

# THE ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF LITERARY TRANSLINGUALISM

*Edited by Steven G. Kellman and Natasha Lvovich*

First published 2022

ISBN: 978-0-367-27918-9 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-032-07715-4 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-0-429-29874-5 (ebk)

## 13

### NORDIC LITERARY TRANSLINGUALISM

*Julie Hansen and Helena Bodin*

CC-BY-NC-ND

DOI: 10.4324/9780429298745-13

The funder for chapter 13 is Uppsala Universitet.



**Routledge**  
Taylor & Francis Group  
NEW YORK AND LONDON

# 13

## NORDIC LITERARY TRANSLINGUALISM

*Julie Hansen and Helena Bodin*

Despite its peripheral place on the world map, the Nordic region has always been a crossroads of cultures and languages. The sparse populations of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden belie a diversity of languages and dialects, as well as complex linguistic situations.<sup>1</sup> Due to colonization, migration, and trade, the languages spoken and written around the Baltic Sea have always extended beyond national borders.

The languages of the Nordic countries today belong to three different families: Scandinavian (Danish, Faroese, Icelandic, Norwegian, and Swedish), Finno-Ugric (Finnish and Sámi), and Inuit-Yupik-Unangan (Greenlandic). At various points in history, other Germanic, Romance, and Slavic languages have traveled there over the Baltic and North Seas. More recently, labor and refugee immigration have added new languages to the mix, including Arabic, Farsi, Kurdish, Somali, Thai, and Turkish. In addition to indigenous and minority languages, approximately 200 languages from around the world are spoken in the Nordic region today (Grønn 4).

The Nordic countries are home to a multitude of dialects that live on despite the homogenizing influence of mass media, and these are reflected in literature as well. The Swedish writer Kerstin Ekman (b. 1933) weaves the dialect of the Jämtland province into her novel *Guds barmhärtighet* (1999, *God's Mercy*), while the Finland-Swedish poet Ralf Andtbacka (b. 1963) makes creative use of the Ostrobothnian dialect in his collection *Wunderkammer* (2008, *Cabinet of Curiosities*).

The long history of Nordic multilingualism includes the codification of Danish, Finnish, Icelandic, Norwegian, and Swedish as national languages, as well as the colonization of the Faroe Islands, Greenland, and Sápmi. A particular feature of this region is pluricentricity, i.e., the geographical spread of different variants of the same language, such as with the two variants of standard Swedish used in Finland and Sweden. Shifting borders, politics, and social processes have all shaped language use over time and led to the pluralism that characterizes the region today. After a brief overview of contemporary linguistic contexts, this chapter will explore Nordic translanguaging through literary examples.

### **Contemporary Nordic Language Contexts**

The Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish languages are similar enough to be mutually comprehensible with some effort. By contrast, speakers of these Scandinavian languages must study the more archaic Icelandic and Faroese languages in order to understand them. Finnish belongs to the Finno-Ugric (rather than Scandinavian) language family, which includes Sámi.

Characteristic of Nordic language contexts is parallel lingualism, in which speakers of mutually comprehensible languages each use their own language without code-switching or translation. A good example of the literary potential of this practice is Swedish author Johanna Frid's novel *Nora eller Brinn Oslo brinn* (2018, *Nora, or Burn Oslo Burn*), in which the Swedish narrator obsesses over her Danish boyfriend's Norwegian ex-girlfriend. The narrative uses all three of the characters' languages, leading one reviewer to praise it as a pan-Scandinavian novel (Eriksson, n.p.). Frid debuted with the translingual long poem *Familieepos* (2017, *A Family Epic*), co-authored with Gordana Spasic, the lines of which integrate Swedish and Danish, as well as some English.<sup>2</sup>

Each of the Nordic countries has minority languages, some of which are indigenous and some of which originated from immigrant communities. Several Nordic language communities have been subjected to colonialism, assimilation, discrimination, suppression, and even extinction. Some of these now have minority status, and recent language policies have made them more visible in literature as well as society as a whole. One such example is the novel by Thom Lundberg (b. 1978) *För vad sorg och smärta* (2016, *For What Sorrow and Pain*), which incorporates lexical elements from Romani into the Swedish narrative in a way that enables the reader to learn some Romani words and phrases over the course of the reading process (Wischmann, "Repräsentanz" and "Self-Reflective 'Minority Literature'").

As none of the official languages of the region qualify as world languages, different *linguae francae* have been used throughout history, including Latin, German, Dutch, French, and English. It has been argued that "German influence on Danish, Norwegian and Swedish during the Middle Ages was far more pervasive than the influence of English on these languages in the 20th century" (Runblom 21–22).<sup>3</sup> This is saying a lot, considering the near universality of English as a second language in the Nordic countries today. English is an obligatory school subject, and proficiency is supported by media and internet use, as well as by the influx of Anglophone popular music, television series, and films, which are not dubbed in Scandinavia (except for young children). English is often used alongside official languages in Nordic higher education.

It would be difficult to live monolingually in the Nordic countries today, where playing "bilingual games"—as Doris Sommer calls on readers to do (xii)—is arguably a commonplace of daily life. Considering how languages have always transcended borders in this region, Nordic literatures cannot be sorted into neat categories according to language or nation. For example, Finnish is spoken in Sweden, Swedish in Finland, and Sámi in all three countries of the Scandinavian Peninsula. The nations of the region are brought together by the mutual intelligibility of some of its languages. Yet each of the contemporary Nordic countries has been shaped by distinct language situations and political agendas, past as well as present.

### Nordic Writers Through a Translingual Lens

Four of the most iconic Nordic writers, Henrik Ibsen, August Strindberg, Edith Södergran, and Karen Blixen (pseudonym Isak Dinesen), look different when viewed through a translingual lens. As Juliette Taylor-Batty has shown, multilingualism is at the heart of modernist literature. The period known as the Modern Breakthrough (1870–1905) in Nordic literary history grew out of multilingual European milieus.<sup>4</sup> The founder of modern drama Henrik Ibsen (1828–1906) wrote historical dramas and poems in Norway in the 1850s, when Norwegian was emerging as a national language distinct from Danish and a Norwegian theater was established, with Norwegian actors performing Norwegian plays (Fulsås and Rem 16). From 1864, he spent 27 years in Italy and Germany, where he began to write in a new way that brought his work onto the international stage. Although it is not a translingual text, the production history of Ibsen's play *Et dukkehjem* (1879, *A Doll's House*), first staged in Germany under the title *Nora*, provides an interesting example of how a work of world literature evolved out of translation and reception in multiple languages (Fischer-Lichte, Gronau, and Weiler).

