Original Paper

The Role of Book Production and Libraries in Shaping Reading Attitudes from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment: The Birth of Recreational Reader

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Abstract

The following paper presents an exploration of the history of books and libraries in conjunction with the development of historical reading practices, focusing on the culturally rich periods spanning from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment. The study combines literary theory and learning theories with a historical survey of the social and cultural milieu during the Renaissance and Enlightenment eras, which influenced the reader's perception of engagement with books and reading. More specifically, the article delves into: a) the interplay between publishing output, library functions, and reader-text dynamics, b) the impact of mass information dissemination on the reading skills prevalent in each era, using specific historical periods as case studies and c) the role of literary salons and the circulation of journals during the Enlightenment era in shaping the archetype of the recreational reader, as observed in contemporary reading communities, library environments and educational settings.

Keywords

History of Books and Libraries, Renaissance, Enlightenment, Recreational Reader

1. Introduction: Reading as a Social and Cultural Experience

According to Downing (1972), the concept of a reading community initially identifies a social and dynamic character in the reading process, rooted in the organizational principles of early human societies. However, this concept has continued to evolve, acquiring new meanings and applications over time (Chartier, 1995). As Banou (2023) highlights, even in its simplest form, reading, delineates the mental relationship between a reader and the author of the work being read, indirectly connecting to attitudes, social, and cultural phenomena reflected in the writing.

Therefore, the dialectical dimension of reading as a means of communication (Bakhtin, 1980) and its

aesthetic aspect, particularly in literary contexts, cannot be overlooked (Panagiotopoulos, 2022). Building upon Robinson (2001), the evolutionary urge to communicate propelled human societies to develop symbolic communication systems, with language being the primary one. This necessity prompted language speakers, and thus community members, to transition from oral traditions to written forms through various writing systems (Polatov, 2001).

According to Goody (1987), the intentions of individuals within smaller and larger societal units laid the groundwork for diverse forms of discourse, on various writing surfaces, always interpreted within the social and cultural contexts of their communities (Fish, 1980). Consequently, the historical evolution of literary discourse is closely entwined with the societies that birthed different genres and cultivated necessary skills in individuals to become readers and potential writers (Barbier, 2002; Fisher, 1987).

Both institutionalized education and individual efforts to engage in social processes, as described by Fisher (1987, pp. 80-11), foster contact with creative forms of expression and imbue reading with a social dimension. Whether it is the training of young Sumerian members in cuneiform writing or modern on -line learning platforms for group reading sessions, reading entails participation and interaction among individuals (Polatov, 2001).

In this context, the article explores the parallel evolution of book production and library institutions within distinct social and cultural context. Our focus spans from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment, a period where increasing literacy rates in Europe fostered the habit of reading. The article aims to stress the mutual relationship between publishing practices, library operations, and the prevailing social and cultural conditions that shape the reader's engagement with written text. Furthermore, it will elucidate how the burgeoning bourgeoisie, supported by the printing press, redefined the readers societal position. Through an examination of reading practices from the Renaissance onwards, particularly during the Enlightenment, the article will demonstrate how reading, especially literary reading, becomes a profoundly social and recreational endeavor.

2. Theoretical Framework and Methodology

The concept of the reading community has deep historical roots, reflecting profound psychological needs, serving complex social functions and contributing to the development of a range of cognitive and linguistic skills in an active reader. As evident in reading theories (Jauss, 1982) and the History of reading (Cavallo & Chartier, 2023), reading practices are intricately linked to the evolution of writing and the history of information, constituting an active rather than passive process. Lafond (1984) and McCormick et al. (2000) argue that reading involves substantial engagement with historical subjects, enabling understanding and response to ideas and emotions within the structural framework of their communities.

As Margaris (1995) contends, the organization of libraries over time reflects a society's prioritization of access to stored information, serving as an institutional expression of societal values. Semertzaki (2006)

defines libraries as the community's endeavor to preserve valuable information, with textual genres and recording techniques influenced by societal needs and requests (Hamesse, 2023; Foucault, 2008) suggests that reading techniques shape ideological frameworks, defining requisite skills for readers to engage with community challenges.

Thomas (1997) and Leahy (2005) emphasize that cultural realities are shaped by the forms of speech they produce, influenced by materials, social demands, and technological advancements, thereby shaping reading attitudes (Hawthorn, 1993). Braudel (2001) asserts that changes in writing methods affect book production and bibliographic classification, impacting reader reception.

