

# GREENLANDERS SEEN THROUGH THE EYES OF SIGNE RINK

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Signe Rink<sup>1</sup> (1836-1909) published four volumes of fiction in Danish, all of them stories from Greenland of the 19<sup>th</sup> century:<sup>2</sup> *Grønlændere*. 1886 (155 pages); *Grønlændere og Danske i Grønland*. 1887 (204 pages); *Koloni-idyler*. 1888 (262 pages) and *Fra det Grønland som gik. Et par Tidsbilleder fra Trediveerne*. 1902 (264 pages). Some of the stories are short, some are not short at all, actually, e.g. Rink 1902 consists only of two parts, the first one 205 pages long.

The focus here will be on this fiction written by Signe Rink: a case study in how genres of fiction might open up for the possibility of going beyond the dominant discourse and for instance throw light at the role played by Greenlanders in colonial Greenland of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and how it might be possible now a century later to disentangle the threads of different discourses, through reflective research - drawing on historical studies, anthropology, cultural studies and post-colonial studies. In order to use and to evaluate her fiction in this way, it is necessary to look first at her background: who was this woman who wrote about Danes and Greenlanders living in Greenland in the 19<sup>th</sup> century? To this end, I will draw on her unpublished memoirs, written in 1902 (when she thought she was going to die), and revised by her in 1905 (as shows her wording), now located at the Groenlandica Collection of the National Library of Greenland, Nuuk, catalogued as *Bedstemor Rink's memoierer*. The memoirs are an unpagged, twenty odd pages long, handwritten manuscript. They are addressed to her daughter – explicitly in order that she would know the details of her mother's biography (and thereby easier answer questions for necrologies). We witness here the late Signe Rink as an emancipated and self-confident woman writer.

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<sup>1</sup> This article is based on a paper planned in an abstract Dec 2006 and then presented at the conference: NORLIT 2007: The Angel of History. Literature, History and Culture. Helsinki 15.-18.8.2007. However, this summer Kirsten Thisted published a fine article on Signe Rink in *Edda* (Thisted 2007). Accordingly, I also respond to some of her points of view.

<sup>2</sup> All quotes rendered in English are my translations.

### **The background of Signe Rink**

The life of Signe Rink (born: Møller) falls into four parts:

**I:1836-1844/45: Childhood (9-10 years) in Greenland.** Born and raised by Danish parents living in Greenland.

**II:1844/45 – 1853: Youth in Denmark (8-9 years).**

1844/45 – 1852: School. Confirmation 1852 in Denmark

1853: 17 years old: Married in Denmark to 34 years old H J Rink (1819-1893)<sup>3</sup>

**III: 1853-1869: Adult life in Greenland (16 years)**

1853: Return to Greenland.

1855: Birth of their only child, a daughter.

1855 - : Signe Rink decides to develop her intellect and emancipate.

**IV: 1869-1909: Life in Denmark and Norway (40 years)**

1869: Moved to Denmark (in 1883 to Norway for some years).

1886 -: Signe Rink's literary works began to be published.

1893: Death of H J Rink

1809: Death of Signe Rink.

A little more than 100 years after the colonization of Greenland in 1721, Signe Rink was born in Greenland by Danish parents – in 1836. Her father was assistant factor in Paamiut in the Southern part of the colonized Greenland, i.e. West Greenland, later he became factor in Sisimiut. Thus she was born into the local upper class of the few Europeans in a small seal hunting community, where she would play with the Greenlandic children and being a girl she would often visit the huts of the Greenlanders<sup>4</sup> and become fluent in Greenlandic.

European parents of the upper class in Greenland would generally - if they could afford it - send their children to Denmark for school and education/cultivation. According to *Dansk Kvindebiografisk*

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<sup>3</sup> H J Rink: famous scientist (especially glaciology – a research work called “the classical Rink” even before their marriage), ethnographic researcher, later governor of Southern Greenland (policy: The Greenlanders should regain self-management partly through self-confidence and enlightenment, therefore among other things he let the Greenlanders write down their oral tradition, started the Greenlandic newspaper and gave it a Greenlandic editor, and installed local political democratic representative organs), subsequently Director of the Royal Greenland Trade Copenhagen.

<sup>4</sup> There might have been a slight difference between the sexes, in the sense that boys would rather meet outside, girls would meet outside and with the boys, but would to greater extent also visit the families attending smaller children (cf. Bugge 1976).

*Leksikon* Signe Rink was sent to Denmark about 1850 and returned to Greenland in 1853. Kirsten Thisted has the same data (Thisted 2007:136) – and the stay thus appears in these two descriptions as a short intermezzo. Neither of them refers to the unpublished manuscript of Signe Rink's memoirs (Rink undated). According to this she came to Denmark already when 9 or 10 years old, and stayed for 8 or 9 years, and consequently she must have had a much more radical experience, and not just a thin layer of cultivation. Further, in her memoirs she tells about how she and her younger brother after their arrival in Denmark were induced to play Greenlanders at a table for audiences. The late Signe Rink comments that they must have had no shame. Such experiences must have had an alienating impact on her in her adolescence towards her childhood in Greenland. In her old age, it's still a lively part of her memories that she finds worthy of note.

Further, after these 8-9 years she was married 17 years old in 1853 to the 34 years old H J Rink, by then not only double her age, but already famous as scientist, especially on glaciology, and on his way to become a very important person in Greenland through his critical description of the situation there. After some few years Rink became one of two governors – the governor of Southern Greenland. Signe Rink thus returned to Greenland as a young lady of utmost upper class, admiring her much older husband, his position and his competence.

In her memoirs she describes the first encounter with Greenlanders on her return: how she was thrilled when anchoring at Paamiut, the colony where she was born, but how she then looked down at the natives coming out to the ship and realized that although everything seemed familiar it also seemed new, although dear to her, at the same time *“fortrinsvis uvedkommende”* i.e. *“first and foremost as something that was of no concern of hers”*. Signe Rink adds that back then she did not realize that it was herself that had changed so much. But she also recalls that she back then after some seconds of afterthoughts could recognize a man and a woman down there in the skinboats as her playmates from Sisimiut and knew that the woman had married just like she herself.

Signe Rink gives us in this passage of her memoirs a description of the double consciousness that she, herself, got aware of at her return to Greenland. She came home and she had a lot of insight in the

culture of the Others almost as if her own, but at the same time she had been socialized to become an upper class European and wished to live that life.

