

JYRKI NUMMI

Foreword

When the project of publishing *Joutsen / Svanen*, an electronic journal of Finnish literary studies, began four years ago, the goal was clear enough: to prepare three volumes in three languages commonly used in the field, namely Finnish, Swedish and English. In addition to the three different channels, there was, of course, another substantial goal: to present the diverse fields of interest in Finnish literary studies, wherever it is conducted.

As the idea of publishing an entire volume in English took shape in the electronic Finnish Classics Library (Suomalainen klassikkokirjasto), we sharpened the focus so as to produce a volume featuring only those scholars working outside Finnish universities. We also thought that it would be a good idea to have an editor who works at a non-Finnish university and whose career is long enough to have both a sufficient network and the necessary distance to Finnish academic life. The editor's job was taken by Harri Veivo, who has worked in France for many years, first in Paris and currently in Caen. The harvest of academics was collected, and researchers from the US, Germany and Sweden contributed articles on diverse topics as well as reports on education and research conducted through the Finnish programmes at German, Polish and Czech universities.

To conduct research in different languages inevitably leads to different approaches. Researchers writing in Finnish and Swedish usually work within two partly separate traditions, which also means they face different problems and use different data within the field of Finnish literature, though these researchers largely share the same semiosphere. The most important characteristic of research written in English is that it is specifically addressed to non-Finnish and non-Swedish speakers, and the exploration of the problems, the data and tradition has to be presented on a different level and often from a different angle to that seen in papers or books written in Finnish or Swedish. Harri Veivo presents some of these characteristic problems in his introduction below.

Finnish studies programmes abroad are, naturally, foreign-language programmes, and research interests outside Finnish academia are at least partly determined by their domestic contexts. The most striking example, perhaps, is the exceptional status *Kalevala* receives in the Finnish Studies programmes at American universities, whereas at Finnish universities *Kalevala* may well find its way on to a reading list of obligatory classics, but is hardly taught as a separate course in literary programmes.

Prestige is a decisive factor driving the visibility of a language in the global literary market. While the valuable assets of a given literary tradition may be internationally successful bestsellers, the real diamonds are a language's universally recognised classics. This explains, for instance, the high status of French literature, but it also provides an explanation for the fact that Scandinavian literatures are, internationally speaking,

more valuable research objects than Finnish literature. Norwegian, Swedish and Danish each have at least one larger than life classic author (Ibsen, Strindberg and Kierkegaard respectively), names powerful enough to provide research fields of their own. *Kalevala*, the only genuinely international success story of Finnish literary culture, is acknowledged in folklore studies, but the epic does not take us very far in the field of literary studies, which is characteristically author-centric: who is Elias Lönnrot? Edith Södergran may be the brightest star of Modernist Finnish literature, but her reputation outside Finland lies within the purview of Nordic interests. Given the international mobility of our researchers, the years to come may witness a change in the overall scene. The work of Sofi Oksanen and Monika Fagerholm – to mention but two of our internationally successful authors – may yet produce much long-standing research interest due to the international themes that their works explore.

The present volume presents the work of researchers who have a lively connection to Finnish literary studies. They remind us that even a small number of enthusiastic researchers working abroad can make a valuable contribution to the field.

Author

Jyrki Nummi
Editor-in-Chief