Social and cultural processes drive changes in reading habits, gradually evolving despite occasional upheavals, as seen in the transition from the Late Middle Ages to the Renaissance (Lemerle, 1981). Bourdieu (2006) and Goldmann (2000) highlight the interplay of literary production with political, social, cultural, and economic factors, shaping societal dynamics and reading practices.

These findings emphasize the need for a study of reading practices in each era, as the social and cultural conditions at each period of time have an impact on the reading skills that each literate subject of a period needs to have in order to effectively adapt to his community. By extension, they also define the methodological organization of the research, focusing on historical research that combines literature related to a) literary theory and especially reader-centered theories (Jauss, 1988; Fish, 1980), b) learning theories, such as Bruner's (1966) on the cognitive processes activated during the reading process and c) history of books and libraries. Bourdieu's (1999; 2005) theory of cultural capital, where he philosophically linked the concept of the symbolic and the material, another dimension of the dialogical composition of the social and cultural structure of a community emerges, which places at its center the ways of preservation, dissemination and contact with information. Therefore, it stresses the power of reading process as a way of accessing knowledge that allows different levels of social assertion in each individual and group. Let us consider the extent to which the democratic political system of ancient Athens redefined the importance of speech, both oral and written, for the social and political advancement of its members (Papadopoulou, 1994). In essence, changes in economic, social and aesthetic realms influence the history of writing and the reading community's dynamics, shaping societies' educational and ideological landscapes.

3. Books, Libraries and Readers: From the Renaissance to the Enlightenment

According to Barbier (2002), the Fall of Constantinople in 1453 precipitated a significant migration of scholars towards the West. Their primary asset was their command of Greek, which granted access to a wealth of texts and manuscripts from Greek literature, reigniting Western interest in Greco-Roman antiquity. The enthusiasm among nobles, scholars and abbots to acquire, copy and at times confiscate texts from ancient Greek authors was instrumental in the establishment of notable libraries in the West during the 15th century in Paris or the Vatican. This bibliophilic movement, coupled with a surge in scholarly reading, served as an extension and response to specific social and political circumstances in

Europe, laying the groundwork for the Renaissance.

Building on insights from Burckhardt (1997) and Wilson (1992), the term "Renaissance" denotes the revival of classical education, enriched by the contributions of Byzantine scholars, spanning roughly from the 15th to the 16th century. Over time, it has come to be perceived more as a cultural movement centered on Humanism and Classicism than as a discrete historical era. Emphasizing the arts, the Renaissance provided the bedrock for subsequent developments in philosophy and science, particularly during the Enlightenment. Consequently, these periods are often analyzed as a unified entity.

Humanism, as elucidated in Abrams (2005), represents the intellectual movement that flourished in Western Europe, with Florence as its center, towards the close of the 14th century. While initially denoting the teachings of liberal arts in the 14th century, humanism evolved to accentuate the significance of oral and written expression -be it literary or otherwise- by placing human nature and its interconnectedness with the natural world at the forefront of inquiry.

Based on Stowell (2015) renaissance society is not an atheistic society, but redefines the relationship between man and the divine, while highlighting the value of art as a means of educating the subject. Artistic products allow the introspection of the human being and the deeper examination of the individual's relationship with the reality he is part of. Away from the ideological narrowness and prejudices of some phases of the Middle Ages, it creates a new self-confidence in the Renaissance reader.

As noted by Hauser (1980), coherence of thought and form, logical organization and the exploration of patterns leading to a new understanding of the world through human reason are pivotal characteristics of the Renaissance period. The cultivation of individual personality to its fullest is deemed essential for the advancement of societies. As later observed in the Enlightenment era, individual advancement correlates with societal progress, and since reading serves as a pathway to enlightenment, enhanced literacy equates to liberated individuals capable of contributing their best selves to society. Humanist scholars of the time delved into the original works of Plato, Aristotle, Ovid (Ovidius) as well as Galen (Galenus) and Hippocrates (Grafton, 2023). Notably, Cosimo the Elder commissioned Marsilio Ficino to translate Platonic and Neoplatonic texts into Latin during this period. He also established a significant library accessible to scholars, such as Niccolo de Nicoli and Leonardo Bruni. The founding of the Platonic Academy in Florence in 1445 by Cosimo stands as a tangible proof to the humanistic pursuits of the time. Key rulers supported endeavors to locate and translate Greek works, thereby diminishing the influence of Scholasticism (Will, 1953).