Later in her memoirs she recalls that - after two years "*barnekoneleg*", i.e. "*playing child-wife*" - she woke up and wanted to become more equal with her husband in intellectual matters even though he did not find it necessary. He accepted it, though, when she persisted in developing her intellect. Some years later, she published a short story in a newspaper - and was very relieved when he found it good and encouraged her to go on. He supported her emancipation also after they left Greenland 1869 and she published three collections of stories about daily life in Greenland over three years 1886, 87 and 88. According to her memoirs, at first she wrote a self-biographical description of her childhood, but

".. , opmuntret – nei lad mig sige kommanderet af den elskelige – Fru Jerichau-Bauman til, istedetfor dette at skrive noget om selve Grønland; "Lidt om selve Kolonilivet derovre" – hed det"

i.e. "encouraged, no let me say ordered by the dear Mrs Jerichau-Bauman <sup>5</sup> instead to write something about Greenland itself, "a little of the colonial life in itself over there" it was said."<sup>6</sup>

But – as she put it – her husband drew her over to his work on the Eskimo culture, too, and she became important for his work. In 1893 H J Rink died. In the 1905 version of her memoirs she describes the 13 years that have gone since his death as "*rædsomme*" i.e. "*terrible*" or "*horrible*".<sup>7</sup> Among other things she tried to comfort herself by taking care of his unpublished manuscripts and by doing research in Eskimology in stead of going on with her authorship of fiction. However, in 1902 her fourth collection of stories about colonial life in Greenland was published.

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<sup>5</sup> Jerichau-Baumann (1819-1881) (*Dansk Kvindebiografisk Leksikon*; Oxfeldt 2004).

<sup>6</sup> In one of her stories, she includes a thematizing of a woman's way to become an author, including the shift from diary about memories of childhood to fiction about Greenlanders and issues from Greenland and including a person acting as mentor (in the fiction a man, the governor) (Rink 1888:155ff). It even includes an echo of the naivety of Signe Rink and her brother as children (Rink 1888:158).

<sup>7</sup> Reading her Memoirs, one might be induced to divide part IV in my survey into two, i.e. before and after the death of H J Rink.

### The right to represent

Reading her memoirs, there is no reason to think that Signe Rink's shift from fiction to translations of works written by the Greenlanders themselves was caused by any second thoughts about her right to represent.<sup>8</sup> But quite amazingly - considering her time - she did comment on the right to represent in her memoirs. She characterized her works as follows:

“at de allerede ret mange novellistiske Skildringer jeg have givet af dem var sandfærdige – i al fald efter min egen Opfattelse;”  
i.e. “that my quite many descriptions of them (i.e. the Greenlanders) in short story form were true – at least in my opinion”.

However, comparing her own work with that done by H J Rink and others, she finds their work so important because her stories described only the external life and not the natural Eskimo, but the civilized Greenlander. First, concerning ‘external’: her narrator sometimes makes a reservation,<sup>9</sup> and second, concerning ‘the natural Eskimo’: in the later period of her life she considered the search for knowledge about the pre-colonial culture more important. In her memoirs when she self-consciously reports that she became an important participant in her husband's research she also mentions that she sort of found it a shame that she during their years in Greenland had acted too much as house wife, in stead of contributing to the discussions among the men with her knowledge about the Greenlandic culture – the emancipated Signe Rink looks back and regret the lost opportunities.

Of course Signe Rink translated texts written by Greenlanders in the Greenlandic newspaper (Rink 1896) in order to let the Greenlanders speak for themselves. However, as an emancipated woman she would be aware that the voices heard there were the

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<sup>8</sup> A point of view found in Thisted 2007:137.

<sup>9</sup> In Rink 1888:144ff the Greenlandic cook hears the factor's wife talk about news from Denmark, including some new statue and first asks whether this means “stone human beings” and whether the Danes shouldn't take care of their poor ones instead, and then states that he has taken a widow and her four children into his home. The narrator goes on with a “presumably”: “.. *formodentlig med den Bagtanke at disse Fem ikke vare Mennesker af Steen men af Kjød og Blod som forlangte at næres med Kjød og Blod, hvilket han nu havde paataget sig at skaffe dem*” i.e. “presumably, with the underlying idea that these five were not human beings made out of stone but of flesh and blood who needed to be nourished by meat and blood, exactly a need that he had taken care of ...”

voices of men, only, as her title *Kajakmænd* itself indicates. As will appear below, much of her fiction is about women, while no women wrote in the Greenlandic newspaper in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the by then firmly male dominated Greenlandic culture.

To sum up, her childhood in Greenland gave her competence in Greenlandic culture and language, but her youth and marriage made her a young upper-class European lady, and her life and her own drive emancipated her cautiously and slowly but steadily. What is her fiction like then?

### **The expressed goal – and the voice of the narrator and the one of the implied author**

The bilingual and bi-cultural insight gives her the opportunity in her description to look at the life in Greenland in a way that balances between insight and distance that is much desired by anthropologists and social scientists (e.g. Wadel 1991), but without personally living with the double standard experienced by some of the members of the less powerful ethnicity, always looking at oneself with the gaze of the significant Other (e.g. Quayson, 2000). How does she use this competence of hers?

The explicit goal for Signe Rink is to give a Scandinavian reader some insight into the daily life in colonial Greenland by means of her fiction, as show both her memoirs and the introduction to the first collection (Rink, 1886:1-5). In this, she concludes a sort of contract with her readers by promising to be their guide. How does she achieve this? Her narrator looks for a start at the content of the fiction with Scandinavian eyes, the eyes of those living in the colonizing nation and not in the colony. She writes from within the colonial and imperial discourse of her time to reach her readers. But the narrative does not stay that monophonic: the implied author (Chatman 1978), the content of the fiction and sometimes the surface narrator lead the receiver to quite kaleidoscopic impressions.

### **Irony and humour with tongue in the cheek**

In Rink 1888 the clergyman's wife, a very young and inexperienced pregnant woman, wakes up with an extreme zeal and pushes all her (Greenlandic) servants around with mere nothings – including the flowers in the windows which should:

“... renses for visne Blade som forresten kun existerede i Fruens egen Indbildning; men hun tog ikkedestomindre ivrigt fat paa at gjøre Uorden imellem de blødt bølgende Nemophiler, der havde løftet sig i svulmende frodig Fylde, .... De kunde umuligt staa smukkere end de gjorde, men rives fra hverandre skulle de nu ....”

i.e. “be cleaned of dead leaves that by the way did not exist but as imagined by the lady of the house; but never the less she started eagerly to put into disorder the softly waving nemophiles .... They [the flowers] could in no possible way be more beautiful than they were, but no matter what, they had to be torn apart and ... “(Rink 1888:10f).

