



Migrants and Literature in Finland and Sweden

Edited by
Satu Gröndahl and Eila Rantonen

Studia Fennica
Litteraria

Studia Fennica
Litteraria 11

THE FINNISH LITERATURE SOCIETY (SKS) was founded in 1831 and has, from the very beginning, engaged in publishing operations. It nowadays publishes literature in the fields of ethnology and folkloristics, linguistics, literary research and cultural history.

The first volume of the *Studia Fennica* series appeared in 1933. Since 1992, the series has been divided into three thematic subseries: *Ethnologica*, *Folkloristica* and *Linguistica*. Two additional subseries were formed in 2002, *Historica* and *Litteraria*. The subseries *Anthropologica* was formed in 2007.

In addition to its publishing activities, the Finnish Literature Society maintains research activities and infrastructures, an archive containing folklore and literary collections, a research library and promotes Finnish literature abroad.

STUDIA FENNICA EDITORIAL BOARD

Editors-in-chief

Pasi Ihalainen, Professor, University of Jyväskylä, Finland

Timo Kallinen, University Lecturer, University of Helsinki, Finland

Taru Nordlund, Professor, University of Helsinki, Finland

Riikka Rossi, Title of Docent, University Researcher, University of Helsinki, Finland

Katriina Siivonen, Title of Docent, University Teacher, University of Turku, Finland

Lotte Tarkka, Professor, University of Helsinki, Finland

Deputy editors-in-chief

Anne Heimo, Title of Docent, University of Turku, Finland

Saija Isomaa, Professor, University of Tampere, Finland

Sari Katajala-Peltomaa, Title of Docent, Researcher, University of Tampere, Finland

Eerika Koskinen-Koivisto, Postdoctoral Researcher, Dr. Phil., University of Helsinki, Finland

Kenneth Sillander, University Lecturer, University of Helsinki, Finland

Laura Visapää, Title of Docent, University Lecturer, University of Helsinki, Finland

Tuomas M. S. Lehtonen, Secretary General, Dr. Phil., Finnish Literature Society, Finland

Tero Norkola, Publishing Director, Finnish Literature Society, Finland

Anu Miller, Secretary of the Board, Finnish Literature Society, Finland

oa.finlit.fi

Editorial Office

SKS

P.O. Box 259

FI-00171 Helsinki

www.finlit.fi

Migrants and Literature in Finland and Sweden

Edited by Satu Gröndahl and Eila Rantonen



STUDIA FENNICA LITTERARIA 11

The publication has undergone a peer review.



© 2018 Satu Gröndahl, Eila Rantonen and SKS
License CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0 International

A digital edition of a printed book first published in 2018 by the Finnish Literature Society.

Cover Design: Timo Numminen
EPUB: Tero Salmén

ISBN 978-952-222-992-2 (Print)
ISBN 978-951-858-035-8 (PDF)
ISBN 978-951-858-034-1 (EPUB)

ISSN 0085-6835 (Studia Fennica)
ISSN 1458-5278 (Studia Fennica Litteraria)

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.21435/sflit.11>

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0 International License.
To view a copy of the license, please visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>



A free open access version of the book is available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.21435/sflit.11>
or by scanning this QR code with your mobile device.

BoD – Books on Demand, Norderstedt, Germany 2018

Contents

RANTONEN, EILA & GRÖNDAHL, SATU
Acknowledgements 7

I Cartography of the Field

ANNE HEITH, SATU GRÖNDAHL & EILA RANTONEN
Introduction: 'The Minoritarian Condition'. Studies in Finnish
and Swedish Literatures after World War II 11

II Generational Shifts

SATU GRÖNDAHL
Sweden-Finnish Literature: Generational and Cultural Changes 37

MARJA SORVARI
Native, Foreign, Translated? 'Russian' Migrant Literature between Finland
and Russia 57

III Reception and Multicultural Perspectives

KUKKU MELKAS
Literature and Children in-between – the Entangled History of Finland
and Sweden in *Svinalängorna*, *Mother of Mine* and *Ingenbarnsland* 83