August Strindberg (1849–1912) was a highly productive writer for four decades, beginning in the 1870s. Although he published in many literary genres and also wrote journalistic articles, he is most renowned internationally for his plays. Less known is that fact that Strindberg was a translingual writer and self-translator who wrote some of his works in French and translated others from Swedish to French, exclaiming enthusiastically to a friend that “the brain crackles when the right word is born in the foreign language” (qtd. in Engwall 35). Strindberg had studied French at school, at Uppsala University, and later in Switzerland in the 1880s (Engwall 36–38).

Canonical Swedish literary history tells us that Strindberg lived for a long time in voluntary exile, residing in France, Switzerland, and Germany from 1883. It was not until 1908 that he re-settled in Stockholm for what turned out to be the last four years of his life. When Strindberg’s career is viewed from the perspective of world literature, however, an alternative narrative emerges—one in which the young and confident Strindberg abandons his native Sweden in order to seek literary fame in Paris. He can be said to have been operating within what Pascale Casanova calls the paradigm of *littérisation*, in which higher literary status is attained through “translation, self-translation, transcription, direct composition in the dominant language—by means of which a text from a literarily deprived country comes to be regarded as literary by the legitimate authorities” (136). Strindberg’s literary use of French was motivated by his idea of it as *the* universal language that every Swede should know besides their mother tongue (Strindberg, “Nationalitet och svenskhet” 126).<sup>5</sup> In letters to friends in 1885, Strindberg declared his intent never to become a French writer or a Frenchman; he was merely using French as a universal language—or, paradoxically, in lieu of a universal language (*Brev* 5: 80, 122).

Strindberg’s self-translations from Swedish to French include three plays: *Fadren* (*Père*; *The Father*), produced with the help of a “Parisian littérateur” (Engwall 38) and published in 1888, with a preface by Émile Zola; *Fördringsägare* (1888, *Créanciers*; *Creditors*); and *Ett drömspel* (*Rêverie* in Strindberg’s 1902 translation; also *Le Songe*; *A Dream Play*). The French manuscripts show him to have been a careful and accurate translator, who followed his Swedish source text closely yet sometimes deliberately francofied the Swedish context as well as characters’ names (Engwall 39–44). Gunnel Engwall notes numerous linguistic errors in Strindberg’s translations, but also an impressive vocabulary. She argues that Strindberg’s texts are as bold in French as they are in Swedish, and that his self-translations helped to ensure a continued audience in France (Engwall 49).

In early 1888, Strindberg completed *Le plaidoyer d’un fou* (*The Confession of a Fool*), his famous hybrid of autobiography, love story, and indictment. The circulation history of this text is intriguing, since Strindberg’s original French manuscript was lost until it resurfaced in Oslo in 1973 (*Le plaidoyer d’un fou* 2: 9). What was published in Paris in 1895 was a radical reworking of Strindberg’s French text by Georges Loiseau (*Le plaidoyer d’un fou* 2: 31–33). There are thus two different French source texts, leading to a complicated chain of translations and receptions in various languages. The original French manuscript was not translated into Swedish until 1976. The autobiographical *Inferno* (1897) and the main part of its sequel *Legender* (1898, *Legends*) were composed in French during a period when Strindberg was staying in southern Sweden; these were translated into Swedish without delay. Strindberg also produced numerous articles in French, published between 1894 and 1902 in the Parisian daily press and cultural journals (Grimal). His oeuvre is thus characterized by a great breadth of genres in both Swedish and French.

The Finland-Swedish modernist poet Edith Södergran (1892–1923) was born and raised in St. Petersburg, Russia. Until her early death from tuberculosis, she lived mostly in the small Karelian town of Raivola, which was part of Finland at the time. Södergran played a central role in the introduction of free verse in Swedish, and her oeuvre is one of the most studied in Nordic literary history. While many scholars have noted Södergran’s multicultural, polyglot background, the particular translingual qualities of her work have been explored in detail by Gisbert Jänicke (1984), who presents her as a poet in two languages, Swedish and German.

From childhood, Södergran spoke Swedish, German, Finnish, and Russian in different contexts, which was not uncommon for this time and place.<sup>6</sup> She attended a German school in St. Petersburg,

learned French at school, and later improved her Finnish. She also studied English and picked up some Italian during her stay at a sanatorium in Davos, Switzerland. She is said to have regarded German and Swedish as her best languages, both of which she likely used with her mother (Jänicke 17–20).

From an early age, Södergran composed poems in notebooks, one of which has been edited and published: *Vaxdukshäftet* (The Oilcloth Notebook), containing poems dated 1907–1909. Of these, 206 are in German, 27 are in Swedish, four in French, and one in Russian (Södergran, *Samlade skrifter* 1: 201–352). Most are written in traditional verse forms with typically romantic themes, including a crush on her French teacher. The Russian poem, “Tikho, tikho, tikho” (no. 56, Quiet, quiet, quiet), appears to have been inspired by revolutionary sentiments and depicts the mythical cycles of death–resurrection–death and sowing–harvest (*Samlade skrifter* 3: 456–457). Several poems employ more than one language—for example, the Russian word for kitten, *kotik*, appears in an otherwise German poem (no. 25; other examples are no. 101 and 142). The last poem in German (no. 219) asks: “Ich weiss nicht, wem meine Lieder bringen, / Ich weiss nicht, in wessen Sprache schreiben, / Ich weiss nicht, zu wessen Herzen dringen” (I do not know, to whom to bring my songs, / I do not know, in whose language to write, / I do not know, whose hearts to reach) (*Samlade skrifter* 1: 336–337). Since the subsequent poems are in Swedish (with the exception of one in French), the line about not knowing “in whose language to write” has been taken by some scholars as evidence that Södergran made a conscious decision in September 1909 to switch from German to Swedish as her literary language, but this argument has been convincingly refuted (*Samlade skrifter* 3: 576–577).

