

SONG, POETRY AND IMAGES IN WRITING: SAMI LITERATURE¹

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One of the most exciting developments in Sami cultural life in recent decades is the multimedia approach that many Sami artists have chosen for their creative expression. Going against recommendations that one ought to specialize in a single art form in order to perfect it, a number of the most prominent Sami artists have instead tried to combine several means of expression. It is, of course, possible to see this as a resistance against the tendency toward specialization that is found in western art, as opposed to a more holistic approach that is found in the art of indigenous peoples. This idea, however, does not furnish a complete explanation. For the tradition has its roots in Sami handicraft itself, that is, in functional art, which in the Sami language is called *duodji*.

Within the *duodji* tradition, the most important criterion for judging an object's merit is its utilitarian value. Naturally, for a people and a culture that exist on the edge of human endurance in the Arctic north, objects' usefulness is of great importance. Still, beauty such as that found in a finely crafted knife handle, a nicely sewn traditional piece of clothing, or a perfect *yoik*-song has always been valued. The *yoik* has invariably occupied a special place in the Sami consciousness because of its traditional role both as a mark of identity and, in the old religion, as the music of the shaman, *noaidi*, in Sami. It has also served as a means by which to remember loved ones. In recent years it has experienced a renaissance as inspiration for a Sami variant of world music, for artists like Mari Boine, Wimme Saari and Adjágas. At the same time, this recent interest with new ways to bring both traditional and modern art to new audiences has resulted in the breaking down of established barriers among literature, visual art, and music. In traditional society, the *yoik* actually served as both literature and music, if indeed one can apply such definitions; images grew forth from the music of the words – images which are, in turn, found in rock carvings and the drawings on magic drums.

It is something of this old idea of wholeness that such artists as the late Nils-Aslak Valkeapää (1943-2001) attempt to retain in their art. Valkeapää was at once a poet, visual artist, musician, and performer who did not define any one genre as his primary form of expression. He took tradition seriously, even in designing and doing the layout for his books. A book is a modern product of *duodji*, and as such, it should be beautiful to look at, pleasant to touch, and well-written. Valkeapää conveyed in his books various levels of meaning through words and the way in which they are arranged typographically; but he also maintained a special communication between

¹ This essay is a revised, extended and updated version of an article that has been published previously, first time as an introduction in my own anthology of contemporary Sami prose and poetry. It will appear in a book of literatures of the Polar North, *From Oral Tradition to Rap*, Ilisimatusarfik 2011. The essay deals predominantly with literature written by Sami authors in a Sami language (of which there are several, not mutually comprehensible). It would be a totally different enterprise, not compatible with the objective of the present article, to write an introduction to the huge, existing literature on the Sami.

his works by constantly returning to earlier themes and elaborating upon them from book to book with regard to genre, form, and content.

Synnøve Person does somewhat the same thing in her books of poetry, where her own watercolors serve not only as illustrations for the poems but also tell a parallel story of their own, bringing about a complete, unified expression only when the poetry and pictures merge. Other names in the similar tradition are Rose-Marie Huuva, Inger-Mari Aikio-Arianaick, and the emerging poet / photo-artist Hege Siri.

Yoik and Literature

Sami literature has its foundations in an old oral literary legacy maintained by skillful narrators and singers. Prose literature can draw from an invaluable rich treasure trove of story and fairy tale, while yoik poetry has tremendous significance for the development of modern Sami poetry. Yoik poetry has provided a native tradition from which contemporary writers can proceed in exciting and creative ways. Traditionally, the yoik played an important role in creating a feeling of unity within the group. When a yoik was dedicated to a Sami, it reinforced his or her sense of identity as a member of a family and community. One might say that, in the old Sami society, the yoik served the same function as baptism and confirmation.

The yoik was also tied to the old religion, both as a medium, in the spiritual sense, and as a means used by the *noaidi* in his rituals. The *noaidi* was the group's or tribe's wise person, usually a male, but not necessarily. He could prophesy with the help of the sacred drum, and he could heal illnesses. Along with places of sacrifice, the drum was among the holiest objects in the old Sami mythology. The yoik was used to draw the shaman into a trance, so that his spirit could wander about in order to gain the knowledge he otherwise could not find. Moreover, the yoiks contained central ideas regarding the Sami's image of themselves and of their surroundings. That is, the yoik provided important information for not only a positive self-awareness but also for survival.

The oldest Sami poetry consists, then, of yoik texts. These texts include both short love poems and longer myths, historical tales and bits of poetry that describe people, places, animals, and fish. The two best-known poems are those which the Sami theological student Olaus Sirma (ca. 1650-1719) wrote down just as he remembered them and gave to Professor Johannes Schefferus, who published a book about the Sami in 1673, *Lapponia*. The book was published in Frankfurt am Main, and was relatively quickly translated into several European languages, and thus the two poems became known far beyond the borders of Samiland. Both of the poems are actually love songs, published as Europe was about to enter its Age of Romanticism.

The poems are titled "Moarsi fávrrot" and "Guldnasas". In both, the woman is absent, and the man expresses his deep love for her. In the first poem, he dreams about various ways by which to come to her; for she is far away, and in those days there were few means for rapid transportation. The young man expounds all the efforts to which he is willing to go in order to reach his beloved, not hesitating to mention the ties that might bind them. It is apparent, of course, that he has let the girl wait for quite some time while he figures himself out. Now she is clearly tired of waiting for this man who is so full of sweet promises but still in the wind's power, "bártni miella lea biekká miella" ["the boy's will is the wind's will"]. It appears that

the man is forced to choose between his affinity with the wind – that which is free to touch everyone – and his own hesitation and procrastination, which could actually lead to his losing his beloved. Towards the end of the poem, it looks as though he has decided to go to his sweetheart, and that is where the next poem picks up: at the start of his journey.

While “Moarsi fávrrot” is clearly set in the summertime, in “Guldnasas” it is already winter. Thus, the first poem can serve as a commentary to the second; in other words, it has taken quite a while for the man to finally decide to go to his sweetheart. Once the decision has been made, however, the man’s inner conflicts are no longer so pronounced. Now what is most important is that his draft reindeer maintains a good speed and that nature doesn’t interfere with the journey. One must keep in mind, here, that this story was originally told at a time when it was accepted that the natural world had a spiritual dimension, and that the will of the gods and of human beings could influence nature. Therefore, it was important to perform a yoik-song asking difficult mountain passes, ice on the lakes, and snow on the marshes to treat the traveler well.

Over the years, these two poems have been translated into several languages, of which H.W. Longfellow’s direct reference to them in his book *My Lost Youth*, probably is among the most well known: “... a verse of a Lapland song / is haunting my memory still / A boy’s will is the wind’s will / and the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts.”

