



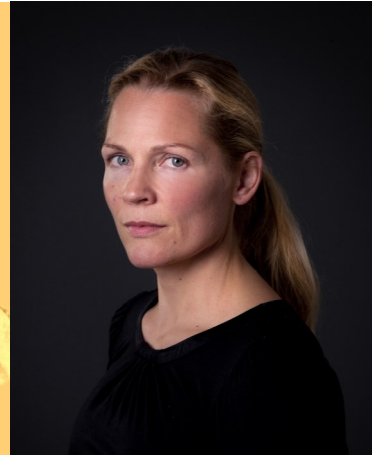
Karl Ove Knausgård  
Photo: André Løyning



Jostein Gaarder  
Photo: Niklas Lello



Sigrid Undset



Åsne Seierstad  
Photo: Kagge Forlag

## Information on Norwegian Literature

**Norwegian literature is travelling more than ever before. Between 2004 and 2014 NORLA has contributed funding to the translation of more than 3300 books, into no less than 63 languages. Norwegian is among the 15 most translated languages in the world.**

### FICTION

**- Jostein Gaarder? Is he Norwegian?**

**Yes, indeed. And he is not alone.**

**Norwegian authors have stepped out onto the world literature stage.**

Norway is famous for its writers, especially when it comes to drama. **Henrik Ibsen** (1828-1906) is often called the father of the modern drama, and his works revolutionised the development of dramatic technique in Europe and the USA. His plays remain popular today, and are said to be the second most performed in the world, after Shakespeare's. Ibsen's dramas offer social analysis and critique, and the masterful portrayal of existential and psychological conflict.

Norway has three Nobel laureates. **Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson** was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1903 as "a tribute to his magnificent and versatile poetry".<sup>1</sup> **Knut Hamsun** received the Nobel Prize in 1920 for *Growth of the Soil*, and his earlier breakthrough novel *Hunger* remains one of the most important classics in Norwegian literature to date. **Sigrid Undset** was awarded the prize in 1928 for her compelling description of life in the Middle Ages. Her trilogy *Kristin Lavransdatter* has become an international classic, and her books have been translated into a large number of languages.

Modern Norwegian literature continues to receive a lot of attention abroad. **Jon Fosse** is the most frequently performed and most debated Norwegian dramatist after Henrik Ibsen, and has achieved great international recognition for his dramas which are characterised by a literary minimalism.

Norwegian contemporary literature has in the course of recent decades entered into a new golden age, and a number of fiction authors are making their mark internationally.

**Erik Fosnes Hansen** was one of the first Norwegian authors to make an international breakthrough. His novel *Psalm at Journey's End* (1990), which tells the story of fictive ship musicians on the RMS Titanic, was an enormous success and has been on a victory lap around the world.

**Per Petterson** has been translated into 50 languages. *Out Stealing Horses* has received a number of prizes in Norway and abroad. Petterson was the first Norwegian author ever to be awarded the Independent Foreign Fiction Prize and The International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award, for precisely this novel.

Another well-established Norwegian author with a huge foreign readership is **Herbjørg Wassmo**.

Wassmo has earned her position and popularity in Norway and abroad through her abilities as a powerful storyteller and her fondness for exposed and vulnerable characters. Her breakthrough came with her first novel about Tora, *The House with the Blind Glass Windows* (1981), followed by two volumes to create the Tora Trilogy. These books contribute to a Norwegian tradition of realism about the coming of age of an unusual and artistic child.