JOHANNA DOMOKOS
The Multicultural Dynamics and the Finnish Literary Field 97

HANNA-LEENA NISSLÄ
Women Writers with Im/migrant Backgrounds: Transnationalizing Finnish
Literature – Perspectives on the Reception of Debut Novels by Lindén,
ElRamly, Abu-Hanna and Salmela 113

IV Writing Migrant Identities

ANNE HEITH

The African Diaspora, Migration and Writing: Johannes Anyuru's *En civilisation utan båtar* 141

PIRJO AHOKAS

Is Love Thicker Than Blood? A Bi-cultural Identity Process in Astrid Trotzig's *Blod är tjockare än vatten* 166

MARTA RONNE

Narratives of Exile, Gender and Disability in Swedish-Latvian Zenta Mauriņas Autobiographical Writings 187

EILA RANTONEN

Writing Biography by E-mail – Postcolonial and Postmodern Rewriting of Biographical and Epistolary Modes in Jonas Hassen Khemiri's *Montecore* 204

List of Contributors 225

Abstract 229

Index of Names 231

Acknowledgements

The quest of writing this book arose at the colloquium ‘The Contemporary Migrant Novel in Quebec and Scandinavia: Performativity, Meaningful Conflicts and Creolization’, which was held in Turku in September 2011. There we discussed that there was a specific need for a comparative study dealing with migrant issues in Finnish and Swedish literature. At that time, only a few Nordic scholars were specialized in this research area. Since 2011 the interest in these issues has significantly increased. We can mention, for example, the organization DINO (Diversity in Nordic literature), which has been an important forum for the researchers, who study migration and minority issues in literature. Further IASS (International Association of Scandinavian Studies) has organized important conferences including migrant issues.

When this volume was in process in 2015, there was a rapid increase in the number of asylum seekers to Europe. Over 1.3 million people sought asylum in Europe because of the conflicts in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. This made the account of displaced people the highest level since World War II. To Sweden fled circa 163 000 asylum seekers via various parts of Europe. This led to the restoring of border controls. Over 32 000 asylum seekers, mostly Iraqis and Afghans, entered Finland over the land border of Sweden and Russia. The reaction of Finnish Red Cross was efficient to this unexpected situation. New reception centers for the asylum seekers were grounded rapidly all over Finland. This resulted in Arabic becoming quite unexpectedly the third largest foreign language spoken in Finland.

The process of editing the volume has not been without its hardships. In the past years, due to various reasons, the project has been delayed. We greatly thank and acknowledge the contribution of the Kordelin Foundation and the Finnish Literature Society for funding this volume. We also want to thank Associate Professor Anne Heath for joining us in the making of the introduction of the volume and translator Judith Crawford for the careful checking of the language of most of the articles. Heath’s contribution is the outcome of the research project ‘Other Places in Literature: Sápmi, Meänmaa and Migrant Cartographies’ funded by Umeå University. We are especially grateful to the Finnish Literature Society for including our book in the *Studia Fennica Litteraria* publication series. Moreover, we want to express

our gratitude to our two anonymous peer reviewers whose careful comments on our manuscript helped us greatly in the revision of the volume.

Finally, we owe our greatest debt of gratitude to the editor-in-chief of the *Studia Fennica Litteraria* series Docent, Ph.D. Riikka Rossi for her invaluable assistance and patience with the volume.

We want to dedicate this book to our friend Ph.D. Matti Savolainen, who was devoted to the studies of a range of minorities.

Tampere and Uppsala, January 2018

Eila Rantonen and Satu Gröndahl

Cartography of the Field I

ANNE HEITH

📄 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0682-2668>

SATU GRÖNDAHL

📄 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7471-6306>

EILA RANTONEN

📄 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1807-4361>

Introduction: ‘The Minoritarian Condition’ Studies in Finnish and Swedish Literatures after World War II

When people are in motion, it changes nations, national and ethnic identities, cultures, people and peoples. *Migrants and Literature in Finland and Sweden* presents new comparative perspectives on cultural transformations and depiction of migration in Finnish and Swedish literature. The volume provides a contribution to the production of new narratives of the nation during recent decades synthesising and comparing Finnish and Swedish literatures. The volume, thus, offers a unique comparative perspective to the study of Nordic literature, since Finnish literature, especially, is often separated from the Nordic literary studies and literary contexts.