The Thief and the Shaman

Among the longer epic yoiks that were registred and written down at the beginning of the 19th century – aside from the strictly mythic texts – there are yoiks that tell of the Sami people’s history, of their settlement in Samiland, and of conditions that existed in truly ancient times. Here mention must be made of the longer pieces, such as “The Earliest and Later Settlement of Samiland”, that the Finnish minister Jakob Fellman (1795-1875) recorded as it was recited to him by the young Sami Matts Anundsson Laiti in the late 1820s. This was while Fellman was serving in Ohcejohka, the northernmost parish of Finland on the Deatnu (Tana) river that constitutes the border between Norway and Finland. Laiti told Fellman that he had heard the yoiks performed by a Sami at the coast about 1805, meaning he recited the yoiks by heart as he recollected them almost a quarter of a century later. According to the old texts the early settlement is supposed to have happened by groups after long migrations. The poems divide the period the Sami have inhabited their land into three phases; when the first Sami came, when the new wave of Sami came with herds to the land, and when the Sami were put under the control of kings.

The account of Samiland’s first inhabitants ends by ascertaining that eventually the times changed and one arrived at a new period where the form of religion was shamanism (drumtime). The poem thus seems to extend over a period of time of several thousand years. Concurrent with the transition to shamanism one was leaving behind the more primitive way of living, and new groups of people who are related to the first immigrants, come to the land. Over time reports about Samiland spread far away, and kings sent observers to the forestland’s people to bring them under the crown’s hegemony. Finally the Sami too acquired knowledge about grace, the song

says, and Christianity forced shamanism to its knees. Politically the period of Sami independence was at an end, and culturally this became the opening for the third phase of Samiland's history – the epoch of colonization. Further, one finds romantic poetry, and songs connected to a variety of experiences of which people took special note and upon which yoik lyrics could be based. Some yoiks also contain unambiguous political viewpoints regarding the process of colonization by the nations that surrounded them.

Images are extremely important in the Sami's old epic poetry. Particularly elaborate are hidden messages conveyed in the more rebellious songs from the period of colonization. The Sami of that time no doubt feared being understood by any public officials who had acquired a little knowledge of the Sami language and might happen to hear one of the songs. Therefore, they avoided the use of direct language and concealed implied messages in subtle texts. Only the initiated could get the points being made. This means of communication served at least two purposes at once: on the superficial level, it contained a harmless tale of various events in the lives of the Sami, while its underlying message to the Sami audience issued a call to resist cultural suppression and assimilation. There are several examples of this type of yoik text, which clearly indicates that the Sami were becoming increasingly aware of the real reasons for the gradual depletion of resources and overcrowding that was taking place in their own country. Into their land have come intruders, or thieves, as they are called in a relatively late piece, "Suola ja Noaidi" [The Thief and the Shaman], an antiphony dating from the period of colonization.

In this song, the shaman admits that the thief has become master of the land of the *noaidi*, but he nonetheless ends his song with a kind of vow to drive the thief away:

Ane, ane iezat eret	Begone! To that place far away
Gos don boadát, dohko manat	from where you come, you shall return
Lean, lean mun du badjelii	I still have power over you
Manan, manan, válddán, bijan	I pull, I catch, I push aside
Suhppen ja deavccastan du eret	I cast you far away from here

The old antiphony contains so many references to what can be characterized as current political rhetorics that a person could almost believe it has been taken from a contemporary play in which a verbal duel takes place between an outspoken Sami representative and a proponent of the majority population's exploitation of resources in the north. The two protagonists never manage to find a common ground or common frame of reference, nor do they reach a consensus – and the one who ends up with the final say is, in spite of everything, the intruder. In fact, the shaman ends his song by admitting, "Be the master now, / Thief, you've become lord," whereupon the thief abruptly concludes, "Then you will perish and become nothing, Shaman."

Although his political and administrative power has been lost, the shaman's words continue to live among the Sami, for whom they have always served as a verbal resistance against the thief. The *noaidi* refuses to accept that the Sami will allow themselves to be assimilated, which he expresses between the lines by calling upon his Sami audience to continue their defiance. The way in which he does this is in keeping with yoik poetry's ability to exploit the metaphoric and associative wealth of

its language. In a sense, the shaman can be heard to this very day, perhaps even in the way that the Sami are again gaining control over the natural resources in their home areas through new legislation that take into account the fact that Norway has been founded on the territory of two different peoples, the Sami and the Norwegians. Thus, artistic expression is shown to always be relevant: even art from earlier eras can, by its content and through new interpretations, speak to the people of today.

From the mythic poetic tradition it is also evident that the Sami were proud of their own history. Some of the songs actually take the Sami people's origins all the way back to the Sun. This is the case mainly in the epic poems the South Sami clergyman Anders Fjellner (1795-1876) committed to writing in the middle of the 19th century. The Sun's daughter in particular kept a close eye on the Sami the whole time; she convinced her father, the Sun, to give reindeer as a gift to the Sami. Therefore the reindeer often have been referred to as the Sun's gift among the Sami. Even on her deathbed the future of the Sami people was closest to her heart, and she was very concerned as to how it would go for the Sami after she herself is gone:

The sun slowly sinks, the wolf comes
Slinks around in the dark of night
...
The sun is setting, the herd shrinks,
The pest rages, insects torment,
Children grope about in the dark,
Morning will come, will it not?

The sun, of course, has always been an important force for the Sami, as for so many other peoples throughout the world. For the Sami ancestors, however, it seemed very special in that it disappeared entirely for two months during the polar winter night, only to remain in the sky – never setting, sleeping, or resting – during the summer months. The sun has always stood for the goodness in life, and those Sami who can trace their ancestry back to this primeval force have always been blessed with good fortune. Evil forces are represented by the dark side, the shadows, and there has been a perpetual struggle between the two since the beginning of time.

Myth and Eroticism

One of the most frequently mentioned Sami epic poems is the Son of the Sun's courting in the land of the giants, as recorded by Anders Fjellner. This poem's style is reminiscent of others in the same genre. It is tightly structured, full of alliteration and parallelisms, and characterized by an effective use of metaphor. It opens with an introduction about the time when there was "a scarcity of women to pair with men" and continues with a description of the Son of the Sun's conception, birth, and childhood. Then the tale itself begins, "Nu leat mii gullan / Sáhka lea beaggán" ["As we have heard it / So it is told"]. Beyond the north star and west of the sun and moon, there is said to be a land of gold and silver, where the mountains are reflected in the sea. The Son of the Sun desires to travel there, so he gathers his best men and sets out on a journey that will last an entire year.

They pass both the sun and the moon, and at last they reach the land of the giants. There they find the giant's young daughter down by the water, preparing to bathe. Eventually she sees the Sun's son and asks him, "Gos don boadát, gean don ozat" ["Where do you come from, whom do you seek?"]. She herself hints at answers meant to frighten the Sun's son into turning back immediately. But he hasn't traveled this far only to return home empty-handed, so he boasts of his strength and states his mission. He wants a friend for life who can comfort and encourage him, guide him, and give him heirs. The giant's daughter is flattered and asks her father for permission to marry the Son of the Sun. But the old fellow refuses to part so easily with his only daughter. He wants to match his strength against that of the suitor. The blind giant holds out a finger, challenging his opponent to a pulling contest. His daughter thrusts a grapnel into the Son of the Sun's hand, and her old father has to admit that the sinews in the lad's fingers are indeed strong, after which he agrees to the marriage. The intoxicating drink that the giant is then given, however, goes straight to his head, and he rages until he once again has calmed down enough to perform the ceremony. This is carried out ritually on the skin of a whale, the king of the sea. Blood is mixed and knots are tied, all elements of a ritual of mythological origin.