Her husband is away, attending some of the many inhabited places in his enormously vast district. She feels lonely and send for the (Greenlandic) mid-wife, Johanne-Marie, to show her the layette:

“... Børnetøi, der vilde have været mere end tilstrækkeligt til at tage imod tyve Grønlænderbørn med – (men disse Smaastakler ere ogsaa meget næisomme!)”

i.e. “... baby cloths that would have been more than enough to welcome twenty Greenlandic kids – (but these poor small creatures are indeed easily contented by little!)” (Rink 1888:13)

The young wife gives birth to a girl pretty much right after this. When she later wakes up, she –

“.., der endnu var saa ung i Landet og endnu ubekjendt med den grønlandske “Naturlighed” i dens fulde Udstrækning”

i.e. “the newcomer, yet without experience of the Greenlandic ‘naturalness’ to the fully extent of it” (Rink 1888:16),

finds herself attended by a man in skin-cloths, her (Greenlandic) cook. He reads her confusion and tells her in Danish:

“det jeg sku sige Dig – min Kone ogsaa faaet sig en Tøs – og jeg udendvidere sende Johanne-Marie derned – jeg sku nok passe Dig imens!” (En dansktalende Grønlænder anseer sig pligtig til at erstatte sin Ordmangel ved et hyppigt “sgu”)

i.e.” “Damn I say you – too my wife gotten a wench – and I no more fuss send Johanne-Marie down there – damn I care you meanwhile!” (A Greenlander when speaking Danish will consider it necessary to compensate his lack of vocabulary by a frequent “damn”)” (Rink 1888:16)

The cook is described as a tough man with hands that can cope with red-hot coals and ice, but whenever he touches a child his hands become soft and sensitive. When he is not satisfied with how the young mother handles her child, he corrects her handling and utters as follows: “Du sku ikke rigtig vant til det endnu; men jeg nok gi’ Dig en Haandsrækning.” i.e. “Damn you not much accustomed to this yet; but I sure lend you hand” (1888:17).

We find here irony and humour used both towards the Dane and towards the Greenlander,<sup>10</sup> but also a depiction of a cultural encounter that turns out positive for both of the involved. Later in the story, when the cook dies, the Danish girl, by then in her puberty, would among other things remember him for this encounter that she has been told about by her mother.

Rink uses this means a lot in the four volumes – most times it is combined with a twinkle in the eye, never with a harsh sarcasm. Sometimes only against the Danes (e.g. describing the ladies of the colony totally absorbed in a competition about who is most stressed by her duties at home (Rink 1888:142), sometimes against the Greenlanders (e.g. describing how Greenlanders from a village, not accustomed to paintings and the like, respond to a Danish home in the colony (Rink 1888:94)).

### **The cultural translation in Rink’s fiction**

Rink includes Greenlandic expressions in her fiction, but never without an explanation – **no metonymic gaps** in the sense used in Post-Colonial Studies (Ascroft et alii, 1998). But through these expressions she keeps the readers aware of that the Greenlandic communities are speaking Greenlandic (except for the few Danes). Using the theories in translations studies (e.g. Tymoczko (1999) 2001:29), I would say that she both brings the receiving audience to the other culture through the use of Greenlandic words and brings the

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<sup>10</sup> In her memoirs, Signe Rink at one point stops herself, and comments on her inclination for irony, that it soon can be boring, even when self-irony. It’s quite obvious that irony is not something that she uses especially towards Greenlanders, but rather so that it is part of her way to view the world around her with a twinkle in her eyes, actually like the sense of humour found among Greenlanders observing themselves and others.

culture of the Others to the receiving audience by translations (or in some cases more elaborated explications).<sup>11</sup>

A special part of this is when she inserts expressions of the non-standard, very restricted Danish used by Greenlanders (as exemplified above), and of the special Greenlandic pidgin used by Danes in Greenland (“køkkengrønlandsk”). The stories contain also some instances of how the communication among Greenlanders and Danes breaks down from time to time. The Danes are a laughing stock when they are incompetent in Greenlandic, and vice versa. Even back then we find an example of a dialogue where a Greenlandic servant interrupts his master in the following way – in which the “Greenlandic” phrases are totally incomplete and grammatically wrong, while the “Danish” is spelled to show the wrong pronunciation produced normally by more or less monolingual Greenlandic speaking persons, and of course it is also pidgin-like in its grammar:

“vi sender saa Mikkel over med Besked. - - Du siger, Mikkel, til palase nullia, at Dora og neviarsiakken-tamasa bliver her til Themut”

“Tu pehøver ikk tale kronlandske, jeg godt forstaaer altinge tanske!” (Rink 1887:121)

i.e. “We will then send Mikkel with the message. – You tell, Mikkel, palase nullia, that Dora and the-neviarsiak-tamasa stay here Teemut”

“You not need speak Greenlandic, me good understand all thing Danish”

Thanks to her competence in Greenlandic, her descriptions of such episodes can be very elegant – for an example, see Thisted 2007:139 for a quote of Rink 1886:25f (a dialogue between a clergyman and a young

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<sup>11</sup> Signe Rink will use Danish translations of some of the geographical names in Greenlandic, in stead of the Danish names, e.g. for Nuuk, not Godthåb, but Næsset (the promontory) (Rink 1888:1). This is not metonymy (or bringing the reader to the other culture, as Thisted 2007:150), the goal is some degree of anonymity (underlining plot and characters are fiction), on par with what she does in Rink 1886: 48 “*ved G*”, i.e. “*in G*”, i.e. in Godthaab. She does nothing of this for the small villages – they will be unknown to her readers anyway. But to ensure that the descriptions from the larger colonies are read as fiction, she establishes the “distance” to the real places.

woman, one of several cases where Greenlandic young women act in a special, shy way communicating that they are going to be married).<sup>12</sup>

Rink's narrative **shows** and her narrator also explicitly from time to time **tells i.e. explains** to her readers what is really going on in the interaction among her characters Greenlanders, Danes and Greenlanders-Danes interacting across the ethnic border. Especially, the narrator will explain the feelings and the notions being at the bottom of the acts of the Greenlanders.

In some cases it is understood by a Danish protagonist, in some cases not. In the case of marriage coming up in Rink 1886:25f mentioned above, the clergyman understood very well the play. In another story the Danish manager of a trading station understands it too, but has to tell his wife (Rink 1888:258). A Danish woman not accustomed to visit the huts of the Greenlanders, feels obliged to do it in order to visit a dying servant that she has appreciated, but abhorred by the smell and how crowded there is, she starts criticizing it referring to doctor's instructions on hygiene and finally leaves in a sad mood. The narrator then tells us explicitly that it is a Greenlandic custom to sing psalms for a person while dying. The Greenlanders have got the sanitarian message, but feel they have to break it to do the best they can to comfort the dying one (Rink 1887:13ff). The reader has to rethink the situation: the Greenlanders appear as good Christians, the Dane is not depicted as a bad person, but as a person who has not done enough to qualify to live in the Greenlandic community. The Greenlanders are on their premises rational beings. The criticism is levelled against the Dane.

Signe Rink communicates her stuff to her receiving audience partly by the normal transference of cultural meaning by describing the unknown by **more or less equivalent concepts** from the culture of the receiver. E.g. to make her Scandinavian readers understand the happy atmosphere on the last one day excursion for berry picking in the autumn, she sums up her description by "*Det er grønlandsk Høstfest*" i.e. "*That is Greenlandic harvest festival*" (Rink 1888:149).

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<sup>12</sup> Thisted 2007: 140 further finds that the situation is told in the humorous way that distances the narrator from the Greenlanders and makes the perspective colonial, by depicting the Greenlanders as children, the wide-spread imperialistic metaphor. As can be concluded from the paragraph on irony, I don't find this a valid interpretation of the humorous/ironic gaze.