Södergran’s first poetry collection, from 1916, appeared in Finland in Swedish, as did her subsequent collections. There is evidence, however, that she continued to write in German, especially in 1921–1923, when she was translating other modernist Finland-Swedish poets’ work into German (Jänicke 67–88). Only a few of her translations from German, French, and Russian were ever published; these were poems by Friedrich Adler, Edmond Fleg, and Igor Severyanin published in Finland-Swedish journals in 1922 (*Samlade skrifter* 3: 607).

Thus, as a poet, Södergran lived and worked beyond any one mother tongue, and beyond a single homeland. Although she had strong ties to Raivola, one of her late poems asks: “Vad är mitt hemland? Är det det fjärran stjärnbeströdda Finland?” (“What is my home country? Is it distant, star-sprinkled Finland?”). The next line answers, “Likgiltigt vad” (“No matter which”), and the poem seems to suggest that the poet needs no homeland (*Samlade skrifter* 1: 141). This cosmopolitan ideal is expressed in the work of other Finland-Swedish modernists as well.

The writer Karen Blixen (1885–1962) grew up in Denmark and spent seventeen years of her adult life in Kenya, which was at that time a British colony (Brantly 13). She pursued a writing career first after her return to Denmark in 1931—not, however, in her native language of Danish but in English, under the pseudonym of Isak Dinesen.<sup>7</sup> Blixen stated that English came naturally after so many years in Kenya (Brantly 13), but there was also an economic incentive: the Anglophone literary market was larger than the Danish one, and having lost her farm in Kenya, Blixen needed income. She explained her use of English as a strategic choice, convinced as she was that *Seven Gothic Tales* (1934) could not succeed in Denmark (Kjældgaard 201). Blixen’s literary style and themes were out of sync with contemporary trends in Denmark—the social realism of the 1930s and postwar modernism. Lasse Horne Kjældgaard notes that Blixen “explicitly did not intend to become a Danish author” (201) and argues that *Seven Gothic Tales* “was born—or constructed—as a world literary classic rather than a work of any national literature” (200).

*Seven Gothic Tales* met with acclaim in the Anglophone world and was subsequently translated and reworked into Danish by the author herself. It was published in Denmark seventeen months later under the name Karen Blixen and the title *Syv fantastiske Fortællinger* (replacing the genre marker “Gothic” with “fantastic”). Until her death in 1962, Blixen continued to write works in English and then translate them into Danish, adapting them to different readerships and sometimes adding new passages to the Danish versions (Brantly 2). Susan Hardy Aiken argues that “we should read ‘Karen

Blixen' and 'Isak Dinesen' as different though intricately intertextual authors" (xxiv). This oeuvre thus offers a rich case study of translingual writing and literary self-translation.

Blixen's second and most internationally popular book, also composed in English, was the autobiographical *Out of Africa* (1937), published almost simultaneously in Denmark, England, Sweden, and the United States to different critical receptions. *Out of Africa* has been criticized by postcolonial scholars, including Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, who writes that its "racism is catching, because it is persuasively put forward with love" (qtd. in Brantly 86). Blixen's depiction of her home country is arguably more subversive of colonial hierarchies. The tales set in Denmark, Kjældgaard notes, "attempt to see Europe through a foreign gaze" (204).

While the works of Ibsen and Strindberg came to be seen as part of world literature through translation and reception in other languages, the work of the novelist, travel writer, poet, essayist, and translator Kjørtan Fløgstad (b. 1944) can be said to follow the reverse trajectory, by bringing elements of world languages into his Norwegian texts. From his vantage point in the *nyorsk* variant of Norwegian,<sup>8</sup> he has integrated Spanish (primarily Central and Latin American), German (of the Nazi period), and Russian (of the Norwegian-Finnish-Russian borderland), along with their cultural and political contexts, into his particular literary world. In this way he enters into an intertextual dialogue with world literature, drawing on works by authors such as Jorge Luis Borges and Julio Cortázar.

As Anne Karine Kleivland has demonstrated, multilingualism has several functions within Fløgstad's aesthetic project, initiated in 1968–1969 with his first two poetry collections, *Valfart* and *Seremoniar* (Pilgrimage; Ceremony). For Fløgstad, it is a means of writing in "a total language" ("et totalt språk"), inspired, as it seems, by Ludwig Wittgenstein as well as Roland Barthes (Kleivland, "Meningspotensialer" 184–187). Consequently, multilingual strategies, often ludic or punning, are essential to Fløgstad's literary style. The two novels *Grense Jakobselv* (2009)—the title of which contains the name of a Norwegian village on the Barents Sea, where Norwegian, Russian, Finnish, and various Sámi languages are spoken daily—and *Nordautpassasjen* (2012, The Northeast Passage), set on several continents, provide rich examples of what Fløgstad himself has called "a world guided by language" ("ei språkstyrt verd") (qtd. in Kleivland, *Den hemmelege* 238). Other works, such as *Pampa Unión* (1994), engage with Spanish within the context of the author's travels to Latin America.

### Language Choices in Postcolonial Contexts

Colonial and postcolonial policies and practices have shaped Faroese, Greenlandic, and Danish writers' language choices. The Faroe Islands were colonized by Denmark already in the fourteenth century but attained self-governance in 1948, at which point Faroese was declared the official language. Greenland was a colony of Denmark from 1721 until 1953, when it became an autonomous province. Suppression of the Greenlandic (Kalaallisut) language through Danification policies continued until self-governance was attained in 1979. Recent language policies in support of Faroese and Greenlandic have contributed to the publication of more literary works in these languages. The population of each is around 50,000, with additionally about 20,000 Greenlanders and 20,000 Faroese living in Denmark. Partly as a result of these demographics, Greenland and the Faroe Islands continue to be part of the Danish literary system alongside their own. Malan Marnersdóttir argues that "one of the main themes in Faroese literature is the relationship with Denmark and Danish culture which covers both opposition to and acceptance of Danish influence on lifestyle and culture" (73).