**Linn Ullmann** is one of the Norwegian authors who have sold the most abroad, with five publications translated into a total of 34 languages. Her novel *The Cold Song* was hugely successful when it was published in English in the USA in 2014, and was included on several prestigious lists of the best books of the year, including in The New York Times. In his review in The New Yorker, literature critic James Wood describes the book as "an excellent, formidable novel", concluding that Ullmann herself "is a very exact writer, who is unsparing of her characters: a tonic, sharp, lyrical, intelligent novelist who deserves to be better-known in English".<sup>2</sup>

**Anne B. Ragde** has a large readership both in Norway and worldwide. She debuted in 1990, and has

## “MUST READS” - CONTEMPORARY NORWEGIAN LITERATURE

### Fiction

**Per Petterson**

*Out Stealing Horses* (2003)

**Karl Ove Knausgård**

*My Struggle I-VI*  
(2009-2011)

**Kjersti A. Skomsvold**

*The Faster I Walk,  
The Smaller I Am* (2009)

### Crime Fiction

**Gunnar Staalesen**

*The Consorts of Death* (2006)

**Jo Nesbø**

*The Snowman* (2007)

**Karin Fossum**

*The Indian Bride* (2000)

### Non-Fiction

**Åsne Seierstad**

*One of Us* (2013)

**Lars Fredrik Svendsen**

*A Philosophy of Boredom*  
(1999)

**Arnhild Lauveng**

*A Road Back from Schizophrenia: A Memoir* (2005)

### Children

**Stian Hole**

*Garmann's Summer* (2006)

**Maria Parr**

*Waffle Hearts* (2005)

**Åshild Kanstad Johnsen**

*Block Makes a Museum* (2010)

written close to 50 books for both children and adults. Her great international breakthrough came with her book *Berlin Poplars* (2004) which is the first book in a trilogy about the Neshov family. The trilogy was a sales success, and was subsequently adapted for the screen, reaching a large audience as a television series.

Norway's most recent shining star in the fiction heavens is **Karl Ove Knausgård**. The publication of his series *My Struggle I-VI* created waves. Knausgård's project is highly representative of one of the strongest trends in modern Norwegian literature: the dividing line between fantasy and reality, fiction and non-fiction is erased.

Paul Binding wrote in the Times Literary Supplement that “Knausgård belongs to an identifiable Norwegian tradition – Ibsen, Knut Hamsun, Edvard Munch, Tarjei Vesaas, Per Petterson – in his ability to achieve the frank, unfettered concentration on naked personal experience.”<sup>3</sup>

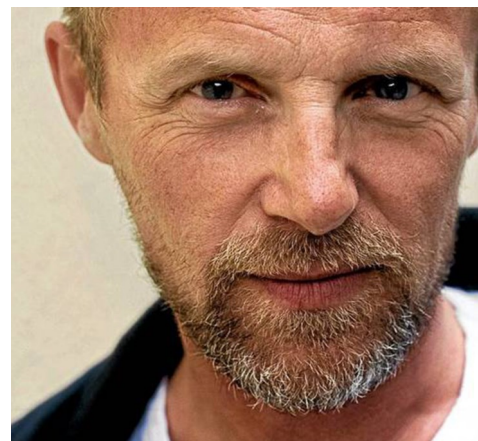
With Knausgård's success Norwegian literature has secured its position as a visible and prominent force in the literary landscape and Norwegian authors are considered an important part of world literature.

### CRIME FICTION

**The world's first crime fiction novel is probably the Norwegian *The Murder of Engine Maker Roalfsen*, written by Mauritz Hansen in 1839-40, the year before Edgar Allan Poe wrote *Murder in the Rue Morgue*. Now, some 175 years later, Norwegian crime fiction is conquering the world!**

Norwegian crime fiction has a long-standing tradition of high quality and among Norway's foremost crime classics, **André Bjerke's** psychoanalytical crime novel *The Lake of the Dead* from 1942 stands out (written under the pseudonym Bernhard Borge) as does **Gerd Nyquist's** *The Deceased did not want Flowers* (1960).

Modern Norwegian crime fiction is to a large extent inspired by the Swedish author-duo Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö, who from 1965 to 1975 wrote



Jo Nesbø. Photo: Paal Audestad

ten novels about the police investigator Martin Beck. Typical for this type of crime literature is a socially critical perspective.

