

# FOUND IN TRANSLATIONS: J.V. SNELLMAN'S (1806–1881) THOUGHTS ON TRANSLATIONS AS A WAY TO STRENGTHEN THE FINNISH NATIONAL LITERATURE

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*Until the 1840s, the dominating language in Finland was Swedish, even if ca. 80 per cent of the population had Finnish as mother tongue. The administration, academic life, public matters and literary life were conducted in Swedish. The literature in Finnish was limited mostly to the religious domain, basic legislation and books of rudimentary instruction for agriculture and medicine, one or two newspapers and journals. The situation started to change in the 1840s, with the birth of the Finnish national movement. One of the most important actors in this movement was the philosopher, journalist and statesman Johan Wilhelm Snellman (1806–1881). This article presents his views on how translations from foreign languages can be used to form a Finnish national literature. His views in this matter were closely related to his theoretical philosophy that was heavily influenced by Hegel. Snellman demanded that the Swedish-speaking elite should change its language into Finnish, and create a high-class Finnish-language national literature of scholarly books and belles-lettres. Translations from foreign languages would give standards for Finnish writers and build contacts to the general European literature and culture. He initiated in 1870 a translation program that was managed by the Finnish Literature Society.*

KEYWORDS: *Johan Wilhelm Snellman (1806–1881), Finland, 19<sup>th</sup> century, cultural history, translations, Finnish national movement, Fennomans, Finnish literature.*

## INTRODUCTION

This paper was read at a conference where the theme was “minority book”. Is this theme applicable to Finland in the nineteenth century? After all, at least 80 per cent of the population of Finland in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was Finnish-speaking. Was the Finnish-language book really a minority book? Yes, it was, because the

dominating language was Swedish that was spoken only by less than 15 per cent of the population. The administration, academic, public matters and literary life were conducted in Swedish. The situation stemmed from the five centuries before 1809, when Finland was part of the Swedish realm. In 1809, Sweden lost the region to Russia in a sideshow of the Napoleonic wars, and Finland became a Grand Duchy in the Russian Empire with an internal autonomy. This did not mean that the Russian language would have come instead of Swedish, but the domination of the Swedish language continued into the Russian era. The Finnish language was not persecuted or oppressed but, certainly, it was neglected and left on a low cultural level.<sup>1</sup>

This was seen in the under-developed state of the Finnish-language literature in the 1840s, just before the situation began to change. There was a relatively rich religious literature in the Finnish language. The whole Bible was available in Finnish since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and lots of devotional literature as well. The basic legislation, the Swedish Law, had been published in Finnish in middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. There were some practical books of rudimentary instruction for agriculture and medicine, one or two newspapers and journals, but there were no scientific books, no original and only one or two translated novels, no maps, no popular science, no secular historical books, almost no dictionaries, no encyclopedias. The list could be continued.

Neither were there Finnish writers of high-class fiction, no literary Finnish language, an insufficient vocabulary for higher forms of culture. For a person, who perhaps was interested in the advancement of the Finnish language, the situation must have felt rather desperate at the beginning of the 1840s. How to create a Finnish national literature?

## TRANSLATING A WHOLE CULTURE

Some of the answers to questions mentioned above were given by Johan Vilhelm Snellman (1806–1881), philosopher, journalist, and statesman, who has played an important role in the cultural and political awakening of the Finnish people in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>2</sup>

1 General histories on Finland see: KIRBY, David. *A concise history of Finland*. Cambridge, 2006. 343 p.; MEINANDER, Henrik. *A history of Finland*. New York, 2011. 227 p.

2 A comprehensive biography on Snellman is: SAVOLAINEN, Raimo. *Sivistyksen voimalla. J. V. Snellmanin elämä*. Helsinki, 2006. 1126 p.

A biography in German: NEUREUTER, Hans Peter. Johan Vilhelm Snellman. *Leben, Werk, Deutschlandreise*. Ein Beitrag zur finnisch-deutschen Geistesgeschichte. In SNELLMAN, Johan Vilhelm. *Deutschland. Eine Reise durch die deutschsprachigen Länder 1840–1841*. Helsinki, 1984, Bd. 2, p. 517–653.

This article concentrates for the most part on the role played by Snellman in the birth of the Finnish-language culture, especially on his thoughts and initiatives on translations as part of the national literature. Of course, Snellman was not alone in the work for the budding Finnish-language culture. Alongside with Snellman, the poet Johan Ludvig Runeberg (1804–1877) was another important figure in the formative period of the Finnish national consciousness. His poetry, all written in Swedish, ignited the national feeling in the minds of the Swedish-speaking youth. The canonized triumvirate of the Finnish national awakening also included Elias Lönnrot (1802–1884), the compiler of the Finnish-language national epic, *Kalevala* (first version 1835, second 1849) and other important works. Lönnrot was originally Finnish-speaking, whereas both Snellman and Runeberg had Swedish as mother tongue.<sup>3</sup>

The group about whose awakening or national consciousness we are talking here was during the 1840s and 1850s principally the Swedish-speaking university students and academics, the young intelligentsia. Thus, the national awakening started from among the elite youth, not from the common people, and this was according to Snellman's beliefs. The Finnish situation was peculiar, although not uncommon in Europe, in that the language of the elite was another than the language of the majority. Therefore, it was not self-evident that the elite would identify itself with the majority. When the concept of nation became important as the basis of the identification of people in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was essential that the Swedish-speaking elite in Finland would decide what the nation they belonged to was. The activities of Runeberg, Snellman and Lönnrot made it possible that a large part of the Swedish-speaking elite youth chose to identify itself with the Finnish-speaking majority.