Different Greenlandic and Faroese authors have made different choices with regard to language. For example, the Faroese author William Heinesen (1900–1991) wrote in what Kirsten Thisted describes as "a rather unusual Danish which to the Danes sounds very 'Faroese'" ("Grey Areas" 48). The poetic language of Carl Jóhan Jensen (b. 1957) plays with the close relation of Faroese to Icelandic and Old Norse (Marnersdóttir 76). The Greenlandic artist and writer Hans Lyngé (1906–1988) wrote his memoirs in Danish and self-translated them into Greenlandic. Greenlanders

Máliaraq Vebæk (1917–2012) and Ole Korneliussen (b. 1947) moved as adults to Denmark but have published works in both Danish and Greenlandic. Bilingual editions are another option, as with Aqqaluk Lynges (b. 1947) Danish/Greenlandic collection *Til hæder og ære/Tupigusullutik angalapput* (1982, In Honor and Glory), which Birgit Kleist Pedersen cites as typical of the genre of rebellion literature aimed at Danish readers (59). The collection *Morgun í mars* (1971, Morning in March) by the first female Faroese poet Gurðið Helmsdal (b. 1941) contains poems in Faroese and Danish. The Greenlandic poet Jessie Kleemann (b. 1959) debuted in 1997 with the collection *Taallat. Digte. Poems* containing original poems in Greenlandic as well as translations (by others) into Danish and English. As Elisabeth Friis has shown, translingual elements in Kleemann's poem "Eskimuuara/Eskimothor" (2012) highlight how the Greenlandic language has been shaped by colonial Danish (Friis 284).

After Danish colonization came to be viewed as negative in the late 1960s, Danish writers were reluctant to write about personal experiences of the Faroe Islands and Greenland (Pedersen 50; Thisted "Hadet i kroppen" 204), but this is changing. An interesting translingual example is Danish writer Lotte Inuk's (b. 1965)<sup>9</sup> autobiographical novel *Sultekunstnerinde* (2004, The Female Hunger Artist), in which the protagonist moves from Denmark to Greenland as a child in 1976 and finds herself at the bottom of the schoolyard pecking order. Although the protagonist does not master the language, Greenlandic words, such as rock lyrics, are woven into the Danish text (Pedersen 53). International readers are more likely to be familiar with Danish writer Peter Høeg (b. 1957) and his bestselling postmodern thriller *Frøken Smillas fornemmelse for sne* (1992, *Smilla's Sense of Snow*), which incorporates isolated Greenlandic words in the Danish text.<sup>10</sup>

### Minority Literatures and Linguistic Pluricentricity

Minority languages have become more visible in Nordic literatures since the turn of the millennium, which saw the ratification of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. This prompted Nordic countries to grant minority status and publication subventions to several languages long spoken in the region, resulting in increased literary production (Gröndahl, "Kven" 82). As Satu Gröndahl observes, although "literature in Finnish and Sami has been written on Swedish territory ever since the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries" ("Multicultural or Multilingual Literature" 188), it is only recently that the Nordic literary canon has been extended beyond monolingual, ethnocentric categories ("Kven" 79).

Denmark has one official language, Danish, and three minority languages: Faroese, German, and Greenlandic. Norway has two official languages, Norwegian and Sámi, and the following minority languages: Kven, Romanes, and Romani. Swedish is the official language of Sweden, which has five minority languages: Finnish, Meänkieli, Romani Chib, Sámi, and Yiddish. Both Finnish and Swedish are the official languages of Finland, while Finnish Sign Language, Karelian, Romani, and Sámi all have minority status.

The pluricentricity of Nordic languages means that some minority literatures can circulate transnationally without translation. Finnish, for example, is both a majority language in Finland and a minority language in Sweden, while the Sápmi region stretches across northern Norway, Finland, Sweden, and Russia. Another interesting case is that of the related languages of Meänkieli in the Tornedalen region of Sweden (classified in Finland as a Northern Ostrobothnian dialect of Finnish), Kven in Norway, Finnish spoken by Sweden-Finns, and standard Finnish. Literature in these languages can potentially reach readers in three different countries without need of translation.<sup>11</sup>

A bestselling novel which deploys Meänkieli along with Finnish and a little Esperanto in the predominantly Swedish text is *Populärmusik från Vittula* (2000, *Popular Music from Vittula*) by the Tornedalian writer Mikael Niemi (b. 1959). This carnivalesque novel narrates the friendship of two

boys growing up in the 1960s and 1970s on the outskirts of Pajala in Northern Sweden.<sup>12</sup> The plot contains linguistic failures as well as discoveries, which all contribute to the humor and magic realism of Niemi's storytelling. In director Reza Bagher's film adaptation of 2004, the characters speak Meänkieli, Swedish, and Finnish and understand each other without difficulty. The same cannot necessarily be said of the film's audience, however, and different parts of the film had to be subtitled for different audiences in Sweden and Finland.

Numerous works make use of Sámi languages in creative ways. Synnøve Persen (b. 1950) publishes her works in Sámi and Norwegian simultaneously (some of the latter in self-translation), and also continues the Sámi tradition of illustrating them herself, thus adding visual language to the whole. The novel-in-verse *Palimpsest* (1987) by Aagot Vinterbo-Hohr (b. 1936) is written in Norwegian, yet "some Sámi words and expressions find their way into the text, and in the end Sámi rather takes over with quotations from another Sámi writer, the lyricist Rauni Magga Lukkari" (Thisted, "Grey Areas" 49).

### Migration's Transformation of the Literary Landscape

Labor migration to Sweden began in the 1940s, to Denmark in the 1950s, and to Norway in the 1960s. In addition to inter-Nordic migration, workers came primarily from the European continent. Since the 1970s, the Nordic countries have received more refugees. Starting in the 1990s, increased globalization brought new migrants from Africa, Asia, and Latin America, as well as from war-torn former Yugoslavia. The percentage of foreign-born residents of the Nordic region is currently higher than ever before (Svanberg 11).

Of all the Nordic countries, Sweden has received proportionally the largest number of immigrants and refugees.<sup>13</sup> Yet long before Sweden's late-twentieth-century transition to a multicultural country, it had been marked by emigration, with around 1.5 million Swedes estimated to have emigrated to North America between 1850 and 1920. This particular kind of immigrant experience was immortalized in the four-part novel suite *Utvandrarna* (1949–1959, *The Emigrants*) by Vilhelm Moberg (1898–1973). Moberg's depiction of the life of Karl Oskar and Kristina as settlers in Minnesota is translingual in that the Swedish-language text contains English words and phrases related to American life. Today numerous translingual writers are injecting the Nordic national canons with new impulses—a development that can be traced back to the early 1970s in Sweden, the mid-1980s in Norway, and the late 1980s or early 1990s in Denmark (Kongslie 35).