As a dowry the giant's daughter receives great boulders from the golden cliffs along the beach. They are brought on board the Son of the Sun's ship. The giant's daughter removes her maiden's slippers and saves for the days to come the menstrual napkin she has received from her second mother. (Second mother refers to one of the goddesses who play a central role in the marriage ritual.) This means that she is an adult now and ready to become a mother. She is given a secret key and has three chests carried out from a sod hut that was specially built to serve as the resting place of youth. The first chest is blue, the second red, and the third white. Besides these, she takes along the cloth with which she was washing herself at the water's edge when the Sun's son arrived in the land of the giants. In the cloth there are three knots tied by the three Sami goddesses, *Máttaráhkká*, *Saráhkká*, and *Uksáhkká*. These knots symbolize three forces of wind, from breeze to gale, which are unleashed when the knots are untied.

When the brothers of the giant's daughter return from hunting seals, whales, and walruses, they discover that their sister is gone. "Whose odor of sweat was so sweet / Who smelled the scent of her bosom / To whom did our sister give her hand?" they ask their father, who answers, "Beaivvi bárdni, borjjus bárdni" ["The son of the Sun, the seafarer"].

The brothers return to their oars and take up the chase after the Son of the Sun's ship. Soon they are right behind the fugitives. But then the giant's daughter unties the first knot. The wind rises, fills the sails, and the brothers fall astern. Nevertheless, they don't give up. Soon they are once again about to overtake the fugitives' ship. They holler and threaten, their rage swells, their wrath boils. But the giant's daughter longs only to enter the bridal bed with the Son of the Sun. She unties the second knot, and immediately the wind grows even stronger. The brothers watch as the other boat once again gains the lead. As they close the gap between their ship and that of the Sun's son for the third time, it is no longer sweat but blood that beads their foreheads, and their hands leave impressions on the oars. "Can the boat withstand

more wind?” the giant’s daughter asks the Son of the Sun, as she unties the last knot and releases the gale. The ship rolls from side to side, cast among the waves; the mast groans; the giant’s daughter seeks cover in the bottom of the boat. Her brothers lose track of the ship and are forced to give up the chase. They go ashore to watch from a mountaintop for the Son of the Sun’s ship, but there, on the next morning, they are struck by the rising sun’s rays, and both they and their vessel are turned to stone.

When, at last, the Son of the Sun’s ship reaches home, the bridal couple must go through the marriage ceremony that is practiced in the Son of the Sun’s kingdom. They are once again united in marriage, this time on a bearskin and the hide of a two-year-old female reindeer, and the giant’s daughter is transformed into a Sami, “moarsi sámáidahttui”. After this, “Her doors are widened / Her room is made larger.” This obviously alludes to impregnation, since in the last line it is noted simply, “Thus she bore the Sun’s sons.” These children were the legendary *Gállábártnit*, who became the progenitors of the Sami people, and who, upon their death, were not buried in the ordinary way but rather lifted to heaven, because not only were they outstanding hunters, they were also the inventors of skis. They make up the constellation Orion’s belt, which is named *Gállábártnit* in Sami (i.e. the old man's sons).

Both the introduction and the conclusion of the poem have obviously erotic undertones clearly associated with a desire for the continued existence of the Sami people here on earth. There are several levels in the poem which touch upon fertility, reproduction, and sexuality. What may well be most significant of all, however, is that the myth creates a link between the Sami people and the most powerful force on earth, the sun. So the poem is in fact meant to legitimize the Sami’s right to inhabit Sápmi, that is, the region which they regard as their own.

“The Death of the Sun’s Daughter” represents in its soft-spoken expression an entirely different attitude compared to the one found in “The Son of the Sun’s Courting in the Land of the Giants.” Where the Son of the Sun poem is clearly a heroic epic that is supposed to transmit pride and faith in the future, “The Death of the Sun’s Daughter” stands for a much more down to earth perspective on the Sami people’s place and possibilities in the harsh Arctic reality. The poem in its pleading formulation is almost a counterpart to the bombastic rhetoric in the Son of the Sun poem, and thus represents an important admonition to the Sami people’s collective conscience about life’s sunny and shady sides. The optimism and faith in the future in the heroic epic gets its counterbalance in uncertainty and a need to pray for a continued existence as a people on this earth.

Turi’s Book of Lapland

When it comes to printed literature, the history of Sami literature is relatively short. The first book written in the Sami language by a Sami and based on material from everyday Sami life, *Muitalus sámiid birra [Turi’s Book of Lapland]*, was published in 1910. Its author was the renowned wolf hunter (so it is expressed in his personal yoik) and reindeer herder Johan Turi (1854-1936). The book was published bilingually, translated into Danish by the artist and ethnologist Emilie Demant (later Demant-Hatt) (1873-1958), who had encouraged Turi to write. Demant and Turi met

first time in 1904, and through studying the language and spending a whole winter with Johan Turi's brother's family, Emilie Demant became fluent in Sami. Turi's story of Sami traditions, values and reindeer herding is both realistic and dramatic, and it takes up a definite position against the colonization of Sapmi. Moreover, the book contains a great deal of material about Sami customs, beliefs, and folk medicine. It also provides historical background for a number of legends, for example, those telling about the raids carried out in Sapmi by bands of marauders such as the Tjudis, as vividly retold in the Sami feature film, *Ofelas [Pathfinder]*, directed by Nils Gaup (b. 1955). In his chapter concerning Sami songs, Turi describes how a yoik might come about among the Sami, and, true to his narrative style, he fashions his story into an exciting account, laced with romantic intrigue.

The last chapter of the book is called "Story about Samiland's strange animals" This is an obvious parable about the Sami situation as Johan Turi understood it at the time he wrote the book – the Sami were regarded as a problem one didn't really know how to handle. Like the strange animals whose land was taken so that it became more difficult for them to manage, in the same way the new immigrants knew they were taking the land from those who had used it since time immemorial, but because these animals (read: the Sami) were so shy and easy to frighten, colonization didn't really represent a moral problem for the intruders: "and these animals are easy to frighten, they are very shy: nor is it terrible if they aren't able to manage so well, they don't need to breed, and it isn't dangerous if they do poorly and are tormented, they are used to this life." This is presented to be the view of the new immigrant. This little story is full of Sami irony, understatement, the roguish Sami mode of expression that conceals much, and still says so much to those who already know, but at the same time lets those who know little dimly perceive that there is a lot more behind what is said than is expressed in the lines. It is the voice of the oppressed that makes a silent revolt in its powerlessness in the face of superior force. And for the one who wants to listen the text contains precisely the main element in all of Turi's plan for the book, namely, to instruct the readers about Sami mentality and way of living.

