

ANN-SOFIE LÖNNGREN, HEIDI GRÖNSTAD, DAG HEEDE AND ANNE HEITH (eds.):

Rethinking National Literatures and the Literary Canon in Scandinavia

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The very ambitious title of this collection of nine articles may have set the bar high for itself in terms of rethinking Scandinavia's national literature and literary canons, but it constitutes a good and well-edited contribution. The first section's three articles offer a useful conceptual foundation with three relevant cases. The six-author article 'National, Transnational and Entangled Literatures' considers the institutions (in the broadest sense) of nation building and highlights the complicated affiliations of one of the most prominent younger writers, Sofi Oksanen, whose Estonian roots make it difficult, as with many other authors, to see her as exclusively Finnish. Annika Olsson's 'Challenging the Bodies and Borders of Literature in Scandinavia' provides a comparative overview of the different strategies that have been implemented in writing national literary histories in Scandinavia, while Olli Löytty's 'Immigrant Literature in Finland' digs deeper into the important question of how immigrant writers are received in their new homelands. Löytty's article introduces a number of key positions in the field of criticism of migrant writing as well as showcasing a number of not just Finnish but Nordic immigrant writers.

The second part of the book consists of more focused readings of writers who challenge traditional narratives of national identity. Helena Bodin's 'Sophie Elkan's Ambiguous Dream of the Orient' traces the importance of the Swedish nineteenth and early twentieth-century writer's international outlook and oriental themes, while Kaisa Ahvenjärvi presents two contemporary Sámi poets and their poetry's close connection with Sámi language, history and culture, which produces a unique expression. Finally, in 'Religion and Revolt in Colonial Scandinavia', Margareta Petersson compares three novels by William Heinesen, Kim Leine and Hanne Ørstavik that all deal with Scandinavian colonization, which in many respects is an underrepresented facet

of Nordic history with a somewhat marginalized position in literary history. Petersson's readings are to the point and rich in inspired comparisons, concluding that the novels 'show the false and oppressive political representation through the colonial administrators; they give the oppressed voices by writing down their testimonies, by creating a fictive collection of letters or by weaving together stories in such a manner as to make their voices emerge implicitly from the silence of the documents' (p. 153).

The final part 'Queering the "Nordic"' begins with Dag Heede's spirited reflections on how a queer perspective would open up to Nordic literature, and he convincingly shows how this would shed new light on key figures such as Hans Christian Andersen and Karen Blixen. In 'Cross-Dressing Mysteries and Monsters', Moa Sam Holmqvist traces the motif of cross-dressing in nineteenth-century Swedish suspense fiction, both showing how this connects with contemporary notions of the queer but also making sure to underline that the cultural condition for being a transgender individual in the nineteenth century was first and foremost marked by shamefulness. The final article by Ann-Sofie Lönngren has a somewhat different take on the queer, and focuses on the long tradition of writing about trolls, whose human-like but not quite human appearance makes them surprisingly relevant in an era where posthumanist thinking has been established.

All in all, this is a stimulating volume, if at times uneven and with some distance between the overarching ambition of contributing to the general debate and the sometimes very specific case studies. Interestingly, the question of bringing the Nordic countries closer together or accepting that national identities still dominate the field, and that the world rather than the region is the most meaningful context, does not take up much space, neither as a problem nor as a project. However, the volume is rich enough already, and it would be hard to think of a reader who could not learn something from this book.

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