Immigrant experiences are often thematicized and problematized in translingual works. A prominent example is the oeuvre of Theodor Kallifatides (b. 1938 in Molai, Greece), a writer whose novels in Swedish have been translated into several languages. Kallifatides moved to Sweden as a student in 1964, due to the political situation in Greece (Wulff). He debuted in Swedish with the poetry collection *Minnet i exil* (1967, *Memory in Exile*) and has published around 30 novels ranging from love stories and detective stories to an adaptation of Homer's *Iliad*.<sup>14</sup> He recently returned to Greek in *Mia zoi akoma* (2016), which he self-translated into Swedish as *Ännu ett liv* (2017; *Another Life*). This autobiographical novel narrates the trauma of not being able to write and depicts emigration as a kind of suicide through loss of language (*Ännu ett liv* 63). Yet the novel ends happily when the author puts down its first five words in his mother tongue of Greek (*Ännu ett liv* 136–137). In the novel *Kärlek och främlingskap* (2020, *Love and Alienation*), Kallifatides revisits his first years in Sweden, narrated here through the eyes of the Greek immigrant Christos, who successfully learns Swedish but senses that his personality changes in the process: "Det räcker inte att lära sig ett språk. Man måste också byta inälvor" ("It's not enough to learn a language. One has to change one's intestines, too") (*Kärlek och främlingskap* 49).

The turn of the millennium saw the debuts of a new generation of translingual writers, who were either born in Sweden or moved there as children. One of the most acclaimed is Jonas Hassen Khemiri (b. 1978), whose debut novel *Ett öga rött* (2003, *One Eye Red*) is a fictional diary kept by the



teenage immigrant Halim, who strives to improve his native Arabic while his father pushes him to learn perfect Swedish. *Ett öga rött* was popular with readers and critics, who focused on its language, described as multi-ethnic youth slang, or “broken Swedish” (Nilsson 50–51; Gröndahl, “Multicultural or Multilingual Language” 182). This “brokenness” is represented as a conscious choice by both the code-switching narrator and the author. As Magnus Nilsson has shown, *Ett öga rött* contains a satirical critique of immigrant literature as a discursive category (50), something which also occurs in the novel *Kalla det vad fan du vill* by Marjaneh Bakhtiari (b. 1980) (2005, Call It Whatever the Hell You Like). Nilsson describes this debut novel as “an example of textual bilingualism,” in which immigrants from Iran and native Swedish characters alike speak with an accent (either foreign or dialectal) (54). Swedish with a foreign accent is also depicted in Khemiri’s second novel *Montecore: En unik tiger* (2006, *Montecore: The Silence of the Tiger*), an epistolary novel in which Tunisian French permeates passages in the Swedish-language text.<sup>15</sup>

Although literary translanguaging in connection with migration has been most prominent in Sweden, examples are to be found in Denmark, Finland, and Norway, as well.<sup>16</sup> Writers in Finland with roots in Russia comprise a special chapter within translingual Nordic literary history. Due to the fact that Finland belonged to the Russian Empire from 1809 to 1917 (previously Finland had been part of Sweden for nearly 700 years), Russian has long been spoken on Finnish territory, and today Russian writers are the most visible of migrant groups on Finland’s literary scene (Heith, Gröndahl, and Rantonen 22). They publish in Russian, for example, in the Finnish-Russian literary magazine *LiteraruS* (literarus.org) edited by the Russian writer Liudmila Kol’. Founded in 2003, *LiteraruS* serves as “a ‘contact zone’ facilitating intercultural exchange in matters of literature, culture and history in Finland and in Russia” (Sorvari, “Native” 65).<sup>17</sup> Russian writers in Finland also publish work in Finnish translation and/or write directly in Finnish and Swedish (Sorvari, “Native”), though most publish in Russian or Finnish. The acclaimed writer Zinaida Lindén (b. 1963) has written all of her novels in her adopted language of Swedish, which is the minority language in Finland,<sup>18</sup> and subsequently self-translated her work into Russian (Hansen; Klapuri; Sorvari, “Altering Language” and “On Both Sides”). The presence of Russian in contemporary Finnish life is also reflected in the novel *Du eller aldrig* (2006, *You or Never*) by Finland-Swedish author Malin Kivelä (b. 1974), who embeds Cyrillic words in the text (Bodin, “Heterographics”).

### Translingual Reading

From early on, waterways have mediated linguistic contacts in the Nordic region. This circumstance is thematized in multilingual works by the Swedish poet and Nobel laureate Tomas Tranströmer (1931–2015), as well as the French-Norwegian poet and sound performance artist Caroline Bergvall (b. 1962), who currently lives in England.

In his long poem *Östersjöar* (1974, *Baltics*), akin to a musical suite in six parts, Tranströmer explores his grandfather’s piloting of the Baltic Sea as a metaphor for reading, writing, and interpreting. The setting is the grandfather’s workplace on a boat in the Stockholm archipelago and the waters between Sweden, Finland, and the Baltic countries. As Markus Huss has shown, the poem contains words in Old Swedish, English, Latin, French, and Old Norse, making partial comprehension—or even incomprehension—a salient feature of the poem. Conversations occur in “misspelled English” (“felstavad engelska”), and the untranslatable script of lichen on the stones of the cemetery of the archipelago folk offers the reader “an unknown tongue” (“ett okänt språk”) written by nature itself (Huss 183, 193).

Bergvall’s multimedial work *Drift* (2014) comprises not only a print book, but also art installations and exhibits, performances, and a 2017 theoretical reflection (Nykqvist 155). The word *drift* occurs in several European languages with connotations of slow movement, such as on currents of water. In Bergvall’s work, the water is the Mediterranean Sea during the disastrous episode of what has come to be called the “left-to-die” boat case, in which only nine of 72 refugees survived after drifting on

the sea for two weeks in Spring 2011. Karin Nykvist examines how Bergvall deploys Old English and Old Norse, as well as a number of multilingual literary devices, such as homophonic associations between languages, stuttering, and deliberate, creative mistranslations of the Old Norse poem *Hávamál* (Nykvist 160) in order to actualize political, philosophical, existential, and ethical problems. In this way, issues of migration, which are front and center in contemporary translingual literature, become grounded in the shared linguistic past of the Nordic region.