Johan Turi's book is the beginning of something new in Sami literary history, but also a continuation of the storytelling tradition, thereby bringing out more aspects of Sami life than just the story as story. One could say that Turi's book is stories about history, at the same time as it both openly and between the lines comments on the Sami situation a hundred years ago. Demant-Hatt gets a large part of the credit for Turi's having written the book at all. She convinced him to believe in the idea that it is important for the Sami people that one of their own tell about his life in a book that could reach out both as documentation and as narrative.

And Turi did that – as probably one of the most cited Sami publications of all whether literature or social science. For what Turi does is to write reality at the same time as he writes fiction, his book is literature and social science and essay at the same time – he is holistic and moving, his book is ethnography and anthropology, history and folklore, his book is in short "A story about the Sámi." In the hundred years anniversary edition of Turi's book (2010), almost forty of his own drawings and paintings are included, thus adding value to the publication and acknowledging Johan Turi as the first Sami multimedia artist as well as the first writer.

The Policy of Assimilation and the Resistance

Only two years after Turi's book appeared, journalist and teacher Anders Larsen (1870-1949) published through his own company in Christiania [Oslo] the first novel to appear in the Sami language, *Beaivi-álgu* [Daybreak], whose central theme is the author's belief in Sami self-respect. *Beaivi-álgu* is really a simple book, a bit reminiscent of popular fiction. Still, it says something important to the Sami reader. It is psychological in the sense that it allows the reader not only to take part in telling the story but also to go further with it. A Sami person's reading of *Beaivi-álgu* never stops where the author ceases to speak, for the story has above all contributed to a process of associative co-creation based on the reader's own experiences. One discovers that little has changed in the hundred years that have gone by, and even if one doesn't exactly identify personally with Ábo's story, reading it arouses feelings and attitudes, so that the book becomes an important key to a clearer understanding of the Sami situation as a minority group.

Beaivi-álgu makes a statement about the consequences of Norwegianization and thus elucidates some of the reasons for the Sami language and culture's gradually being assigned such low status, even among many Sami. Larsen, however, is out to do more than simply explain a state of affairs; he also offers a vision of something better, a utopia toward which to strive. It was Larsen's intention to address the issues of his day by using creative writing as a means to express his view of contemporary society. In many ways, his book is an extension of his perhaps even more important contribution as a cultural figure and Sami political pioneer through the newspaper he edited from 1904 to 1911, *Sagai Muittalægje*, which, among other things, served as a mouthpiece for Isak Saba (1875-1921), who in 1906 became the first Sami to be elected to the Norwegian National Assembly. In addition to this distinction, Saba is author of the lyrics to the Sami national anthem, "Sámisoga lávlla", introduced for the first time in the April 1, 1906, issue of *Sagai Muittalægje*.

The period of Norwegianization lasted from around the middle of the 19th century until well into the 1960s. During this time, the public's view of Sami people underwent a change: Where Norwegians had once regarded the Sami as innocent, naive children of nature, they gradually began to openly look down on everything that had anything whatsoever to do with that which is Sami. The Sami were to be made civilized, elevated to a higher cultural level. Obviously, under this cultural policy, no support could be given to any effort made by the Sami themselves. It became forbidden to use the Sami language in teaching, and separate wage scales were established for those teachers who were most successful in Norwegianizing Sami children.

At the beginning of the 20th century the Sami living in Norway and Sweden began to organize themselves in order to take a stronger stand against the efforts being carried out in the two nations to assimilate them. In the lead were the Southern Sami, who in 1904 chose the young activist Elsa Laula (later Laula Renberg) (1877-1931) to be the first leader of Fatmomakke Sami Association. She, in turn, formed the first Sami women's association, *Brurskanken Samiske Kvindeforening*. Laula Renberg was one of the central figures at the first Sami national conference, held in Trondheim in 1917. Although not an author of literary works, she was a formidable debater and published a pamphlet in Swedish, *Inför Lif eller Död* (1904) [A Matter of

Life or Death], in which she urges the Sami to demand their land and water rights. In a sense, it can be said that her pamphlet serves as a link between the Shaman's resigned, accepting appeal in the old Sami antiphony dating from the period of colonization and today's more overt Sami political demands for justice.

Ensnaring the Language or Being Ensnared in It

Sami literature first began to flourish in the 1970s, a period of increased Sami cultural and social activity when advances were made in the struggle for Sami rights and a number of important institutions were founded. At the end of the decade, the first artists' associations were formed and the first Sami publishing company saw the light of day, which meant that the threshold was lowered a bit, encouraging Sami writers to dare come forth with their manuscripts. Sami literature became established as a university subject during the 1980s, and, in recent years, both single works and anthologies of Sami literature have appeared in other languages. Studies in Sami culture and literature have been established at several U.S. colleges and universities, and quite a few European universities offer classes in Sami studies.

Of all the Sami art forms, it is perhaps literature that has had to strive against the greatest odds. Anyone can listen to music or look at a picture without having special qualifications to do so; without the ability to read, however, no one can have direct access to literature. There are still many Sami who have never been educated in their own language. Others have lost their language through assimilation and can experience Sami literature only in translation. But there is little money for publishing either original editions or translations. The market is so small that no company can hope to recover its costs through sales. In order for a book in the Sami language to be published, it must be almost completely financed by government money. Even though the distribution of the support to Sami cultural projects now is channeled through the *Sámediggi*, an elected representative political body based on a voluntary electoral registration among the Sami, the money for distribution still is granted by the national governments. There is a *Sámediggi* in all the three Nordic countries where the Sami live, Norway, Sweden and Finland. Unfortunately, literature as an institution and Sami cultural journalism – not to mention literary criticism in Sami mass media at all – are so poorly developed that Sami authors receive responses to their books from “primary readers” far too seldom. Newspapers and radio do not review books on a regular basis, and there hardly exists any literary journals. Nor is there any literary debate worth mentioning, and to the extent literature is treated in Sami mass media, it often is limited to interviews or portraits of individual authors when a new book is launched.

One of the most prominent Sami cultural figures to emerge during the new revitalization at the end of the 1960s was Paulus Utsi (1918-1975). He combined his job as a teacher of *duodji* at the Sami Folk High School in Johkamohkki, Sweden, with writing poetry. Utsi had a plan in his writing: He wanted to capture the language, to catch it in the very snares of language itself. Utsi published two collections of poetry, *Giela giela* (1974) [Ensnare the Language], and *Giela gielain* (1980) [Ensnare with the Language], the latter appearing posthumously, with his wife, Inger Huuva-Utsi (1914-1984), as co-author. In an interview, Utsi once explained that the Sami used to write in the snow, and that made him think of writing

poetry. Perhaps it is precisely the transitoriness of this type of writing he had in mind when, in one of his poems, he compares the threatened Sami way of life with ski tracks across the open tundra that the wind wipes out even before the next day has dawned.

