

Emotional Imprints: Letter-Spacing in N.F.S. Grundtvig's Writings

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Abstract. Undertaking a distant reading of letter-spacings in the digitized and annotated N.F.S. Grundtvig data, this paper targets a trait of an overall romanticist emotionalizing trend in a corpus of 19th century literature: It proposes to analyze the letter-spacings as a deposition of heightened attention to subjective emotional experience in printed matter and typesetting in the writings of the Danish poet, priest and politician N.F.S. Grundtvig (1783–1872), who is widely regarded as the central figure in the 19th century Danish religious development and nation building process. As such this paper sketches the temporal and semantic contexts of the letter-spacings.

Keywords: N.F.S. Grundtvig, 19th Century, Letter-Spacing, Typography, Emotional History.

1 Introduction

The 19th century is oftentimes presented as the entry into modernity: A period in which fundamental political and psychological phenomena, dominating the world today, were established. One of these phenomena where the cultivation and secularization of the private emotional experience [1]. As is well established in scholarly literature, particularly the beginning of the period – the eve of the Romantic era – testifies to a significant expansion in the vocabulary used for registering and describing emotional experiences [2]. Handbooks on Romanticism thus hold entries with suggestive titles such as ‘The subjective turn’; anthologies on the matter are rich with chapters on ‘emotionalization’ [3,4].

This paper deals with a specific trait, or perhaps more precisely, a specific material consequence of the overall romanticist emotionalizing trend: It deals with the deposition of heightened attention to subjective emotional experience in printed matter and typesetting. As the romantic movement worked its way through the world languages, authors and printers seemed ever keener on engraving texts with emotion. Thus, typographical strategies to convey feelings and intentions were advanced [5]. This is not least the case with the writings of the Danish poet, pastor and politician N.F.S. Grundtvig (1783–1872), who is widely regarded as the central figure in the 19th century Danish nation building process [6] and in the construction of a modern Danish Christianity [7].

Grundtvig was deeply indebted to the romantic movements [8] – not least in respect to the emotionalization of texts. In his colossal amount of published writings, he was paradoxically committed to promoting the kind of open-ended and sensitive communicative style often associated with oral communication, creating layers of emphasis and emotional imprints. Not least through the typographical use of tracking, also known as letter-spacing. Numerous Grundtvig scholars have noted the vast amount of tracking in Grundtvig’s writings [e.g. 9,10,11,12,13,14]. However, they have mentioned them only in passing. Therefore, in the following we want to take the first steps towards a more systematic study of this specific stylistic trait by extracting the distribution of letter-spacings in the complete collection of Grundtvig’s published writings.

2 Emotional Imprints as Proxy for Grundtvig’s Core-Content

In scholarly literature it is widely acknowledged that Grundtvig sought to stimulate the process of assembling a Danish collective-emotional consciousness based on 1) a horizontal-contemporary axis incorporating the different strata within the socially heterogeneous “Folk” [15] and on 2) a vertical-temporal-historical axis connecting present-day Danes with forefathers and legendary characters. In social historian Benedict Anderson’s words, the emotional fabric intended by this attempted interlacing was an ‘imagined community’ [16].

Today Grundtvig is celebrated for his efforts: “N.F.S. Grundtvig founded Danish democracy”; “N.F.S. Grundtvig established the Church of Denmark (*folkekirken*)”; “N.F.S. Grundtvig is the founder of the Danish school system”; “N.F.S. Grundtvig revived the pre-Christian Nordic tradition”; “N.F.S. Grundtvig is the most important writer of Christian hymns in Denmark”. These are surprisingly recurrent statements in Danish public media [17] deeming his intellectual activity more culturally important than the work of his world-famous contemporaries Søren A. Kierkegaard (1813–1855) and H.C. Andersen (1805–1875).