On the other hand, the majority of the minority, that is, the Swedish-speaking population in Finland, were peasants, living in the countryside under similar conditions as the Finnish-speaking common people. Therefore, in the long run, a policy based on the slogan, "one nation, one language", was not possible in Finland, but the realization of this fact and the tensions created by it came much later, which is another story.

The important thing is that according to Snellman's ideology, the Swedish-speaking elite, only some percent of the total population, should change its language into Finnish. In a way, the political and cultural awakening in Finland was, thus, based on a change of language, i.e., on translation. The whole culture was to be translated.

Certainly, it was the original belles-lettres and non-fiction that were fundamental for the domestic culture, and Snellman worked in many ways to help the origi-

nal Finnish literature to emerge. An important contribution was the indefatigable criticism that he published in his newspaper and journal. He also initiated the tradition of state literary prizes. When he was senator in the beginning of the 1860s, he proposed that an amount of the state funds that were left unused in 1863–1864 would be used as prizes to “stimulate the literary life of the country”. The first prize was given in 1865 to the student Alexis Stenvall (under the pseudonym of Kivi) for his play *Nummisuutarit* (Heath Cobblers). Unfortunately, the next prizes had to wait until the 1880s.<sup>4</sup> However, in this article we concentrate on Snellman’s thoughts and initiatives concerning translations.

The history of translations as part of the Finnish literature is rather well researched. A two-volume work on the cultural and literary history of translations as part of the Finnish-language belles-lettres appeared in 2007<sup>5</sup>, and another volume on the translations of non-fiction was published in 2013<sup>6</sup>. The special contribution of the present article, as far as I can see, lies in the more detailed account of the role of J. V. Snellman’s views on translations. The importance of Snellman’s views can be examined from a specific point of view, i.e., how he explicitly promoted translations as tools to enhance the Finnish national literature. This is linked to his conception of the national literature and the duty of the educated elite to produce it. But his views on translations can also be put in a more metaphorical perspective, e.g., as a corollary to his theoretical philosophical standpoints. His thoughts on how an individual finds one’s place in the world and society on a philosophical level can be interpreted as a kind of translation as well. Furthermore, he clearly demanded a change in the dominating language of the Finnish society, from Swedish into Finnish, even here a “translation” of great proportions.

## BASICS OF SNELLMAN’S THEORETICAL PHILOSOPHY

Snellman’s mother tongue was Swedish, and he wrote most of his texts in this language, except for his main work of theoretical philosophy *Versuch*

3 We should add even other canonized names, such as Matthias Alexander Castrén (1813–1853), philologist that studied the origins of the Finnish language, and Fredrik Cygnaeus (1807–1881), professor of literature who greatly supported the birth of the original Finnish belles-lettres, and Zacharias Topelius (1818–1898), writer and professor who popularized Finnish history.

4 SANTAVUORI, Martti. Kirjailija ja yhteiskunta. In *Suomen kirjallisuus VII. Kirjallisuuden kenttä*. Toim. Matti Kuusi. Helsinki, 1968, vol. 7, p. 79.

5 *Suomennoskirjallisuuden historia 1–2*. Päätoim. H. K. Riikonen. Helsinki, 2007. 697+625 p.

6 *Suomennetun tietokirjallisuuden historia: 1800-luvulta 2000-luvulle*. Helsinki, 2013. 766 p.

*einer spekulativen Entwicklung der Idee der Persönlichkeit*<sup>7</sup> (= An attempt for a speculative development of the idea of personality, 1841) that he wrote in German, as well as some academic works that he wrote in Latin. He also knew Finnish, and even edited for some time a Finnish-language newspaper, *Maamiehen Ystävä* (= Peasant's Friend) (1844), but his Finnish never became as fluent as Swedish.

Snellman's way of answering the pressing questions of his time was based on Hegel's philosophy of spirit, but with some individual emphases.<sup>8</sup> In his biography of Snellman, SAVOLAINEN claims that Snellman was "a spiritual philosopher" rather than a Hegelian. Snellman was, according to SAVOLAINEN, more liberal than Hegel in his ideas about the society.<sup>9</sup> The feature that might be the most difficult to accept for a reader of today is the concept of the World Spirit (*Weltgeist*). A passage of Snellman's *Versuch einer spekulativen Entwicklung der Idee der Persönlichkeit* (1841) gives a glimpse of the philosopher's style: "Ueberhaupt kann der Geist als Substanz, als der objektive Geist, der Weltgeist, aufgefasst werden. Die menschliche Bildung, die Humanität, im objektiven Sinne des Worts, die sittlichen Mächte, die durch die Menschheit hindurchgehen, deren Diener der Mensch ist, gehören so in die Substanz herein, deren allen diesen Sphären gemeinschaftlicher Ausdruck die Vernunft als vernünftiger Gedanke ist. Die einzelne Mensch bringt sie nicht erst hervor, sondern er ist vielmehr als vernünftiger ein von ihnen Hervorgebrachtes."<sup>10</sup>