But this is not the only method she uses. In the first of the stories in *“Grønlændere”* (Rink, 1886) Signe Rink describes a small settlement six miles from the nearest colony, and for the time being only inhabited by one small family. It is Christmas Eve but the father is hunting in tough weather, as usual:

“han pløier søen dagligt i sit “Ansigts Sved” som det jo hedder, ihvorvel i dette Tilfælde “Frost” vilde passe langt bedre”  
i.e. “he ploughs the sea each day by “the sweat of his brow” as the saying goes, although in this case “frost” would apply much better” (Rink 1886:6).

In such instances, Signe Rink focuses on the **displacement of the metaphor** – and the reader becomes even more aware of the differences between his environments and his conditions – and those of the tough Greenlandic hunter that are the theme of the start of the story. In other cases, she points out how a **dead metaphor if revitalized** covers the case more than the receiving audience maybe is aware: when a hunter’s family arrive the daughter would like to hike a little, but is told by the father that there won’t be time for that, since they should put the umiaq (the big skinboat rowed by women) up on land and

“se den efter i sømmene – dette ganske bogstavelig taget”  
i.e. verbatim “to go carefully over its seams and overhaul them – this in its literal sense” (i.e. “to go carefully over something and overhaul it”) (Rink 1887:42).

Another technique she uses is what I would call **“cultural double gaze”**, not in the sense that the gaze is displaced, but in the sense that the gazes of both cultures are represented in one and the same description, encompassing the negative attitude of the European discourse and the positive one of the Greenlandic discourse: In the story already referred to in the example with the displaced metaphor, the narrator says, that the barren beach is for us, i.e. the narrator and the reader, horribly barren and waste, but not so for the Greenlander who immediately spots the light from the small window of his hut which contains his fortune and happiness on earth. The narrator describes the situation both with European standards and with the Greenlandic ones (Rink, 1886:10). Likewise (Rink 1886:10ff): In the hut

the little son looks forwards to the seal meat boiling in the lamp pot and filling up the room with its sickly-sweet smell – that is: much waited for inside the culture, abhorred outside it. The parents and their son are described for their feelings and their caring as could they be any family, but the setting is far from the European standard. The persons are described as hardworking and very much caring for their son: they tell him, that it will be fun for them all to flense the seal next day, they tell him about the large world totally beyond him: the colony, and they talk about that next Christmas their son will probably be able to recite Saint Luke by heart. Thanks to the positive tone of the description of the persons the readers are forced to reconsider what they might have of stereotypic views of the Greenlanders and their living conditions.

A further example could be the Danish woman at the deathbed of the Greenlander, referred above. There are lots of examples in near context, but maybe the whole of her fiction shall be read as an instance of the cultural double gaze. I will return to this point of view.

### **Plot versus interrelations between persons: impressionistic style**

The third collection of stories has the title: *Koloni-idyller* (Rink 1888) i.e. Colonial Idylls. The genre idyll prizes the simple and natural life, often in nature, as a contrast to the superficial and nervous city civilization. So does Rink in her stories – we find the Danish upper class as caricatures in some instances, when they try too hard to display European highbrow culture without really mastering it or without environments that can support it, while the Greenlanders are not displaced in their own country.

The personal interrelations within each of the ethnic groups and across the ethnic border is the main focus of Signe Rink – and most of the stories are love stories or at least contain some elements of that theme. The focus is on the daily-life interaction, however first and foremost on falling in love and love in marriages – the relations between the sexes. The stories have each some kind of plot, but that is not the most salient part of the narrative drive. If there are passages with a dramatic tone, in most cases it is pseudo-dramas invented by the Danes for the lack of real ones, and the tone is ironic. While the real love dramas among her characters are underplayed in tone.

In fine accordance with this on interpersonal relations, Signe Rink often will switch to an **impressionistic style** with some kind of **direct free thought** (Chatman 1978:183), a style very much used in the 1880s by authors like Herman Bang in Denmark (Kristensen 1955). In one of her stories, a newcomer, a young Danish trainee wants to know all about the Greenlanders, but does not want to get into physical contact with them even in the shop and he abhors to look at them eating raw seal blubber. Of course, he is the laughing stock to the colony and the narrative about him is very ironical in long passages. An instance where the reader of the 19<sup>th</sup> century no doubt in many passages would have found the acting of the trainee the ones of a civilized man, but the reader is then confronted with the cultural double gaze technique. However, the young man also is a social climber: he wants to impress the wife of the doctor. He gets her attention due to that he has brought with him a piano and she accepts to play together with him – and this is depicted in the impressionistic style:

“... - de kunde jo vælge lidt lettere Ting – lagde hun til, hvad der rigtignok ikke undlod at berøre ham lidt ubehageligt; hun saae altsaa dog ned på hans Begavelse – men ligemeget – denne Parenthes blev jo mellem dem alene, og Sagen i sig selv gav jo enorm Prestige – næste Sommer vilde det være bekendt fra Baffin til Cap Farvel at han spillede sammen med Grønlands eneste Virtuos!”

i.e. “.... – they could pick some easier parts – she added, an utterance that couldn't leave him unaffected; obviously she looked down at his gifts – but never mind – this parenthesis, well, it remained between them and should go no further, and the matter itself gave enormous prestige – next summer it would be known from Baffin to Cap Farewell that he played together with the one and only virtuoso in Greenland!” (Rink 1888:141).

### **Ethnic characteristic features versus stereotypes**

In her fiction, Signe Rink is very concerned with on one hand to draw attention to cultural features that seem to be adhered to by many (or even most) in a culture, and on the other hand to let her stories be full of **borderline cases and exceptions** from such professed general standards.

She would for instance about a Dane say that his temperament is much like what would be expected from Greenlanders, and vice versa: e.g. Rink, 1888:30, where among two namesakes, the Danish child, heavily dressed and slow, is said to be more Eskimo-like than the Greenlandic one, while the latter, power-seeking and capricious, seems unlike the norm of the Greenlanders; Rink 1888:212, where a Greenlandic cook has installed the love of his life, Rosine, now widowed (from the Dane she chose in stead of himself) in his house together with his wife and children. He is stressed when the widow gets the chance to move away soon – he becomes:

“... baade fortvivlet og bister. Han havde nemlig ikke sine Landsmands Phlegma og lignede dem i mange Stykker slet ikke; og Tanken om at skulle miste Rosine igjen bragte ham nu næsten fra Sands og Samling. ...”

i.e. “... both heart-broken and fierce. He did not possess the phlegm of his fellow-countrymen and in many ways he was not like them at all; and the thought of going to lose Rosine once more almost made him lose his senses. ...” .