Like other cultural work, writing fiction as a creative process has only recently become a means for gaining any particular social status among the Sami. How to write was considered worth knowing – a valuable skill for carrying out business transactions, for example – but it was mainly the others, the non-Sami majority, who reaped the benefits of their ability to write. Even if Sami parents did encourage their children to do well in school in order to succeed in the new society, the perception of real work was still associated with manual labor and the Biblical edict, “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread.” But Paulus Utsi understood that his people, too, had to learn new techniques and that, in many lines of work, they would have to resort to the “arts” of the others in order to be heard and taken seriously. Utsi stressed both aspects of writing: its utilitarian value as a means for both learning and earning income, on the one hand; on the other, its aesthetic dimension, that is, writing as an art form, as literature, which in its own way can open up completely different avenues for understanding and communication than can factual prose. Utsi wanted the Sami to preserve their own language as the minority’s own voice, but he also wanted them to learn the language of the majority in order to expose the majority’s linguistic manipulation of the Sami. In other words, they should become aware of language as a trap with which one could ensnare, but also in which one could be ensnared, as his book titles indicated. In Sami the same words are used for learning languages and checking a snare: “oahppat giela” can mean both “learning a language” and “looking to see if there is anything caught in the snare.”

With the Myths into a New Multimedia Era

Multifaceted artist Nils-Aslak Valkeapää (1943-2001) made his debut as an author in 1971, with an essay book written in Finnish, *Terveisiä Lapista* [*Greetings from Lapland*, 1983]. In this book he ridicules Nordic stereotypes and condescending views about the Sami, at the same time as he demonstrates how dissimilar even neighboring cultures can be in their value systems and respect for each other.

Nils-Aslak Valkeapää was a Finnish citizen until he settled permanently in Skibotn in Nord-Troms in Norway and changed his nationality to become a Norwegian citizen. He studied at a teachers’ training college in Finland, and chose teachers’ college not because he ever intended to become a teacher, but because it was an education that trained him in a number of areas he was interested in, among others literature and music. Valkeapää became a revitaliser of Sami culture, and above all of Sami music. In particular he created a new interest in Sami yoik at a time when it was in danger of dying out. At the end of the 1960s he combined traditional yoik with modern instruments and popular music, later also combining yoik with jazz-inspired genres in cooperation with some of Finland’s foremost jazz musicians. There are still several Sami musicians who follow this fairly new tradition. As time went on he also developed a new form of more extensive yoik composition that associates itself with the composition of classical music.

Nils-Aslak Valkeapää won the Nordic Council's Prize for Literature in 1991 with his book *Beaivi, Áhcázan* [*The Sun, My Father*, 1997], whose title alludes to the myth about the Sami as the children of the Sun. The book is an amalgamation of old photographs and newly-written lyrical poetry that ties together the past and present, the documentary and the fictional, in a form that is innovative and creative. It provides at once an expression of Sami cultural history and the richness of language. The photographs illustrate various aspects of the Sami people's lives and history and comprise an enormous body of documentary material, which the author spent six years collecting in Scandinavia, Europe, and the United States.

In a purely artistic sense, Valkeapää continues in *The Sun, My Father* his idea from *Ruoktu váimmus* (1985) [*Trekways of the Wind*, 1994], but he goes a step further by testing new forms for combining words and images, visual impressions and associations, expressions and content. In one poem, the words appear to be spread across the page without any apparent connection, until the reader discovers from the meaning of the words that they actually represent an entire herd of reindeer. Each word stands for a reindeer, and each word is different from the others. In the Sami language there are innumerable ways to describe reindeer, such as according to their sex, age, or variations in their appearance. It is by such simple means that Valkeapää elicits the different depths to which different readers can understand a text. If one interprets the broken lines that run from individual words across one page and onto the next, then the whole poem is set in motion – the reindeer herd, too, is obviously on the move.

The section of *Trekways of the Wind* that has, perhaps, reached further out into the world than any other Sami literature – with the exception of Olaus Sirma's love poem from the 17th century – is the "My Home Is in my Heart" sequence. In this fairly long poem Valkeapää expresses the views of a nature-based culture when it comes to the question of ownership of land and water, the clashing of totally different notions of closeness to the places a person moves in, and most of all the feeling of inadequacy and impossibility in reaching across with an explanation as to why the whole surrounding – including landscapes, people, weather, the bushes, the lakes – why it all is a part of a person, an inseparable part of that person's whole identity: "My home is in my heart / it migrates with me / (- -) You know it brother / you understand sister / but what do I say to strangers / who spread out everywhere / how shall I answer their questions / that come from a different world". The concept of "place", the notion of "home" is dealt with in this poem into the core of the matter.

Nils-Aslak Valkeapää's last book was *Eanni, eannázan*, (not yet translated into English, the title means *The Earth, My Mother*). In the book one understands better how absorbed Valkeapää was with the importance of traditions to indigenous people. The book is meant to open up a wider perspective on the place and importance of indigenous peoples in the world, and as such is both an extension and continuation of the prize-winning book *The Sun, My Father*. The Sami stood at the center of *The Sun, My Father*, while in *The Earth, My Mother* the first person narrator goes on a visit to other indigenous peoples in the jungle and the desert. It is nevertheless clear the whole time that the first person narrator is a guest; he does not pretend that he can be one of the peoples he visits, but he registers similarities in values and manner of living. In *Trekways of the Wind* too the first person narrator was on a visit to his

kindred in Greenland and on the American prairie, so in many ways in *The Earth, My Mother* the reader is presented with the completion of the journey he began earlier. And thematically there are several similarities between *Ruoktu váimmus* and *Eanni, eannážan*, not least in the criticism of civilization – it is man himself in all his self-righteous grandeur that is the greatest threat to all life on earth. The first person poet stands shoulder to shoulder with the oppressed, and remembers in ironic expressions how the erudite and genteel people in their time used to look down on the northern indigenous people; yet they weren't able to manage without help precisely from those they called primitive.

Valkeapää also wrote a play that was performed twice in 1995 in Japan. In the original Sami it was first staged at the Sami theater Beaivvás in 2007 as *Ridn'oaivi ja Nieguid Oaidni* (*The Frost-haired and the Dream-seer*). In this piece he shows clearly how humans are part of Nature, how everything is tied together and connected to each other. The piece in many ways represents Valkeapää's artistic legacy, and expresses the indigenous peoples' view that the future for the whole human race is dependent on our showing respect for Mother Earth.

Nils-Aslak Valkeapää's art, like all great art goes beyond all ethnic borders, as evidenced by the reception he received wherever he appeared – his radiance and presence on the stage were powerful, he drew the audience to himself in such a way that they joined him on his journeys. His music was world music before the term had even been coined. "The Bird Symphony" for which he received the Prix Italia in 1993, fully expresses his great affection for birds. They actually are the lead vocals in the symphony. The migratory birds were his nearest friends; perhaps he saw in them a parallel to his own journeys around the world with his art.

