

On Grundtvig and his use of bible references

Musings of a software developer

Sigfrid Lundberg

<https://sigfrid-lundberg.se>

ABSTRACT

Nikolaj Frederik Severin Grundtvig (1783-1872) is one of the most influential persons in Danish 19th-century history. A polymath and very prolific writer and “a pastor, author, poet, philosopher, historian, teacher and politician”, as [Wikipedia \(2003\)](#) describes him. In this paper I present some data analyses on his use of the bible in his writing.

Introduction

Nikolaj Frederik Severin Grundtvig’s use of different references to the bible varied a lot over time. I found that, Grundtvig referred to 1 Kor 13,12: “*For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.*”¹ in more works than any other bible reference, but he did so mostly before 1820. Intrigued by this observation I checked other references and found that he quoted 1 Mos 1,27 (or 1 genesis 1:27)² That is, “*So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them*” which occurred mostly from 1855 to 1859. I discovered this when developing and testing the bible reference faceted search for the Center for Grundtvigforskning’s and Det Kgl. Bibliotek’s (2020) [Grundtvigs Værker](#), a part of the Royal Danish Library’s Text Collections.

A bible reference is typically a string such as 1 Kor 13,13 (or 1 Corinthians 13:13). There is an ambiguity in the usage, since it denotes both the reference and the text in the scripture, where it refers to “*And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.*”³ I will try to use the term *bible reference* when discussing Grundtvig’s usage it, whereas use *bible location* when referring to the scripture. This is somewhat like a word in the text and the same word in a dictionary.

The complexity of bible references and locations is that they are semantic units, hypertext links and inter-textual objects, all at the same time. As semantic units they are abstract

¹ https://biblehub.com/1_corinthians/13-12.htm (English)

https://www.bibelselskabet.dk/brugbibelen/bibelenonline/1_Kor/13 (Danish)

² <https://biblehub.com/genesis/1-27.htm> (English)

https://www.bibelselskabet.dk/brugbibelen/bibelenonline/1_Mos/1

³ https://biblehub.com/1_corinthians/13-13.htm (English)

https://www.bibelselskabet.dk/brugbibelen/bibelenonline/1_Kor/13 (Danish)

indicator of what a text is about, an indicator of its aboutishness (in Digital Library jargon). They are almost certainly also adornment, text jewellery if you like.

Grundtvig referred to 1 Kor 13,12 41 times, but he liked the preceding verse even more, since he referred to 1 Kor 13,12 (as mentioned above) 54 times. The number of times a given bible location is referred to as presented in this paper depends on two factors, where the number of times he actually used is just one. The other one is the philologists effort to identify the references, and their ability to do so in a text where the references are just vague hints of a location. Hence there are some possible systematic errors hidden here: Not all works are equal and philologists might invest more in some important ones than in other. Also, I can imagine that bible references could be more difficult to identify in poetry and fiction where the intellectual practice does not force an author to make clear references. Finally, the goal of an edition project is not to provide data for text mining and quantitative analyses.

The Grundtvig data for the portal comes from the Århus university's (2009) [Center for Grundtvigforskning](#), the publisher of [Grundtvigs Værker](#). (I refer to the scientific edition of Grundtvig's works as GV in the following.) What you find below is an outline of my analysis of of his bible references.

Table 1. The five most frequent bible references for verse

| Frequency | Bible location |
|-----------|----------------|
| 16 | Ordsp 20,28 |
| 17 | Sl 23,4 |
| 18 | Ordsp 4,23 |
| 19 | Joh 6,63 |
| 20 | Matt 16,18 |
| 34 | 1 Mos 2,7 |

Table 2. The five most frequent bible references for prose

| Frequency | Bible location |
|-----------|--------------------------------|
| 31 | 1 Kor 13,13 |
| 31 | Joh 1,14 |
| 39 | Matt 16,18 |
| 40 | Joh 8,44 |
| 43 | Matt 28,18-20 og Matt 26,26-29 |
| 52 | 1 Mos 1,27 |