Migrants and Literature in Finland and Sweden explores the ways in which intersectional identities and transcultural connections have affected the national self-understanding in the Nordic context and how they relate to concepts and conditions of marginal situations including race, gender, class and disability. Many articles of the volume tackle the issues of reception and classification and ask how experiences of migration have resulted in new modes of writing and generic innovations. Narratives of migration depict Finland and Sweden being lived not only transnationally but also transculturally. The latter signifies how individuals and social groups are no longer cultures but people. It is a question of what individuals and social groups do with culture in an increasingly globalized world (Schulze-Engler 2009, 93). In this volume, studies of fiction and autobiographies lucidly show how migrational processes, cultural transformations and transcultural connections are experienced on an individual level.

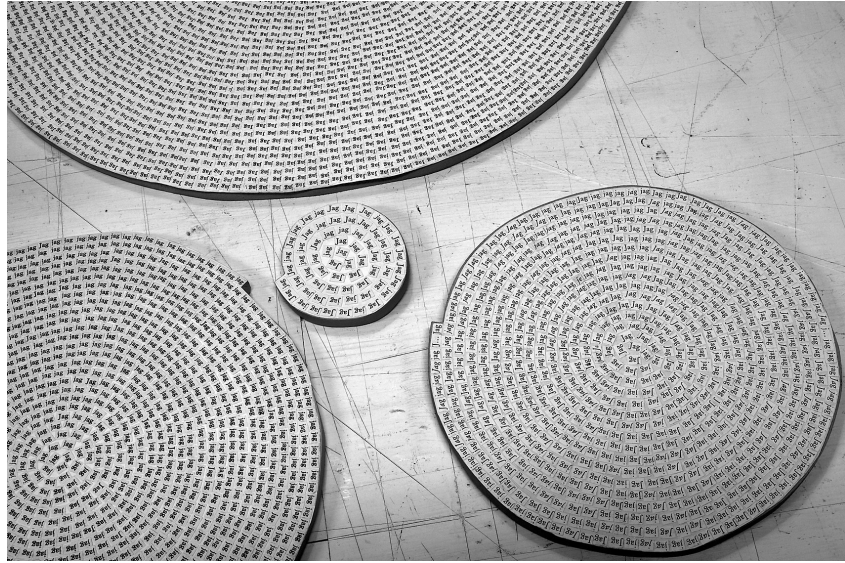
The volume demonstrates the complexity of grouping literatures according to nation and ethnicity producing such categories such as ‘Finnish literature’, ‘Swedish literature’ or ‘immigrant literature’, which recently been under discussion. For instance, in 2007, the Karelian Finnish writer Arvi Perttu strongly asserted that the missing pages of migrants living in Finland should be written. He also insisted that Finnish literary institutions should be more open to writers who have a migrant background. Another author, Somali-Swedish Mohamed Hassan, who works at the Scansom publishing house in Stockholm, defiantly proclaimed in 2008, ‘We are here, whether

you like it or not!’ at the ‘Kielten kudos [Tissue of Language] – textum linguarum’ seminar in Helsinki dealing with multicultural writing in Finland and Sweden. Perttu’s and Hassan’s proposals exemplify a call for more visibility of authors with a minority background. However, migrants are not a homogeneous category and the obstacles to being acknowledged by the dominant national literary field which the major literary institutions are part of vary. When considering issues of presence and visibility in relation to literary fields, it is important to have in mind the target groups of the works of authors with a minority background. To claim that migrants *per se* are marginalised is a simplification. It is obvious that there are barriers when it comes to language. Authors writing in minority languages such as Karelian and Somali, for example, are often not acknowledged by the dominant national literary field simply because they will not reach out to readers in the majority population, including those actors in the literary field, such as publishers, academics and critics, who may contribute to the visibility and success of a writer.

The fact that migration and minority status are diverse and multifaceted phenomena is illustrated by the authors mentioned above. Minority groups may be seen as more or less ‘strange’ and ‘alien’ compared to the ethnic majority. This is certainly the case in Finland and Sweden where black Muslim migrants from Africa often are seen as more different than white European immigrants. For immigrants themselves who have been violently uprooted, the contexts of upheaval vary. They may have been subjected to displacement due to shifting national borders as in the case of the Karelians, or as an effect of conflicts on geographically distant continents such as Africa.