Women Breaking with Convention

Rauni Magga Lukkari (b. 1943) has shown a gradual movement from an ethnic-emancipatory poetry to a poetry in which the poet-self's voice rises not so much from her cultural background as from her desires and longings as a woman. In her first book, *Jienat vulget* [The Ice Breaks], published in 1980, Lukkari hits upon a number of themes which she later revisits and further develops. By using irony and humor, she gets the reader to observe matters from a fresh perspective. From her portrayal of the deceived woman in *Báze dearvan, Biehtár* (1981) [Farewell, Biehtár], via *Losses beaivegirji* (1986) [Dark Journal], in which there are two main female characters – a liberated woman as subject and her oppressed counterpart in an objectified personification of female destiny, whose life is dominated by alienation, superficial modernization, and social isolation – Lukkari has gone on to write about a proud, free woman in *Mu gonagasa gollebiktasat / Min konges gylne klær* (1991) [My King's Golden Clothes]. Here the woman is still divided concerning her relationship with the man, at times uncertain what she should do, but nonetheless more certain of her own worth than were her literary predecessors. This woman is at the same time confident in the power she has over the man, for she says that it is the skill of her eyes and hands that determines for how long her king will sparkle in his golden clothes – meaning on the surface that it is her handicraft skills that have produced the beautiful *gákti* (the Sami costume the man is wearing) which he can show off with. Between the lines, the woman is still worried about her position in

their relationship, and – not the least – about the way the surrounding community judges her as a woman, based primarily on her skills as a hand crafter.

Rauni Magga Lukkari was chosen to be the Sami contender for the Nordic Council's Prize for Literature in 1987. In 1996, she was awarded first prize in Sami publisher Davvi Girji's literary contest for her collection of poetry, *Árbeeadni* [*The time of the lustful mother*, 1999], in which Lukkari's symbolic language is more elaborated and demanding than in her previous books. Lukkari is also much sought for as a writer of prologues and poems for opening ceremonies, because of her great mastery of Sami language. Some of these writings are collected in *Ávvudivttat*, 2006 [Ceremonial poems]. In 2002, Lukkari established her own press, Gollegiella, which has published her most recent works, the theater play *Lihkkosalmmái*, 2007 [A Fortunate Fellow], which was performed in Norwegian adaptation in the National Theater in Oslo, Norway, and *Lex Sápmi*, 2009, which is a collection of poetic prose texts, well-suited for performance art.

Synnøve Persen (b. 1950) is perhaps recognized first and foremost as a visual artist. Her twofold artistic approach to book production can be noted in the play between text and watercolor illustration, not least of all in her work from 1992, *biekkakeahtes bálggis* [windless path], where the pictures do not serve primarily to illustrate the poems but rather actually tell their own parallel story, alongside the words. The wholeness achieved in the meeting between two art forms gives the book an extra dimension. The text intimates, insinuates, directs the reading, while the pictures bring home the point with their simple lines and quiet opposition to a single interpretation. In her book, Persen purifies the yoik's poetical brevity and striking expression to an almost minimalistic style, where all that is superficial is pared away, and the poems step forth in the total nakedness of their words.

The book jacket and first illustration show a leaf with clearly visible veins, while the veins are entirely gone in the final picture. The composition of the watercolors throughout the book play upon a contrast between the rounded, labyrinthine versus the disjointed, angular. The rainbow-like interval illustration is introduced with a poem introducing soft lips and open heart, and ends with "the ocean's secret / moonbeam / kiss". Under the rainbow's arch swims the poem's "I" in the early light of day. She is called by the night birds to take a chance on something that is only vaguely defined. Both the textual and the visual context clearly imply, however, that it all revolves around a love-encounter, a matter of daring to open oneself to another, as might a starfish. That the reality of a harsh world forces the starfish to close and thrust out its spines in defense is paralleled in the text with a faded summer and bare trees.

In *ábiid eadni* (1994) [the sea's mother], it is again apparent that Persen the visual artist and Persen the writer work in tandem. This no doubt has to do as much with the book's overall design and individual pages as with the interplay between the words' message and the dark, melancholy visual metaphor that is conveyed by the pure black lustrous paper that comprises the entire book – except for the bright red facing pages that occur at the middle of the volume as a shocking contrast to or amplification of the black.

Ever since her debut with *alit lottit girdilit* (1981) [blue birds flying], Persen has distinguished herself as a poet with a sure feel for style, an artist who plays upon

poetry's metaphorical nature in her illustrations. So far, her most recent book is a mournful processing of the loss of her daughter, *meahci suvas bohciidit ságat*, 2005 [the forest wind brings news]. Through all her books of poetry, Persen insists upon her right to express herself with unbound freedom; insists that her personal artistic objectives will not be relegated to some ethnic or cultural category. Persen refuses to be caged. Art is, in itself, free; hence, each one of us has the right to develop a life design.

The legacy

Jovvna-Ánde Vest (b. 1948) made his literary debut with the prize-winning book, *Cáhcegáddái nohká boazobálggis* (1988) [The Reindeer Path Ends at the River Bank]. This book is something between fiction and a biography of his father. His father, who was killed in an airplane accident on his way to a Sami conference, was an outsider among his own people, yet somehow a spokesman for them. The author manages to lift the depiction of his father from the usual biography to an artistic portrayal of a man filled with conflict, who lives in the middle of a time when great social, economic, and cultural changes are rapidly taking place in the small Sami communities in the north. This is a time when the automobile, motorcycle, and phonograph appear along the banks of the Tana River – and the story's "Father" is the first to acquire them all. It is also at this time that the local bureaucracy enters into people's everyday lives, so that to hold a post in local government means status and an important say in the direction things will take. The book's "Father" is involved here, too, but none of this brings him happiness. As time goes on, he becomes a more and more irritable, frustrated man.

Even in the way he makes use of his immediate surroundings, the father shows himself to be a man who follows his own path. He prefers to walk where others fear to tread. In the forests and mountains, however, he shows another side of himself. He is kind and thoughtful, a man who patiently teaches his children the techniques they will need to know in order to get along in the woods and fields. And he tells stories – not about ten-headed trolls or his life as a soldier on the frontline, but about small, everyday occurrences that have meaning for people in their own communities.

Vest has also written a trilogy that describes life over the past few decades in a little community in the Tana River valley, where local history reflects a larger perspective of the changes that have occurred in the Sami way of life and attitudes during this period. Appropriately, the books in this series are titled *Árbbolaccat I–III* [The Heirs]. Vest is a master in creating eloquent dialogues, that contribute to portraying the different characters in the trilogy, not least through his use of vernacular.