The work of the Finland-Swedish poet and performance artist Cia Rinne (b. 1973 in Sweden and raised in Germany) makes creative use of sound, languages, and alphabets. In Rinne's collections, among them *zaroum* (2001), *notes for soloists* (2009), *l'usage du mot* (2017), and *sentences* (2018), readers may construe the poems in multiple languages, such as English, Finnish, German, French, and Spanish. In this way, Rinne's poetry "enacts processes of linguistic bordering," inviting readers to become co-creators of literary multilingualism (Tidigs and Huss 221–222).

It is with readers we choose to conclude this necessarily selective overview of literary translingualism in the Nordic region. In the effort to survey a rich and varied literary landscape, the role of readers is sometimes overshadowed by that of authors and works. As recent works by Nordic scholars of literary translingualism demonstrate, however, readers also play an active part in creating the translingual worlds of contemporary Nordic literatures.<sup>19</sup>

## Notes

- 1 As of 2019, the population of the entire region was just over 27 million.
- 2 Both Frid and Spasic were born in 1988 and grew up in Sweden (Spasic is originally from Belgrade).
- 3 The writer August Strindberg joked that "Swedish is Low German in twelve dialects" (qtd. in Runblom 21).
- 4 The term was coined in 1883 by the Danish critic Georg Brandes.
- 5 In a footnote, Strindberg calls English a non-European, colonial language (*Samlade verk* 17: 126). Many years later, in 1908, Strindberg's dabbling in historical linguistics inspired him to announce cuneiform as a universal language pre-dating Babel, though he still believed French to be a legitimate universal language due to its grammar (*Samlade verk* 66: 752, 843).
- 6 Tito Colliander was another Finland-Swedish writer with a multilingual background (Bodin, "So let me").
- 7 Blixen's chosen pseudonym is translingual, employing the Hebrew word "Isak," which means "the one who laughs" (Brantly 5).
- 8 There are two variants of written Norwegian with equal status as official languages: *bokmål* and *nynorsk*. Bokmål is based on written Danish, which was the official language in Norway from 1380 until Norway's independence from Denmark in 1814. Nynorsk was constructed by the linguist Ivar Aasen in the 1850s, on the basis of Western Norwegian dialects, as an alternative to the Danish-influenced written Norwegian language.
- 9 The author's chosen surname is the Greenlandic word for "a human."
- 10 For critical discussions of Høeg's depiction of the Danish-Greenlander postcolonial situation, see Poddar and Meador; and Thisted "The Power to Represent."
- 11 Meänkieli, which literally means "our language," was previously called Tornedalian Finnish. For a detailed survey (in Swedish) of Meänkieli literature, see Gröndahl, Hellberg, and Ojanen.
- 12 For a discussion of the intercultural theme of this novel, see Gröndahl, "Att bryta på svenska" 62–65.
- 13 19.7% of Sweden's population was foreign-born as of 2020 ("Utrikes födda i Sverige").
- 14 On bilingual transformations in the work of Kallifatides, see Kallan.
- 15 For a discussion of the intercultural aspects of Khemiri's depiction of language in *Montecore*, see Gröndahl, "Att bryta på svenska" 59–62.
- 16 For scholarly works in English on translingual writing in the context of migration in Denmark, Finland, and Norway, see Gaettens; Frank; Gröndahl and Rantonen; Grönstrand, Huss, and Kauranen; and Kongslin.
- 17 *LiteratuS* publishes quarterly issues in Russian, as well as annually in both Finnish and Swedish (Sorvari, "Native" 66).
- 18 Approximately 5% of the current population of Finland have Swedish as a native language (af Hällström-Reijonen, n.p.). On Lindén's work, see Hansen; Sorvari, "Altering Language" and "On Both Sides"; and Klapuri.
- 19 See Grönstrand, Huss, and Kauranen, and the special issue of *Edda: Nordisk tidsskrift for litteraturforskning* 107.3 (2020) (available open access: [www.idunn.no/edda/2020/03](http://www.idunn.no/edda/2020/03)).