The studies in part II, III and IV of this volume relate to different geographical and historical contexts, which are interconnected with the various forms of migration that have led to the arrival of people who have found themselves struggling to cope with Finnish and Swedish society, respectively. Experiences of encounters with the new country, which by and by may become the new homeland, are reflected in imaginative writing by authors with experiences of migration. The migration of Finnish labourers to Sweden is reflected in Satu Gröndahl’s and Kukku Melkas’s contributions to this volume, the latter also discusses material related to the placing of Finnish war children (‘krigsbarn’) in Sweden during World War II. Migration between Russia and Finland is discussed by Marja Sorvari, while Johanna Domokos attempts at mapping the Finnish literary field and offering a model for literary analysis. Transformations of the Finnish literary field are also the focus of Hanna-Leena Nissilä’s article discussing the reception of novels by a selection of women authors with an im/migrant background.

The African diaspora and the arrival of refugees to Europe from African countries due to wars and political conflicts in the 1970s is the backdrop of Anne Heith’s analysis of migration and literature, while Pirjo Ahokas deals with literature related to the experiences of a Korean adoptee in Sweden. Migration from Africa to Sweden also forms the setting of Eila Rantonen’s article about a novel by a successful, Swedish author with roots in Tunisia. Exile, gender and disability are central, intertwined themes of Marta Ronne’s article, which discusses the work of a Swedish-Latvian author who arrived



Helena Laukkanen's collages Jag ('I') 1999–2009. Each spiral includes all 'I-words' cut out from one novel and can be seen as an illustration for the fragility of the modern subject. Photo: Jouni Suomalainen / Liekki ruotsinsuomalainen kulttuurilehti.

in Sweden in connection to World War II. As this brief survey indicates, migration is a heterogeneous phenomenon, and migrants do not share a common history or cultural background. However, there are experiences which migrants share, namely the encounter with a new country, a new language and new traditions. These encounters may be described as frustrating, but also as transformative when ideas of home and belonging change. It is not rare that authors describe feelings of multiple belongings and the shaping of new hybrid identities and cultural forms that emerge when the baggage from the past is intertwined or replaced with experiences of living in a new country, which gradually becomes more and more familiar.

The Finnish literary institutions mentioned by Arvi Perttu above are part of a literary field where mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion operate. In Bourdieu's influential description of the literary field, the concept of 'cultural capital' plays an important role for analysing issues of power, inclusion and exclusion (Bourdieu 1996). People with the appropriate cultural capital have the power to make statements about literary value, which an author's success or failure is based upon. If we accept Bourdieu's model, it is hardly correct to claim that all authors with a minority background are marginalised. On the contrary, it is a significant feature of the contemporary literary scene both in Finland and Sweden that there are authors with a minority background who have been very successful when it comes to getting positive attention in major national newspapers, as well as other media. This means that they have been successful on the dominant literary field. To some extent, alternative literary flora has emerged in connection to possibilities for getting subsidies for publishing literature in minority languages. This development is related to political decisions aiming at supporting publishing in minority languages.

In Sweden, The Swedish Arts Council has granted support for literature published in immigrant languages since the 1970s, the decade when immigrant policy in general was reformulated by the Swedish government. When it comes to authors with an immigrant background, there are both commercially successful authors published by the major commercial publishers in Finland and Sweden, as well as writers published by small publishing houses with a specific ethnic, cultural or ideological profile. The status of these publishers varies. In a study of 'immigrant' and 'minority' literature in Sweden between 1970–2000, Lars Wendelius suggests that Swedish publishers of fiction form a hierarchy with four levels. The old, well-established, Stockholm publishers Bonniers and Norstedts are found on the most prestigious top level, while publishers with an ethnic profile are found at the bottom (Wendelius 2002, 25).

