

The forgotten 33%? Finland-Swedish literature from a database perspective

In the digital era, one could say, that literary history is partly written and shaped in databases and digital archives, via metadata about authors and literature. What is the impact of such resources on the visibility – or invisibility – of authors of literary work? And to what extent is the Finland-Swedish minority literature “forgotten” seen from a database perspective?

In my paper, I will approach these questions with starting point in my research on the amount of database references, and secondary literature about the group of Finland-Swedish authors writing in 1830–1930 (Biström 2021). The study builds on information especially in the database Finna (finna.fi), and bibliographies. My ongoing research focuses the group of “invisible authors” – those with no relevant database references in searches with the authors’ name as subject, exploring the question what the Finland-Swedish literary field looks like from the point of view of the invisible authors, with a theoretical starting point in the concept of cultural memory (Assmann 2010). Among other things, my data indicates that these forgotten authors represent – not 99% (Moretti 2013)- but around 33% of all the authors, which supports a point made by Kristina Malmio (2021) about Finland-Swedish literary history about the year of modernist debutants 1916.

The database or archive on which quantitative studies are based, is however not complete, as has been pointed out by Katherine Bode (2014: 7–25) in her critique of Franco Moretti’s claims to accuracy and objectivity. I have approached this issue with the concept of “database visibility” – which represents not only the actual amount of literature about an author, but rather the visibility and accessibility of this literature. From this perspective, the database or archive is not only an (imperfect) source of information, but also in itself an interesting objective for research. In my paper, I will also develop this concept a bit further against the background of the forgotten Finland-Swedish authors.

Literature:

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