Literary and artistic creations of the Renaissance period serve as manifestations of humanity's creative spirit, reflective of being made in the image and likeness of God the Creator. Thus, engaging with these works serves as a catalyst for awakening creativity and understanding creation itself. Artistic expression is viewed as a path to salvation rather than condemnation, with human creativity celebrated despite ideological and religious controversies, such as the revival of the Inquisition during the Council of Trent (1545-1563). As explained in Barbier (2002) and Grendler (1981), cultural expressions of the

36

era encapsulate ideological and social imperatives, bridging the Late Middle Ages with the Enlightenment. The rise of the middle class during this period significantly influences the publishing movement. The social and cultural milieu is epitomized by Luther's posting of his positions in Württemberg Cathedral (1517), igniting the Reformation and the ensuing response of the Catholic Church through the Counter-Reformation (Catholic Reformation). Italian literary and artistic productions set the aesthetic standards of the time, with Petrarch's poetry (1304-1374) scoring high in reading preferences, given its profound influence on contemporaries. The pursuit of history and understanding human society characterizes the literary endeavors of prominent intellectuals such as Leonardo Bruni (1370-1444).

In both the Western and Eastern regions, the clergy undertakes significant educational roles, while the Hellenistic influence of the former Byzantine territory transitions into a new reality, requiring centuries to politically and culturally redefine its dynamics. Understandably, areas that remained connected to the West continued to exhibit notable cultural output over time (e.g., Crete until 1669). Consequently, the roles reversed, with Western states evolving into cultural hubs where reading and writing flourished. According to Staikos (2016) and Davarinos (2003), Greek scholars in Italy made substantial contributions through translations, linguistic expertise and support from humanistic rulers and the Pope, fostering a general cultural renaissance. The connections of figures like Bessarion, a theologian and philosopher, Markos Mousouros, and Janus Laskaris with key personalities and cultural centers of the period underscore the Byzantine philosophy's involvement in the Western Renaissance. Bessarion aided the Curia's efforts to enrich the Vatican Library, contributed bibliographic gifts to the Malatesta Library, and maintained relations with Maximilian I, Emperor of Austria. Markos Mousouros collaborated with Aldus Manutius in publishing Greek works (e.g., Aristophanes' comedies in 1498) (Staikos, 2016; Barbier, 2002).

As Nuovo (2018) analyzes, Manutius emerged as one of the foremost publishers of Greek classical literature, partnering with scholars like Ioannis Grigoropoulos, Arsenios Apostolis, Dimitrios Doukas, and Erasmus. He founded the "New Academy" in Venice to bolster Greek studies. Janus Laskaris was dispatched to Byzantium by Lorenzo the Magnificent to procure manuscripts, teach Greek and aid in managing the Medici Library. Subsequently, he established the Greek Gymnasium in Rome (1514-1521) and a Greek printing press in 1517 with Pope Leo X's support, fostering the education of expatriates and advancing humanistic pursuits. Laskaris also championed the humanistic interests of King Francis I of France, playing a pivotal role in founding the Royal Library of France (Politis, 2003; Staikos, 1996).

The list of Greek scholars and their proteges in this era exceeds the scope of this article. Many became influential figures in literature, contributing as writers, educators, and coordinators of educational institutions. In Venice and other Hellenic enclaves, Greek books took on distinctive characteristics, with Greek printing presses, such as Zacharias Kallergis' press in 1499, exhibiting significant activity (Layton, 1994). As noted by Holton (1999), the zenith of Greek typography occurred in the 18th century,

37

intertwined with the national efforts of the New Greek Enlightenment.

In general, Renaissance individuals recognized the benefits of reading, which reshaped their self-perception and societal interactions. Notable works like Boccaccio's *Decameron* (1349-51), Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered*, Moliere's plays (e.g., *Tartuffe*, *Don Juan*), Racine's tragedies (e.g., *Phaedra*, 1677), Montaigne's essays, and Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (1605) exemplify the confidence of creative minds daring to be original. Through the power of literature, Renaissance writers and readers engaged in critical commentary on social issues, sparking new literary trends in Europe (Sutherland, 2014).

