

THE SECRETIVE TEXT: YOIK LYRICS AS LITERATURE AND TRADITION

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The most obvious example of the need for a culturally internal interpretation technique in relation to Sami texts must be yoik poetry. The yoik is the original music of the Sami, with clearly defined parameters for production, function, and practice. The concept of *juoigat* (to yoik) exists over the entire Sami region, but yoik itself is called different things in the diverse Sami dialects. It is integral to the Sami sense of community, making the subject of a yoik a part of the society.

The yoik is a way of remembering—it connects a person with the innermost feelings of the theme of the yoik, and may thus communicate between times, persons, and landscapes—like in the long, old yoik which Nils Mattias Andersson from Tärnaby, Sweden yoiked for the Swedish national radio company when they travelled around and collected yoiks from different regions of Sapmi (Arnberg, Ruong, and Unsgaard 1969: 158-62). Nils Mattias Andersson was born in 1882, and was already an old man when the recordings took place in the mid 1950s. He wanted to tell of his life as a reindeer herder through his yoik, and sat down then and there and dictated one of the most beautiful epic poetic pieces we know within Sami impressionistic poetry, "The Reindeer on Oulavuolie".

The yoik opens with Andersson relating how his wife, Anna, sits in the *lávvu*, the Sami tent, and blows into the embers to light the fire. But his thoughts are not only for his wife—they shift quickly to the large mountain, Oulavuolie, which has a glacier with a deep fissure in it—a crevice. His reindeer run around on the glacier: "the reindeer run around, run around, run around." Suddenly, in his memory children appear. Children who were on a fishing trip in a boat, and, who caught a big fish—so big, in fact, that they were nearly frightened by it. Nevertheless they thought, according to the

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yoik, that "Oulavuolie's beautiful reindeer are finer/Oulavuolie's tall reindeer are finer." And so he describes the reindeer, using the Sami language's special terminology to differentiate the animals according to age, gender, and appearance. The reindeer are beautiful, but Oulavuolie with its glacier is dangerous: "Oulavuolie's huge ice fissure/ice fissure, huge ice fissure/has sucked up my beautiful tall ones/my beautiful slender reindeer."

Then the yoiker turns back in his reminiscing to the present: "But now I have grown old/grown old, grown old/and my tall ones have changed/changed, changed/They are no, are no, are no longer." He remembers the reindeer with the swaying antlers, the beautiful ones who stood proudly aloof, "when I was the man on Oulavuolie, the man on Oulavuolie." At the end, he approaches the tent again, sees the woman who blows into the embers, blows on the fire to get it to ignite. And he finishes the poem with a dual image, age and forgetfulness: "And it is the two of us/Our memory, memory of us/vanishes, vanishes./We remember and we have forgotten./We are both old."

If "The Reindeer on Oulavuolie" is first and foremost a reminiscing yoik with reindeer as its center, under the surface it is also a deeply philosophical text, which relates something about the Sami's understanding of themselves as a part of a larger whole. At the same time it is a text typical of the attitudes toward the Sami in the 1950s and 1960s in Scandinavia. It is not only a memory of two single individuals and one man's reindeer herd which disappear—the whole Sami lifestyle can be seen as something which is disappearing. We find in the text a vulnerability regarding that which no longer exists, one which expresses a greater sorrow for "the tall ones" which have changed and are no longer vital, than for the fact that "the memory of us/vanishes. We remember and have forgotten/We are both old." There is a sense of something given up, a resignation in the text—that which the old have stood for is gone; but at the same time, the yoiker finds solace in the memories, and perhaps happiness in the fact that his text is preserved in the recording. In this way Andersson's yoik enters the collective Sami consciousness, and thus comes to represent something besides the defeatist abandonment of a culture's distinctiveness.

Yet even though yoik is so collective in its essence, it nevertheless demonstrates a distinct concept of ownership. It is not the one who composes a yoik who owns it, but rather that which is yoiked. The producer, in this sense, loses the right to his or her product, while the subject assumes dominion over this same creation. This the traditional role of art in a culture in which the central focus is on collectivity, not in the sense that the individual owns nothing, but rather in the respect that a perceived solidarity is what actually holds the culture together. In such a society, an artist is not simply an individual—she or he is also a representative of the entire culture, one element in the distribution of labor within the whole.

In and of themselves, understanding and interpretation of yoik as an artistic expression are not dependent on the verbal field of meaning at all. There are many yoiks, especially personal yoiks, which don't have words at all, in which the yoik melody itself, the *luohti*, transmits the yoik's content to the listeners. In the same manner that any given form of art can be beautiful to observe and a pleasure to behold, a yoik should also be pleasant to listen to, providing one with peace of mind and pride in one's soul on behalf of one's own people.

