

Editors' Note

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In September 2019, Johan Sandberg McGuinne the South Saami speaker and author published a long post on his Facebook page about the situation of Saami languages and Saami literature. Sandberg McGuinne's (2019) text is a rhetorically constructed analysis of the problems of minority literatures. He begins his text with a reference to the situation of the world's endangered languages: "The Saami languages are severely endangered. Together with half of the world's languages – of which most are indigenous or minority languages – they are at risk of dying out during the next decades."

Despite his concerns regarding the survival of endangered languages, Sandberg McGuinne problematizes the decision made by Sámi Girječálliid Searvi (SGS) – the Sami Writer's Association (SGS) – during 2018, according to which only authors who use Saami language as their literary tool, can become members of the organization. Before this decision was taken, authors who also wrote in other languages – mainly in Finnish, Swedish, Norwegian – could become members. Johan Sandberg McGuinne underlines that the Saami languages are endangered and they should be supported, but he is also critical of the monolingual definition of Saami literature. His statement connects to a long, and from time to time heated, discussion about the boundaries of national literatures vs "other" literatures in the Nordic countries, as well as in European countries with linguistic minorities.

The 1970s and 1980s are considered to be the founding decades for minority literatures in the Nordic countries. The development of such literatures as Saami, Sweden-Finnish and Tornedalian literature, was connected with a worldwide ethnic revival, emancipatory politics and the rise of various counter-cultures during the 1960s and 1970s. Subcultures that have emerged include: postcolonial literature, women's literature and indigenous peoples' movements, all of which inspired minorities in the Nordic countries. Overall, one could say that culture became politicized during this period and literature was seen as a tool in the process of emancipation (Gröndahl 2019). However, Sandberg McGuinne's view also highlights how relevant questions of language choices and language rights still are.

This issue of *Multiethnica* discusses multilingualism, especially in a minority language context. In recent years, multilingualism has become an expansive multidisciplinary research area, and this special issue brings together many of the current perspectives related to multilingualism in minority studies, as well as in literary studies and philology. In the first article, Anitta Viinikka-Kallinen deals with Alf Nilsen-Børsskog's four-volume series of novels *Elämän*

jatko [Continuation of life, 2004–2015]. These works are strongly rooted in the recent history and contemporary life of the Kvens, a minority with a long history and a recognized legal status in Norway since 1999. Nowadays the Kven language is also an official minority language of the country. In her article, Viinikka-Kallinen shows how the tradition of portraying Kvens as ethnic “others” is a long one in Norwegian fiction, and it is only now, in Alf Nilsen-Børsskog’s novels, that the Kvens are finally being depicted from their own perspective, “from within”, in their own language. According to Viinikka-Kallinen *Elämän jatko* is a counterstory that does not underline the crisis of the minority culture or conflicts of the Kven and the majority, but rather the power of the native culture. The Kvens establish their identity through self-assured confidence based on pride in their own language and culture.

In recent years, many scholars working within studies on minority literature have been interested in sociologically oriented studies on literature and language revitalization. In this issue of *Multiethnica*, Robert Borges discusses language revitalization, namely the revitalization process of the Wymysorys language, spoken in Wilamowice, Poland. In his article, Borges highlights the importance of written language forms in efforts to revitalize an endangered language. Literature and written forms of Wymysorys play a key role in language education, proficiency development, and language practice associated with the revitalization efforts in Wilamowice.

The third article of this special issue by Linda Bäckman and Saara Haapamäki presents a case study on the integration of newcomers and, among other things, their language choices in Finland, in an environment in which the main language of the community is Swedish. Swedish, one of the two national languages in Finland, is a minority language in Finland, but a majority language in Närpes, where the study has been carried out. The results of the interviews, which included 23 participants, show that economic stability and the possibility to work are the most important elements in the integration process. The results show also that while most interviewees regard learning Swedish as self-evident, only those with a higher education emphasize the language issues and, for example, the importance of also learning Finnish.

In contrast to the contributions presented above, Antje Wischmann’s article ‘Self-reflective “minority literature”: A stylistic profile of a case study’ deals with multilingualism and especially literary multilingualism as a textual phenomenon. Wischmann investigates intra- and transtextual stylistic processes in Thom Lundberg’s debut work *För vad sorg och smärta* (2016) about a Traveler family. Firstly, she shows how Lundberg, by drawing on ethnolinguistic sources, has embedded insertions in *resande-romska* (a variety of Romani) within the main text in Swedish, making the activity of translation integral to the text and activating non-literary discourses. Secondly, the translations undertaken by the narrator and characters (by means such as glossing, explication, or contextualization) shape the performance of reading, with the reader forced to decide whether to accept the invitation to gradually build a limited Romani vocabulary.