## Works Cited

- af Hällström-Reijonen, Charlotta. "Svenska talas också i Finland." Svenska institutet. <https://svenskaspraket.si.se/finlandssvenska>. Accessed 15 Nov. 2020.
- Aiken, Susan Hardy. *Isak Dinesen and the Engendering of Narrative*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990.
- Bodin, Helena. "Heterographics as a Literary Device: Auditory, Visual, and Cultural Features." *Journal of World Literature* 3 (2018): 196–216.
- Bodin, Helena. "'So let me remain a stranger': Multilingualism and Biscrptalism in the Works of Finland-Swedish Writer Tito Colliander." In *The Aesthetics and Politics of Linguistic Borders: Multilingualism in Northern European Literature*, eds. Heidi Grönstrand, Markus Huss, and Ralf Kauranen (London: Routledge, 2020). 242–262.
- Brantly, Susan C. *Understanding Isak Dinesen*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2002.
- Casanova, Pascale. *The World Republic of Letters*. Trans. M. B. Debevoise. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004.
- Engwall, Gunnel. "'Det knastrar i hjärnan'. Strindberg som sin egen franske översättare." In *August Strindberg och hans översättare: föredrag vid symposium i Vitterhetsakademien 8 september 1994*, eds. Björn Meidal and Nils Åke Nilsson (Stockholm: Kungl. Vitterhets-, historie- och antikvitetsakad., 1995). 35–52.
- Eriksson, Therese. "Hon tänker mer på killens ex än på honom själv." Rev. of *Nora eller Brinn Olso brinn*, by Johanna Frid. *Svenska Dagbladet* 5 Nov. 2018. Web. Accessed 8 Nov. 2020.
- Fischer-Lichte, Erika, Barbara Gronau, and Christel Wieler. *Global Ibsen: Performing Multiple Modernities*. London: Routledge, 2001.
- Frank, Søren. "Is There or Is There Not a Literature of Migration in Denmark?" In *Literature, Language, and Multiculturalism in Scandinavia and the Low Countries*, eds. Wolfgang Behschnitt, Sarah De Mul, and Liesbeth Minnaard (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013). 197–223.
- Friis, Elisabeth. "The Permeable Border: Anxieties of the Mother Tongue in Contemporary Nordic Poetry." In *The Aesthetics and Politics of Linguistic Borders: Multilingualism in Northern European Literature*, eds. Heidi Grönstrand, Markus Huss, and Ralf Kauranen (London: Routledge, 2020). 278–299.
- Fulsås, Narve and Tore Rem. *Ibsen, Scandinavia and the Making of a World Drama*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.
- Gaetens, Dörthe. "NewVoices Wanted: The Search for a Danish Multicultural Literature." In *Literature, Language, and Multiculturalism in Scandinavia and the Low Countries*, eds. Wolfgang Behschnitt, Sarah De Mul, and Liesbeth Minnaard (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013). 63–96.
- Grimal, Sophie. "Strindberg dans la presse française 1894–1902." In *Strindberg et la France: douze essais*, ed. Gunnel Engwall (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1994). 65–67.
- Gröndahl, Satu. "'Att bryta på svenska utan att vara svensk.' Språket och den interkulturella litteraturen." In *Revitalisera mera! En artikelsamling om den språkliga mångfalden i Norden tillägnad Leena Huss*, eds. Ulla Börestam, Satu Gröndahl, and Boglárka Straszer (Uppsala: Uppsala universitet, 2008). 56–69.
- Gröndahl, Satu. "Från Fångarnas kör till Svinälängorna: Kvinnliga erfarenheter i den interkulturella svenska litteraturen." In *Genusvetenskapliga litteraturanalyser*, eds. Åsa Arping and Anna Nordenstam (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2010). 235–245.
- Gröndahl, Satu. "Kven, Tornedal and Sweden-Finnish Literature at the Turn of a New Millennium." In *Nordic Voices: Literature from the Nordic Countries*, ed. Jenny Fossum Grønn (Oslo: Nordbok, 2005). 78–91.
- Gröndahl, Satu. "Multicultural or Multilingual Literature: A Swedish Dilemma?" In *Literature for Europe?*, eds. Theo D'haen and Iannis Goerlandt (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009). 173–195.
- Gröndahl, Satu, Matti Hellberg, and Mika Ojanen. "Den tornedalska litteraturen." In *Litteraturens gränsland: Invandrar- och minoritetslitteratur i nordiskt perspektiv*, ed. Satu Gröndahl (Uppsala: Centrum för multietnisk forskning, 2002). 139–170.
- Gröndahl, Satu and Eila Rantonen, eds. *Migrants and Literature in Finland and Sweden*. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2018.
- Grønn, Jenny Fossum, ed. *Nordic Voices: Literature from the Nordic Countries*. Oslo: Nordbok, 2005.
- Grönstrand, Heidi, Markus Huss, and Ralf Kauranen, eds. *The Aesthetics and Politics of Linguistic Borders: Multilingualism in Northern European Literature*. London: Routledge, 2020.
- Hansen, Julie. "En flerspråkig värld på svenska. Språkliga diskrepanser i Zinaida Lindéns roman *För många länder sedan*." *Edda: Nordisk tidskrift för litteraturforskning* 107.3 (2020): 211–223.
- Heith, Anne, Satu Gröndahl, and Eila Rantonen. "Introduction: 'The Minoritarian Condition.' Studies in Finnish and Swedish Literatures after World War II." In *Migrants and Literature in Finland and Sweden*, eds. Satu Gröndahl and Eila Rantonen (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2018). 11–33.
- Huss, Markus. "'Conversations in misspelled English': Partial Comprehension and Linguistic Borderlands in Tomas Tranströmer's *Östersjöar. En diket (Baltics)*." In *The Aesthetics and Politics of Linguistic Borders: Multilingualism in Northern European Literature*, eds. Heidi Grönstrand, Markus Huss, and Ralf Kauranen (London: Routledge, 2020). 176–198.

