issues.⁴⁸ Serial fiction went on to become a major literary form in the periodical press, but pre-1800 serializations such as these serve to modify the perception of it as a nineteenth-century phenomenon.

While a closer examination of the many unsigned and unidentified pieces in *Provincial-Lecture* is needed, these examples already indicate that Kühle had access to a book collection that was contemporary and topical as well as historical and classic. They also suggest that one contemporary critic's comment that 'et halvt Aar plagede hun sine Læsere med Opkaag af gamle Romaner og Elskovsbreve' ['for half a year she tormented her readers with rehashings of old novels and love letters'] was likely more the result of prejudice towards the editor's sex than of a full and balanced review of the periodical's contents.⁴⁹ Even though translating foreign materials was seen as more acceptable for a woman than writing her own texts, Kühle was still subject

41 Dominico Cyrillo [sic], 'Om Manna-Træet' ['About the Manna Ash'], *Provincial-Lecture*, 22 (1794), 173–74; 'Underretning om Hr. William Herschels Levnet og Skrifter' ['Notice on the Life and Writings of Mr William Herschel'], *Provincial-Lecture*, 52 (1794), 409–16.

42 'Den navnkundige Lord George Gordon' ['The Famous Lord George Gordon'], *Provincial-Lecture*, 41 (1794), 321–28.

43 Ibid., p. 328.

44 'Forsøg at bringe strubede og qualte Personer til Liv igjen' ['Attempts at bringing strangled and suffocated persons back to life'], *Provincial-Lecture*, 19 (1794), 145–48.

45 'Observationer, angaaende Nyttens af Syrer ved Linned-Bleging' ['Observations Regarding the Usefulness of Acids for Bleaching Linen'], *Provincial-Lecture*, 17 (1794), 129–31; 'Kort Beskrivning over Telegraphen' [Short Description of the Telegraph], *Provincial-Lecture*, 3 (1794), 14–16.

46 'Velgiørenhed: En østerlandsk Historie' ['Charity: A Story from the East'], *Provincial-Lecture*, 4 (1794), 27–29 (p. 29); 'Isaac Bickerstaffe den yngres Levner og Tidsfordriv' ['The Life and Pastimes of Isaac Bickerstaff the Younger'], *Provincial-Lecture*, 17 (1794), 132–35 (p. 135).

47 'Brevveksling imellem Frederic og Louise' ['Correspondence between Frederic and Louise'], *Provincial-Lecture*, 4 (1794), 29–32, (pp. 29–30); 5, 38–40, 9, 68–71; 14, 109–11; 15, 117–19; 20, 153–57; 30, 233–40; 39, 309–12.

48 'Velgiørenhed: En østerlandsk Historie' ['Charity: A Story from the East'], *Provincial-Lecture*, 4 (1794), 27–29; 6, 43–47.

49 Quoted in Torill Steinfeld, 'Fra salmeoversettelser til det borgerlige familiedrama' ['From Hymn Translations to Bourgeois Family Drama'], in *Norsk kvinnelitteraturhistorie* [History of Norwegian Women's Literature], ed. by Irene Engelstad, Jorunn Hareide, Irene Iversen, Torill Steinfeld, and Janneken Øverland (Oslo: Pax forlag, 1988), pp. 28–40 (p. 37).

to such dismissive evaluations.⁵⁰ In reality, she produced a periodical that straddled the eighteenth century from its 1794 viewpoint, cultivated Enlightenment ideals of reasoning and cultural education, and like Fasting, targeted ‘all kinds of readers [...] the farmer and the merchant, the beer brewer and the poet’.⁵¹

As for the male–female axis, to what extent did Kühle include female authors and critics in *Provincial-Lecture*? Hilary Brown and Gillian Dow have documented intriguing examples of female cultural networks across Europe in the eighteenth century, stretching as far as Denmark–Norway.⁵² Kühle, however, does not supply us with any further cases of such interchanges. On the surface, few — if any — women authors appear in her periodical. Part of the reason lies in the editor’s method of obtaining material from various sources without necessarily crediting them. Another reason for the paucity of women writers’ names could be their customary modesty, the convention of hiding behind anonymity, pseudonymity, or initials. This often makes it well-nigh impossible to identify them even if they are there.⁵³

Still, we cannot escape noting that Kühle did not choose to imitate any of the ‘female’ periodicals modelled on the *Tatler* and *Spectator*. There was the short-lived, pseudonymous *Female Tatler* in 1709, and the *Female Spectator* (1744–46), edited by Eliza Haywood; while the apparent Danish counterpart to these, *La Spectatrice danoise* (1748–50), written in French, was in fact edited by a man, Laurent de la Baumelle.⁵⁴ Incidentally, one of Haywood’s editorial personas, Euphrosine, inspired the title of the first Norwegian ladies’ magazine, *Euphrosine: Et lidet Tidsskrift for unge Damer* [*Euphrosine: A Little Magazine for Young Ladies*] (1830–31). There is no evidence of such influence on Kühle’s journal. Kühle’s library does not seem to have contained any of Haywood’s prolific novels or translations, which included yearly publications until she died in 1756; if it did, Kühle chose not to include any of her works in *Provincial-Lecture*. Haywood may, however, have already been perceived as outdated and not awarded the same classic status as Addison, Steele, and Swift.