Not merely text, nor just music

In this essay I will more or less let the musical aspect of yoik lie undisturbed and concentrate on interpreting the textual part of the yoik in a wider reading taking into account a Sami understanding of the yoik. I will return to discuss the implications of this so-called 'Sami' understanding of the yoik later in the essay, but just to give one clue to trace I am primarily thinking about a contextualized interpretation of a cultural expression, which, first and foremost, is not *merely* text, nor just music, but both of them and even more than just the sum of lyrics and melody.

As is common in all research, yoik studies often divide the genre into smaller segments, in order to delve deeper into the material through detailed analyses. The most common division among 'outside' researchers examining Sami yoik has been to split it into musical and literary portions. I am, of course, aware of the

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problems contained in 'dissecting' the yoik in this way and departing from the demand for the yoik's unity with the intention of splitting up something which is indivisible into smaller units as I will be doing. The Sami scholar, Jon Eldar Einejord also opposes this approach in his thesis on yoik: "This can lead the researcher into an impasse, where yoik is merely seen as a collocation of expressive means, as a musical (and eventually literary) expressive form, and not as a social form of expression [...] One could thus overlook the function yoik has in its entirety." (1975: 62)

The Sami yoik and multimedia artist, Nils-Aslak Valkeapää, addressing the primary function of yoik, has stated that, "it was never the understanding that yoik should be presented as art" (1984: 45). The yoik is social in its function, but, on the other hand, it is clear that it is also aesthetic in its creation and, as such, can function remarkably well as art. But it is equally important to keep in mind yoik's origins—the historical and social—when one evaluates the genre's new uses and contexts for performance.

This presents an interesting dilemma to research principles and ethics: one is allowed to dissect yoik in a disciplined manner, but such an operation is nearly synonymous with committing violence to the tradition. A yoik actually only has meaning as a unified structure, whose cultural parameters do not allow for a division into musical and textual parts. The question, therefore, for researchers is whether one should take heed of these traditional boundaries, or shall researchers, like artists, have the right to cross these boundaries at will? On the other hand, however, do these boundary transgressions mean that respect for the tradition diminishes, and that important differences become blurred, or do new eras always require new ways? If a medium no longer functions, should it be allowed to die in peace unchanged, or shall it live—or be made to live—further in a revised form? These are important questions to raise in regard to the preservation of traditional cultural expressions not only within minority communities, but as a general discussion concerning the esteem of "old" values in our (post)modernist society. When current Sami singers are modernizing traditional Sami yoiks to make them fit into the framework of one or another kind of popular music, are

they violating or renewing tradition—or are they just simply creating something fresh, unique and original?

This problematizing of the approach to the (literary) works of writers and other artists of ethnic minorities (Native Americans, the Scandinavian Sami, the Australian Aborigines and others) one could name "Indigenous Criticism", which in each case primarily would be concentrating on the specific reading and understanding of a culture's own products. Not at all trying to diminish the importance of this kind of criticism, I will still try to position myself in between the (more) established methods of criticism and the rather esoteric exposition of each specific culture. Being in the field of a communicative scientific practice, I feel it most urgent to be able to reach out with one's findings, not only to one's own people, but to transgress cultural boundaries and obstacles. I feel this to be the aim and intention also of ethnocriticism. I would like to adapt and adjust ethnocriticism to an indigenous approach to traditional Sami texts, represented by yoik lyrics. At least in my case, this will be a meeting between two basically congenial ways of reading the texts, but presumably with different emphases concerning the interpretation of the material, and naturally with regards to the self-positioning of each analytical practice.¹

A two-fold approach

"Ethnocriticism," according to Arnold Krupat in the book *Ethnocriticism: Ethnography, History, Literature*, is to a large extent based on work with Native American literary texts, but it does not at all offer itself as a master narrative for interpreting this literature the Native American way. On the contrary, one may say, ethnocriticism wants to position itself at the frontier, meaning a movement at the borders between the "other cultures' way of construing and representing the world" and the "West's"—Europe and America's—way of producing criticism, something which is not "internal" or "indigenous" in relation to traditional native cultures. Ethnocriticism is concerned with differences rather than oppositions, thus seeking to replace oppositional with dialogical

¹ For further discussion on matters related to this kind of problematics, see Gaski (1996), "Voice in the Margin".

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models (1992: 25-26). This situates, in Krupat's words, "the would-be practitioner of ethnocriticism [--] at the various frontier points where the disciplines of anthropology and literature, literature and history, history and philosophy meet and interact" (31-32).