A factor, Lausen, thinks he is losing his wife, becomes alcoholic and sinks into financial problems because he cannot stop helping Greenlanders in need. In a passage he is in a depressed mood, until all in a sudden a lot of sea animals are caught and instantly, he turns enthusiastic, as do the Greenlanders:

“Og da Sorg og Smerte hos dette lette Folkefærd aldrig efterlader nogen dybtstikkende Braad, afløstes Nøden her ogsaa brat uden ringeste Overgang af den højeste Glæde, og med Lausen, der af Temperament var et Stykke af en Grønlænder, gik det næsten ligedan: han lod sig smitte, ...”

i.e. “ And since sorrow and pain never leaves any profound sting, the hardships changed also in this case into the greatest happiness abruptly without any kind of transition, and for Lausen, who by temperament was much like a Greenlander, almost the same happened: he let himself be infected by it, ....” (Rink 1887:141).

It is a fundamental part of the fiction written by Signe Rink that it leaves **no Manichean dichotomies** untouched.

### Critique against Danes and the Danish colonization

The descriptions of Signe Rink show the readers that the colonial life was on a superficial view rather monotonous but on closer inspection the colonial life had its own dramas, including the ones created for the lack of real ones. She shows that the experiences differed much from person to person, and that ethnicities are not monolithic. Rink has a keen eye for misplaced Danes, but she also describes how some Danes enjoy their life in Greenland – and how in some cases some of the Danes think that they will become happy if in Denmark, but when returned to Denmark move back to Greenland or stay in Denmark longing for the good old days in Greenland.

In general, Danes and Greenlanders live separate lives in Greenland, but there are mixed marriages, Danes and their Greenlandic servants and employees interact, Danish men interact in their job with Greenlanders. For some Danes it works, for other ones it does not – some will learn some Greenlandic, others will not – however, even some of the latter will have positive relations with the Greenlanders (Rink 1888:33). Some will respect the culture of the others, some will not.

Through her portraits and narratives Rink shows that she thinks that there are too many Danes<sup>13</sup> that could be better integrated and live a better life in Greenland if they learned the language or at least learnt more about the culture of the Greenlanders.<sup>14</sup> Signe Rink in this way indirectly, but quite thoroughly **criticizes such Danes in Greenland**, although she at the same time let her Danish characters differ a lot among themselves and disagree among themselves in their attitudes towards the population of Greenland and its culture. No Manichean stereotyping.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> She does not say all Danes, and e.g. Rink 1888:32 stresses their ability to mingle: *"Fru Buck havde virkelig ikke kunnet blande sig saa familiært med de Indfødte som ellers saa mange af de Danske kan"* i.e. *"indeed, Mrs. Buck had never been able to fraternize with the natives as in general so many of the Danes are able to"*.

<sup>14</sup> Especially women would sooner become depressed if isolating themselves in their home, analogue to the situation in Denmark under the patriarchy (e.g. Dahlerup (1983) 1984), but even worse because of the ethnic-linguistic barrier. But the author does not only pity the women, but also the loneliness of some of her male characters. However, in many cases as an emancipated woman, she focus on how insensible men are to women's needs and their feelings (e.g. explicitly told by narrator comment in Rink 1888:156-7, showed in Rink 1888:139-40).

<sup>15</sup> Danes are sad when the last ship of the year sails off to Denmark and they will be exited about the arrival of the first ship after the long winter with letters from

Likewise the narrative criticizes some of the Danes for their racist stereotypes or their lack of respect for Greenlanders and their work. The young Danish trainee (and social climber), mentioned above, airs his atheistic points of view at a party. The clergyman tries to disarm the discussion, but the Greenlandic catechist at first shy, but then with authority rebukes the trainee.

“Volontæren var bleven noget taus – han, som jo var kommen over med den Forestilling, at Grønlænderne igrunder ikke var stort andet end Transpisere – Idioter! Og nu denne Kateket, som ligefrem havde tillads sig at imponere ham? – ”  
i.e. “The trainee had grown a bit silent – he, who had come with the idea that Greenlanders after all were not much but blubber-eaters – idiots! And now this catechist who actually had dared to show off towards him? – ” (Rink 1888:151-53).

In the long story in Rink 1902, the servants of the factor are described several times with the attribute “*serfs*” (e.g. Rink 1902:41). In Rink 1888:190 a Dane observes a servant of another Dane work – and in free direct thought style the servant is described as “*Mrs Tang’s slave*”. In Rink 1888:42 on a picnic:

“ – Grønlænderne belæssede som Elefanter med de Danskes Komfort og altid et godt Stykke forud for disse og leende ad disse, der uagtet at de kun havde sig selv at bære, allerede begyndte at støne af Træthed ved Reisens første Begyndelse – ”  
i.e. “the Greenlanders [are] loaded like elephants with the things to comfort the Danes and always a lot ahead of these and laughing of them because they although only carrying themselves began to puff and blow dead-beaten from the very start of the trip - ....”.

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family and friends etc. This will tie together the maybe very different Danish personalities of each of the Greenlandic colonies, as described by the narrator and in the narratives (e.g. Rink 1888:118f). The narrator underlines that those feelings are understood and respected by the Greenlanders (Rink 1888:119). Of course such a preoccupation can be overdone, because of too little integration. But the 19<sup>th</sup> century is the heyday of Danish nationalism and there is no reason why such national feelings should be seen as displacement by Rink, nor were national feelings and longing for family members living far away unknown to the Greenlanders – those few who visited Denmark would be homesick and in Rink’s fiction there are examples of Greenlanders far away from their family in Greenland (e.g. Rink 1886:100ff, a story in which a young girl from Nuuk marries a catechist who has got vocation in his home town far away – they move and start a happy life, but he dies – and then she chooses to move back immediately).

Apart from Rink's allusion to India and her criticism against the Danes (Thisted 2007:140), the scene contains, too, the turn around of the position of the narrator to look at the grotesque scene with the eyes of the Greenlanders: the master people is the laughing stock.

Danes do not agree among themselves on how to deal with the Others, the Greenlanders, whether to socialize at all or to what degree. E.g. Mrs Tang mentioned above (for treating the Greenlandic servants as slaves) is mocked by the other Danes for never having visited a real Greenlandic home (Rink 1888:160ff).

In several contexts Rink's narrator or one of the characters (with positive response from the narrator) will utter some **criticism against the colonial power as institution**, e.g. narrator's comment on how little the Greenlanders get for their work (Rink 1888:5) and on how the Danes have come to Greenland as thieves (uttered by a Greenlandic midwife, educated in Denmark, widow after a Danish carpenter, in a discussion with a clergyman, Rink 1888:66). In the preface to Rink 1902:8, Signe Rink – in accordance with the criticism of her husband – utters that colonization has brought hardships to the Greenlanders because of their loss of leaders and integrity of identity, despite the blessing that they die as Christians and most certainly have become nicer towards all including their own countrymen.