Analyses

The philologists at the Grundtvig centre has identified 11499 bible references in the GV. They refer to 4637 locations, i.e., Grundtvig referred to each location 2.5 times on the average. In reality there are large number of bible locations that just appear once in a reference, whereas he had a number of favourites which is cited 60 to 70 times in the corpus. The distribution of bible references for text in verse and the entire corpus can be seen in [Figure 1](#) . For the latter

distribution, there are some 3605 locations that are referenced once or twice and 805 more locations used 3 to 6 times. At the other end, only one location Matt 16,18 is referenced 66 times. Of those 4637 locations, only a small fraction, 227 bible locations, are referenced 7 and more times.

Note that the dashed curve, related to references occurring in verse, starts lower and actually increases towards a peak. The main difference between the two distributions is that Grundtvig is more inclined to use his favourite bible locations in verse, and he is not

There are some debates on important dates in Grundtvig's career. "*Within the ever-growing bulk of Grundtvig studies, the years 1810, 1825, 1832, 1835, 1838, 1839, and 1848 are competing for scholarly attention.*", writes Nielbo et al. (2019). In a detailed schedule of events in his life, Engebretsen (2008) points out the years 1810, 1844, 1853, 1867 as life crises. Thodberg (2005) writes about the crisis 1844.

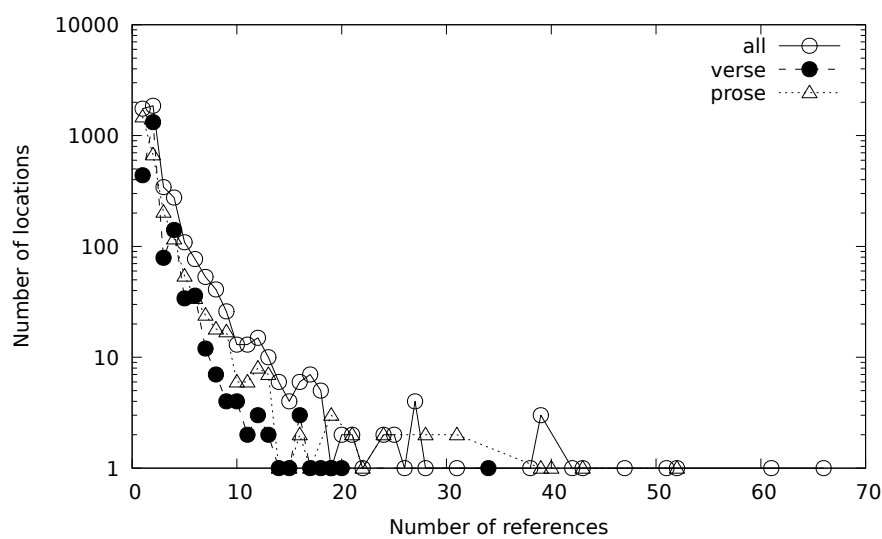


Figure 1. The distributions showing the bible location counts for different numbers of references, for all references (solid curve) and references occurring in verse (dashed curves). Note the logarithmic scale on the y-axis.

I use the counts of individual bible references to compare all the years of Grundtvig's professional life.