There are a number of strong contemporary authors writing within the crime fiction genre of Norwegian literature. **Gunnar Staalesen** has achieved great international recognition for his crime fiction novels about the private investigator Varg Veum – a Raymond Chandler-inspired hero with a social democratic heart.

Another internationally recognised crime fiction author is **Karin Fossum**, who writes literary, psychological crime fiction, with detective Konrad Sejer as the protagonist. Ten books have been published in the series so far, and her work has been translated into a number of languages.

**Anne Holt** has won huge international success with her two series, the one a realistic police novel series about the dysfunctional, lesbian police officer Hanne Wilhelmsen, and the other about the happy couple Vik and Stubø. Holt's books have reached a big audience worldwide.

Norway's hands-down, best selling author worldwide is **Jo Nesbø**, who has become world famous for his crime fiction novels about the anti-hero police inspector Harry Hole. His novels have been translated into no less than 50 languages. He has been praised for having expanded the genre through his strong, literary qualities, his psychological insight and his depictions of life in a modern, globalised world.



### Did you know that...?

#### **The Norwegian Purchasing Scheme (*Innkjøpsordningen*)**

The Norwegian purchasing scheme is a state funding programme for Norwegian book publications. The scheme is administrated by Arts Council Norway, which purchases new books and distributes them to Norwegian public libraries and school libraries and to some educational institutions, Seamen's Churches and libraries abroad. The intention of the scheme is to safeguard the publication of new Norwegian books, to secure public access to the books, thereby making it possible for all readers to learn about contemporary literature, and not least, to ensure better revenues for authors.<sup>4</sup> This scheme contributes to Norway having an exceptionally rich book flora, characterised by high quality and breadth.

#### **The National Library – digitalisation of books**

The National Library of Norway is working on a digitalisation project that is unique in a global context. Everything published in different media is delivered to the National Library and digitalised. The collection is further expanded through acquisitions and donations. The digital collection contains materials from the Middle Ages up to the present day. The material is digitalised for storage and some materials are made available to the public. The digitalisation programme started in 2006, and it is anticipated that it will be 20–30 years before the entire collection is available in digital format<sup>5</sup>.

#### **A reading nation**

An entire 93% of the Norwegian population reads books other than school books and syllabus literature. The average Norwegian reads 17 books a year. 6 out of 10 Norwegians read up to 10 books a year, while 4 out of 10 read more than 10 books a year. The percentage of the population who read more than 10 books a year is at a solid 40%.<sup>6</sup>

Other authors who have had great success with police crime fiction are **Jørn Lier Horst** and **Unni Lindell**. Horst's books excel through the extreme realism of both the plots and the descriptions of police work – not surprisingly, since he has a background as a policeman. Lindell also puts a strong emphasis on realism in her successful books about the policeman Caato Isaksen.

Norwegian crime fiction literature is characterised by its large breadth.

Author and journalist **Tom Egeland** is best known for his books about the archaeologist Bjørn Beltø, the main character in a series of action and adventure oriented books that often have a story connected to mysteries from the past. Egeland is often compared to the American author Dan Brown.

### NON-FICTION

**Non-fiction genres have for centuries been an expression of identity and mindset in Norway.**

The first Norwegian non-fiction authors to become known abroad were explorers and adventurers. **Fridtjof Nansen** (1861-1930) and **Roald Amundsen** (1872-1928) are still remembered for their incredible polar expeditions. The written accounts of their adventures and expeditions remain popular to this day.

**Thor Heyerdahl** followed in the footsteps of this tradition. He became world-famous when in 1947 he led the revolutionary and bold Kon-Tiki expedition, sailing a raft across the Pacific Ocean. The fantastic story of the journey, *The Kon-Tiki Expedition* (1948), became one of the 20th century's great international best-sellers and has been translated into more than 70 languages. Today another generation of adventure-loving authors have taken the helm, among them Cecilie Skog, Børge Ousland, Erling Kagge and Liv Arnestad.

