

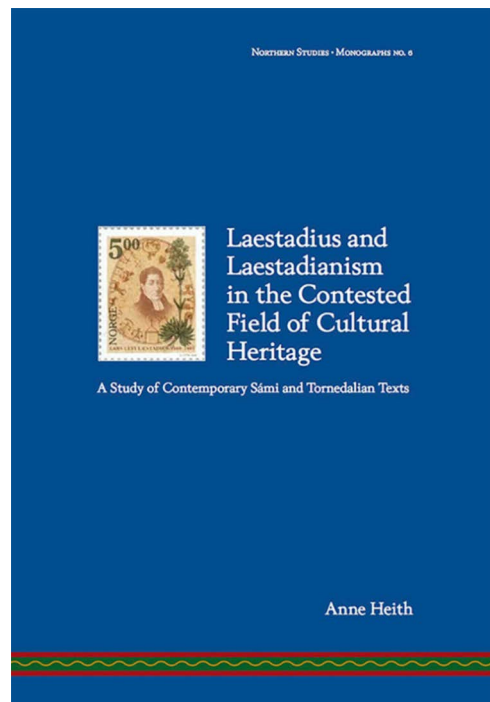
Laestadius, Laestadianism and contemporary Sami and Tornedalian literature

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Anne Heith, **Laestadius and Laestadianism in the Contested Field of Cultural Heritage: A Study of Contemporary Sámi and Tornedalian Texts** (Umeå University, 2018), 249 pp.

Anne Heith's latest book *Laestadius and Laestadianism in the Contested Field of Cultural Heritage: A Study of Contemporary Sámi and Tornedalian Text* came out in 2018. The volume is based on the outcome of a project entitled 'Decolonisation and Revivalism: The Role of Laestadianism in Contemporary Sámi and Tornedalian Text'. The volume is a continuation of the subject that she worked on in the aftermath of the project 'Tornedalian Textual Landscapes' under the auspices of the University of Tromsø between 2008–11. This time she discusses the uses of local-historical subject matters in the creation of Sami and Tornedalian anti-colonial narratives against the background of colonialism and the cultural homogenization which we can link to the cultural homogenization characteristic of modern nation building. These issues have been problematized in literature and cultural studies related to ethnic minorities all over the world during the last 25 years, including the Nordic countries.



Anne Heith's book is a comprehensive study of Sami and Tornedalian literature in the context of Laestadius and Laestadianism in the northern part of Sweden. Lars Levi Laestadius was a charismatic minister of the National Swedish Lutheran Church who had a special status among the Kvens, Sami people and Tornedalians. Historical and sociological circumstances enabled him and his movement to gain a special

foothold among the minorities in the North Calotte. In the beginning of the study Heith brings up several researchers in the study of religion, culture and history and discusses their presentations of Laestadius and Laestadianism. For the reader this is an essential introduction to the topic of the study. It provides insight into the Laestadian movement and the power it has held in the North Calotte for the last 175 years. Although the movement started in Sweden, it quickly spread to Finland and Norway. In Sweden Laestadianism especially attracted followers among the Sami and Finnish-speaking minorities (Tornedalians), while in Norway it spread among the Sami and Kvens. In Sweden and Norway, these minorities were considered alien elements in the nation state and in the context of homogenizing nation building. Laestadius acknowledged them by preaching to them in their own language. As we know today, language is an important part of the ethnic and cultural identity of suppressed minorities.

In her book, Heith exposes different points of view in several Sami and Tornedalian authors' productions. She bases her study on postcolonial studies, which works effortlessly. She incorporates the ideas of acknowledged theoreticians such as Homi K. Bhabha, Gayatri C. Spivak, Bart Moore-Gilbert and the anthology *Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (Routledge, 2009) by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. Even though these theories work in her study, they do not result in new interpretations. Throughout the last twenty years a wide range of research has been published all over the world, including the Nordic countries, which are based on the works of the previously-mentioned theorists. Therefore, I miss a critical approach in Heith's use of the postcolonial theories. In addition to postcolonial theories and

cultural studies, Heith uses narratology as a methodological tool in the analysis to reach levels that would otherwise be difficult to obtain. However, it would have been useful if the author had given short introductions to narratological terms, such as *focalization*. This term, from Gérard Genette, is obvious to literary scholars, but not necessarily to other readers. Despite my criticism, Heith's choice of using postcolonial theories combined with narratology as a methodological approach works. In short, the material that was analysed in her study is seen as performances of heritage from the vantage points of anti- and postcolonial studies, critical race and whiteness theory and ethno-futurism.