This passage also illustrates that Snellman was not a mystic but always stressed rationalism, rational thinking. The world spirit does not have to be understood as something mystical. According to MANNINEN (1986), already Snellman's *Versuch einer spekulativen Entwicklung der Idee der Persönlichkeit* and even more his work on state philosophy *Läran om staten* (= Theory of the State, 1844) show, how he distanced his thoughts from Hegel and especially *Läran om staten* "does not contain any doctrine of an active superhuman spirit — in other meaning than as a binding and national and general human culture"<sup>11</sup>. Hegel's world spirit appears in Snellman's texts more often as the national spirit. An intensive reading of the works of the philosophers of enlightenment and liberalist thinkers freed Snellman from a too painstaking following of Hegel.<sup>12</sup>

Snellman's points of departure were the tensions between the subject and the object, freedom and necessity, man and nature, individual and society etc. His philosophical solutions strove at reconciling or overcoming these tensions using Hegel's dialectic as a method. The individual must surrender his subjective discretion and submit himself under the general rationality that in the end also is good for the individual<sup>13</sup>. Man's personal self-consciousness is realized, when he understands that he is executing the everlasting orders or decisions of the world

spirit<sup>14</sup>. One is free only when one understands the rationality of the world and one's position in it.

We might freely interpret Snellman's thoughts about how a person becomes conscious of the rationality of the world: a person must learn to know the structure of the world. Snellman does not say it like this, but in essence he sees the world as some kind of a language, a structure of concepts, and the person must "translate" the message of this language for himself in order to make it comprehensible.

## PUTTING THEORY INTO PRACTICE

Snellman was, however, not in the first place a contemplative philosopher. In his theoretical philosophical works he developed basic views that he then applied in the analysis of practical political and cultural questions in his journalistic work and as politician.

He had already aroused the interest of the university students by his lectures and other direct contacts with them at the University of Helsinki in the late 1830s, but he got into a disagreement with the university authorities because of his views about academic freedom. He moved for a couple of years to Sweden, where he worked as journalist, and even wrote fiction. He made a study tour in Germany in 1840–1841 completing there his main book on theoretical philosophy. In 1843 he

7 Snellman's papers have been published in a critical edition SNELLMAN, J. V. *Samlade arbeten. I–XII*. Helsingfors, 1992–1999. I refer to this work with the title (shortened if necessary) of the original article or book and the volume in the critical edition, e.g., *Versuch einer speculativen...*, SNELLMAN, *Samlade arbeten II*, p. 197–344.

8 On differences between Snellman's and Hegel's views, see MANNINEN, Juha. "...Se voitti itselleen vain sivistyksen voitot" – Suomen hegeliläisyyden perusteemoja. In *Hyöty, sivistys, kansakunta*. Toim. Juha Manninen & Ilkka Patoluoto. Oulu, 1986, p. 144; MANNINEN, Juha. G. W. F. Hegelin ja J. V. Snellmanin yhteiskunnallis-poliittisten katsomusten eroja. In MANNINEN, Juha. *Miten tulkita J. V. Snellmania*. Kirjoituksia J. V. Snellmanin ajattelun ja kehittymisen taustoista. Kuopio, 1987. 209 p.; and VÄYRYNEN, Kari. *Der Prozess der Bildung und Erziehung im finnischen Hegelianismus*. Helsinki, 1992, p. 119–138.

9 SAVOLAINEN, op. cit. p. 4, 241.

10 "The spirit can in general be understood as a substance, an objective spirit, spirit of the world. Thus, the human culture, the humanity, in the objective meaning of the word, the moral powers that govern the humanity, the servant of which man is, belong to the substance whose expression, common to all these features, is reason, as rational thought. An individual human being does not beget them [the moral powers], but he – as rational – is brought forth by them." *Versuch einer Speculativen...* SNELLMAN. *Samlade arbeten II*, p. 255. Translated by IM. All translations from Swedish and German in this article are by the author.

11 MANNINEN, op. cit. (1986), p. 144.

12 SAVOLAINEN, op. cit., p. 242, 308.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 277.

14 *Versuch einer speculativen...*, SNELLMAN. *Samlade arbeten II*, p. 290–291.

returned to Finland, but could not obtain a position at the university and became a secondary school headmaster in Kuopio, a remote small town in eastern Finland. This did not end his national importance, because he started to publish a Swedish-language newspaper *Saima* from the start of the year 1844. This newspaper had an electrifying effect on the journalism and public discussion in Finland. Unfortunately, this period was culturally difficult in Finland because of the reactionary politics of Czar Nicholas I. Any publication that spoke too liberally about the political and cultural matters or criticized the administration aroused the suspicion of the authorities. Accordingly, *Saima* was prohibited by the censorship in 1846.

After the prohibition of *Saima*, Snellman founded a cultural-political monthly journal *Litteraturblad för Allmän Borgerlig Bildning* (= Literary journal for general civic education) that appeared 1847–1863, where he continued to publish his critical viewpoints.

Already in the first issues of *Saima* Snellman started to explicate his thoughts on nationality, language and literature. In the second issue of the newspaper in January 1844 he wrote: “Vi anse för den hufvudsakliga: att Finland icke eger en Nationallitteratur”, or: “We think that the main thing is: that Finland does not have a national literature”. The lack of the Finnish literature was evident, but even the books published in Swedish in Finland did not create anything that could be characterized as a national literature. Snellman, of course, thought that if Finland would get a national literature of its own, it must be in Finnish.<sup>15</sup> The present day bibliographical conception of the Finnish national literature includes all books published in Finland and related to Finland in all languages, but Snellman had a more selective and ideological basis for his conception of the national literature.