In the twenty-first century, the literary field is anything but monolingual. In Sweden, literary subcultures such as Estonian, Kurdish, Persian, Saami, Swe-

den-Finnish, etc. have their own thematic and stylistic characteristics, as well as their own distribution channels. Nevertheless, these literatures are primarily signified by their "other" languages, i.e. the presence of a language other than the majority language of Swedish, and their political and institutional preconditions are still formed within the frame of the nation state (see Gröndahl 2019). In many regards, the Swedish situation differs from many other countries as the rise of ethnic movements among historical minorities and the development of minority and migration literatures coincides temporally. Comparative studies on literature of autonomous or indigenous minorities and migration literature have been a fruitful starting-point for literary studies in Sweden, but do not necessarily fit in other national contexts.

The concept of literary history in the Nordic countries has been changing during the last decades, and the complexities of grouping literatures according to "nation", "ethnicity" and "language", producing such categories as "Swedish", "Finnish", "Saami", "Sweden-Finnish", "Finnish-Swedish", or "Kven" literature, has been apparent. On the one hand, there are 'new' literatures that claim to be recognized as their own, autonomy literatures; on the other hand, there are ongoing processes aiming to include these literatures as specific areas in national literary canons. The cartographies of "center" and "periphery" are being re-framed and binarism is no longer a core principle when understanding literary canon. The resultant discussions about such terms as "(im)migrant literature", "minority literature" and "multicultural literature" also convey ambitions to reconstruct essentializing, ethnifying and even racializing expressions or categorizations. (See also Löytty 2015.)

In many cases, the author's background has been used as a starting point when defining "other" literatures. Even if there have been many attempts to replace definitions or terms in reference to an author's ethnic background with more neutral ones, these terms seem to come back again and again. One of the latest examples can be found in the comprehensive volume *Immigrant and Ethnic-Minority Writers since 1945: Fourteen Contexts in Europe and Beyond* (2019), which focuses on "immigrant and ethnic-minority writers", i.e. authors whose backgrounds are in other countries or other 'ethnic' groups. The volume provides an interesting working definition for the discussed authors that borrows from the definition of "long-term immigrant", as devised by the United Nations: "A person who moves to a country other than that of his or her usual residence for a period of at least a year (twelve months), so that the country of destination effectively becomes his or her new country of usual residence" (Sieverts & Vlasta 2019:3). Moreover, the volume relates to a previous, controversial understanding of ethnic writing as a specific, racialized subcategory as it also includes "writers who are the descendants of such immigrants" (ibid.) The editors of the aforementioned volume, Wiebke Sieverts and Sandra Vlasta (2019:4), are aware that their definition may seem "outdated" but they underline its importance as a heuristic tool that guarantees "that we are comparing like for like across the different national contexts".

The tendency to define literature as a monolingual institution has from time to time been seen as an expression of nationalism and essentialism. Sandberg-McGuinne's (2019) post refers to these ethnifying and essentializing tenden-

cies when he claims that the new bylaws of the Sami Writer's Association give expression to a narrow definition of "saminess", grounded in ethnic attributes, and right "blood" or ancestry:

In the end, it is all about confusing identity politics with language planning and language maintenance. When we allow all discussion to come down to the value of our literature being defined by the ethnicity of the author, and not by their ability to enthrall the reader with their narrative skills, we are on a dangerous path.

Instead of defining "new" literatures as determinable entities, they could be understood in relation to their linguistic contexts and the language struggles that characterize this context. These literatures may be regarded as cultural expressions which are overlapping with other literary areas (cf. Behschnitt & Nilsson 2013:15). As Sandberg-McGuinne's text implicates, defining minority literature as closed space, can ultimately lead to a decrease in importance.

Today, literary multilingualism can be approached from a number of angles. For example, Marja Sorvari (2018) underlines that literary multilingualism, or literary translanguaging as she prefers to say, seems to "undermine monolingual and monocultural literary canons and to cross national, linguistic and geographic borders". When using translanguaging as a tool for contextualization, traditional categorizations and definitions that follow national borders and linguistic boundaries "become irrelevant when applied to migrant, transcultural or translanguaging literature". In the research anthology, *The Aesthetics and Politics of Linguistic Borders: Multilingualism in Northern European Literatures*, literary multilingualism is seen as a highly dynamic and processual phenomenon, which emerges as a result of interactions between authors, texts and readers, as well as literary and political institutions on different societal levels (Kauranen & al. 2019). The debate surrounding membership of the Sami Writer's Association reflects aptly the multifaceted nature of the phenomenon of multilingualism. It also demonstrates how multilingualism challenges notions of minorities and the concepts of minority politics.

Endnotes

¹ Translations of Johan Sandberg McGuinne's citations from Swedish are by Satu Gröndahl.

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