Another model and source of inspiration could have been the *Lady’s Magazine* (1770–1832), which ran for sixty-two years and was already well established in Kühle’s day. Under male editorship, but with female as well as male contributors, this was, as Jennie Batchelor has demonstrated, a significant cultural space for women.⁵⁵ However, Kühle’s literary preferences appear to be more male than female. She includes even less female writing than does her male colleague Fasting, who includes letters by Elisabeth Santi-Lomaca Chenier (1729–1808) and an anonymous tale that appears to be from a novel by Elizabeth Griffith (1727–93).⁵⁶ When she mentions ‘Hertuginde

50 Aina Nøding, ‘Syndfloden kommer: redaktøren som internasjonal formidler’ [‘The Flood is Coming: Editors as International Mediators’], in *En Pokkers Skriveyge [A Heck of a Writing Disease]*, ed. by Ellen Krefting, Aina Nøding, and Mona Ringvej (Oslo: Scandinavian Academic Press, 2014), pp. 205–23 (p. 218).

51 Nøding, ‘The Editor as Scout’, p. 65.

52 Brown and Dow, p. 8.

53 For a discussion of the difficulties of identifying female authors, see Marie Nedregotten Sørbo, ‘Elusive Women Authors in Norwegian Nineteenth-Century Reading Societies’, in *Gender in Literary Exchange*, ed. by Anka Ryall and Anne-Birgitte Rønning (London: Routledge, 2021), pp. 5–67.

54 See Ellen Krefting, ‘Feminine forkledninger: *La Spectatrice Danoise* i 1700-tallets tidsskrifthistorie’ [‘Feminine Disguises: *La Spectatrice Danoise* in Eighteenth-Century Periodical History’], in *Opplysningens tidsskrifter: Norske og danske periodiske publikasjoner på 1700-tallet [Enlightenment Journals: Norwegian and Danish Periodicals in the Eighteenth Century]*, ed. by Eivind Tjønneland (Bergen: Fagbokforlaget, 2008), pp. 37–60.

55 Jennie Batchelor, ‘Connections, which are of service ... in a more advanced age’, *The Lady’s Magazine, Community, and Women’s Literary Histories*, *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature*, 30.2 (2011), 245–67.

56 ‘Delia: En Fortælling’ [‘Delia: A Story’], *Provinzialblade* 3.39 (1780), 305–10. The title is the one given to Griffith’s *The History of Lady Barton* (1771) in early French and Dutch translations, and Fasting is probably using such a secondary version as a source for his short excerpt.

av Devonshire' ['The Duchess of Devonshire'] (Georgiana Cavendish, 1757–1806) it is not as an author, but as a mother.⁵⁷ This is characteristic of women's general presence in the journal. Women may be absent or invisible as authors, but they are often written *about* and many pieces target a female readership. Full-text searches in the digitized version of *Provincial-Lecture* yield sixty-two hits for the word 'fruentimmer' ['woman'], thirty-eight for 'frue' [a married woman of the bourgeoisie], twenty-nine for 'kone' [a married woman of any class], and twenty-three for the word 'Mrs' (in English). Moreover, there are thirty-five hits for the word 'barn' ['child' or 'children']. Although there are even more hits for 'mand' [man] (seventy-six), 'Mr.' (sixty-four) and 'herre' ['gentleman'] (thirty-five), it demonstrates female presence in what appears to be male writing. The miscellaneous prose often reflects the perceived feminine private spheres of home and family, including pieces on 'how to 'forbedre Skorstene' ['improve chimneys'] and apply honey to 'brændte Saar' ['for healing burns'], as well as the public spheres of society, culture, and ethics, with topics such as 'Frihed og Trældom' ['liberty and slavery'], 'Menneskets øye' ['the human eye'], and the usefulness of 'velskrevne moralske Dramer' ['well-written moral dramas'].⁵⁸