Discussion

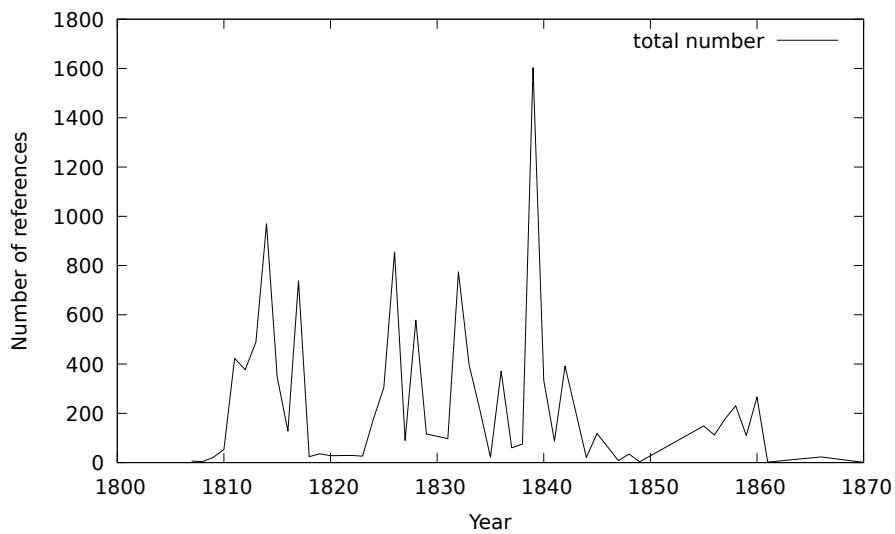


Figure 2.

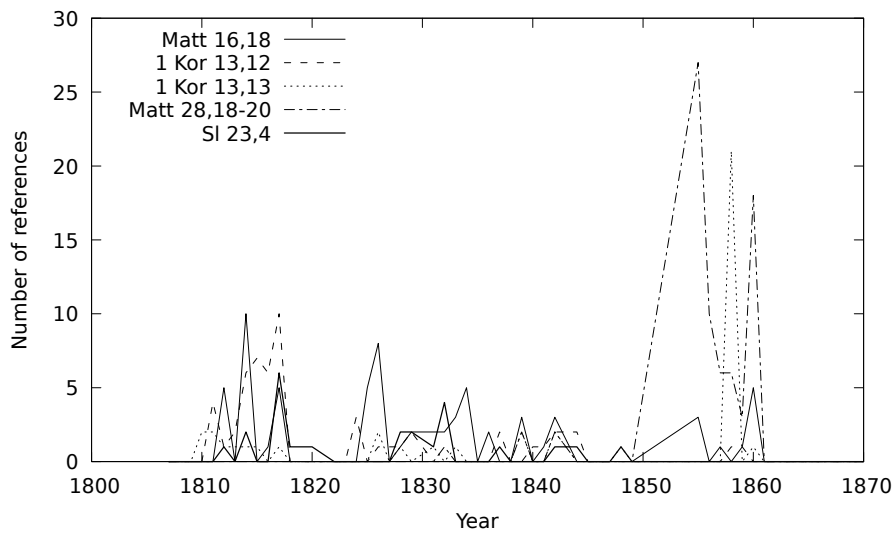


Figure 3.

References

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<https://tekster.kb.dk/gv>
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<http://grundtvigsvaerker.dk/>
- Engelbrechtsen, Else Bang, 2008. *Grundtvig Kriseåret 1810/1811 - Anfægtelser eller galskab?*
<http://urn.nb.no/URN:NBN:no-21152>