There is quite a lot of dogmatic character in Snellman’s texts: he endeavored to fulfill a political and cultural program based on his philosophy. Action was an essential consequence of theory. Snellman wrote that man “also has to know that his actions, his own doing, are producing the moral world order”. The instrumental character of Snellman’s philosophy is a result of the priority given to the spirit: “man, as a spirit, subjugates the material world or nature as his instrument”. The body also is part of nature and therefore even it is subordinated to the spirit, it is from the start an instrument of his activity. Instrumentality prolongs even further. Education also is the work of the spirit, not something superficially or internally given to the spirit.<sup>16</sup> Here Snellman is using the German word *Bildung* or its Swedish form *bildning* that usually are translated in English as *education*, but they also contain elements of meaning from *civilization*, *culture*, even *enlightenment*. A person may have lots of formal education but still is not truly educated or civilized. Even education is one of the tools of the spirit.

Education (*bildning*) was for Snellman not an exact amount of knowledge or doctrine, but “a living interest in man’s higher matters and a competence to strive for an individual conviction about them”<sup>17</sup>. This endeavor may appear as well in a person who only has got primary school education as in someone who has fulfilled academic studies. It is essential that even the primary school should give a competence for a contact with the higher matters of mankind.<sup>18</sup> A peasant can in his own circle of life try to understand what the actual situation is demanding of him, i.e., to understand the spirit of the times.

The acquisition of a personal conviction was central for Snellman’s educational philosophy, which entails a decisive role given to reading. By reading even a peasant can rise above the tradition that has been transmitted unalterable from grandfather to the father and further to the son. He can judge the tradition from a more general angle. Therefore Snellman emphasized that an idealized state of nature was no goal to be striven at, but education is building something new. Reading has a recreational role but as its noblest it is acquiring knowledge and seeking for a personal conviction. Snellman had not much understanding for trivial literature, reading only to kill time.

Education was for Snellman closely bound to the nation, and the nation is defined by a common language. He did not believe that there is any real cosmopolitan culture, although he often speaks of the “general culture” of the humanity. Each nation’s culture must strive to keep in balance with the general culture of the humanity, and therefore no national culture can ever stop from evolving. The culture/education of a nation is embodied in its own national literature.

## FROM NATIONAL LITERATURE TO POPULAR LITERATURE

According to Snellman, the basis of the national culture, that is, the channel through which the national education and culture are connected with the general culture, was the national literature (*nationallitteratur*), versatile, high-class fictional and scholarly literature in the vernacular. Literature was for Snellman more than a collection of separate books: it also is the sum of knowledge imbedded in these books. It is what the nation knows. The nucleus of the national literature was, according to him, poetry and belles-lettres in general, but it also included

15 Saima n:o 2/11.1.1844, Suomi och fosterländska litteraturen, SNELLMAN. *Samlade arbeten* IV, p. 4.

16 Versuch einer speculativen..., SNELLMAN. *Samlade arbeten* II, p. 293–295.

17 Lärnan om staten, SNELLMAN. *Samlade arbeten* III, p. 331.

18 Saima 14/3.4.45, *Folkskolans bestämmelse*, SNELLMAN. *Samlade arbeten* IV, p. 482.

history, especially the history of the own country. Snellman included in the realm of history also zoological and botanical geography, meteorology etc.<sup>19</sup> Philosophy was as well part of the national literature, whereas, e.g., pure mathematics or physics actually did not belong to it. Snellman's conception of national literature may have changed in details in the course of decades, but his principle was all the time that all literature that had a national character belonged to it. Snellman's and his contemporaries' conception of literature was broad: it included both fiction and non-fiction.<sup>20</sup>

Snellman believed that there were two ways how a national literature in Finnish could be created and suggested that both should be applied. The slow but thorough way would be to start from below by making Finnish the language of education in the schools from the primary school upwards until the university studies. The other, quicker way, from above, would be to translate the best works from other nations' literature. Both ways demanded great sacrifices from the educated people. It was the duty of the educated people to build the national literature: they must learn to write in Finnish, they must change their language into Finnish, they must produce the national literature and the popular literature as well. Only those who had Finnish as the language of education, and preferably as mother tongue, could write intelligibly for the common people.

The work of translation was in Snellman's view a typical and necessary method in the creation of national literatures. He wrote in 1848: "Already the transmission of the best works of foreign nations into one's own language has in all times proved to be the nearest way towards a domestic literature. It is undisputable that this way must be chosen, in order to reach at producing original literature that is on the top of its time and on the level of the consciousness of the most educated among the nation." Snellman believed that this is a historical law: it has happened before, e.g., when the French, English and German literatures were born of the Latin literature, thus, it should happen that way also in Finland.<sup>21</sup>

The national literature in vernacular created a possibility for the distribution of education on all levels of population, but the persons without school education beyond primary school could not directly access the scientific part of the national literature. The access was made possible by creating a popular literature or "folk literature" (*folk litteratur*). An aspect of translation is present even here. The Finnish-speaking academics and other educated people were the ones that should produce the popular literature, i.e., to "translate" or adapt the scholarly literature into a form that the common people could understand.

