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Bjarne Thorup Thomsen
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Introduction

Bjarne Thorup Thomsen

In an essay entitled 'Center og periferi' (Centre and Periphery), the Danish literary and cultural theorist Frederik Stjernfelt imagines how cultural and natural places might be articulated in a space which does not *a priori* privilege any particular points in favour of others. Such a purely geometrical conception of space, he muses, is of relevance to phenomena ranging from biological morphosis via architecture and homesickness to state building (Stjernfelt:362). He goes on to situate this problematic in the context, *inter alia*, of geopolitical changes in Europe after 1989. In the collection of essays presented here the focus is on the complex spaces of the Nordic world and Scotland and the mulitiple articulations of core-periphery relations in the rich literatures of these lands. In sixteen studies by scholars of Scandinavian and Scottish literature the examination of literary voices, currents and traditions is set in dialogue with contemporary theoretical approaches to the study of local, national and global cultural constellations. In Cairns Craig's opening chapter the book's overarching field of enquiry is formulated, while the cultural role of Scotland is also reassessed. The chapter interrogates discourses of centre and periphery as they have developed since the 1960s in world systems theory, post-colonial studies, deconstruction, theories of nation and of postmodernism through to the resistance in chaos theory to constructing an order out of core-periphery relations and the assertion in such theory of the truths embodied in the local.

Following Cairns Craig's conspectus, the challenges, creativities and connections of the northern peripheries are considered in a sequence of studies which together consitute a trajectory from, broadly speaking, east to west through a number of 'debatable' territories and texts. The journey begins in Finland whose Swedophone areas or cultures form the focus of two chapters. In Clas Zilliacus' contribution politics of nationhood meet semiotics in the context of linguistic and cultural conflict in Finland in the decades before and after its independence in 1917. The chapter investigates the quest for a figurative language that could connect the Swedophone part of the Finnish population with its 'peripheral' strongholds on the western and southern coasts of the country and in the archipelagos and thus match the inland imagery of the majority. Whereas this chapter is centred on the Finland-Swedish 'heartland' (albeit a Finnish fringe from another perspective), Nalle Valtiala's contribution

takes us to the apparent eastern remoteness of the Finnish-Russian borderland of Karelia to encounter an internationally informed Swedophone poet, Edith Södergran, whose work – at the forefront of a wave of innovative Finland-Swedish lyrical output in the early decades of the twentieth century – pre-empted and hugely impacted on the development of literary modernism in the Swedish 'mother' culture and beyond.

The next three chapters shift the focus from Swedophone Finland to the Swedish nation's own spatial and cultural complexities. Anders Öhman discusses connections between early twentieth century modernity and mobility and what he terms the nomadic cultural identity of the northern 'periphery' of Sweden, Norrland, the region that occupies almost two thirds of the country's land mass. He demonstrates the role played by Norrlandic literature in re-mapping a territory and a culture which it had hitherto been the privilege of the centre to describe and draws parallels with the workings of postcolonial literature. Anders Persson's contribution likewise centres on Norrlandic cultural identity, more specifically the considerable role played by pietistic revivalism and layman-led religious life in the region from the beginning of the nineteenth century to the present and the impact of these movements on Norrlandic literature. Using prominent writer Torgny Lindgren as his main reference point, Persson shows how oral and written genres such as sermon, parable and legend are employed and reworked in contemporary Norrlandic literature, achieving an interpenetration of local specificity and universal significance. Bjarne Thorup Thomsen rounds this 'Swedish' section off, while also opening up a wider perspective on Scandinavian territoriality, by discussing the representation and problematisation of Nordic national borderlands in texts by Nobel Prize-winning novelist and Swedish icon Selma Lagerlöf. The chapter considers negotiations or reflections in Lagerlöf of redrawings of the Scandinavian map in 1658, 1864, 1905 and 1920, tracing a dialogic notion of nationhood in the author's work.

Responses, in body, landscape and discourse terms, to questions of peripherality in Norwegian, Danish and Scottish literature are the subject of two contributions of a comparative nature. Steinvör Pálsson explores the fragmenting topography of the human body in two Norwegian novels – one set in the capital, one in a northern island fishing community, one male, one female authored, one from the 1880s, one from the 1980s – that both, however, deal with profoundly decentring and debilitating experiences of rape and sexual abuse. Claire Thomson's contribution works as a stepping stone between southern Scandinavia and Scotland in comparing discourses of marginality found on either side of the North Sea, arguing that in Denmark the dominant discourse is centripetal, homogenising and to a considerable extent tied up with the vision of the welfare state, whereas in Scotland it is centrifugal, dialogic and 'heteroglossic'. Her chapter then moves on to consider the imagining of national

'spacetimes' and the play with the peripheral in one Danish and two Scottish novels from the 1990s, by Vibeke Grønfeldt, Alan Warner and Andrew Greig.