However, not all Norwegian non-fiction authors are explorers and



adventurers. Philosopher and author **Arne Næss** is known as the founder of the philosophical school of deep ecology. He was one of the important minds of the environmental movement from the 1970s and onward.

Another Norwegian author whose work has been translated into many languages is the criminologist **Nils Christie**, who has written about prison, conflict and crime control. Nils Christie is part of a long-standing Norwegian tradition of communicating complex subject matter to a general public in comprehensible language.

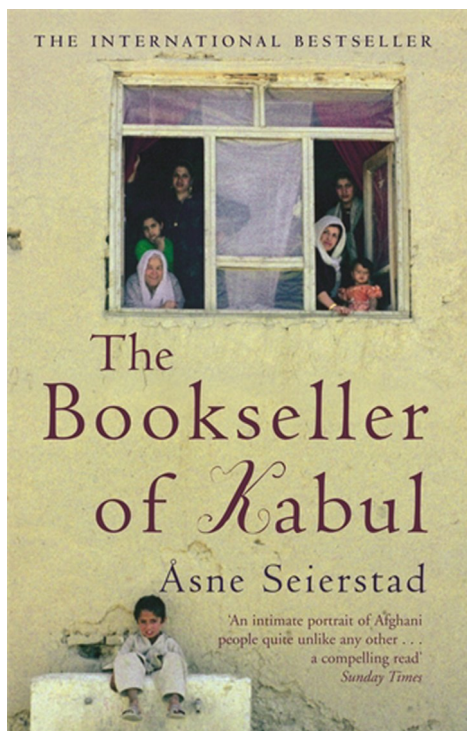
Author and social anthropologist **Thomas Hylland Eriksen** is a part of the same tradition. His works include both academic textbooks and books for the general public.

Another non-fiction author with a solid position in this tradition is the philosopher **Lars Fredrik H. Svendsen**. He is a professor at the University of Bergen, and has published a number of books about philosophy, all of which are characterised by an outstanding narrative voice. His breakthrough work was *A Philosophy of Boredom* (1999).

Today Norwegian non-fiction is characterised first and foremost by a breadth and variation in genres and themes. The books that are sold abroad can be about everything from philoso-

phy and psychology, to knitting and handicrafts.

Of particular interest is the emergence of strong literary voices within journalistic and documentary books. In recent years, it is **Åsne Seierstad** who has reached the most readers in Norway and worldwide. Her documentary book *The Bookseller of Kabul*



(2002) remained on the New York Times' bestseller list for 40 weeks, and has been sold to 38 languages.

The social anthropologist **Erika Fatland** is another Norwegian author who has travelled out into the world. Her first non-fiction publication was the book *City of Angels*, a gripping documentary about the Beslan school hostage crisis in 2004. In 2012 the book *The Year without a Summer* was published, about the 22 July tragedy in Norway. She is now current again with the book *Sovietistan: A Journey through Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan* (2014). Here she takes the reader along on a journey to countries that few have visited – that now have greater current relevance than ever before.

An interesting tendency in Norwegian non-fiction is that of compelling personal stories, a parallel to the trend of autobiographic novels. An ex-

ample here is the author **Arnhold Lauveng**. She writes with exceptional intensity about psychological illness in her autobiography *A Road Back from Schizophrenia: A Memoir* (2006).

In the course of a ten-year period she was admitted to a psychiatric ward several times with the diagnosis of schizophrenia. Today Lauveng works as a psychologist. In this book the reader is taken on a journey into a world of voices and hallucinations, and given unique insight into Lauveng's struggle to overcome this illness. This is powerful reading, about a victory few would have believed possible.