One reason for Grundtvig’s continuing relevance, measured in current political and cultural media attention, seems to have been the introduction of emotional categories to domains where they hitherto had not been relevant: A) In the relationship between the individual and the Danish people, Grundtvig encouraged individuals to feel part of the collective national entity, Denmark [18,19]; B) In the relationship between the individual and the church, Grundtvig encouraged individuals to take part in and feel part of congregational life [20]. Following this line of thought, one could expect that national-ethnic terms as well as Christo-religious terms – the two domains representing Grundtvig’s supposed core-content – would be highlighted in his writings.

However, of late historian J.F. Møller have convincingly argued the case, that the Grundtvig legacy and reception history distorts specific core features of the Grundtvig writings – not least pertaining to Grundtvig’s skepticism towards democracy [21]. Perhaps distortion is at play in our material as well? Perhaps the believed emotional imprinting strategy of letter-spacing will indicate unanticipated centers of semantic gravitation in Grundtvig’s writings? Before finding out and delving into Grundtvig’s writings, we need to consider the material at hand as well as the context surrounding the typographic trait of letter-spacing.

2.1 N.F.S. Grundtvig's Writings

Grundtvig was a polyglot and polymath, who wrote on a variety of different subjects. Therefore, the Grundtvig dataset is enormously varied in terms of content. It covers books, essays and poems on Danish history, Nordic mythology and Church history, political and philosophical texts, as well as linguistic studies of Old Icelandic and Old English. In the general public, however, he is better known for his hymns of which he wrote close to 1,600.

In toto the Grundtvig corpus comprises 37.000 pages, published from 1804 to 1872: This material has been OCR prepared and is being furnished with XML markup by the staff of the Grundtvig Study Centre, Aarhus University. As a part of this process, the bulk of the collected writings born in the blackletter typeface Fraktur has been transformed into the Roman typeface Antiqua, more familiar to a modern audience. As this paper targets letter-spacing, a specific feature of Fraktur print material, a rudimentary history of the typesetting is necessary.

2.2 Typesetting in Fraktur

'Fraktur' is the name of a group of blackletter typefaces of the Latin alphabet derived from calligraphic hand. Other such groups are Textura, Schwabacher and Rotunda. The blackletter typefaces are sometimes referred to as Gothic minuscule suggesting medieval origin. Indeed, the typefaces were developed in Western Europe in the High Medieval Period from the 12th century and onwards. Blackletter typefaces are identifiable by the contrast between thick and thin contours of the strokes, and especially in Fraktur by the fact that curved parts of the letters are broken into straight lines. In fact, the word Fraktur is derived from the Latin 'fractura' that means 'a break', also the root of the English 'fracture'.

In Southern Europe the blackletter typefaces were replaced by the roman Antiqua typefaces during the Renaissance period. In Germany and Scandinavia, however, the blackletter style – from the early 16th century mainly Fraktur – to a certain extent persisted up until the 20th Century. In the 18th century, however, Antiqua grew into a genuine rival in these areas. As a roman typeface Antiqua was a symbol of Classical Antiquity, the ideals of which dominated the growing cosmopolitan bourgeoisie during the Enlightenment period – also in the parts of Europe that had previously used Fraktur. This development was hotly debated in Germany, where it was known as the so-called Antiqua-Fraktur dispute. To some extent this was a clash of worldviews; a clash of the enlightenment-cosmopolitical ideology condensed into Antiqua on the one hand, and of the medievalist-romantic nostalgia represented by the use of Fraktur on the other [22].

In Denmark the tension was less articulated. Antiqua had for centuries been in use for texts in Latin and for Latin passages integrated into Danish texts. In the latter half of the 19th century Antiqua replaced Fraktur. In a classic study, Danish literary scholar Richard J. Paulli has estimated that 5 % of 1843 publications were printed in Antiqua, 63 % of the 1883 publications and 95 % of the publications printed in 1902 [23]. Furthermore, from 1875 Danish children were taught Antiqua handwriting alongside the hitherto dominating Fraktur hand.

N.F.S. Grundtvig's hand was Fraktur as was the typesetting in most of his publications. A significant exception was the important 1832 publication *Nordens Mythologi eller Sind-Billedsprog historisk-poetisk udviklet og oplyst* (*Norse Mythology or Mental-Imagery historically-poetically developed and enlightened*) which was printed in Antiqua. But the typesetting of Grundtvig's writings and the strategy of his publishing houses seems to have been representative of the overall typesetting trends in Denmark during the 19th century except for one feature: His use of letter-spacing.