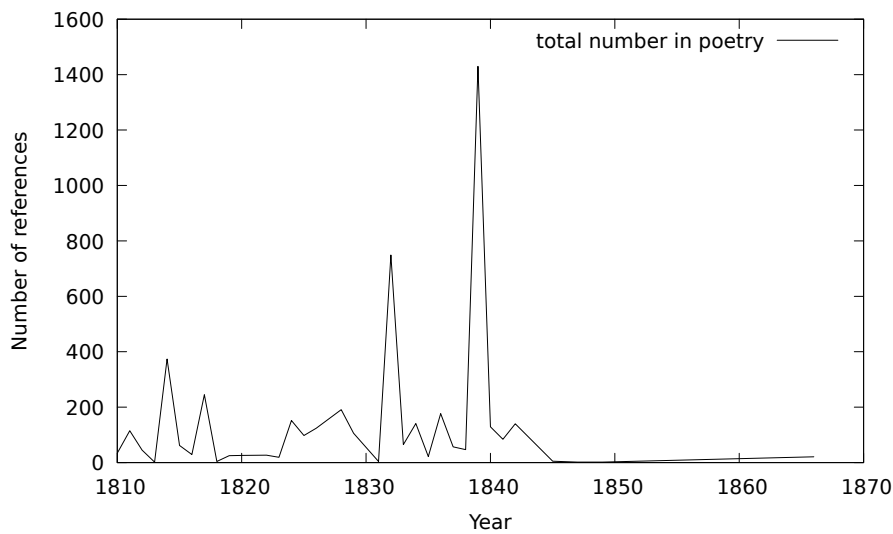


Figure 4.

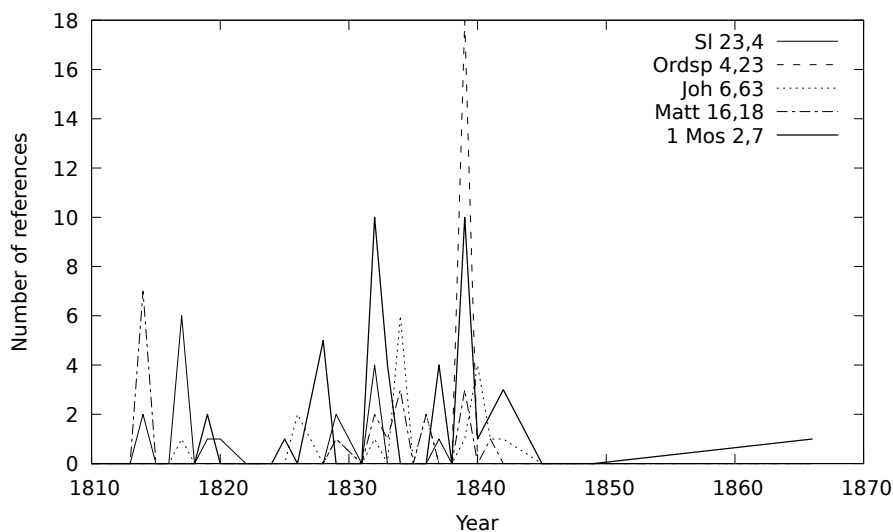


Figure 5.

Nielbo, Kristoffer L., Katrine F. Baunvig, Bin Liu, and Jianbo Gao, 2019. A curious case of entropic decay: Persistent complexity in textual cultural heritage. In: *Digital Scholarship in the Humanities* Vol. 34(3), pp. 542-557.

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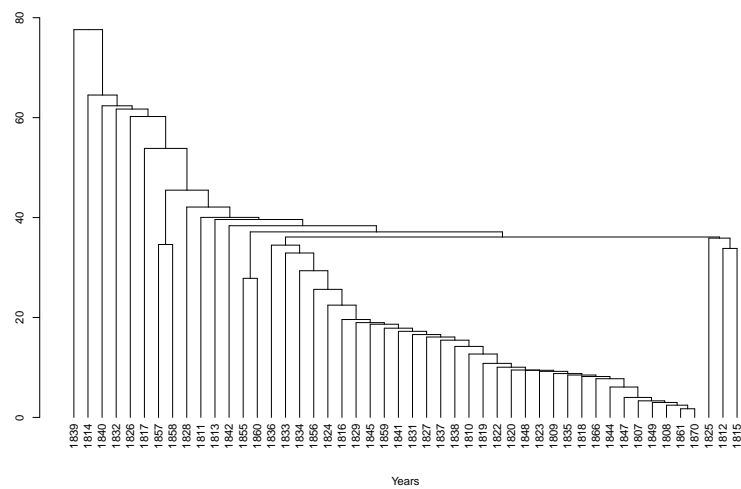


Figure 6.

Århus university, 2010. *Center for Grundtvigforskning*
<https://grundtvigcenteret.au.dk/>