A Sky Full of Gold-Winds: Identity in Writing

Inger-Mari Aikio-Arianaick (b. 1961) has thus far published five books of poetry, *Gollebiekkat almmi dievva* (1988) [The Sky Full of Gold-Winds], *Jiehkki vuolde ruonas gidda* (1994) [Beneath the Glacier Green Spring], *Silkeguobbara lákca* (1995) [The Silk Mushroom's Cream], *Máilmmis dása* (2001) [From the World to Here], and *Suonat* (2008) [*This Beloved Homeland*, 2009]. In *Gollebiekkat almmi dievva*, Aikio is experimental and breaks the close bond between the poet, the text,

and the context that yoik lyrics represented; here she is stylistically innovative and closer to international trends than to Sami literary tradition. Yet a traditional way of expression nearly catches up with her in her ensuing works. She uses a more aphoristic style in her next two volumes of poetry, where a kind of resignation seems about to overtake the youthful enthusiasm of her first book. This is particularly the case in *Máilmmes dása*, where she describes how the female “I” falls in love with a man from almost the other end of the world, the pregnancy that entails the relationship, and how different cultural values from her part of the world meet with the expectations of the mother-in-law family. The couple divides its life between the two countries, and the “I” person of this book seems more mature, almost complacent, in her pondering on the female’s role and situation compared to the previous books. As a book of poetry *Máilmmis dása* is also interesting in the way it blurs, or problematizes, the border between being personal or private in fictional works in that it includes private photographs of the poet’s family, and thus invites the reader to examine the separateness between the poet and the “I” person in the poems.

On the visual level alone, it is a pleasure to page through *Silkeguobbara lákca*, thanks to John Åke Blind’s incredibly beautiful pictures, such as icicles that resemble pillars or segments of frozen water that remind one of sculpture or paintings. It is pleasant to note the way in which the photographs and the poems quite clearly compliment one another thematically, for example where some of the poems’ cool exteriors are reflected in the cold blue color of the ice. It is woman who always stands in the center of Aikio’s poems, with an ironic distance – both from herself, in terms of her own experiences, and from the text – which she uses as a metaliterary medium to process her experiences. Aikio is true to her artistic plan: to objectify romantic encounters and disappointments for the sake of creating literature. The “I” in her poems, however, is no long-suffering woman, broken by men’s deceit; she settles the matter in plain words, “lie to me / deceive me / you will be my poems”. The painful irony in her poems seems to convey an understanding of the “I” that is important to grasp fully in order to understand the bitterness that constantly makes itself heard in her texts. The reader is left to ask whether it is the writing itself that is serving a therapeutic function, or is it the metaliterary aspect – the problematization surrounding the text’s coming into existence as literature – that is being emphasized in the poems. Aikio has a clear consciousness as a writer, in the way she tests literature’s possibilities in order to gain self awareness and insight. Although she is looking inward into the heart of Sami society, there is something in her writing that aims beyond.

Suonat [i.e. The Sinews], *This Beloved Homeland* in English rendition, is the first book of poetry in Sami with ekphrastic poems, that is, poems written to or being inspired by pictures. In this case the photographs are by the Hungarian photo artist Josef Timar. In this book two eminent artists have successfully united the language of images with the language of letters, utilizing the potential that an artist sees in material reality; which in this book is represented by images of Arctic landscape, philosophically mediated into poetry of indigenous wisdom.

No oars in the boat – heading home to the global ...

Among the new voices, this essay will conclude with two books of poetry by Sigbjørn Skåden, but before that, two other names deserve to be mentioned; namely Hege Siri (b. 1973) and Niilas Holmberg (b. 1990). Both are multimedia artists in the sense that Siri combines poetry and photography, while Holmberg is a poet, musician and actor. So far, both of them have published one book of poetry each, which demonstrate promising and aspiring artists. Siri's poetry takes on itself to represent an interesting variant of a collectiveness in depicting the Sami resistance to a hydro-electric dam project in the late 1970s and early 80s, where the “we”-aspect resonates the community commitment that one finds in a lot of indigenous writing.

With his debut book *Skuovvadeddjiid gonagas* [King of the Shoemakers] Sigbjørn Skåden (b. 1976) has written an interesting story about making a choice in life – sacrificing one love for another. In this case, the other can be another person or thing. The book consists of 14 parts where every part – except the first and sixth – concludes with a relatively coarse bitmap photo as if from an old photo album. The poems are connected in a story, but they could also be read as individual poems. Both ways of reading make good sense. Jusup is the main character or the one the story revolves around. Other central characters are Jusup's girlfriend Thea – whom he breaks up with – and Juan, who is the person from abroad, the sailor and the one who makes Jusup put things in relief.

Jusup-Juan, however, could be one and the same person because judging from the photographic images in the book and from the fact that the book came out first in Sami, it is more than allowable to consider *Skuovvadeddjiid gonagas* as a work of Sami poetry. It is of course deliberate that the photographic images were included; they provide a context for the text, which geographically contributes to placing the book in Sapmi. The texts in themselves do not necessarily do that, not counting that the Sami original was written in the local dialect from Skåden's home region. Juan could be said to represent another side of Jusup, namely the international – who becomes a metaphor for the stay-at-home's meeting with the world.

Thea calls Jusup Josef, which symbolizes that she does not understand or acknowledge Jusup on Jusup's own terms. This is an alienating element for Jusup, and he gradually realizes that the Mary figure and the love she represents in Jusup's way of thinking, is not founded in Thea. This sends Jusup away – northward. Home?

There are many allusions in the text to poems of Nils-Aslak Valkeapää and Rauni Magga Lukkari. This is interesting to observe for one with knowledge of Sami literature, without it needing to have any deliberate meaning for the text. Thematically too the first Sami novel echoes in the background, when the main character Ábo Eira in Anders Larsen's book from 1912, *Beaive-álgu*, also heads home after an unsuccessful love affair in the south. Ábo too has two different names in the book. Taken that way it is entirely possible to read Sigbjørn Skåden's book in a Sami literary and literary-historical connection, but Skåden is open to a further reading in *Skuovvadeddjiid gonagas* – not least through the fact that he himself translated his own text into Norwegian. This surely has a basis in several circumstances, where the main motive must be assumed to be a wish to reach out to more readers, but this need not mean only non-Sami readers, since the Sami language

situation in the wake of the long assimilation history in the Nordic countries has led to the majority of Sami no longer knowing Sami.

Juan is the one who opens up Jusup's eyes, and thereby also the readers', to the international perspective or cosmopolitan thinking, but Jusup ends up all the same frustrated in a boat drifting haphazardly in an inlet. The open sea is mentioned in an earlier poem, but the boat Jusup drifts away in has no oars, so he cannot determine the direction himself, but is dependent on the right current and wind conditions to get out. Here too lies some of the tension in the book's thematics: What will you become when you return home: no Messiah, no Juan, but a Jusup who is trying to get his rural community (his people) to see, but they just ask: Has he gone crazy? So when Jusup wades out to the boat in his shiny shoes and feels the salt water on his feet, he has perhaps realized that the values of an earlier nomadic culture, where migration and utilization of different resource areas was central, has now changed to be quite like the norms of settled people. In his frustration in registering the changes in the set of values, Jusup chooses a long and deep sleep, drifting in an inlet in his childhood village, not knowing whether he still wants to be there when he awakens, or whether he is on the open sea – in the grasp of globalism.