There are also transnational publishing houses engaged in publishing for diasporic groups. Scansom Publishers, mentioned above, describes itself as 'the leading publisher and distributor in Somali language materials' on its website. Considering the marginal status of Somali languages in Finland and Sweden, it is hardly surprising that literature in Somali languages receives little attention in the Finnish and Swedish literary fields, respectively. The target group of literature in Somali languages is a transnational, diasporic group of readers. As a rule, this type of literature does not get any attention on the dominant national literary field in Finland or Sweden. However, if an author of African descent writes in Finnish or Swedish in Finland and Sweden respectively, there is the possibility that s/he may be appreciated for providing new perspectives on the new homeland when depicting it from the vantage point of a stranger. This is the case, for example, in Swedish Sami Said's successful first novel *Väldigt sällan fin* from 2012 (Heith 2016). Said, who was born in Eritrea, came to Sweden at the age of ten. The reception of Said's novel shows that being black and a Muslim, and writing fiction about it in a predominantly white society, may prove to be positive assets when critics with a cultural capital that qualifies them as literary judges applaud the work as interesting and important. If an author with a migrant background and roots in a culture traditionally seen as alien to white European culture, such as African cultures, successfully writes about the particular experiences of being black Muslim and Swedish, there is nothing to indicate that this author will be marginalised on the literary field (Heith 2016).

However, there are different responses to how to deal with issues such as ethnicity and background. While Arvi Perttu and Mohamed Hassan seem to wish for more visibility of the authors with a minority and migrant background, there are also those who wish to dismiss the category of ethnicity altogether. In an essay from 2005, the Swedish writer Astrid Trotzig critically examines categorisations such as 'suburban novel' ('förortsroman') and 'immigrant literature' ('invandrarlitteratur', Trotzig 2005). The essay is included in a volume about Orientalism in Sweden and it is presented as an example of how authors with an immigrant background are exoticised and

othered in Swedish mainstream culture (Matthis ed. 2005).¹ But, there are also diametrically different responses to terms such as ‘immigrant writer’. Finnish Zinaida Lindén, for example, who has been described in reviews as an immigrant author, does not perceive this label negatively, declaring that ‘I’m definitely an immigrant author’ (Hämäläinen 2005).

There are many examples of successful author’s with a minority background, and experiences of migration, who extensively use themes related to migration and minority status in their work (Heith 2004, Heith 2012, Heith 2014). In fact, this forms a body of literature which transforms national literatures in both Finland and Sweden by introducing new perspectives, themes and modes of writing. It is obvious that themes like ethnicity, race, cultural – and not least religious – diversity, cultural encounters, as well as issues of transforming identities, home and belonging are explored in contemporary Finnish and Swedish literature related to experiences of minority status and migration. Backdrop of this volume is the fact that nations are transformed and that this calls for new modes of writing. The volume brings together researchers from various countries doing research on intersections between cultural transformations, transnationalism and migration in Finland and Sweden.

The focus of the contributions is contemporary fiction relating to experiences of transnational migration and changing borders as in the case of the Karelian migration to Finland. Other central themes are cultural transformations related to the displacement of groups of people and the emergence of new cultural forms. Migratory flows are discussed below in the section ‘Migration to Sweden and Finland: Refugees and labour immigrants’. Migration and cultural diversity are central themes of this volume, but it must be kept in mind that neither migration, nor cultural diversity, are new phenomena. A study of multicultural Sweden claims that Sweden, historically, has never been as cosmopolitan as it was in the 17th century, when political debates were held in Low German, Dutch and Swedish (Svanberg & Runblom 1990, 9).

The development of a body of literature by authors with experiences of transnational migration has been different in Sweden and Finland. In Sweden, this kind of literature has been part of the literary field since World War II, while in Finland this cultural phenomenon has become visible only during the last decades. As mentioned above, the aim of this volume is to offer perspectives on transformations of the nation, which occur when the Finnish and Swedish society and culture are narrated by transnational migrants, or citizens with an immigrant background.

1 Also see Magnus Nilsson’s study *Den föreställda mångkulturen. Klass och etnicitet i svensk samtidsprosa* (Nilsson 2010). Nilsson dismisses studies of ethnicity while proposing that class is a more relevant category to investigate. This perspective is not relevant for this volume, although Satu Gröndahl discusses ethnicity *and* class as relevant categories for analysing literature relating to the migration of Finnish labourers to Sweden.