As early as the 14th century, a confluence of social, political, and economic factors set the stage for the rapid advancement of printing and the mass production of written material. The early movements following Jan Hus' teachings, culminating in his execution in 1415, foreboded the Church's later clash with Luther a century later. These events underscored the significance of translating the Bible into the various vernacular languages, revealing the book's evolving role as a tool for advancing different ideological agendas within society. As believers sought more personal connections with sacred texts, religious book experienced a surge in publication. This movement was further propelled by the growing need for school textbooks, particularly as monastic movements in the West advocated for education, necessitating the creation of handwritten educational materials.

Simultaneously, the expansion of trade networks and economic prosperity facilitated the introduction of innovations that revolutionized publishing production and consequently influenced reading habits. The advent of paper production from pulped fabrics during the medieval period provided a more affordable writing surface. Additionally, the use of woodcuts for printing on paper in the 14th century contributed to increased publishing production. The rising bourgeoisie of the 13th century emerged as a transformative social group, reshaping various aspects of European life. To attain political influence, this group sought to disseminate its values more widely, with the printing press emerging as a key tool for this purpose. Writing and reading became fundamental skills, leading to a proliferation of documents and an associated increase in literacy, a defining characteristic of identity for centuries to come.

The development of the book industry was particularly pronounced in regions with abundant resources and adaptable social structures. Consequently, it is noteworthy that Johannes Gutenberg, credited with inventing typography in Germany, succeeded in creating movable metal printing elements, although the concept of "mechanical" reproduction of images and texts had been known in China as early as the 7th and 8th centuries.

The publication of Gutenberg's 42-line Bible in 1455 marked a pivotal moment in the evolution of reading practices, information dissemination, and the role of libraries in fostering the skills required by contemporary readers and beyond. Typography rapidly spread throughout Europe, facilitated by printers of German origin who shared their expertise across regions. Cities such as Cologne, Liège, Lyon, and Venice emerged as significant publishing centers, with Venice notably serving as a hub for

38

the dissemination of Greek-language literature. While religious texts predominated, the middle class also showed interest in literature written in their native languages, as evidenced by works like the *Nuremberg Chronicle* by Hartmann Schedel and printed by Anton Koberger.

The proliferation of diverse textual genres during this period, as noted by scholars such as Knox (1968) and Fussel (2003), facilitated the expansion of recreational reading and inner reflection among literate audiences. Gilmont (1998) highlights how the religious upheavals of the 16th century, culminating in the Protestant Reformation and Counter-Reformation, profoundly impacted publishing activity as new ideas were disseminated through print. This period also saw the utilization of books as ideological tools during events like the Peasants' Revolt (1524-1526), further emphasizing the power of the written word in shaping societal dynamics.

Eisenstein (1979) and Barbier (2002) illuminate the papal church's efforts to regulate the publishing movement and control reader access to works conflicting with its doctrines, revealing the intertwined nature of religious and political authority and its impact on freedom of expression and reading attitudes in subsequent centuries. Additionally, figures like Luther and Calvin expressed reservations about the wide circulation of books, citing concerns about readers' ability to discern and critically evaluate the content, thus advocating for measures to regulate the publishing market.

Similar measures were enforced by official authorities who adhered to Catholic doctrine, selectively granting monopolies and shutting down bookstores. Consequently, travelling merchants acted as intermediaries for Europe to acquire "forbidden books". Despite the Pope's official prohibition on the circulation of any Bible other than the Vulgate of St. Jerome in 1515, and the Jesuits establishing a network of libraries and spiritual centers in Europe to promote the Counter-Reformation, readers sharing similar ideological beliefs found ways to access desired information. Subsequently, the evolving practices and perceptions regarding the dissemination of written material, despite the hurdles, did not halt the flow of ideas. Protestantism embraced individual reading as a path to salvation, leading to higher literacy rates within Protestant communities. These circumvented the traditional networks which were controlled by the palace and church, ultimately bringing power to the bourgeoisie (Chaudhary & Rubin, 2011:17-33).

According to Eagleton (1990), the correlation between political ideology and reading constitutes an interactive relationship destined to intensify in the following centuries, especially with the appearance of magazines. A new intellectual elite is emerging, characterized not only by their systematic consumption and production of knowledge but also by their primary intention in writing: social criticism and subsequent political action through the written word. The rising literacy rates in the New World colonies, growing interest in linguistic matters and the demand for modern literature to reflect contemporary social experiences will strengthen the role of typography during this period. Barbier (2002), thus, characterizes the intellectuals of the 16th century as advocates for the "typographic man".