### **Attitudes towards Greenlandic culture and Greenlandic ethnicity in Rink's fiction**

#### *Agency*

Thus Signe Rink writes from within the colonial and imperial discourse of her time to reach her readers, but the narrative and even the comments explicitly made by her narrator do not stay that monophonic, but utter critique against some of the Danes and the colonization process as a whole. How did she treat the Greenlandic culture and ethnicity? She explained the notions of it to her readers and we have already seen some examples of ironical approaches to it (parallel to what she does towards some of the Danish manners), but also some examples of Greenlanders **speaking up against the Danes** or **discussing the Danes** among themselves. From the start of the colonization Greenlanders are reported to have asked critical questions to the missionaries. Some sources would condemn such

attitudes (e.g. Crantz 1765), others would respect them as justified criticism against the ethics of European Christians (e.g. Poul Egede 1788<sup>16</sup>). In Rink's fiction this is a recurring issue. E.g. a Greenlandic cook and other Greenlandic servants are discussing the habits of the Danes, and the cook notes that Greenlanders eat smelling fish, the Danes smelling cheese, that Greenlanders dry their meat, the Danes smoke theirs, some Greenlanders and some Danes are fat, the Danes because of pork, the Greenlanders because of blubber – what's the big difference? (Rink 1888:2ff) A cook will shake his head when scurvy grass is put in a vase by the Danes (Rink 1887:75). If Greenlanders find their fellow Greenlanders too servile towards the Danes they will utter their criticism (e.g. Rink 1888:3ff).

Further, Greenlanders are truly Christians, but so they are with their own standards for reverence for God – to some extent they have **appropriated** Christianity by **transculturation**, see below.

### *Christians, rational, non-exotic*

Greenlanders are in Signe Rink's fiction depicted as believing Christians, except in a story said to take place in Disco Bay in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when some were still pagans up there (and their way of thinking is defended by a Dane referring to analogical example from ancient Greece). Rink thematizes the depth of Greenlanders' Christianity in her fiction, with the message that they are not at all superficial (Rink 1888:153-54) – and she underlines such a point of view in her memoirs.

None of Rink's Greenlandic characters refer to the beliefs of their forefathers.<sup>17</sup> Nature is a dangerous place because of the climate. If we find any superstitious beliefs, it is found in one story (Rink 1887:18ff) where the narrative drive is the fear of the Greenlanders towards the supposed qivittoq, i.e. "fjeldgænger", the hermit who leaves the community and lives alone in the mountains where he is thought to get supernatural strength by concluding a pact with the Devil. Thus qivittoq-stories were incorporated into the Christianized culture – on par with ghost stories. However, apart from such beliefs we find no superstition. Further, it must be on purpose that Rink in her qivittoq-

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<sup>16</sup> A book that the Greenlanders knew and appreciated, Rink 1888:66.

<sup>17</sup> Only reference made is to the "Seawoman" – and done among some of the Danish characters (Rink 1888:97 and 205).

story when she describes how the children play here and there, focuses on how the children threaten the small waves of the rising tide by making faces at them,

“.., det vil sige: bare “lader som”, thi i Virkeligheden aflure Grønlænderbørn selv i den tidligste Alder Naturen hvert af dens Træk, og enhver af disse her vidste ligesaa godt som de Voxne, at Vandet simpelthen var ved at voxte, .... – det var kun saa uhyre morsomt at lade somt det var paa deres Bud, det hveranden Gang løb op og hveranden Gang tilbage igjen.”

i.e. “.... that is: they just “pretend”, because actually the Greenlandic children even from the very earliest age find out every feature of nature, and all of these kids knew as much as the grown ups knew that the water was rising towards tide .... - it was just so much fun to pretend that it happened because of their command that .... ” (Rink 1887:27).

Nature in Rink’s fiction is viewed from a pragmatic point of view – quite different from the dread of the waste empty quiet wilderness as depicted by the Danish author Aage Ibsen, after his stay in Greenland for some years as doctor:

“Men denne Dal laa i en forstenet Ro, en Dødens Stilhed herskede mellem disse Fjælde, som kunde meddele selv det koldeste og roligste Sind en Følelse af Uhygge”

i.e. “But this valley laid there in a fossilized immobility, a dead silence was among these mountains that could induce into even the most cold and calm mind a feeling of the uncanny” (Ibsen 1894:79).

“Selv den uforklarlige Uro og Frygt, som han omspændes af i denne Ensomhed, drager og lokker ham og pirrer hans Fantasi.”

i.e. “Even the unaccountable unrest and dread that he [the traveller] is encircled by in this solitude tempts him and stirs his imagination” (Ibsen 1894:80).

However, we often find Nature personified by Rink, but always as part of descriptions made by the narrator or in the Preface to Rink 1886 by Rink herself, - never by any of her Greenlandic characters.

Adhering to the Christian rituals Greenlanders have made their own attitudes towards them: during Christmas and at New Year’s Eve they go around the community singing hymns (e.g. Rink 1888:195), in Easter they don’t eat any meal before communion (Rink 1886:81). In

Rink 1888:23 about the baptism of two children, the narrator stresses that although the Greenlandic mother is without the exaggerated gestures and feelings that the Danish mother displays, she gives her child to God with no less belief and no less devotion. A further example: The Greenlanders have accepted the importance of Christian marriage, but keep to their old customs that women have to play not-interested and even unwilling for a while, and that it is too embarrassing for a young woman to tell the clergyman that she wants to get married (e.g. Rink 1886:25ff).

### *Skirtless women*

In quite many cases, Signe Rink focuses on the skirtless Greenlandic women. Why? In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, women wearing pants were not part of the European ideas of what women were permitted to wear. If Rink from an emancipating perspective of hers wanted to focus on women, then of course this was the most obvious symbol of the Greenlandic ethnicity and culture,<sup>18</sup> although language and customs are also part of the demarcating symbols in the Greenlandic society as well as in the fiction of Rink.<sup>19</sup>

A baby girl will one day get her first Greenlandic woman dress, and be marked as Greenlander ("*stemplet som Grønlænder*"; Rink 1888:25) and this wrapping ("*hylster*", Rink 1888:25-26) she will wear to her death unchangeable. Is she marked in a pejorative and stigmatizing way or hallmarked as real Greenlander? Or is the message just that this is the clothes worn under all circumstances through all the life? The Greenlandic dress permits the women to move freely - in the colonial discourse as Amazon-like creatures, but – according to Thisted 2007:147 - it is at the same time the symbol of their very limited prospects of spiritual and mental development. I don't think that these two issues are intertwined in this way. My

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<sup>18</sup> As mentioned Rink's mentor was Jerichau-Baumann, who in her travelogue was much preoccupied with the costumes of exotic women that she painted on her travels – Rink might have been encouraged to focus on the cloths of the Greenlandic women, but without following the ambivalence that Oxfeldt finds in Jerichau-Bauman (Oxfeldt 2004).

