

HELENA WULFF'S CURRENT RESEARCH

Cosmopolitan and Vernacular Dynamics in World Literatures
Programme funded by Riksbankens Jubileumsfond 2016-2021

Cosmopolitanizing from Within: Migrant Writers in Sweden

This subproject explores the social world of the young generation of migrant writers and their work, fiction and journalism, ranging from established writers such as Jonas Hassen Khemiri to debutantes such as Pooneh Rohi. By uncovering often cruel experiences of racism in a country which boasts an ethnically inclusive policy, yet has an expanding anti-immigration party (the Sweden Democrats), these writers have both a Swedish and an international readership. The project's contribution to the theme of the programme is to identify Swedish instances of literary cosmopolitanism from within. This includes an examination of how fiction is transposed to other genres (plays and film), as well as the social and textual process of translation and possible untranslability in Apter's (2013) sense. The project builds on the work of sociologist Howard S. Becker (2008) on art worlds as social worlds, including the dynamics of the publishing market and the media. Many of these writers present themselves as Swedish writers, yet are categorized by readers and publishers as immigrant writers. Here the making of a migrant writer's career raises issues of competition and collaboration, breakthrough and reputation (cf. Bourdieu 1993), as well as gender and class. In-depth interviews with writers as well as with publishers, editors and agents will be central. The project will also draw on Sherry Ortner's (2013: 26) idea of "interface ethnography" focusing on events where closed communities interact with the public such as Gothenburg Book Fair and Stockholm Literature as well as activities at The Swedish Writers' Association.

Writing in Ireland: An Ethnographic Study of Schooling and the World of Writers

The project is an ethnographic study of the practice of writing in Ireland: in schools, at university, and in the world of writers where the literary tradition is continued by contemporary writers. Why are the Irish a people of the pen? How is socialization to writing accomplished? Importantly, with anthropology's comparative perspective, these questions accentuate the fact that despite efforts to provide students in Sweden with special training in writing, there is still a perceived lack of writing ability among Swedish students which is one explanation of students dropping out of university. In line with the anthropological practice of contributing to theoretical debate through analysis of an ethnographic case, Ireland and its educational system is the site for the project. The aim is to explore 1) how school pupils in primary and secondary school, and students in creative writing classes at university, learn to write, 2) the social organization of the world of contemporary writers of short stories and novels. Many of these writers teach creative writing to pupils, as well as to teachers, and students. Theoretically, the project connects Bourdieu's ideas on fields, power, and habitus, with anthropology of education and situated learning, as well as Becker's notion of art worlds. The project was carried out by way of multi-site fieldwork in Dublin with participant observation in writing classes in schools and at university, at writers' conferences, readings, and festivals, complemented with interviews. The project was funded by the Swedish Research Council. Among many other publications such as peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters with international publishers, the project will result in a monograph to be published by Bloomsbury in London.