2.3 Reactions to and ideas of N.F.S. Grundtvig's Letter-Spacings

In Denmark – as well as in the rest of Scandinavia and in Germany – from the beginning of the 19th century letter-spacings became the most common way of conveying emphasis in texts printed in Fraktur [24]. Letter-spaced emphasis was first and foremost used when introducing a person or place name in a given text. Nevertheless, N.F.S. Grundtvig usage of letter-spacings went far beyond this praxis. In fact, Søren A. Kierkegaard, amongst many other things a persistent observer of Grundtvig's, was highly annoyed with this orthographic feature and disdainfully remarked that the massive use of letter-spacing flipped the effect so that the emphasis in Grundtvig's writings were to be found amongst the words *without* letter-spacing [25]. Kierkegaard did not stand alone. In his satirical piece “Syv Udvalgte Digte af Kapellanen” (“Selected Poems of the Chaplain”) (1861) author Knud Vallø (1833–1877) mockingly mimics Grundtvig and followers of his thoughts and literary style by saturating the novel with what has been deemed the characteristic Grundtvigian “abuse of letter-spacing” [26].

In Grundtvig scholarship it is generally acknowledged, that his use of letter-spacing is vast and idiosyncratic. K. E. Bugge has suggested that the frequency of Grundtvig's spacings increase as he enters old age [27]. Oftentimes, scholars have paid attention to the letter-spacings whenever their influence and expansion for some reason seem to have been reduced. This is the case in Grundtvig's orthographic alignment to the mean within the hymnic production, Sune Auken notices [28]; this is the case in Svend Grundtvig's editorial post hum adjustments of his father's work, pointed out by Henning Høirup [29, 30].

Furthermore, it is well known that Grundtvig in his handwritten manuscripts sought emphasis by underlining words and phrases. Not by use of letter-spacing. In other words, this feature is a translation of intention made in the printing process [31]. This makes relevant the consideration of the role played by the variable of publishing houses, editors and printers – and their respective influence on the Grundtvig corpus.

These questions have never been approached systematically and thus the distribution and the semantic context of Grundtvig's letter-spacing still lacks a systematic study at scale. On the basis of two simple procedures we seek to begin to remedy this situation.

3 Exploring Grundtvig's Letter-Spacings

We wish to establish 1) whether N.F.S. Grundtvig's letter-spacing changes significantly over time and whether they are affected by the publishing houses responsible for the printing of his texts: Does his letter-spacing seem to change when he enters into new

publishing collaborations? Likewise, we wish determine 2) a list over the 20 words Grundtvig is most likely to ascribe emphasis to, that is: Which words are letter-spaced most often? This list is taken as a proxy for an emotional indication of the core-content of Grundtvig’s writings.

3.1 The N.F.S. Grundtvig Data

Grundtvig’s collected writings are available in XML ($N = 1073$) following the TEI guidelines. Currently 22% are richly annotated, but the process of enriching the data is ongoing. The project’s scheduled completion date is in 2029. The data set has a median document size of four pages and contains 3.968.841 word tokens distributed over 115.240 word-types. The data for the current study are available at: <https://github.com/centre-for-humanities-computing/grundtvig-data>. The data are made available in this format through an agreement with Grundtvig Study Centre. We have also made a custom XML parser available to facilitate third-party data exploration: <https://github.com/centre-for-humanities-computing/GrundtvigParser>.

3.2 Procedure

Letter spacing is rendered by a “spaced” tag for the entire data set. This reduces information extraction to a simple fetch element by tag operation, which is also available with the parser. Following extraction, word distributions of letter spaced tokens were computed and ready for a distant reading analysis [32].