The interrogation of modern Scottish literature and culture is continued in two chapters that centre on the interface between gender and nation and on the 'state-of-the-nation' drama respectively. Aileen Christianson discusses how to configure the relationship between the marginality of femaleness and the Scottish nation, identifying a lack of analysis of the role of gender in nationhood as a feature of seminal theories on nation. Against the assigning of a privileged role in national representation to urban, male- and masculinity-centred fiction, Christianson foregrounds the core contribution made by Scottish women's twentieth century fiction to Scotland's narrative of identity. Bill Findlay then draws attention to the involvement of Scotland's strong current of contemporary drama in the re-examining of Scottish identity in response to the political peripheralisation during the Thatcher years and in the wake of devolution and the opening of the Scottish Parliament in 1999. Through an analysis of Stephen Greenhorn's acclaimed drama *Passing Places* (1997), the chapter takes us on a northwards trajectory from Scotland's urban 'Central Belt' into the Highlands, in search of a redefined identity expressed in terms of a broader, more inclusive idea of both nationhood and selfhood.

Following the examination of modern Scottish culture conducted by Thomson, Christianson and Findlay, Ronald Jack adds a deeper diachronic dimension to the understanding of the centre-periphery relations of Scottish culture. To widen a unitary cultural paradigm which has centred on a nationalist model of the Scottish literary tradition, Jack argues that an alternative multiracial, multilingual, decorous and polymathic model of Scottishness has been presented in Scottish literature from the Middle Ages onwards.

No consideration of Scotland's linguistic and literary landscape can overlook, of course, the influence of the Gaelic language with its strongholds in the highlands and islands of western Scotland. In his discussion of twentieth century Hebridean literature, prose writing as well as verse, Donald Meek explores how the theme of enduring, powerful islands is central both to traditional literature, affirming the archipelago, and to the exile Gaelic writer, operating between cultures and languages and negotiating the demands of a variety of maps. Meek demonstrates how, in the creative processes of the 'non-traditional' poets, any meaningful distinction between core and periphery is nullified.

The problematics of language, poetry and the island community are developed further in Anne-Kari Skarðhamar's contribution which deals with the Faroe Islands, located between Scotland and Iceland in the North Atlantic. The chapter focuses on the figure of Christian Matras, who, in his twin capacities as leading twentieth century Faroese poet and as professor of

Faroese language and literature at the University of Copenhagen, was well versed in the cultural, linguistic and national dynamics of his native islands as well as in competing perspectives on their position. The chapter explores how Matras' poetry, in centring on Faroese topography, fuses the physical and metaphysical, reaches out to the cosmic and the sublime and challenges the notion of Faroese marginality.

Moving further north-west, the main themes of Baldur Hafstað's discussion are the vibrancy, connectedness and sense of tradition of the literary culture of Iceland, a nation of 300,000 inhabitants. In co-examining the ostensibly disparate textual phenomena of a medieval family saga, the novels of Halldór Laxness – the country's most prominent and most controversial twentieth century writer – and the poetry of the Icelandic-Canadian Stephan G. Stephansson, Hafstað shows how modern Icelandic literature has been engaged in constant dialogues with the country's weighty literary heritage as well as with international intellectual influences in order to address contemporary concerns of the nation. The investigation of the international involvement of Icelandic culture is continued in Daisy Neijmann's contribution. It traces the development of Icelandic-Canadian immigrant literature from strategies of cultural purity, colony building and transplantation, through processes of transformation, 'translation' and 'bastardisation' to the current embrace of multiculturalism. The chapter sheds light on the changing core-periphery relationships between 'old' and 'new' Icelandic culture in the contexts of Icelandic struggle for independence, the home rule of the inter-war period, full independence in 1944, post-war NATO entry and American military presence to today's globalisation.

Some of these themes are continued and new ones added in Kirsten Thisted's contribution, which concludes our journey through the debatable northern terrains by focusing on Greenland, its post-colonial relationship to Denmark and its prospect of becoming a full national state in a globalised world. The complex questions of identity and belonging this context implies are investigated in the chapter through the prism of the different literary voices of Ole Korneliussen and Hans Anthon Lynge: the former post-national, constructivist, bilingual and inclined to stepping off a map based on the fixity of notions of home and roots, the latter centred on Greenlandic settings and the Greenlandic language and preoccupied with the re-definition and positioning of Greenlandic identity, culture and nation in a world of multiple core-periphery and periphery-periphery relations.

Reference

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