

## **Else Mundal**

It is reasonable to think that after the arrival of writing texts that were written down would be read word for word when performed. In my paper I will problematize this assumption. When a written text was performed, there existed more than one possibility: The text could be read word for word, however, if the performer knew the text well he could choose to tell the story without looking at the book, more or less as in an oral culture; or he could look at the book only occasionally, perhaps before he started his performance or before he started on a new chapter. The saga tellers in the oral culture were trained in the art of oral storytelling. The performer of a written text had to be a trained reader. With the written text the performance was transferred from one profession to another, and whether a performance of a text sounded like reading or telling would make a great difference. Whether a performer chose to read a text word for word or tell it more freely would not only depend on what he was able to do but on what the audience expected. It is likely that the expectation of the audience would differ from one type of text – or situation – to another. The audience would expect that a text read in the church, for instance, should sound like reading, but it is possible that the audience would expect – or prefer – stories of the type that had existed in oral storytelling to sound like told stories also when the performer had a book at hand. There are not very many episodes describing reading or performance of written texts to be found in Old Norse sources, but it seems obvious from the sources we have that in some cases texts were read, in other cases told. The paper will discuss the possible changes of oral performances after the arrival of writing on the basis of the different factors that could influence the performance and on the basis of descriptions of oral performances in the sources.