3.3 Analysis A: Distribution of Letter-Spacings over Time

As mentioned above, Grundtvig scholar K.E. Bugge suggests that Grundtvig’s use of letter-spacing is most prevalent in his old age. This statement calls for a test. Therefore we have extracted information on the distribution over time of Grundtvig’s use of letter-spacing. Information on the distribution of Grundtvig’s publications (Figure 1) [33] is the backdrop for evaluation of the relative use.

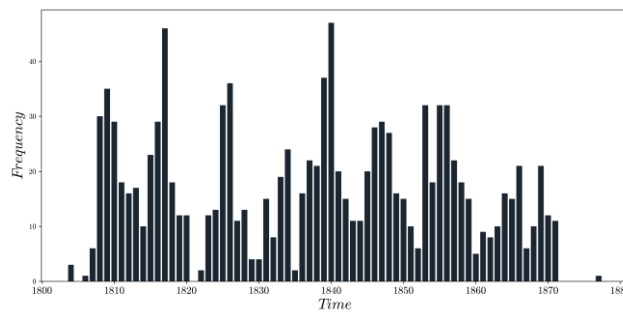


Fig. 1. Distribution of N.F.S. Grundtvig’s Published Documents.

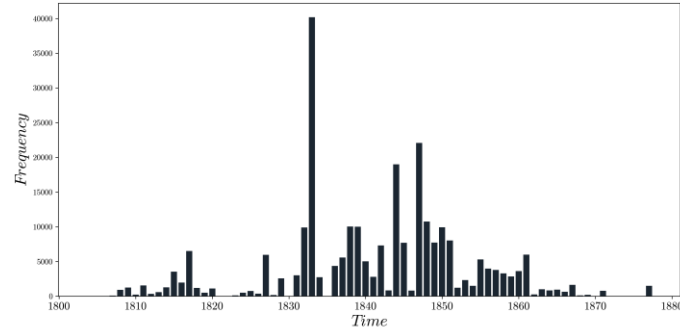


Fig. 2. Distribution of N.F.S. Grundtvig's Letter-Spacings.

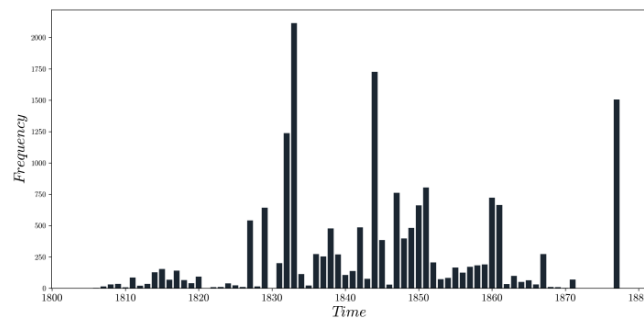


Fig. 3. Distribution of N.F.S. Grundtvig's Letter-Spacings Relative to Publications.

As becomes evident from Figures 2 and 3, Grundtvig's use of letter-spacing is relatively low up until the mid 1820ies. His use of the typographical feature does not, however, increase indiscriminately over time: Singular absolute and relative peaks occurs from the late 1820ies through to the early 1860ies: The relative peak in the late 1870ies (Figure 3) represents the 'Within Living Memory' ('Mands Minde') lectures written in 1838 but published posthumously in 1877. This makes the period from the early 1830ies through to the mid-1840ies the richest in peaks in terms of the number of letter-spacings in all (Figure 2) and per document (Figure 3). However, the adjoining period through to the mid-1850ies displays a consistently high level of letter-spacings. This leads us to suggest the 1830ies, 1840ies and 1850ies as the period most dominated by letter-spacing.

3.4 Analysis B: The Effect of Affiliation to Publishing Houses

N.F.S. Grundtvig was engaged with a variety of different publishing houses. Scholar Steen Johansen mentions five significant agreements with respectively 1) Andreas Seidelin (1777–1840), 2) Jacob Frederik Milo (1795–1865) in charge of the publishing house "Den Wahlske Boghandel", 3) C.A. Reitzel (1789–1853), 4) C.G. Iversen (1817–1881) and 5) Karl Schönberg (1832–1908) [34]. Besides, Johansen points to the late 1840ies and early 1850ies as a period of turbulence. The most urgent turbulence was the First Schleswig War (1848–1852) also known as the Three Years War, a military

conflict in Northern Germany and the southern parts of Denmark over the territory of the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein. The political turbulence, Johansen suggests, is, however, also evident in Grundtvig's alternations between various printers and publishing houses. Especially 1848–1849 seems to be an interim period in this respect.