The primary school should give a competence to utilize popular literature for all persons. This competence was necessary for awakening a personal desire to read, love of reading, or, as Snellman preferred to say, a desire for knowledge.<sup>22</sup>

According to Snellman, the popular literature that transmitted scientific knowledge among the common people could only be based on the national, high-class scholarly literature. Thus, the primary goal was to create a genuine national literature and only after (or along with it) popular literature. Therefore he became a bit surprised at the end of the 1840s, when the development seemed to proceed in a different order. Enthusiastic persons seemed to want to make popular literature the basis of national literature. Before there were high-class Finnish scholarly books, there was production of books that transmitted scientific knowledge to the common people. This was against Snellman's dogma. According to Snellman, history shows that the development proceeds from the literature of the educated classes towards popular education, not vice versa: "Wherever we turn our gaze in the past of the European nations, we see that everywhere the start has been in the literature of the educated classes and after that the reform has moved to the school and popular education. Perhaps it now is rather a lucky instinct than reflection that has made the Finnish writers to use an opposite way and try to make popular education a downright basis of the national literature."<sup>23</sup>

In the prevailing circumstances Snellman accepted this development, even if it was against the order he believed that the process should have followed. Later, when more Finnish scholarly literature started to appear, he seems to have returned to his original thought that the vernacular high-class scholarly literature and belles-lettres, or national literature, were the essential basis of the popular literature.

Snellman defined the popular or "generally intelligible" literature in a large article on the primary school in 1856: "This term, popular literature, means, in fact, always something changeable. That which on one day is the knowledge of the

19 Litt. blad 12/1856, *Finska litteraturens när-maste framtid*, SNELLMAN. *Samlade Arbeten* VII, p. 441–442.

20 About the concept and terminology of literature in Swedish and Finnish, see: LEHTINEN, Marja. Kirjallisuuden käsite ja kirjallisuusinstitution eriytyminen. In *Suomen kirjallisuuden historia I. Hurskaista lauluista ilostelevaan romaaniin*. Päätoim. Yrjö Varpio. Helsinki, 1999, p. 196–203. About Snellman's views on literature in the narrow sense of the term in use today (belles-lettres), see KARKAMA, Pertti. *J. V. Snellmanin kirjallisuus-politiikka*. Helsinki, 1989. See as well: KNAPAS, Rainer. J. V. Snellman och nationallitteraturen. In

*Finlands svenska litteraturhistoria. Första delen: Åren 1400–1900*. Utgiven av Johan Wrede. Helsingfors & Stockholm, 1999, p. 280–288.

21 Litt. blad 3/1848, *Finsk litteratur*, SNELLMAN. *Samlade arbeten* VI, p. 178.

22 About the concept of *love of reading* and its role in Snellman's and his followers ideology, see MÄKINEN, Ilkka. From Literacy to Love of Reading: The *Fennomanian* Ideology of Reading in the 19th-century Finland. *Journal of Social History*, 2015, vol. 48, no. 4, p. 287–299.

23 Litt. blad 3/1848, *Finsk Litteratur*, SNELLMAN. *Samlade arbeten* VI, p. 177–179.

scholar, is another day possessed by the great public. Generally intelligible or popular knowledge, however, differs from the scholarly essentially in that it is not scientific in form. We can leave aside that this form is not only form, but it also decides the substance of knowledge. The important thing is that the popular knowledge is not dressed in this form.”<sup>24</sup> The popular literature defined by Snellman included, however, from the start also belles-lettres. Already in his early writings he recommended, for example, translating suitable poetical works into Finnish and publishing them for a price that also the common people could afford. He mentioned here as an example Johan Ludvig Runeberg’s long poem *Julqvällen* (Christmas evening), part of which he published in translation in *Saima*<sup>25</sup>.

Snellman believed that the best way to produce popular literature was to let it be published by private publishers. Therefore, he was in principle against creating non-profit, ideological institutions for the production of popular literature, such as the Society for the Enlightenment of the People (*Kansanvalistusseura*), established by his political followers in 1874. He was afraid that this kind of benevolent institutions would hamper the activity of private publishers.

#### “SOMETHING INTERESTING TO READ FOR THE EDUCATED CLASSES”

Because of Snellman’s conception of vanguard, he thought that it was important to make the Swedish-speaking educated people, especially women, interested in the Finnish-language literature. This was in his mind, when he already in the first issue of *Saima* proposed that translations should be included in the journal *Suomi* of the Finnish Literary Society, which would mean that the journal could reach a greater public than publishing only strictly scholarly articles could do. At the same time there would be in Finnish “something interesting to read for the educated classes”. In essence, this kind of texts would satisfy the love of reading of the ladies of the educated classes. If they start to read Finnish texts, they can pass this interest to their children, and also secure demand for Finnish-language books. The names of the recommended potential authors to be translated were the three French, Alfred de Vigny, Jules Janin and Eugène Sue, and a German, Heinrich Heine.<sup>26</sup> All of them were very popular in the 1840s. This kind of literature was not meant for the uneducated masses, but in the first place for the educated people.