According to Barker, Clark & Vaucher (1954), the intellectual curiosity and thirst for knowledge of Renaissance individuals presupposed advanced reading skills, involving critical information processing

akin to that of a systematic reader. Moreover, literacy during the Renaissance necessitated creative skills to synthesize and reinterpret information. When it comes to reading literature, individuals needed to connect and compare numerous literary works, both classical and contemporary, to grasp their aesthetic value within the context of genre-specific rules. This aesthetic discourse, as a reflection of higher intellect, was rooted in the study of classical patterns and nature, as outlined by Murray & Murray (1995), significantly influencing European culture and subsequently shaping Romanticism's conception of literary and artistic innovation (Mascuch, 1997).

Building upon Grafton (2023), proficiency in Latin and Greek was crucial for Renaissance scholars who immersed themselves in the aesthetics of literacy, as these languages housed the essential works across various fields of knowledge. Additionally, a systematic scholar of classical literature would delve into the principles of rhetoric, from Aristotelian approaches to modern adaptations. The importance accorded to both spoken and written word by contemporary reading communities thus finds deep roots in Western culture. Intellectual gatherings in rulers' courts fostered interaction between scholars and artists, leading to mutual benefits but also conflicts of interest where rhetorical skills became invaluable (Buringh & Van Zanden, 2009).

Moreover, a cultured reader of the Renaissance needed to grasp not only literary genres, conventions and patterns but also appreciate poetry and other aesthetic forms of expression by exploring the values and knowledge inscribed within literary works. Whether as a writer, artist or engaged in other fields, literature served as a reservoir of ideas and information for creative assimilation and application across various domains, including music and painting (Kaczor-Scheitler, 2021). According to Hause & Maltby (2001), the characteristic learnedness and multifaceted social roles of humanists required them to acquaint themselves with anything new and intriguing in science and art, studying and incorporating it into their sphere of interests.

4. The Effect of the Reading Practices of the Enlightenment on the Modern Perception of Love for Reading

Kondylis (1998) posits that the philosophy of the Enlightenment in the 17th and 18th centuries serves as a natural progression from the preceding period, strongly opposing all forms of prejudice. Works by Descartes, alongside the ideas of Hobbes and Spinoza, challenged entrenched authorities of the past, liberating contemporary thinkers from the restraints of traditional thought. Drawing on Dimaras (1989: 25-26), the Enlightenment further instilled in individuals a sense of self-assurance, empowering them to believe in their capacity for growth and acquisition of knowledge through education. This sentiment is echoed in John Locke's "Essay on Human Understanding" (1690), fostering an internal drive to enhance one's social standing through educational pursuits and access to literature. The groundbreaking impact of Rousseau's *Emile or Treatise on Education* (1762) reshaped perceptions surrounding education and reading, laying the groundwork for political liberalism and the eventual outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789 (Spalioras, 2013).

As highlighted by Porter (2014), the ideas stemming from the European and Neo-Greek Enlightenment eras, spanning from Locke and Voltaire to Rigas and Korais, found expression and dissemination through books, significantly influencing reading habits and the channels through which literature was consumed. Lyons (2023) notes the pivotal role of the periodical press (journals) in the 18th century, facilitating publishers' understanding of reading behaviors and granting broader access to classical and contemporary works across diverse subjects and genres, particularly among marginalized social groups. Greenhalgh, Worpole and Landry (1995) underscore the transformative impact of converting private libraries into public institutions, employing subscription models to engage readers in the publishing process, and democratizing access to archives and museum collections, exemplified by the establishment of the Reading Room at the British Museum in 1753.

The emergence of scholarly societies and the establishment of reading communities within aristocratic salons laid the foundation for contemporary Reading Clubs, where like-minded individuals gathered together to discuss their literary encounters. This revival of collective reading, influenced by the growing individualism of the modern era, reinvigorated the communal spirit of libraries of the Enlightenment. Writers of this period predominantly sustained themselves through contributions to magazines, while the proliferation of reading rooms in the 17th and 18th centuries fostered social interaction, positioning texts -both literary and non-literary- at the forefront of societal discourse (Barbier, 2002; Sedo, 2011).