Table 1. N.F.S. Grundtvig's Publishing Houses Relative to Letter-Spacings.

	Period	Publishing House	Pub.	Amount of L-S	L-S per Pub.
1	1808-1820	A. Seidelin	283	19.884	70,2
2	1821-1842	Den W. Bogh.	385	112.688	29,7
3	1843-1847	C.A. Reitzel	70	28.341	404,9
4	1848-1849	Interim	84	42.171	211,3
5	1850-1860	G.C. Iversen	200	42.251	111,6
6	1861-1872	Karl Schönberg	144	16.071	502

'Pub.': Publication, 'L-S': Letter-Spacings

Grundtvig's changing affiliation to publishing houses, however, does not translate into remarkable shifts in the praxis of letter-spacing. This is not least illustrated by Figure 4 displaying the distribution of Grundtvig's letter-spacings relative to the number of publications per year with indications of affiliation to publishing houses.

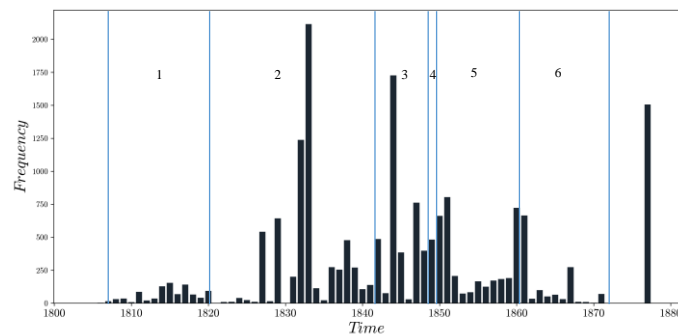


Figure 4. Distribution of N.F.S. Grundtvig's Letter-Spacings Relative to Publications with Indications of Affiliation to Publishing Houses. The intervals between the blue lines indicate the period of affiliation to each of the five publishing houses mentioned in Table 1.

This undermines expectations that the level of letter-spacing would be associated with the publishing house and editorial influence. From the investigation another scenario seems to be more likely: A scenario impinging upon political cause and upon genre.

The Political Publications of the 1830ies, 1840ies and 1850ies. N.F.S. Grundtvig relatively late in life experienced a breakthrough. He was almost 55 years when in the fall of 1838 he gave the above-mentioned series of lectures ‘Within Living Memory’ (‘Mands Minde’) that secured him the support of a group of followers, now dedicated to the *Grundtvigian* case and cause [35]. Hitherto historical, religious and theological subjects had dominated the content of his writings. But now his interest and participation in public-political debates rose. This transformation was anticipated by the aforementioned 1832 publication *Nordens Mythologi eller Sind-Billedsprog historisk-poetisk udviklet og oplyst (Norse Mythology or Mental-Imagery historically-poetically developed and enlightened)*. But from the late 1830ies the more or less concrete political cause – evoking strong emotions in the general public for Denmark and for the Danish people – grew into a robust and recurrent Grundtvig subject reflected in new genre choices such as political speeches.

As mentioned, the mid 19th century represent a stormy period in Danish history: Wars with Prussia and the adoption of the Constitutional Act of the Kingdom of Denmark ending the absolute monarchy and introducing democracy are the most decisive events [36]. Furthermore, this is the period in which Grundtvig’s use of letter-spacings is most prevalent, inviting for the hypothesis that the letter-spacing are driven by a state of political and cultural urgency stimulating Grundtvig’s idiosyncratic typographical preference for engraving emotional intentions into the printed texts. As we will show in the following section, the semantic content of the actual letter-spaced words seems to corroborate this proposition.