Nature has experienced a renaissance in Norwegian film, literature, visual arts and journalism, something which finds expression in a wave of books about nature and life in the outdoors. The books encompass a range of genres and perspectives on the relation between human beings and nature. Some write in an extension of the adventurer tradition in Norway, such as **Lars Monsen**, a Sámi-Norwegian adventurer and journalist, famous for his explorations and expeditions into the harsh wilderness. Others write about nature's cultural history, such as **Henrik Svensen** who in the book *Captivated* (2011) writes about the mountains' history and our fascination with great heights.

But it is not solely nature that captivates. Many wish to return to the roots of a simpler time and learn how to make things by hand, such as by knitting and crocheting. Norwegian hobby books are a large export item and some books sell by the tens of thousands, both in Norway and abroad. Among the most well-known authors are **Arne & Carlos**, who knit everything from clothing to toys to Christmas tree decorations.

A book that combines the “do-it-yourself” approach with the strong sense for nature is *Solid Wood* (2011) by **Lars Mytting**, a book about wood chopping. The book was a bestseller both in Norway and in Germany.

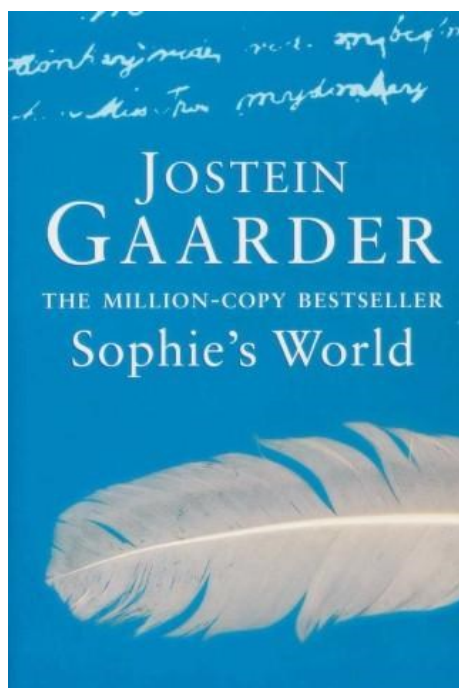
## CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Norwegian children's literature is diverse, and characterised by imagination, independence and autonomy. The first Norwegian books for children were written in the late 18th century.

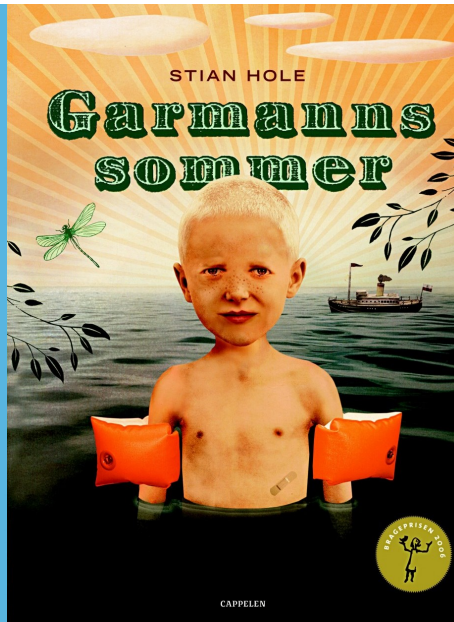
Norwegian children's literature entered a golden age in the post-war period. **Thorbjørn Egner**, **Anne Cath. Vestly** and **Alf Prøysen** wrote books for children that are monoliths in Norwegian children's literature to this day. The books *When the Robbers Came to Cardamom Town* (1955), the novels about Twigson (1962) and *Mrs. Pepperpot* (from 1957) are traditional stories for children, where the child's security is of a central importance, while it remains clear that the little ones are also capable for accomplishing great feats.

During the last few decades Norwegian children's literature has been flourishing as never before. In 2013, 401 new Norwegian books for children and young people were published, and more authors are being translated into different languages than ever before.

Best-known among internationally renowned Norwegian authors of books for children and young adults is **Jostein Gaarder**. His novel *Sophie's World* (1992) was the most sold fiction







title in the world in 1995. The novel has been translated into 60 different languages, and has sold over 40 million copies worldwide. With the success of *Sophie's World*, Norwegian literature made its international breakthrough.

