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Yrjö Varpio and Maria Zadencka (eds.): *National Identities at the literary Field. Literatur und nationale Identität III. Zur Literatur und Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts im Ostseeraum: Finnland, Estland, Lettland, Litauen und Polen*. Stockholm 2000, 339 p. (= Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis: Studia Baltica Stockholmiensia 22).

For the last decades the global scale, regions and locality may have driven past nation-states as the meaningful, or better said popular, contexts for understanding contemporary societies. Nations are forced to collaborate and to become accustomed to stronger external forces which earlier would not be thought of at all. However the nation-states are neither becoming extinct nor the research work done upon them diminishing. What comes to the research literature, on the contrary? The sociologists and historians have tackled upon different questions concerning the theme even more than before. The other context-options have brought new relevancy for understanding what actually was and is a nation-state and how its main uniting force, nationalism, has evolved.

An international project *Literatur und nationale Identität* looks forward for understanding nationalism in the Baltic Sea region's context concentrating especially on Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. After publishing article collections firstly on methodology and concepts for researching national literature and secondly on the themes of national literatures, the project has now advanced to its third publication which introduces presentations of a conference *Literatur und nationale Identität III. Zur Literatur und Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts im Ost-seeraum: Finnland, Estland, Lettland, Litauen und Polen*, in September 1998 at Stockholm-Runö.

Why to give such an important role for the literature – or actually for five different national literatures? The editors cite poet Czeslaw Milosz for pointing out that these nations are “born out of literature”, meaning that the relationship between culture, ideology and political and social life has been exceptionally intense. However, this is not a novelty of the five mentioned nations. A similar answer can be given for other national histories, but still their developments and crucial events would differ strongly. What comes to the Baltic Sea region one may continue that the cultural politicisation took place in considerable measures in literary field: the main theme for all of these nationalist movements was the national language, which got its arena and approval in national literature during the 19th century. The written and printed form was the most important channel for expressing the national feelings and culture.

The researchers have named three central questions for this collection: firstly the invented tradition – how history was mythologised for the use of nationalism; secondly the context for the national literature – what kind of ideas influenced on them and where did these ideas originally come from; thirdly what kind of picture the national literature gave about the nation and its development. As the unifying national literatures are at the core of these

articles, the researchers give their approval especially for Benedict Anderson's concept of imagined communities, and cite also Eric J. Hobsbawm for invented traditions. The articles follow Anderson also in placing Christianity and nationalism at the same cultural level: if Christianity, the earlier main cultural context, had its own holy texts, the new nationalisms would follow the same rationality for expressing their rights to exist and spread. Jaan Undusk presents the discussion concerning the holy language: how different national movements wanted to prove that their own language was the one and the right language for national movement. Later Maria Zadencka wonders if nationalism was a part of the secularisation or more likely the sacralisation of the "idea of the nation".

The collection is divided in two parts. In the first part the writers ponder on how the nationalism and nations were constructed by the literature. The theme 'mythology against history' is given the central stand. Undusk gives the main outlines in the first article when remarking how a written form of a national language was and still is understood to be a necessity for creating a modern nation.

In the 19th century national epics had a central place when expressing cultures' or languages' rights to exist. They would prove it by finding the original and mythical beginning for the nation. However both Undusk and Ea Jansen show in the Estonian context how difficult it would be to create this kind of an epic tale: the traditional poetry and storytelling of the peasants were not part of the high elite academic culture, where the first waves of nationalism dwelled. At the same time the poetry and storytellers were vanishing and collectors were left with unfinished stories. The full text and connections between different parts had to be arranged or even altogether newly created. Undusk does not see this as a negative falsification but as a normal procedure: how the past is always interpreted and used for the current time – a phenomena that took also place in all other cultures discussed here.

Janina Kursite and Audrone Zentelyte show still a different kind of problem both for Latvia and Lithuania. As both areas had been influenced by two important political powers, namely Russian and German, as Polish and international German and French elite cultures have left their signs to the local culture and as the areas included many different subcultures, a creation for one unifying national epic or culture seemed impossible. For supporting these national movements one had to blur the national cultures' borders both in accepting some outside influences but also in diminishing some local cultural traits. This multinationalism, different cultural influences and how they were handled upon rise as the main theme of the whole collection.

Most of the articles are situated comfortably in the field of the intellectual history, but Yrjö Varpio makes an exception by examining the 19th century Finnish reading books for schools and how they presented or actually propagated the Finnish nationalism. Varpio's article reminds how books may have a deep social reception, "a social history of ideas" as book historian Robert Darnton says it, outside highly intellectual academic life. Through these school books and their presentations one can clearly see the birth of

an imagined community.

The second part discusses about connections and confrontations: how the different national cultures saw, influenced and competed with each other. Quite surprisingly the political aspects and Russia's power have a diminished role, although naturally indispensable to note in some articles. Clearly writers have not sought to write a political history, although it could have been lifted up as even the central theme and has its connections to literature history. But at the same times this omission gives room for rarer and fresher topics. Finland, Baltic countries and Poland are not diminished to one unity as minor western parts of Russia, seeking one way or the other to their own independence. Room is given also to such themes as how all these different cultures understood each other, influenced to each other, how the strong German culture lived in Baltic countries, and how they all sometimes worked against each other.

It becomes clear that the question is not just between different national cultures, but in fact all countries had numerous smaller cultural groups and identities and still the differences and contradictions were not only cultural or even political, but also social. In the beginning of the 19th century the main high cultural identity was certainly the German-Baltic culture, but even then Leena Lukas shows how diversified the actors could be in that group and how these writers varying according places and times would create different opinions and images about Estonian and Latvian cultures and identities. A good example of these different opinions is also given in Gert von Pistohlkors' article, where he presents the vast amount of Baltic, German-Baltic and Russian newspapers and journals and their views of national cultures and their propagation.

The best continuation between articles takes place at the end of the book as Pavel Lavrinec, Mieczyslaw Jackiewicz and Eugeniusz Klin discuss about the foreign influences of Lithuanian nationalism, mostly from the Russian and Polish point of view. The reader is given a complicated picture of Lithuanian-Polish intelligentsia: how it evolved through 19th century and how the strong neighbourhood cultures and political powers saw, supported or acted against it. At the same time the reader is brought back to the question of how to use literature and national history as a tool for nationalism's propagation or suppressing it and how multicultural influences were handled upon.

The article collection covers a wide area of national cultures and themes in great variety. It is not an overview, but as such very interesting: each reader may find some familiar texts according his or her own background, but surely finds also altogether new themes. However the collection misses comparative articles or an epilogue that would knit different themes and national histories together.

This leads to the question if this region's (if there is one) history of the 19th century (or any other period) should be written together? A question that can be partly answered with saying that it has already been done, but still article collections like this only collect separate writings together: a regional point of view is quite rare. In the end, if we follow the logic of the nationalism's history, we may even remark that the contemporary effort of

creating a unified Baltic Sea region and Northern Dimension of the European Union would need a common history. At least one can state that the co-operation between researchers of neighbourhood countries is fruitful, as this project and its publications have shown.

For the last one may notice the rising importance of the German language in the Baltic Sea region. In this collection all but one article are presented in German, although the book itself is printed in Finland and published in Stockholm University's series (as such a remarkable example of an international book-project). As the scholars of Baltic countries and Poland have begun to present their topics more frequently in the Baltic Sea context, their old main high cultural language German rises again as an international language around the Baltic Sea.

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