Drawing on Benoit-Dusausoy and Fontaine (1999) and Travers (2005), the burgeoning interest in the natural sciences during this period also left its mark on literature, exemplified by the stylistic evolution of French poet F. de Malerbe in the early 17th century, which paved the way for the zenith of French classicism (1660-1690). In Italy, a subtle neo-classical tendency emerged in the early 18th century, finding its purest expression in the "Arcadian" school. The literary endeavors of figures like Goethe, Schiller, Foscolo and Hugo further propelled European literature from the realms of classicism towards the romantic, imbuing works with deeper thematic resonances reflective of the evolving society.

In light of these developments, many of the attributes delineated for the Renaissance reader remain applicable to their Enlightenment counterparts. It is not coincidental that within this context, the recreational aspect of reading gained prominence, a tradition rooted in the recitations of rhapsodes and the gatherings of ancient Greek symposia. However, the contemporary perception of this leisurely pursuit was reinforced by the educational significance accorded to art and literature during the Renaissance, as well as by the experiential pedagogy espoused by Rousseau (Pyrgiotakis, 2000). Consequently, a novel understanding of the reader-book relationship emerged, predating the theoretical formulations on reading theories regarding communal formation of aesthetic criteria for literary appraisal (Fish, 1980) and individualized reading experiences (Iser, 1991). Hence, it is not surprising that many observations regarding reading habits remain pertinent to contemporary societies.

As elucidated in Barbier (2002; Staikos, 1996), the modern conception of reading as a rewarding and entertaining endeavor, transcending the confines of scholarly or systematic inquiry, owes its origins to

the popularization of reading during the Enlightenment era. The democratization of access to libraries, the proliferation of printed material, the diversification of genres disseminated through periodical press, and the institutionalization of education in the Western world collectively gave rise to a new breed of reader. No longer confined solely to erudite scholars with distinct compositional skills similar to the Renaissance era, the modern reader comes from diverse walks of life with varying levels of literacy proficiency, spurred by the proliferation of information and the accessibility of reading materials. While scholars and intellectuals like Locke and Voltaire persist, the landscape of readership has expanded to include individuals with intermediate levels of reading proficiency.

As Cohen (1982) underscores, a fundamental skill for Enlightenment readers lies in their capacity to critically engage with texts, questioning all forms of authority. This entails recognizing and scrutinizing the reasoning presented within texts, evaluating the logical coherence of the arguments put forth. Lynn (2006) further suggests that readers of this period, regardless of scholarly status, possess the potential for broad-based knowledge across diverse subjects. However, with the proliferation of information on a mass scale, concerns regarding the reliability and validity of such information become increasingly salient. Newspapers and magazines of the era serve as platforms for public discourse, stimulating discussions on various facets of daily life. Public debates within scientific societies stress the necessity for greater specialization in response to the deluge of available information.

Writing and reading during the Enlightenment adopted a pronounced political dimension, consciously imbued with ideological expression and mobilization. Notably, the publishing endeavors of the New Greek Enlightenment, as highlighted by Dimaras (1989) and Iliou (2006), exemplify the direct link between science and political activism. Greek intellectuals disseminate selections from classical and Western literature to inform the populace about the political and social aspirations of the European Enlightenment. Works such as the *Apology* (*Απολογία*) of Moisiodakas and the *Geographia Neoteriki* (*Γεωγραφία Νεωτερική*) of Filippidis and Konstantas, alongside the publishing initiatives of Rigas and the writings of Korais, reflect this newfound political consciousness, contextualized within specific national circumstances.

As Barbarosa (2013) and Putnam (2000) assert, Enlightenment readers shape their literary interests through both individual exploration and dialectical engagement within social groups where literary texts serve as focal points of discussion. Literary salons emerge as prominent fixtures of intellectual life during this period, particularly in 18th century France, although similar gatherings occur throughout Europe. These salons, often hosted by affluent women with keen literary interests, serve as venues for formalized discussions on literature, philosophy and art. One notable example is the salon organized by Catherine de Vivonne, Marquise de Rambouillet, in 17th century Paris, frequented by scholars, poets and artists engaged in spirited discourse. Additionally, discussions of literature pervade social events of the 18th and 19th centuries, exemplified by Balzac's *Illusions perdues* (1837), wherein literature serves as a recurrent topic of conversation.

The discourse surrounding literature during this era transcends scholarly analysis, permeating everyday

42

reading experiences as both individual and collective endeavors. These social manifestations of the Enlightenment period lay the groundwork for later 20th century reading theories, emphasizing reading as an interactive dialogue between the reader and the text, a dynamic process reflecting the aesthetic and educational values espoused during the Renaissance.