<sup>19</sup> It is noteworthy that food supplies differ in kind and eating habits too (e.g. Rink 1886:96 on ptarmigans: for Danes a feast versus for Greenlanders starvation diet), but not as a border almost impossible to transgress as it was for Englishmen concerning seal meat (Langgård, 2007 on John Ross). Danes serve seal meat even at a party for other Danes without any comment at all from the narrator or the fictive characters of Rink (Rink 1887:155).

interpretation is that Signe Rink uses the dress as a symbol that will appeal to the European stereotypical ideas of Greenlanders, and then she will show through her narrative with the technique of the cultural double gaze, that Greenlandic women look different, but basically act in the same way as Danish ones. The young Greenlandic women are in no way are less flirtatious and coquettish, than the Danish ones of their age. They would loosen and tighten their headscarf. The scarf that has the same role as the fan has in other cultures (Rink 1886:21). They are in no way less feminine. Signe Rink lets her reader focus on the difference and then she undermines the Manichean dichotomy, and she herself has no ambivalence towards the dress.

### *Focus on the agency of women*

When Signe Rink focuses on the fact that Greenlandic women flirt, her growing emancipation also shows up: The Greenlandic culture in colonial time is male-dominated, but women are not passive – they find their ways, at least some of them. The woman can not take the initiative in the by then male dominated Greenlandic culture, but she would go to the beach and wait for the young man to come – and she would even sometimes confidentially take the lead towards engagement (e.g. Rink 1887:50) even though she in public will have to play “the unwilling one”.

### *Faithfulness and reflection – the prospects of spiritual and mental development*

Greenlanders fall in love – and if it is only a calf love it will be over soon, but quite many of the Rink’s characters live a long life without forgetting their love to someone they did not get, however in most cases not loosing their ability to go on. E.g. the cook that never forgot his Rosine, mentioned above. Greenlanders are pragmatic, even in love, but many of them are very faithful to their feelings. Further, Rink depicts broken hearts as something Greenlanders are aware of and tell and sing about (Rink 1887:187).

Despite this, Rink sometimes also describes the Greenlanders as childish in their behaviour. Why does she do that and how does she evaluate their prospects of spiritual and mental development? The prospects according to Rink are limited, but not as limited as Thisted describes it. She quotes Rink 1888:71 about the Greenlandic one of the

two namesakes born at the same day (mentioned above for irony and for border crossing) that

“maaske havde hun i den ene Vinter hér naaet den Modenhedsgrændse som en ung Grønlænderinde overhovedet nogensinde naaer”

i.e. “ she maybe during her one year’s stay in a village reached the limit of maturity that ever at all can be obtained by a young Greenlandic woman”.

Thisted’s quote stops here and the prospects would seem very limited, indeed. But actually, Rink’s text continues as follows:

“Hendes Læsning gaaer jo sjeldent ud over Skolebøgerne og hendes Haandgjerning forbliver jo hele Livet igjennem den same eensartede. Først Moderglæder eller Modersorger formaa at bringe nye Tanker.”

i.e. “Her reading will seldom exceed the schoolbooks and her work will remain the same through her life. Only mother-happiness or mother-sorrows can create new thoughts”.

In this way, Rink does not exclude the Greenlandic women from further development, but she points to the fact that back then for almost every one it would only come about through the ‘school of life’. The decisive factor is the lack of enlightenment of the women – and the Greenlanders in general: they do not read books – and we must add that there were almost no books in Greenlandic back then. Once more her views are in agreement with the policy of her husband, and this policy of his was implemented through the newspaper which also published translations of enlightening novels like Defoe: *Robinson Crusoe* for a start.

In accordance with this view, what really matters for the development of the Danish children born and raised in Greenland when reaching puberty is their aroused interest in literature (e.g. Rink 1888: 84 and 1888:107).

### ***Rink’s use of the child-metaphor – compared to its use in colonial Greenland***

Rink describes a Greenlandic young girl as childish when she does not reflect on the development of a young Danish girl, but instead “*med Naturbarnets Naturlighed*” i.e. “*with the child of nature’s naturalness*”

makes fun of her (Rink 1888:106 – once more in the story about the namesakes). Rink thereby uses the widespread colonial and imperialistic metaphor used about natives, and Thisted 2007:140 sees Signe Rink as supporting the colonial stereotype that Danes represent insight, planning and reflection, while the Greenlanders are swayed by intuition, feelings and the moment, which gives the former ones the natural right to rule over the latter ones. I don't agree. First, Rink has a young immature Danish woman as main character in another of her stories – and she uses the following wording: *“og det barnlig legende i hendes Væsen”* i.e. *“and the childish play of her ways and her nature”* (Rink 1887:93). Thus the child-metaphor is not only for Greenlanders. We find irresponsibility shown by some of the Greenlanders, especially some of the young girls, but also by some of the Danes. E.g. in one of her stories we meet a young Danish woman 18 years old who in a very immature way does not teach the children that she should take care of (Rink 1888:103), and when she considers marriage, she plays with which surname would sound best (Rink 1888:143) Secondly, the metaphor is not used about all Greenlandic women in general at all.

However, Rink describes, too, how Greenlanders - after the turning point to better times after some hardships, not least after a period of hunger – will “forget” about the hard times and just enjoy (see the example quoted above to illustrate border crossings). Most of these cases are exactly the kind of cases that H J Rink's policy was meant to deal with: it is fine to look forward, but childish not to learn from the hardship and try to avoid the situation to arise again. To evaluate this, it is necessary to look at the contemporary context, one source is the Greenlandic newspaper where the Greenlandic editor would ask his fellow-Greenlanders to stop acting as children and begin to act responsibly in order to restore self-support and self-management – and where the elite of Greenlanders after the turn of the century discussed in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century how the Greenlandic population should undergo development before getting into direct contact with the international world. I think that Signe Rink actually did resist racism and arrogance, but on the other hand had a pragmatic view at the situation: something had to change and part of the work should be done by the Greenlanders, supporting the new policy that her husband had started up. When Greenlanders got attitudes partly similar to those advocated by some of the Danes one

might wonder whether this is a case of hegemony. But looked at a little closer, one finds that the Greenlanders back then discussed the possibilities and made their choices, they did not passively take over the attitudes – they weren't mimic men, Greenlanders deliberately appropriated ideas from abroad and carried out some active transculturation. In the Greenlandic case the child-metaphor became liberating (for references to sources and more articles, see e.g. Langgård 1998 and 2003).

### *Greenlanders' attitudes towards the Danes – according to Rink's fiction*

As mentioned above already, some of Rink's Greenlandic characters, especially those in the colonies accustomed to the cultural encounter, are in many contexts agents in the relation to the Danes: Signe Rink would depict them criticizing the Danes or just stating that one can never know how the Danes think and act, that the Danes are odd. In other cases Greenlanders will anticipate for instance weather change but will not argue with the Danish authorities when travelling with them since too often they have experienced that Danes won't listen; consequently they just wait for the Danes to realize the situation if not too dangerous (Rink 1886:40ff).