Since the turn of the new millennium, **Maria Parr** has taken both Norway and the world by storm with her two books *Waffle Hearts* (2005) and *Tonje Glimmerdal* (2009). What these books share is a large portion of humour, main characters who are children with a lot of gumption, serious themes and not least, stable adult characters. Parr is often compared to the Swedes' Astrid Lindgren.

Another Norwegian author who has had great success with novels for children is the world-famous crime fiction author **Jo Nesbø**, with his books about Doctor Proctor, Lise and Bulle.

With the recently established prize for children and young people's literature, the Nordic Council aspires to promote literature for children and young people in the Nordic region. In 2014 the prize went to the duo **Håkon Øvreås** and **Øyvind Torseter**, for *Brown* (2013). By day, Rune is an ordinary boy, but by night Rune becomes a super hero who is not afraid of anything. Armed with a brush and brown paint, he sneaks out and paints the bicycles of the older boys, who have been bullying him. *Brown* is a book about

friendship, courage and standing up for oneself.

**Øyvind Torseter**, who has illustrated *Brown*, is an important figure in the field of Norwegian picture books. The picture book genre is undergoing continuous development and Torseter is responsible for a number of prize-winning picture book publications. The most recent release was *The Hole* (2012). For the book *Detours* (2007) in 2008 he was awarded the prestigious Bologna Ragazzi prize in the category for fiction.

The previous year another significant Norwegian picture book artist won this prize, none other than **Stian Hole**, for his book *Garmann's Summer* (2006). A patent feature of Hole's books is a gripping poetic lightness that communicates life's big questions with a profound creativity. He is responsible for critically acclaimed publications such as *The Old Man and the Whale* (2005), the series about Garmann (2006-2010), *Anna's Heaven* (2013), and in 2015 is making headlines again with the book *Morkel's Alphabet*.

Among young and recently established picture book artists one can also highlight successes abroad such as **Åshild Kanstad Johnsen's** series about the character Block. So far three books (and one e-book) have been published about Block – the little block of

### Did you know that...?

**The Norwegian "Brothers Grimm"**  
Asbjørnsen and Moe's *Norwegian Folktales*, published as booklets in the late 1840s, have been translated into several languages. Like the German Brothers Grimm, Asbjørnsen & Moe travelled throughout the countryside collecting folktales and folklore for publication. These folktales have become an important part of the Norwegian cultural heritage.

### **The largest literature festival in the Nordic countries**

The Norwegian Festival of Literature is the largest literature festival in the Nordic region based on non-commercial values. Its main focus is Norwegian contemporary literature and the interaction between literature and society. In the past few years it has had an increasingly international profile.

The festival takes place every year in Lillehammer at the end of May/start of June.<sup>7</sup>

### **Crime fiction for Easter**

Reading crime and detective novels during Easter is a national custom in Norway. TV and radio stations produce crime series just for Easter and publishers release series of books known as "Easter thrillers" or *påskekrim* for the Easter holiday season.

It is believed that the tradition of *påskekrim* began with an ad-stunt on the part of Gyldendal's publisher Harald Grieg during the Easter of 1923. The advert, printed like a regular news article, appeared on the front page of a Norwegian daily under the headline "Bergen train looted in the night". The text was actually an advert for a new crime fiction book written by Nordahl Grieg and Nils Lie. The book was a success and it was clear that people liked the idea of crime fiction for Easter. The following year, the publishing house Aschehoug began to focus on crime fiction during Easter time. Since then, Easter has been incorporated as the peak season for the crime fiction genre.<sup>8</sup>

wood with his many projects. Kanstad Johnsen succeeds through her good-natured and detailed drawings in making Norwegian pine forests and school marching bands seem universal. The Block character has attracted broad international attention, also in Japan, where both animation series and countless spin-off products based on the books have been made.

