

Godelieve Laureys

INTRODUCTION

The Image of Scandinavia in a Transnational Perspective

Mr Rector, Mr Dean, Dear colleagues and students,

Thank you, Mr Rector, for your kind and stimulating words. I am very grateful for the support from the Faculty and from the University.

I honestly must admit that it has been a challenge to combine two arrangements, as it happened to be Ghents turn to organise both the annual *Skandinavistendagen*, the nordistic conference of the Dutch speaking area, and the intensive programme within the framework of our ERASMUS- and TEMPUSnetwork.

First of all I want to thank all the participating departments for their involvement in the preparation and the organisation of the conference.

The arrangements with the *Center for Kulturstudier, Medier of Formidling* ran quickly and smoothly. On the whole cooperation with Odense University witnesses of an old and stable partnership.

With the colleagues from Groningen and Amsterdam cooperation was easy and self evident. Especially the high number of participants from Groningen today (40 students and 10 teachers) surpass all expectations.

The Freie Universität Berlin joins us for the first time and has contributed in a very constructive way to the programme by offering a workshop.

Cooperation with our new partners from Budapest within the framework of the TEMPUS-programme was easy and pleasant from the very start. The first contacts are promising as to future activities in the realm of student and teacher exchanges.

I think we all owe thanks to the staff and the students of the Ghent Department of Scandinavian Studies, who devoted themselves to the best of their abilities to the preparation of this study conference.

I also welcome the speakers of the plenary programme : Professor *Åke*

Daun from the ethnological department of Stockholm University will give a lecture on Swedish mentality in a comparative perspective and will let us perceive Swedishness through contrasts. Professor *Arne Martin Klausen* from the Institute for Social Anthropology of Oslo University, editor of the anthology *Den norske væremåten*, will throw light on the Norwegian ethos as sketched by social anthropologists. In his lecture he will discuss the coverage of the book in the mass media and present some of the critical views. Lektor *Jørn Guldborg* is an art historian from Odense University. In his lecture on '*Scandinavian design : Ideology, Style and Value System*' he will encourage us to look upon Scandinavian design as an expression of Scandinavian mentality in colours and shapes, in which we can find all the basic components of Scandinavian identity. Lektor *Johs. Nørregaard Frandsen* from Odense University will sketch some changes in the state of mind which emerged when Denmark in the post-war period developed from an agrarian society into a modern industrialised state. His lecture will describe some of the ambivalences and paradoxes in the self-image of Denmark today. Professor *Bernd Henningsen* from Berlin will turn the picture around and discuss the image of the Germans in Denmark¹. Professor *Tarmo Kunnas* completes the geographical picture, both in a northern and in a southern direction, as he is Director of the Institut Finlandais in France. His lecture, *The two faces of Finland*, deals primarily with the image of Finland abroad and the perception of the Siberian, shamanic Finland versus the modern technological welfare state.

After the plenary lectures students are divided into groups and will attend workshops. The themes of the workshops are: *Images of Scandinavian Identity, Culture Transfer in Literature : Anthologies, Scandinavia in the Foreign Press. The Image of Sweden in the Swedish Detective and Crime Novel, The Image of Scandinavia in literary Travel Accounts and in*

¹The lecture by Bernd Henningsen is published as 'Der Deutsche wird nie ein guter Däne'. Zum Bild der Deutschen in Dänemark. In: Trautmann, Günter (red.), *Die hässlichen Deutschen? Deutschland im Spiegel der westlichen und östlichen Nachbarn*, 1991.

non-fiction Travel Brochures.

Mr. Rector, Mr Dean, Ladies and Gentleman,

As a young scholar one of the first things one learns is not to generalise. One needs evidence and a solid empirical basis to put forward a general statement about a given phenomenon.

During the next days, however, we are going to devote ourselves to generalising statements and stereotypes. We are going to discuss "reserved and rational Swedes, who feel slightly superior to the rest of the world", "serious, honest, somewhat naive and chauvinistic Norwegians", "ambivalent, ironic and self-relativizing Danes" not to mention the "shy, innocent, but emotional Finns".

By focussing on prototypical qualities and behaviour patterns, however, we are going to penetrate to the underlying conditions of Scandinavian culture in the broadest sense of the word.

Allow me a metaphore borrowed from the field of linguistics. We are going to search for the antropological universals, the deep structural properties, which manifest themselves as stereotype habits and behaviour modes, as norms and value systems in the surface structure of a culture.

In an increasingly international Europe the concept of cultural identity will gain momentum. Both the wave of internationalisation in all sectors of society and the development of multicultural entities due to the increased mobility will in the near future entail frequent and intense contacts and confrontations between different cultures. It is therefore of the utmost importance that favourable conditions are created for direct contact and culture transfer between small states and small language communities. This applies both to literary translations - the European literary canon must not become the monopoly of the big languages - and to business communication and political negotiations. We can learn a lot from each other and our respective approaches have a specific relevance.

The analysis of the image of Scandinavia in a transnational perspective will hopefully add a new dimension to the study of Scandinavian languages and literature. Language as a mirror of individual and collective cognition

is in itself, however, one of the best channels of approach to the cultural identity and the national characteristics of a nation or a people.