The Female Printer-Publisher

The fourth female role in the production of *Provincial-Lecture* was the printer-publisher, although in this case it was not Birgithe Kühle herself. While it is hardly surprising that she did not own a printing press, it is perhaps more unexpected to find women printers at all at the time. The title page of the journal reveals that it was 'Trykt hos R. Dahls Efterleverske' ['Printed by R. Dahl's Widow'] in Bergen.⁵⁹ There are publications with this or a similar imprint such as 'Dahls Enke' ['Dahl's Widow'] until at least 1815–16, and then simply with the gender-neutral 'Dahl' from circa 1819.⁶⁰ Widows could sometimes inherit and run their deceased husbands' printing presses or bookshops, and this became more common and more regulated by law after 1842. There are quite a few nineteenth-century publications bearing names like 'Jac. Andersens Enke' ['Jac. Andersen's Widow'], 'R. Hviids Enke' ['R. Hviid's Widow'], and 'H. J. Geelmuydens Enke' ['H. J. Geelmuyden's Widow'].⁶¹ The Widow Dahl is an early example; and she was neither alone, nor the first. Around fifteen years earlier, Claus Fasting's journal *Provinzialblade* was printed by another professional woman in the same city of Bergen, Anna Dedecken, widow of the printer Henrik Dedecken. And a century earlier, Hans Hoff's widow Margrethe edited and published religious books.⁶² These widow publishers

57 'Reflexioner om Foreldres Pligter imod deres Børn' ['Reflexions on Parents' Duties towards their Children'], *Provincial-Lecture*, 1 (1794), 5.

58 Thomas Ruston, 'En Maade at forbedre Skorstene' ['A Method for Improving Chimneys'], *Provincial-Lecture*, 8 (1794), 57–63; 'Hønningens Nytte for brændte Saar' ['The Honey's Usefulness for Burnt Wounds'], *Provincial-Lecture* 18 (1794), 142–44; 'Frihed og Trældom' ['Freedom and Slavery'], *Provincial-Lecture*, 9 (1794), 65–68; 'Menneskets Øye' ['The Human Eye'], *Provincial-Lecture* 10 (1794), 73–77; 'Beviis paa Nyttens af velskrevne moralske Dramer' ['Proof of the Usefulness of Well-Written Moral Dramas'], *Provincial-Lecture*, 31 (1794), 244–48.

59 Title page, *Provincial-Lecture* (1894), [1].

60 For example Johan Nordahl Brun, *Frimodighet: En Tale [Courage: A Sermon]* (Bergen: Trykt hos R. Dahls Enke [Printed by R. Dahl's Widow], 1807).

61 For example *En Ny Sang [A New Song]* (Bergen: H. J. Geelmuydens Enke [H. J. Geelmuyden's Widow], 1833); Morten Hallager, *Ny Tydsk Læsebog for Begyndere [New German Textbook for Beginners]* (Christiania: R. Hviids Enkes Bogtrykkeri og Forlag ['R. Hviid's Widow's Printing and Publishing House'], 1840); Sylvius, *Nogle Digte [Some Poems]*, (Christiania: Jac. Andersens Enkes Forlag ['Jac. Andersen's Widow's Publishing House'], 1861).

62 One example is *Een Ny Haandbog med 14 Bøger [A New Handbook of 14 Books]* (Christiania: Sal. Hans Hoff's Efterleverske ['The Late Hans Hoff's Widow'], 1688).

serve as an apt reminder of the female contributions to past culture that even today are often overlooked.

Conclusion: A Female Voice Recovered

Birgithe Kühle's 1794 journal *Provincial-Lecture* provides ample evidence of the transfer of Western European reading matter to a peripheral, Norwegian readership. More specifically, it showcases the budding Nordic interest in English written culture, which would blossom in the following century. The journal's mixture of long-standing, perceived classic authors with newer concerns and names indicates a broad target audience that should be entertained as well as informed by snapshots from the greater world.

Furthermore, the journal's reliance on translations of foreign texts as its main matter — at the cost of domestic texts — points to the distinctively transnational nature of literary exchanges in the eighteenth century. Small countries especially relied on the import of texts to fill the demand of the growing readership and the flourishing new channels of publication opened up by the periodical press. By harvesting materials from her European book collection for the small, weekly format of eight pages of translated and refashioned pieces, editor Kühle joined in on the endless, ongoing recycling of cultural texts for local purposes.

Birgithe Kühle may not have been an editor of or for women, and others have done more to circulate women's texts. Nevertheless, *Provincial-Lecture* is a valuable testimony of female contributions to the European culture of the 1790s, as a woman's initiative demonstrating the different roles women took on for the periodical press. *Provincial-Lecture* was not only edited by a woman and based on a (jointly owned) book collection, it also bears the imprint of a female printer-publisher, and above all, demonstrates a woman's penmanship and voice as a translator and mediator of foreign-language texts. As part of a special issue on European women's editorship, the Norwegian case presented here takes its place among a larger reconstruction of women's work of the past that also builds on previous and ongoing projects such as [Orlando](#) and [NEWW Women Writers](#). In the next decades, the contributions of more pioneering women will hopefully be uncovered, and our collective cultural memory will continue to be challenged and modified by further evidence of women's significant but otherwise forgotten roles.

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