Some Reflections upon Terminology

The time span in focus for this volume is the period after World War II. Naturally, the terminology for categorising and analysing literature related to migration has changed during the decades. Today there are a number of concepts and theories for analysing this literature. Concepts such as ‘multicultural literature’, ‘postcolonialism’, ‘transculturalism’, ‘transnationalism’, ‘migrant writer’, ‘migration literature’ and ‘migratory aesthetics’ are problematized in contemporary literary theory. The abundance of terms demonstrates that the concepts connected with immigration are socially and politically charged. For instance, the concept of ‘immigrant literature’ has been contested and new terms have been proposed. As the diametrically opposite views of the authors Astrid Trotzig and Zinaida Lindén concerning the terms ‘immigrant literature’ and ‘immigrant author’ mentioned above show, there are different responses to terminology and there is no consensus that terms like ‘immigrant literature’ or ‘migrant literature/s’ *per se* are essentialising or marginalising.

In some of the case-studies the term ‘migrant literature’ is used. However, the term ought to be used with caution. Merolla and Ponzanesi highlight problematic aspects of the term, such as the issue of when an individual ceases to be a migrant (Ponzanesi & Merolla 2005, 25). Still, Merolla and Ponzanesi themselves use the term ‘migrant literatures’. Another potential problem with the term is its vagueness when used in an extended fashion for designating migration in a symbolic sense. If everybody experiencing flux and transformation is seen as a migrant, the term is no longer useful for categorisations of specific forms of literature. The articles of this volume deal with various forms of migration in a literal sense; thus, when considering the thematics, the terms ‘migrant literature’ or ‘migration literature’ are relevant. The term ‘migration literature’ has been proposed in order to define imaginative writing by *textual*, *thematic* and *stylistic* criteria (Gebauer & Schwartz Lausten 2010, 4).

In social and literary theory, new concepts that attempt to describe the migratory phenomenon, at the same time avoiding the concepts of ‘immigrant’, ‘migrant’ or ‘migration’, are constantly being proposed. For example, Simon Harel, among others, prefers the term ‘*postexilic writing*’ instead of migrant writing (see Lindberg 2013, 16.). This resembles an older term, *exile literature*, which describes the mental, political and social process of migration and writing literature in exile. Furthermore, Anders Olsson has underlined that modern ‘exile literature’ is intimately connected to a wide and sophisticated understanding of ‘world literature’, written by trans-border authors who do not ‘have a specific national foothold’ (Olsson 2011, 186).

Migrants oscillate between nations, cultures and languages, their presence can thus be seen as a questioning of the supposedly homogeneous nature of nations, cultures and languages. This view has gained ground in the discussions of postcolonial theory concerning alternative spaces, a third space, and contact zones. In the essay ‘The Commitment to Theory’, Homi K. Bhabha discusses ‘the Third Space’ as a ‘contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation’, which destabilises the ‘the narrative of the Western nation’

Migrants and Literature in Finland and Sweden presents new comparative perspectives on transnational literary studies. This collection provides a contribution to the production of new narratives of the nation. The focus of the contributions is contemporary fiction relating to experiences of migration.

When people are in motion, it changes nations, cultures and peoples. The volume explores the ways in which transcultural connections have affected the national self-understanding in the Swedish and Finnish context. It also presents comparative aspects on the reception of literary works and explores the intersectional perspectives of identities including class, gender, ethnicity, 'race' and disability.

This volume discusses multicultural writing, emerging modes of writing and generic innovations. Further, it also demonstrates the complexity of grouping literatures according to nation and ethnicity. This collection is of particular interest to students and scholars in literary and Nordic studies as well as transnational and migration studies.

Editors of the anthology are PhD Satu Gröndahl, Associate Professor in Finno-Ugric Languages and researcher at the Hugo Valentin Centre at Uppsala University and PhLic Eila Rantonen, researcher at the University of Tampere.



STUDIA FENNICA
LITTERARIA 11
ISBN 978-952-222-992-2
32.21
www.finlit.fi/kirjat