Snellman also recommended that the pieces to be translated should be selected so that they had not been previously published in Swedish, the mother tongue of the educated classes: “Finnish translations of poems of, e.g., Tasso, Oehlenschläger, Schiller, Beranger, Hugo, Shakspeare [sic!], and Byron shall not be left without

readers — if the translation to some degree succeeds in transmitting the spirit and beauty of the original.” Only such texts should be translated from the Swedish that were meant for the common people. Translating poetry is extremely difficult, but, according to Snellman, the threshold is much lower concerning translations of prose. Novels were, Snellman wrote, besides newspapers, the most efficient vehicles of the present day general culture. The richest selection of novels was offered in the French and English literatures: “We remind only that, e.g., several of Dickens’ so pleasant and popular novels are not available in the Swedish language. Our steadfast conviction is that in this way the Finnish language would easiest win success among the mass of the literary educated, and at the same time the language would be led to express the thoughts and feelings of the modern culture.”<sup>27</sup>

The two-step strategy advocated by Snellman was shared by his friends and allies. Elias Lönnrot started in 1848 to promote an idea of a literary society that would publish foreign novels in translation especially for the educated people. It was to be called *Suomalaisen Kauniskirjallisuuden Yhdyskunta*, the Society for Finnish Belles-Lettres. The initiative was met with great initial success. A committee was organized to write the statutes, money was gathered, publicity was sought by publishing newspaper articles, translators were sought, potential novels were listed. Authors named were, e.g., Dickens, Pestalozzi and Auerbach. Unfortunately, the cultural situation worsened quickly because of the news of revolutions from France and all over Europe. As a measure to keep the revolutionary movements from infiltrating into Russia and Finland, Emperor Nicholas I demanded that all societies, new and old, should give their statutes to be scrutinized by the authorities. The Committee for Censorship in Finland did not approve the statutes of the Society for Finnish Belles-Lettres.<sup>28</sup>

The cultural situation became even utterly more complicated in 1850 when an imperial decree prohibited publishing in Finnish of other books or texts than religious or economic. Even here, translations played a role, because it is said that one of the causes of this draconic measure were the rumors that a book by Alexandre Dumas on “William Tell and the liberation of the Swiss people” was about to be translated into Finnish. In fact, the booklet in question was rather innocent as to the contents, but already the name of the hero of liberty and the book being

24 Litt. blad 10/1856, SNELLMAN. *Samlade arbeten* VII, p. 401.

25 Saima 14/4.4.1844, SNELLMAN. *Samlade arbeten* VI, p. 153.

26 Saima 1/4.1.1844, *Suomi och fosterländska litteraturen*, SNELLMAN. *Samlade arbeten* IV, p. 5.

27 Kallavesi 14/21.11.1846, *Öfversättningar till Finska i bunden stil*, SNELLMAN. *Samlade arbeten* V, p. 384.

28 PALOPOSKI, Outi. Suomentaminen ja suomenokset 1800-luvulla. In *Suomennoskirjallisuuden historia 1*. Helsinki, 2007, p. 107–108.

originally French aroused the suspicions of the authorities. The decree stalled the development of the Finnish-language literature severely for five years. It lost its meaning during the Crimean War, when the authorities needed to ease the censorship in order to prevent false rumors from spreading among the Finnish-speaking population, but officially the decree was abolished first in 1860.<sup>29</sup>

## PROMOTING TRANSLATIONS BY PRIZES AND SCHOLARSHIPS

Snellman returned to the question of translations as a support for the national literature, when he was in 1870–1873 chair of the Finnish Literature Society. The Society had been founded in 1831 in Helsinki. Its first concrete accomplishment was a translation into Finnish of Heinrich Zschokke's *Das Goldmachedorf* in 1834. At that time Snellman was not actively involved in the Society's activities. In 1835 the Society published the first version of Lönnrot's epic *Kalevala*. Since then, the society was the center for the aspirations to develop a Finnish-language literature. Snellman proposed in 1870 to the society that it starts to support translations of high quality books from foreign languages in order to enrich the Finnish literature and give models for Finnish writers for the refinement of the style and form.

Snellman wrote in his proposition:

“Domestic original literature cannot be produced by rewards and prizes. Its birth can, however, be advanced so that the Society supports publishing such literary works that have a real progressive value. <...> Geniality and talent do not appear every day; and the experience teaches that their development is connected with certain spiritually active periods in the history of a nation. But every nation of every time can take into its own literature those products of geniality that other nations have produced. Thus, such books have become common property among the civilized nations in Europe. We know what kind of influence these reciprocal loans have had on the ways of thinking and aspirations and how they have been the most important factor in the birth of a common European culture. And their influence on the national literatures has not been less fertile.

In the last regard mentioned above, we can hold the influence triple: it affects in a refining manner on the domestic original writer's ideas about all natural and historical phenomena and circumstances, on his ability and way of expressing them in words, in the manner of presentation and style, as well as directly on the literary language in a more narrow meaning, on the etymological and syntactic development of the mother tongue. <...>

The scantier the literature is, the more its literary language needs refinement this way. We know what a great role the classical literature has had on the literary language of the modern

nations and how national literatures that have reached blooming have more and more taken its role. We can say that the Finnish language still is completely outside this double development of culture. I am steadfast that if the Finnish literature does not consent to go through this process it will never rise into blooming.”

Snellman continued by writing suggestions on how the Society could proceed in the matter, such as reserving funds for the translators, publishing such works or letting private publishers publish them, and securing that the translations are of good quality.

He presented a short summary list on the books that could be included in the translation program. The list that followed Snellman’s broad conception of national literature included classical works by, e.g., Xenophon, Plutarch, Herodotus, Homer, Plato, Livy, Cicero, Virgil and Horace. From the French literature he mentioned the classics Montesquieu, Rousseau and Molière, as well as more recent historians Adolphe Thiers, François Mignet and Jean-Baptiste Say. From the English literature he mentioned Hume, Charles James Fox, Shakespeare, Sterne and Walter Scott. These were more or less expected, except maybe Fox, but Snellman’s suggestions of German literature present some names that are not any more among the most known, such as historians Friedrich von Raumer and Friedrich Schlosser, but also more familiar names, such as Humboldt and Schiller are mentioned but not Goethe.<sup>30</sup>

Snellman’s proposition was totally in accordance with his long-time goals and ideology that he had, as we have seen, several times presented in print. But why did he just in May 1870 present his proposition for the society? Historians have continuously wanted to see here something more than a coincidence that during the same year, a serious crisis was growing concerning the publication of the first true Finnish novel, Aleksis Kivi’s *Seitsemän veljestä* (Seven brothers), later to be accepted as one of the cornerstones of the Finnish literature. The novel had been already published in installments in a series called *Novellikirjasto* (Short story library), but there also was a plan to publish it as a single volume by the Finnish Literature Society.