Based on Hesse (2001) and Long (2003), the tradition of these gatherings continued into the 18th century as salons began to attract an increasingly diverse audience of participants, including politicians and philosophers. The literary salon, for example, of De Geoffrin was attended by important figures such as Voltaire, Diderot and Rousseau. However, although this trend began to decline during the late 18th century, as the French Revolution contributed to their decline, their legacy was significant. In England, for example, the Bloomsbury group at the beginning of the 20th century and in Greece the *Hestia literary circle* from the end of the 19th century share common elements with literary salons.

Likewise, a closer examination of literary circles formed around particular magazines illuminates the profound influence of social interaction among peers on literary creation. For instance, Dounia (1996; 2021) has meticulously scrutinized the ideological and aesthetic commonalities within circles centered around magazines and literary dialogues in Athenian cafes (e.g., Korais cafe), shedding light on the fusion of internalized and dialogic reading within cultural collectives that foster reading communities. Some examples are: a) *Numas* (1903-1931) and his positions on the language issue, b) *Musa* (1920-1923) by writers of the generation of 1920, c) the *New Letters* (1935-1940, 1944-1945) and the generation of 1930, d) *New Pioneers* (1931-1936) as an expression of the left intellectuals in the interwar period. The literary circles, therefore, of writers and artists who shaped contemporary intellectual and literary movements in the 20th century have their foundations in this social dimension acquired by reading and especially literary reading in the Enlightenment.

5. Discussion

By extension, the fondness for reading can be contextualized within Fish's (1980) concept of contemporary interpretive communities, albeit with a more dynamic manifestation emerging particularly in the latter decades of the 20th century in Europe and America. Its origins, however, can be traced back to the literary circles prevalent during the Enlightenment period. Indeed, the term "recreational reader" inherently implies the individual's engagement with reading as a liberating and thus enjoyable pursuit. In this light, reading as a means of escaping the mundane incorporates a social dimension, intertwining the individual's affection for books with the innate human inclination to connect with others based on shared reading interests. The modern Enlightenment reader, much like today, could transform their engagement with literature into a realm of social interaction (Rosenblatt, 1970).

While literary salons may not have consciously aimed to orchestrate educational endeavors or adhere to theories of learning and literary analysis, they nevertheless played a pivotal role in fostering intellectual and cultural exchange, as well as shaping literary and artistic trends. As observed by Martins (2022)

and Long (1993), these gatherings were often orchestrated by specific individuals who provided a framework for facilitating discourse. Moreover, the discussions held within these forums generated a collective set of aesthetic standards and reading preferences among participants, influencing their subsequent selection of texts and responses to literary stimuli.

Simultaneously, the recreational aspect of reading does not diminish the multifaceted engagement of cognitive processes in the reader, as highlighted by Bruner (1966). This symbolic interaction with social and cultural values through reading nurtures various linguistic and cognitive abilities in readers, while also fostering their inclination to engage in social activities centered around literature (Kotopoulos, 2013; Kalogirou, 2019).

This is why modern coordinators of Reading Groups, whether in libraries or school classrooms, employ a range of techniques informed by learning theories and interdisciplinary approaches to literature studies. Their aim is to cultivate positive reading experiences by promoting reading as a voluntary and enjoyable activity, free from external pressures. In this vein, as noted by Stauffer (1970), the inclination and readiness to read are not acquired but activated through conducive environments and approaches to reading.

6. Conclusion

In summary, while the tradition of reading groups with a focus on literary works can trace its roots back to Classical Athens' Philosophical Schools, Hellenistic Gymnasiums and Roman libraries reading rooms, the Renaissance onwards witnessed a gradual strengthening of literacy, leading to a more subtle approach to engaging with literary texts that blends individual and collective reading practices. This evolution is exemplified by social phenomena such as literary salons and magazine-based literary circles, which, though originating in the 17th century, continued in various forms into the 20th century. These social gatherings provide a platform for closed groups to convene and discuss literary texts, fostering a context of social interaction characterized by diverse interpretive perspectives. In essence, the primary aim of such gatherings is not merely academic enrichment but the enrichment of reading pleasure through the dynamic dialogue arising from the expression of individual readings by group members. Modern versions of these practices, such as reading clubs and Creative Writing Workshops, can be viewed as contemporary evolutions of these historical social engagements with literature.

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