The point of view for the analysis is the use of history in constructions of cultural heritage. The term 'cultural heritage' is also mentioned in the title of the volume. However, how she defines 'cultural heritage', is quite unclear throughout her study. I miss a more accurate definition of cultural heritage and a discussion about it for a couple of reasons. Firstly, cultural heritage is usually considered as something we have inherited, a legacy of physical essences and intangible features of a group or society that is inherited from past generations. Cultural heritage is not, however, a stable essence, but a process and construction, as Heith also explains, briefly referring to Laurajane Smith (p. 24). Secondly, it would have been useful for the analysis if Heith had problematized the concept 'cultural heritage' more clearly in the sense of a deconstruction of the concept which started around the beginning of this millennium. That happened partly because of issues concerning minority and indigenous people and partly as a consequence of an increasing popularity of postcolonial theories in other fields than literature research. The question of cultural heritage is especially important

for ethnic minorities since it can define their identity and uniqueness in comparison with other groups, as also comes out in Heith's study. After all it is important to point out that cultural heritage is not, as Rodney Harrison expresses it in his book *Heritage: Critical Approaches* (Routledge, 2013): '... a "thing" or historical movement, but refers to a set of attitudes to, and relationship with, the past' (p. 14).

Heith has chosen several Sami and Tornedalian authors and their works as the primary material, including Bengt Pohjanen, Sara Ranta-Rönnlund, Björn-Erik Höijer, Annika Korpi, Stina Aronson and Mikael Niemi. She views the Laestadian revivalist movement through several vantage points. She argues clearly that there is no united narrative of Laestadius and Laestadianism. Right here we see the strength of her analysis. Heith shows that she has a broad knowledge of Laestadianism and Tornedalian literature and manages to exemplify several contrary and conflicting narratives about Laestadius, Laestadianism and Laestadians. The volume clearly highlights presentations of Laestadius's role as a champion of the poor and ethnic minorities, and as a social reformer in the North Calotte, but also his role as a grave plunderer who engaged in the sale of Sami skulls. Other presentations she discusses widely include how authors describe Laestadianism as a revival movement. There is a big difference between texts of authors who grew up inside the movement and within the ethnic group (*insider narratives*, e.g., Pohjanen, Ranta-Rönnlund) and those who are outsiders (Höijer, Aronson) who describe Laestadianism and Laestadians in altogether negative terms. She also discusses gender structures in Sami literature and how the Korpela movement is presented in Tornedalian literature.

The primary material clearly highlights the main themes of the study. However, I have a couple of critical comments on Heith's choice of secondary material. While reading her study, I started to wonder why she didn't connect Tornedalian literature to Kven literature. When she introduces the Tornedalian culture and Laestadianism, she utilises Norwegian researchers and brings out similarities between the Tornedalians and Kvens. In my opinion, it would have been natural to also include Kven literature in her study. The Kven authors have been concerned with the same problems as Tornedalian authors, such as language issues, cultural self-understanding, counter-narratives and Laestadianism. I find this especially important, because in minority-political discussions these two people identify with each other. In the context of art, it could also be interesting to mention two Norwegian artists who have used Laestadianism as a theme in their works: the Kven-born photographer Kåre Kivijærvi and Sami painter Odd Marakatt Sivertsen.

My other comment is related to how Heith expounds the relationship between a Laestadian father and his son(s), and how this relationship is depicted in literature and films. I agree that the character of abusive and tyrannical father has become a literary topos in negatively-inflected descriptions of Laestadianism. In my opinion, the interpretation of the Laestadian father in Tornedalian literature is accurate, but I find the examination of the popular Finnish film *Pahat pojat* (Bad boys) in this context problematic. As I see it, the only link between the film and Sami and Tornedalian literature and culture is that the father in the story is Laestadian. Heith devotes too much space to this movie, where a footnote would have sufficed in what is already a substantial volume.

In the end, though, Anne Heith's book is an enjoyable read which explores a vast expanse of Sami and Tornedalian culture and literature. It gives a good description of the situation for minorities in the North Calotte and why Laestadius and Laestadianism have played a such big role in minority culture, art and literature in the northern part of Sweden, while at the same time presenting differing vantage points in presentations of Laestadius, Laestadianism and Laestadians. First and foremost, her study is based on literature research and analysis of fiction, although she discusses other forms of art such as paintings and movies. She utilises postcolonial theories and narratology throughout the whole project of the research, which makes this book a coherent study. I will not be surprised if the volume will find its way onto reading lists for courses on Sami and Tornedalian literature in Sweden in the coming years. ■

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