3.5 Analysis B: Verification of Semantic Centers of Gravity

The most frequently letter-spaced word in N.F.S. Grundtvig’s writings is ‘Danmark’ (Denmark) and the first runner up is ‘Danske’ (‘Danish’, adjective in the plural ending). Number 6 and 16 are respectively ‘Dansk’ (‘Danish’, adjective in the singular ending) and ‘Danmarks’ (Denmark’s). This indicate a strong national agenda in Grundtvig’s letter-spacing strategy, possibly echoing the political turmoil of the 1840ies and 1850ies. Number 14 ‘Norden’ (the North) could be said to be drawn in by the same semantic field of gravity. In Grundtvig’s writings ‘Norden’ is a word used as the common term for the Nordic countries – Denmark, Norway and Sweden – and in precisely this period Grundtvig envisioned a political union of the three nations. Following this line of thought, it could be argued that number 10 and 18 – the old Norse gods Odin and Thor – belongs to this semantic cluster.

Table 2. 20 Most Frequent Letter-Spaced Words.

	L-S Words	L-S Words (English)	Total Amount of Occurrences	First Occurrence in Text
1	Danmark	Denmark	1106	78
2	Danske	Danish	1105	51
3	ikke	not	735	16
4	Jesus	Jesus	601	62
5	Daaben	The baptism	463	78
6	dansk	Danish	451	47
7	Jesus Christus	Jesus Christ	449	82
8	Damerne	The ladies	444	5
9	Ordet	The word	434	80
10	Odin	Odin	422	13
11	levende	living	415	49
12	Aanden	The spirit	415	57
13	det	it	414	15
14	Norden	The North	401	27
15	den	it	383	18
16	Danmarks	Denmark's	380	43
17	Frihed	Freedom	380	69
18	Thor	Thor	372	21
19	Zeus	Zeus	337	5
20	Jesu	Jesus'	328	28

But other semantic clusters inhabit the list. As a sole polemic signifier – ‘ikke’ (not) –, number three testifies to Grundtvig’s impassioned feuds and disputes that went into print [37].

In addition to the Danish and Nordic cluster the most extensive is, however, the Christo-religious one. Number 4,5,7,9,12 and 20 indisputably belong here: Three different variations of the name Jesus (4, 7, 20) challenges the Norse-national cluster. In itself this duality of loyalty between the Christian religion and the Norse mentality confirms what is often perceived to be the main competing centers of gravity in Grundtvig’s work and writings [38].

Furthermore, imprints of the oral origin of a significant amount of Grundtvig’s published writings is evident from number 8 on the list ‘the ladies’ (‘Damerne’). As he had done in 1838, Grundtvig in 1843–1844 gave a series of lectures. This time on the subject of Norse and Greek mythology. For the first time in his life, however, this series of lectures demanded that Grundtvig had to address a mixed-gender audience [39] – an uncommon event in gender segregated 19th century Denmark. Grundtvig took delight in addressing women and did it emphatically so throughout his writings [40]. For a discussion on Grundtvig’s views on gender and his usage of the term ‘woman’ see Martinsen 2017 [41].

4 Concluding Remarks

The letter-spacings of N.F.S. Grundtvig’s reflects a series of circumstances: 1) the idiosyncratic preferences of a 19th century Danish author mainly publishing writings printed in Fraktur; 2) the turbulence of the mid 19th century in Danish history; 3) a duality of semantic gravitation in the writings of Grundtvig, who is regarded as the

central figure in the 19th century Danish nation building process as well as in the development of the modern day Church of Denmark, the state church like construction that holds approximately 75% of the Danish population as members. In other words, a distant reading of the letter-spacings roots this reception history in Grundtvig's writings.

This is a non-trivial finding, making it possible to suggest a limit to the implications of the views held by J.F. Møller – that legacy and reception have distorted the core-content of Grundtvig's work [42]: At least this is not evident from the current exploration at scale of Grundtvig's letter-spacings as emotional imprints and signals of core-content very much consistent with the 'Grundtvig myth' and public reception.

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