- Jänicke, Gisbert. *Edith Södergran: Diktare på två språk*. Helsingfors: Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland, 1984.
- Kallan, Monika. "Leaving, Losing, Letting Go: Some Steps in Bilingual Transformations in the Work of Theodor Kallifatides." In *Modern Greek Literature: Critical Essays*, eds. Gregory Nagy and Anna Stavropoulou (New York: Routledge 2003). 137–157.
- Kallifatides, Theodor. *Ännu ett liv*. Stockholm: Bonniers, 2017.
- Kallifatides, Theodor. *Kärlek och främlingskap*. Stockholm: Bonniers, 2020.
- Kjældgaard, Lasse Horne. "Out of Africa, into World Literature." In *Danish Literature as World Literature*, eds. Dan Ringgaard and Mads Rosendahl Thomsen (New York: Bloomsbury, 2017). 193–208.
- Klapuri, Tintti. "Literary St. Petersburg in Contemporary Russian Transnational Writing: Anya Ulinich, Gary Shteyngart, and Zinaida Lindén." *Scando-Slavica* 62.2 (2016): 235–248.
- Kleveland, Anne Karine. *Den hemmelege jubelen i denne forma: Spanskspråklig kultur og flerspråklighet i Kjartan Fløgstads forfatterskap*. Diss. Trondheim: Norges teknisk-naturvitenskapelige universitet, 2017.
- Kleveland, Anne Karine. "Meningspotensialer og lesningens *panta rhei*-prinsipp. Flerspråklighet hos Kjartan Fløgstad." *Edda: Nordisk tidsskrift for litteraturforskning* 107.3 (2020): 182–195.
- Kongslie, Ingeborg. "Migrant or Multicultural Literature in the Nordic Countries." In *Nordic Voices: Literature from the Nordic Countries*, ed. Jenny Fossum Grønn (Oslo: Nordbok, 2005). 34–45.
- Marnersdóttir, Malan. "Post-Colonial Poetry and Fiction in Faroese." In *Nordic Voices: Literature from the Nordic Countries*, ed. Jenny Fossum Grønn (Oslo: Nordbok, 2005). 70–77.
- Nilsson, Magnus. "Literature in Multicultural and Multilingual Sweden: The Birth and Death of the Immigrant Writer." In *Literature, Language, and Multiculturalism in Scandinavia and the Low Countries*, eds. Wolfgang Behschnitt, Sarah De Mul, and Liesbeth Minnaard (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013). 41–61.
- Nykvist, Karin. "Situerad flerspråkighet—exemplet Caroline Bergvalls *Drift*." *Edda: Nordisk tidsskrift for litteraturforskning* 107.3 (2020): 152–166.
- Pedersen, Birgit Kleist. "Young Greenlandic Writers in the Public Versus the Anonymous Space." In *Nordic Voices: Literature from the Nordic Countries*, ed. Jenny Fossum Grønn (Oslo: Nordbok, 2005). 56–69.
- Poddar, Prem and Cheralyn Meador. "In a little country like ours ...: Narrating Minority Identity." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 44.2 (2008): 193–204.
- Runblom, Harald. "Migration to the Nordic Countries." In *Nordic Voices: Literature from the Nordic Countries*, ed. Jenny Fossum Grønn (Oslo: Nordbok, 2005). 18–33.
- Södergran, Edith. *Samlade skrifter 1. Dikter och aforismer*, ed. Holger Lillqvist. Helsingfors: Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland, 1990.
- Södergran, Edith. *Samlade skrifter 3. Kommentar till Dikter och aforismer. Varia*, eds. Boel Hackman, Carola Herberts, and Sebastian Köhler. Helsingfors: Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland, 2016.
- Sommer, Doris. *Bilingual Aesthetics: A New Sentimental Education*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2004.
- Sorvari, Marja. "Altering Language, Transforming Literature: Translingualism and Literary Self-Translation in Zinaida Lindén's Fiction." *Translation Studies* 11.2 (2018): 158–171.
- Sorvari, Marja. "Native, Foreign, Translated? 'Russian' Migrant Literature between Finland and Russia." In *Migrants and Literature in Finland and Sweden*, eds. Satu Gröndahl and Eila Rantonen (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2018). 57–80.
- Sorvari, Marja. "'On Both Sides': Translingualism, Translation and Border-Crossing in Zinaida Lindén's *Takakinves-Tokyo*." *Scando-Slavica* 62.2 (2016): 141–159.
- Strindberg, August. *August Strindbergs brev*, ed. Torsten Eklund. Vol. 5. Stockholm: Bonnier, 1956.
- Strindberg, August. *August Strindbergs samlade verk*, ed. Gunnar Ollén. Vol. 66. Stockholm: Norstedts, 1999.
- Strindberg, August. *Le plaidoyer d'un fou*, eds. Lars Dahlbäck and Göran Rossholm. Vol. 2. Stockholm: Svenska vitterhetssamfundet, 1993.
- Strindberg, August. "Nationalitet och svenskhed." In *August Strindbergs samlade verk*, ed. Hans Lindström. Vol. 17. (Stockholm: Norstedts, 2003). 143–160.
- Svanberg, Ingvar. "Cultural and Language Pluralism in Contemporary Nordic Countries." In *Nordic Voices: Literature from the Nordic Countries*, ed. Jenny Fossum Grønn (Oslo: Nordbok, 2005). 8–16.
- Taylor-Batty, Juliette. *Multilingualism in Modernist Fiction*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.
- Thisted, Kirsten. "Grey Areas." In *Nordic Voices: Literature from the Nordic Countries*, ed. Jenny Fossum Grønn (Oslo: Nordbok, 2005). 46–55.
- Thisted, Kirsten. "The Power to Represent: Intertextuality and Discourse in *Miss Smilla's Sense of Snow*." In *Narrating the Arctic: A Cultural History of Nordic Scientific Practices*, eds. Michael Bravo and Sverker Sörlin (Canon, MA: Watson, 2002). 311–342.
- Tidigs, Julia. "Multilingualism and the Work of Readers: Processes of Linguistic Bordering in Three Cases of Contemporary Swedish-Language Literature." In *The Aesthetics and Politics of Linguistic Borders: Multilingualism in Northern European Literature*, eds. Heidi Grönstrand, Markus Huss, and Ralf Kauranen (London: Routledge, 2020). 225–241.

- Tidigs, Julia. "The Tongue, the Text and the Tape Recorder: Vernacular and the Technology of Writing in Ralf Andtbacka's *Wunderkammer*." *Textual Practice* 34.5 (2020): 761–782.
- Tidigs, Julia and Markus Huss. "The Noise of Multilingualism: Reader Diversity, Linguistic Borders and Literary Multimodality." *Critical Multilingualism Studies* 5.1 (2017): 208–235.
- Tranströmer, Tomas. *Östersjör: En dikt*. Stockholm: Bonniers, 1974.
- "Utrikes födda i Sverige." Statistikmyndigheten SCB. [www.scb.se/hitta-statistik/sverige-i-siffror/manniskorna-i-sverige/utrikes-fodda/](http://www.scb.se/hitta-statistik/sverige-i-siffror/manniskorna-i-sverige/utrikes-fodda/). Accessed 7 July 2021.
- Wischmann, Antje. "Repräsentanz einer Minderheitensprache—Thom Lundberg: För vad sorg och smärta (2016)." *Neues Lesen Skandinavien* 20 Mar. 2018. [www.neues-lesen-skandinavien.de/repraesentanz-einer-minderheitensprache-thom-lundberg-foer-vad-sorg-och-smaerta-2016/](http://www.neues-lesen-skandinavien.de/repraesentanz-einer-minderheitensprache-thom-lundberg-foer-vad-sorg-och-smaerta-2016/) Accessed 15 Nov. 2020.
- Wischmann, Antje. "Self-Reflective 'Minority Literature': A Stylistic Profile of a Case Study." *Multiculturalism* 39 (2019): 54–65.
- Wulff, Helena. "Ambiguous Arrival: Emotions and Dislocations in the Migrant Encounter with Sweden." In *Claiming Space: Location and Orientations in World Literature*, eds. Bo G. Ekelund, Adnan Mahmutović, and Helena Wulff. London: Bloomsbury, 2021, 217–235.