Some time after the meeting, where Snellman made his proposal of translations, an angry critic, professor August Ahlqvist, published a crushing criticism of Kivi’s novel. This created an atmosphere, where the board of the society started to doubt the publication of the novel. It took almost three years before the book was

29 MÄKINEN, Ilkka. The historical background and imperial context of the Finnish language decree of 1850. *Knygotyra*, 2005, vol. 44, p. 72–86.

30 SNELLMAN. *Samlade arbeten* XII, p. 750–753; SULKUNEN, Irma. *Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura 1831–1892*. Helsinki, 2004, p. 158–161.

published, and meanwhile the poor author had died in miserable conditions, and it has been said that the public condemnation of his novel and the stalling of its publication were partially to blame for this tragedy. What was the role of Snellman as the chair of the society during these years? Was his translation program to a certain extent a reaction caused by Kivi's realistic and bold novel? Did he think that Finnish writers needed more education in the art of writing with true masterpieces as models? These questions cast a doubt on the previous consensus that Snellman supported Kivi and found in *Seven Brothers* a corollary to his own aesthetics and cultural philosophy.<sup>31</sup> Lack of decisive sources prevents a final answer to this question, but at least it is certain that Snellman did not invent his translation program just for the occasion, but it was a logical continuation of his longtime views.

The society nominated a special committee to develop Snellman's idea further. It gave its statement in the fall of 1870. The role of the society and demands to translators were specified. The list of recommended works to be translated was partly revised. The greatest changes were in the German section, where Goethe was added and some names in Snellman's list were substituted by others. A Spanish classic, *Don Quijote*, was added. Some Swedish books published in Finland were added as well, i.e., M. A. Castrén's book on his travels in Siberia and Snellman's own *Läran om staten* (Theory of the state). Even a Danish play by Adam Oehlenschläger was included in the list.

In January 1871, the Society announced a competition for translators based on the list, but no translations were presented for the prize that year. The first time the prize was given to a translator was in 1873, when J. Enlund got a prize for a translation of Oehlenschläger's tragedy *Axel og Walborg*. The competition was announced every year until 1883, but the prize was given only sporadically.<sup>32</sup>

Of special importance for the Finnish theater and literary language were the translations of all Shakespeare's plays that were on Snellman's original list. A single man, Paavo Cajander (1846–1913), did this immense work under 30 years, 1879–1912. This was a period when the Finnish language developed into a full-fledged literary language, a development that even is visible in the Shakespeare translations – and where these translations greatly contributed.<sup>33</sup>

## AFTER SNELLMAN

Snellman's original translation program was in the first place intended to raise the level of the Finnish literary language, i.e., to teach the Finnish authors. By the 1880s, the literary Finnish was much improved and the original argument had lost some of its emphasis. The Finnish-speaking reading public

grew rapidly and therefore a new approach seemed necessary. Now the focus was shifted more to the reading public and its need to have access to the classical and contemporary literature in its own language. In the fall of 1886, the Finnish Literature Society started to plan a new translation program that was announced in February 1887. This time the emphasis was on contemporary literature from the great language areas in Europe. The statement of the committee that had compiled the list emphasized the needs of the reading public: "... the committee has had an eye on the greater, educated public that does not know other languages than Finnish, but it also has kept in mind the fact that a valuable work written in any foreign language naturally will be more read, if it is translated into the people's own language." The committee admitted that in the recent years there had been translations of many books, but said that the selection of books to be translated had not been systematic enough, which had led to gaps in the variety of disciplines. There also was lacking in books that could illustrate the contemporary ideological currents. This they wanted to remedy with their list, which included both fiction and non-fiction.<sup>34</sup>

The list included almost 70 different titles. There were modern classics, such as Darwin's *Origin of the Species*, several of John Stuart Mill's works, Ranke's *Weltgeschichte* etc. The section on fiction consisted mostly of English, French and German prose of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with some occasional books from minor language areas, such as Swedish and Hungarian. Noteworthy is that also Russians were included, Tolstoy's *War and Peace* and Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. Snellman did not mention any Russian names. The Society promised to reserve funds for translations but it also welcomed private publishers to join the effort. The private publishers should only accept the translator chosen by the Society or in other ways consent to guarantee the quality of the translation.<sup>35</sup>

The funds that the Finnish Literature Society could channel to translations were welcome, but they could not rise to any important amounts. A new bold initiative that raised the public support of translations to a new level was the author Juhani Aho's (1861–1921) campaign to establish a fund financed by the state for supporting translations of major works of the world literature. Aho made his first

31 SULKUNEN, op. cit., p. 158–166; see also commentary no. 57 by Esko Rahikainen in SNELLMAN, *Samlade arbeten* XII, p. 936–939; for a more positive view on Snellman's relation to Kivi, see KARKAMA, op. cit., p. 233–235 and SAVOLAINEN, op. cit., p. 844–849.