Rink finds differences between Greenlanders. She finds that many of the young women working as servants of the Danes for sure are the agents of their own lives, indeed to an extent where she find them a little too bold (Rink 1888:130). But even though Greenlanders living in small villages coming to town will be shy and even weak towards Danes, she will also in this case break down the dichotomy and describe exceptions (e.g. Rink 1886:95, where a seal hunter very insisting and very outspoken opposes the doctor of the colony who plans to educate a very competent young seal hunter as his assistant in nursing: it is not reasonable to pick such one in stead of one of the many unemployed men in town without competence in hunting).

### *Desire for the Other*

As part of the fiction, Rink describes both women and men with an erotizing gaze, but a gaze ascribed to some of the fictive characters – or as a hint of what will become important later in the story. These erotizing gazes cross the ethnic border too, in flirts and in serious

attractions. As it's well known, maybe, and as it will be obvious from the examples quoted, too, mixed marriages and children of mixed descent were rather common in colonial Greenland (though not in the Moravian congregations). In general the Eskimo race was not demonized. These realities are mirrored in the fiction of Rink. However, as we have seen Rink do in other matters, so too in this: of course some newcomers would have attitudes like the one of the Englishmen in India about persons of mixed descent – and Rink describes such a Dane and his tabooed desire for a young beautiful “half-caste”: he assures himself that he would never sink that deeply as to be attracted to a half-caste (Rink 1888:179), but a few minutes later he happens to correct her with the following slip-of-tongue-like wording:

“Fy!” sagde Volontæren – “veed De at hvis De var min Forlovede fik De ikke Lov til at sige saadan en daarlig Vittighed.”

i.e. “Ugh!” the trainee says – “you know, if you were my fiancé you would not be allowed to utter such a poor joke” (Rink 1888:182).

The young “half-caste” has a ready answer for him, but he insists that it would be his duty to correct her. Once more she refuses, and he replies that she could tell him his faults too and “saa hende lige ind i Øinene med et Udtryk der skulde betide ægte Frisind” i.e. “looked her straight in her face with a look meant to signify true broad-mindedness.” (Rink, 1888:183). (Sic!)

Rink thus describes the colonial racism gaze – and in this the tabooed desire towards the Other (in another scene we have the middle-aged jealous Danish women’s gaze towards the young half-cast: “Greenlander tart” (Mrs. Tang in Rink 1888:129)). But otherwise I don’t find that her descriptions support the analysis that Rink’s narrator or implied author can be accused of having the colonial racism gaze towards the marginalized Other (contrary to Thisted 2007:148).

### **Summing up**

Seen from theories on ethnicity and nationalism Signe Rink’s fiction shows us the cultural encounter between two cultures and how both of the cultures defines the other one as the significant other and how

they constantly negotiate their own ethnicity in relation to the significant other, although there were so few Danes in Greenland in those times. But at the same time she shows that actually each culture is far from monolithic – she shows tensions within both of the cultures and she shows crossovers. She is European, she does not try to ‘go native’, but she uses her insight, thanks to her childhood and language competence, to make her readers more aware of their own stereotypes. What I term “the cultural double gaze” is a very important and subtle one of her means to do the cultural translation. By means of this, she confronts the imperialistic discourse with the Greenlandic one in a fairly subtle way. The cultural double gaze is found with both of its discourses explicitly opposed in some more narrow textual contexts, but actually – as the examples above should have demonstrated – her text as a whole works along these lines. She starts out from within the colonial discourse and then undermines this in her narrative. She criticizes the lifestyle of many Danes living in Greenland – and the negative consequences of the impact of the colonization. On the other hand her message is that the Greenlandic population needs more enlightenment, to develop further which is needed because of the colonization and its negative consequences.

Greenlanders in general are good Christians and rational human beings with a pragmatic attitude to life, while they are also faithful and have deep feelings towards others – except some young selfish and superficial girls. Greenlanders in her fiction retain agency and their sound astuteness towards the Danes and their ways in quite many instances despite the unequal power relation.

I have tried to show how Signe Rink’s fiction is full of details that subvert any Manichean dichotomy. The predominant feature is not ambivalence towards the Others, but attitudes towards persons as individuals and as community members living in a culture with norms and standards, of which the implied author / the author criticizes some. Because of her halfway insider status she can transgress the ethnic border and see the Others not first and foremost as Others, but as individual human beings who of course like any human being live in a certain cultural context – in this case a context very much under impact of the cultural encounter between two ethnicities. Her stories about Greenland are fiction, she depicts all the themes and details that

she wants to include with a high degree of economy in her narratives.<sup>20</sup>

### **The merit of Signe Rink's fiction**

Signe Rink is by historians reckoned an important source to knowledge about daily life of Greenlanders as well as colonial Danes in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (personal communication with Ole Marquart, ph.d, assoc. prof. and rector at Ilisimatusarfik, with 19<sup>th</sup> century Greenland as research field). Further, Signe Rink is important because her literary works support the readings that find agency among Greenlanders in the older ethnographic depictions of Greenlanders, written by missionaries in most cases.

But is she important for the history of literature? And whose history of literature? If important literature is defined as fiction that deals with human relations that concern some readers and do it in an eye-opening way, then she is both interesting in a Scandinavian context and in a Greenlandic one: She is interesting as an female Scandinavian author who is emancipating herself and in this process focuses much on women be it Greenlanders or be it Europeans living in Greenland, but who does it in a very delicate way. She is interesting as an author who with competence focuses on the interethnic relationships in an unequal power relation between two ethnicities and two cultures with something in common already in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but at the same time very different from each other. In order to evaluate her way of handling her stuff, it is necessary but profitable too, to draw on other sources revealing the times and the situation of the small Greenlandic communities, e.g. the Greenlandic newspaper debate referred to above. To evaluate the ethnic-national themes and feelings etc concepts from ethnography, post-colonial studies, cultural studies and discourse studies have been the base of the interpretation here of Signe Rink's texts.

The author Aage Ibsen published his experiences of Greenland in Ibsen 1894. But later on he published a novel (Ibsen 1908), in which he gives a rather ironic portrait of one of his fictive characters, Amalie Saaby, as woman author (Ibsen 1908:65). Signe Rink could very well be the model for this description of his.

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<sup>20</sup> I fully agree with Thisted 2007:150 in her criticism against Pil Dahlerup's reduction of Rink's works (Dahlerup (1983)1984:437-38).

In Greenland some of her short stories have been translated into Greenlandic and published in 2003 – in his introduction the translator, the Greenlandic author Hans Anthon Lynge, explains that when he came across some of her works he found that she had such an intimate insight in the colonial life that she was able to base her fiction on both of the cultures in an unconstrained way (Lynge 2003:7). To him she is not a Greenlandic writer, but a Scandinavian one writing for Scandinavians, but in a way that concerns Greenlanders too (according to what he said when we half a year ago discussed how to define Greenlandic literature).

Personally, I find that Signe Rink's ability never to dichotomize in a Manichean way - in colonial times and in a male-dominated culture - is impressive and worth reading.

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