In Skåden's second book, *Prekariáhta lávlla* – so far only available in Sami – [*Song of the Precariat*], 2009, the 1980s constitute some of the adornment of the book. There are references to new wave music and computer games that were popular at that time. Debbie and Ian remain in many ways representatives of the epoch – Ian Curtis, the author informs us in a footnote at the end of the book, was central in the flourishing of the Manchester-based music genre post punk. Debbie was his wife. Music and song texts and performance are accordingly central elements in the book, where several of the texts have a darker undertone that matches the more somber aspects of new wave and post punk. In some poems the author borrows the form from other poets, e.g. Ibsen and Shakespeare, but some of the loans could just as well be ascribed to old epic yoik poetry that had roughly the same form. In the "Grand Prix" song Skåden even has end rhyme in Sami, something that is not at all easy, while in other places he makes sound poems with clear references to Sami yoik and Native American chant.

In the poems that pretend to be song texts, Skåden shows that he masters several means of expression – he parodies the most naïve love songs in a humorous way – but at the same time he takes the need to rebel and the power of love seriously. The songs are placed in the Sami context, not least through geography and Sami references, but the themes are universal. In spite of several of the poems being humoristic on the surface – specially when one has the chance to experience the author himself presenting them as performance art – many of them nevertheless have an undercurrent that is gloomier and more serious. Some of the poems are simply melancholy.

The texts allude several times to fog, mist and sleep. The book begins with the words "I want to tell you / about fog, ..." and it ends with "I" and "you" are "*mierkkáiduvvon*" – in a situation of fog, foggy. The expression is a passive verb with the basic stem in the noun fog. The last poem is an allusion to Nils-Aslak Valkeapää's poem "when everything is over" from *The Sun, My Father*, a poem that quite clearly points to death, and which is also often quoted in obituaries. In

Prekariáhta lávlla the Valkeapää line constitutes the impact of the epilogue. The epilogue allows the “I” and “you” to be back alone: “when everything is over / it is you / and me, / abandoned / again / alone / again, / [...] / placed here / to be forgotten / ...” the expression “to be forgotten” can be translated as being intentionally left behind; the verb form used is the active supine, which hence expresses a will – in case you and I are left behind in this place in order to be forgotten. There is fog, or they are put in (or have put themselves in) a situation of fog, alone and forgotten.

Sigbjørn Skåden’s two books of poetry demonstrate maturity and a clear consciousness of poetic practice that affirms the dealing with a poet who knows his craft, and who dares and is capable of using tradition in a creative way, at the same time as he is concerned with universal questions that he allows to take shape in a language both old and young – a primordial language of Europe, at the same time as it is relatively new as a written language, just as Sami literature also has deep roots back in history as oral narrative art, at the same time as it is young as a written literature.

Looking back in order to find the way forward

Sami literature focuses upon many of the same things as do other literatures. While it may not encompass the variety that characterizes great national literatures, its writers address situations that they feel are important to write about in the Sami language. No other literature in the world can, in fact, treat Sami experiences better than the Sami literature itself. Within children’s literature, there has been a special effort to retell the old fairy tales and legends so that they will not be forgotten and disappear into the modern media culture. This is done because there is a desire to find a great deal of valuable, traditional Sami knowledge and wisdom in the old myths and tales. Some readers, however, have called for a greater preoccupation among today’s writers with describing and seeing as problematic the times in which the Sami live and what it is like to be a Sami at the turn of the millennium, when most Sami people live in towns and no longer work at all within traditional occupations. What makes a Sami a Sami as well as a Norwegian, Swedish, Finnish, or Russian citizen? The answer to who and what a Sami is will surely vary greatly according to whom one asks and where that person is from. There are many Sami people, living both along the coast and inland, who can not speak the Sami language but who, nonetheless, define themselves as Sami. This applies to the entire Sami settlement region in all four nations in which the Sami live.

A portion of Sami lyrical poetry has addressed these types of questions and treated them in an artistic manner. An example is found in writers’ looking at the problem of identity by describing personal relations between people. Paulus Utsi often combined beautiful nature poetry with themes about the small and weak who are suppressed, but who nonetheless never give up. Utsi saw hope in communication between people. This he expresses in the little poem “Sátni” [The Word], where a soft voice that whispers to the mountain is intercepted by someone in the mountain, who, in turn, echoes and magnifies its message, carrying it farther.

Today, there are several companies that publish Sami literature. The distribution of Sami books has also improved significantly in recent years, and Sami literature as an area of study has entered every level, from elementary school to the university. There

now exists a separate law that assures the use of the Sami language in public administration in Norway, Sweden and Finland. There is one Sami language newspaper in Norway, and Sami radio and TV in the Scandinavian countries broadcasts news and programs in the Sami language every day. Sami writers have organized themselves into associations for authors of both fiction and non-fiction. Most of them write in Sami, but some have also distinguished themselves in the majority languages.

The new Sami art takes tradition seriously, looking back in order to find the way forward, at the same time helping to give a small group of people in the Arctic north a voice that can be heard much further than their numbers would seem to justify. The Sami have always been a people without borders, which they affirm through their involvement in such international questions as those pertaining to indigenous peoples. It is as an indigenous people themselves that they are directed to listen to the Earth's inner voice and relay its message to the world. For one Sami myth has it that, when the Great Spirit created the people who were to become the ancestral mothers and fathers of the Sami, he knew the difficulties that awaited them. In order to give them something in which to believe, something to comfort them in trying times, he placed the living, beating heart of a two-year-old female reindeer at the center of the earth, so that each time the Sami felt their existence threatened, they could simply put their ears to the ground and listen for the heartbeat beneath. If the heart was still beating, their future was secure, and their problems would be solved. These heartbeats are connected with the rhythm of the songs that were created to praise the contrasts between Samiland's harsh tundras and its soft, warm lap – the stories that would give the Sami people faith in the future, the stories that will continue to be renewed in picture, word, and song.

Recommended further readings:

Brief introduction to Sami history, legal status, and contemporary arts and media:

<http://www.galdu.org/web/index.php?sladja=43&vuolitsladja=39&giella1=eng>

Anthologies of Sami literature in English:

Gaski, Harald (ed.)1997. *In the Shadow of the Midnight Sun: Contemporary Sami Prose and Poetry*. Davvi Girji, Karasjok.
Sammallahti, Pekka and Anthony Selbourne (eds.) 1996. *Beyond the Wolf Line. An anthology of Sámi Poetry*. Making Waves, Surrey.

More on Sami literature:

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Summary:

The article is an overview of Sami literature, past and present, with a specific emphasis on the connection between tradition and innovation, in which literature is regarded in a broader sense than only limited to the written word. Thus the relationship between the traditional epic *yoik* songs and contemporary poetry is being dealt with, as is the multimedia approach that several Sami artists have chosen for their creative expression. It is almost more the rule than an exemption that Sami artists express themselves through the use of more than only one medium. Through the introduction to Sami literature, the reader also gets acquainted with the history and the culture of the Sami, who are the indigenous people of the northern regions of Scandinavia, Finland and the Kola peninsula in Russia.

Key words:

Sami literature, Indigenous studies, Circumpolar, Identity, Literary institution, Assimilation, Resistance, Resilience.