32 SNELLMAN. *Samlade arbeten* XII, commentary 283, p. 1022–1023.

33 HÄGGMAN, Kai. *Sanojen talossa. Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura 1890-luvulta talvisotaan*. Helsinki, 2012, p. 143–146; LAITINEN, Kai. Cajander, Paavo (1846–1913). In *Suomen kansallisbiografia*. Päätöim. Matti Klinge. Helsinki, 2003, p. 80–82.

34 SULKUNEN, op. cit., p. 209–211.

35 Ibid.

proposal in the spring of 1907, when the first modern parliamentary election in Finland with a universal suffrage for all adults, men and women alike, was held. He may have calculated that the new Parliament with its great Finnish-speaking majority would be predisposed to favor the Finnish culture. The new system would also support the work of the professional translators or translation as a part of the writer's profession. Aho's campaign was successful and the Parliament appropriated a considerable amount of money for this purpose.

The management of the funds was given to the Finnish Literature Society that founded the Finnish Literature Promotion Fund (*Suomalaisen kirjallisuuden edistämisrahasto*) in 1908. The fund also supported original works in the Finnish language, especially in the sciences, but its most important task was to distribute funds for translations. The Fund was organized in four sections, the Humanistic, the Scientific, the Social-Economic and the Belles-Lettres sections. The Belles-Lettres Section headed by Aho himself started by giving scholarships for the translations of Cervantes, Dante, Boccaccio, Molière, Goethe and Homer. Among the translators were top names of Finnish literature, such as Eino Leino, Joel Lehtonen and Otto Manninen. The liberal and democratic character of the fund was illustrated by the fact that the Social-Economic Section as one of its first decisions reserved a sum for the translation of Marx' *Das Kapital*. After a glorious start, the work of the Fund was, however, hampered by the actions of the Russian authorities in the 1910s.<sup>36</sup> The Fund also supported translations from Finnish into other languages.<sup>37</sup>

The history of the public support for translations was before the independence (1917) heavily loaded with language disputes between the Finnish- and the Swedish-minded circles. These disputes did not stop altogether when Finland became independent, but at least some kind of balance was sought. One example was the creation in 1923 of the Delegation for the Promotion of Swedish Literature (*Delegationen för den svenska litteraturens främjande*).<sup>38</sup>

### Conclusion

Snellman's legacy was strong in Finland until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, although his philosophy was not anymore as influential as in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Still, the national literature, now comprising both the Finnish and Swedish literatures, is held in esteem. There are many ways to support the production of vernacular books, even if the literary system in general is based on commercial values. Until recently, books have been published mainly by commercial publishers, which, in fact, was also preferred by Snellman. There is turbulence on the literary market-

place that is starting to affect even the traditional fiction production, but still more the production of non-fiction. No element of the literary production and distribution chain can feel completely safe. Some people think that the Finnish culture and literature are in danger from the turmoil of the digital media and globalization. Still, the Finnish culture and literature are strong at the moment, in the manner that Snellman would appreciate, even if he might be doubtful about many particular phenomena of today. On the other hand, Snellman expressly denied that any age or period could dictate what the values of the coming generations are. It is each particular time that defines its culture and its values, and these are always changing. It is the duty of the people living now to come up with solutions for today's problems. Hopefully we are as consequent and far-sighted as Snellman was.

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IŠEITIS – VERTIMAI: J. V. SNELLMANO (1806–1881) ĮŽVALGOS APIE  
VERTIMUS KAIP SUOMIŲ NACIONALINĖS LITERATŪROS  
TURTINIMO BŪDĄ

*Ilkka Mäkinen*

### Santrauka

Iki XIX a. 5-ojo dešimtmečio dominuojanti kalba Suomijoje buvo švedų, nors suomių kalba buvo gimtoji net apie 80 procentų gyventojų. Švedų kalba buvo vartojama administracinės valdžios srityje, akademiniam ir literatūriniam gyvenimui, viešumoje. Suomių kalba buvo vartojama ribotai – religinėje srityje, pagrindiniuose teisės aktuose, žemės ūkiui ir medicinai skirtuose leidiniuose, kuriuose buvo dėstomos pradinės žinios, ir viename ar dviejuose laikraščiuose bei žurnaluose. Padėtis ėmė keistis XIX a. 5-ajame dešimtmetyje, kai Suomijoje prasidėjo nacionalinis

judėjimas. Vienas žinomiausių nacionalinio atgimimo dalyvių buvo filosofas, žurnalistas ir valstybės veikėjas Johanas Wilhelmas Snellmanas (1806–1881). Straipsnyje aptariamos jo mintys apie vertimus ir tai, kaip vertimai gali prisidėti prie Suomijos nacionalinės literatūros gausinimo. Snellmano požiūris šioje srityje buvo glaudžiai susijęs su jo teorine filosofija, kuriai savo ruožtu didelę įtaką darė Hegelio filosofija. Snellmanas reikalavo, kad švediškai kalbantis elitas pereitų prie suomių kalbos vartosenos ir sukurtų aukštos klasės mokslinių knygų ir grožinės literatūros suomių kalba. Vertimai iš užsienio kalbų suteiktų Suomijos rašytojams standartus ir supažindintų su visa Europos literatūra ir kultūra. 1870 m. Snellmanas parengė vertimo programą, kuriai vadovavo Suomijos literatūros draugija.

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