Young adult novels is a genre attracting increased interest from abroad, particularly after Gaarder's success with *Sophie's World*. The author **Nina E. Grøntvedt** has written bestsellers such as *Hey, it's me!* (2010) and *Absolutely Unkissed* (2012). These are memoirs written and illus-

trated by 11 year old Oda.

Another young people's book for readers who are a bit older and that has been sold to many languages is **Johan Harstad's** horror tale *Darlah: 172 Hours on the Moon* (2008). This is a chilling sci-fi tale about three ordinary teens who win a trip to spend 172 hours on the moon. The question soon turns out to be: will they make it back alive? *Darlah* was in the autumn of 2014 named the best Norwegian book for young people of all time by a professional jury of experts, in one of Norway's largest newspapers.

Crime fiction and thrillers for

children is also a popular genre, and **Bjørn Sortland** has had success with books in this genre.

Literature for children and young people has a high status in Norway and many established authors who write novels, also write for children. This has led to a broad range of books of a high literary quality, and ensures young readers access to many forms of expression in different genres. This is a reflection of the huge breadth found in Norwegian literature, for readers both young and old.

**NORLA**, Norwegian Literature Abroad, promotes the export of Norwegian literature through active profiling work and translation subsidies for fiction, non-fiction and literature for children and young people.

### The Norwegian Book Industry

#### Organisations

Norwegian Non-fiction Writers and Translators Organisation (NFF) - <http://www.nffo.no/eng/default.aspx>

Norwegian Writers for Children (NBU) - <http://www.nbuforfatter.no/om-nbu/>

Norwegian Authors Union (DnF) - <http://www.forfatterforeningen.no/english>

Norwegian Publishers Association (DnF) - <http://www.forleggerforeningen.no/english>

Norwegian Booksellers Association - <http://www.bokhandlerforeningen.no/om-bokhandlerforeningen>

#### Publishers and agencies:

The largest publishing houses in Norway are Cappelen Damm, Aschehoug, Gyldendal and Vigmostad & Bjørke. Other key publishing houses in the Norwegian book industry are Schibsted, Oktober, Pax, Universitetsforlaget, Kagge and Samlaget. In Norway one also finds a rich abundance of small presses and growth in the number of newly established publishers. In 2013 all of 6300 new titles and editions were published by Norwegian publishers that are members of the Norwegian Publishers Association.<sup>6</sup>

The largest publishers have their own agencies, Cappelen Damm Agency, Aschehoug Agency and Gyldendal Agency. The agencies Hagen Agency, Stilton Agency and A. Nicolaissen Agency are independent.

#### Literary prizes:

Norway has a large number of literary prizes and awards. Among the most prestigious are the Brage Prize, the Sult Prize, the Gyldendal Prize, the Critics' Prize, the Aschehoug Prize, the P2-radio listeners novel prize, the Ministry of Culture's literary prizes for children and young adults, and the joint prize for the Nordic region, the Nordic Council's Literature Prize.

#### **Kilder**

- 1: [http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/literature/genres.html](http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/genres.html)
- 2: <http://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/favorite-books-2014>
- 3: <http://archipelagobooks.org/back-in-this-world-a-review-of-my-struggle-book-one-from-paul-binding-in-the-times-literary-supplement-uk/>
- 4: <https://snl.no/Innkj%C3%B8psordning>
- 5: <http://www.nb.no/Om-NB/Digitalisering/Kva-vert-digitalisert>
- 6: [http://www.forleggerforeningen.no/filemanager/download\\_file/file/719606.pdf/Bransjestatistikk%202013.pdf](http://www.forleggerforeningen.no/filemanager/download_file/file/719606.pdf/Bransjestatistikk%202013.pdf)
- 7: <http://www.litteraturfestival.no/english/about-the-festival/>
- 8: <http://www.tnp.no/norway/exclusive/2836-introduction-to-paske-traditions-in-norway>

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