Being a Sami scholar in the field of comparative literature represents an interesting approach to the research on traditional yoik lyrics. Knowing the cultural background of the yoik, and, at the same time, knowing the literary methods normally used for the interpretation of textual materials, may serve as a two-fold approach to Sami texts, where cultural background, linguistic skills in Sami and literary methods converge and enrich each other to comprehend more of the texts than knowing only one of the skills would allow. There is, nevertheless, a residue left in the text—something which is not easily explicated through the methodical exposition of the subject. This something I like to think of as being a more or less culturally internal code or mode, which is hard to catch without a broad knowledge of the background and context of the story, song or myth.

Being aware of this extra potential of the text, and also being able to explicate it, is of course the advantage, superiority and enjoyment of the "insider". This is furthermore the part of all artistic performance—and understanding—that represents the specific values of each culture, and thus is celebrated as a certain kind of cultural wealth. In the Sami case the old lengthy oppositional yoik poems transcribed by the Finnish minister Jacob Fellman in Tana valley at the beginning of the 1800s from the times of colonization may serve as an example of texts of this kind, where a subtle use of double meaning in the yoik poetry made it possible to communicate on two levels at the same time, so that one type of message was conveyed to a Sami audience and quite a different one to outsiders. While the Sami listeners immediately understood the underlying encoded message, those representatives of the government present at the performance only grasped the meaning of the yoik at its most superficial level (Gaski 1993: 120-22).

Still, be these internal matters as important as they may, the real interesting point of this "internality" only comes into its own when it is made communicable for a larger audience—naturally on

the condition that we are strictly talking theoretically here, not being in a war-like condition, where people's lives and well-being are depending on the secrecy of encoded messages. Yet even in a situation such as war, most people would be aware of the importance of codes, and thus the enemy would put all his efforts into breaking the code. Anyway, in regard to literary interpretations of texts celebrating limited openness, some may only want to emphasize their esoteric potential, while others prefer to try to make them more communicative.

Like the ethnocritics, I am more interested in the *meeting place* of different texts or cultures, rather than just seeking and explaining the internal meaning of a text to people who supposedly already know it. The "translation" of a text into new contexts may be much more interesting than just repeating the already obvious. A combination of a linguistic-poetic translation and a culturally contextualized explanation may open the text for new audiences to be regarded as an expression of that specific culture, but, at the same time, every translation is also an interpretation, and nothing can—or should—restrain new readers from associating other things with the text as compared to the reception of what I would call the "primary intended reader or listener". The Sami yoiks should primarily be understood in accordance with and within their cultural context, but can in addition be analyzed as, for example, literary expression, as long as one is aware of the alienation this represents from the original cultural context to which they primarily belong as traditional artistic forms of expression. This is also, for that matter, a very exciting question of artistic perspective and hermeneutics; how differing sets of expectations determine the way in which we interpret cultural expression.

Here it could also be interesting to examine more closely the discussion which took place in Germany during the 1980s on "Intercultural Germanistics," where, among other things, the opinion was expressed that intercultural Germanistics had a broadening effect on traditional hermeneutics in that it contributed a "foreign cultural distance" to the hermeneutics. This was expressed, among others, by Bernd Thum in the article "Auf dem Wege zu einer interkulturellen Germanistik" in *Jahrbuch Deutsch*

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als *Fremdsprache* 11, 1985. I have in the meantime not had the possibility to follow this discussion further, but I find that many of the same problems are taken up in the more culturally based methods' way of recognizing a graduated approach to traditional cultural expression, where one first tries to discover tradition's own understanding and use of the expression, and thereafter open up for a more artistic/scientific interpretation of the expression.

An interesting attempt to awaken folklorists to the fact that they have something to contribute to the discussions going on in literary studies, is an article by Tom DuBois in *Journal of American Folklore* called "Native Hermeneutics". The article continues to develop Alan Dundes' expression "oral literary criticism", and offers an etic typology of hermeneutic strategies for the interpretation of lyric songs in Northern Europe. The article also touches on yoik analysis, but does not delve exclusively into the problematics regarding it (DuBois 1996: 259-261).

In his dissertation on the Sami yoik, Richard Jones-Bamman states in the chapter on constructing meaning in a yoik:

[The] process is deeply embedded within all of Saami culture, on one level, while remaining subject to regional and even personal interpretation. No amount of objective data, apparently, will get us any closer to the 'meaning' of the yoik and how it is conveyed musically, unless we also focus our attention on the specific 'yoik milieu' wherein composition and performance occurs (1993: 139).

In a footnote to this chapter Jones-Bamman refers to Clifford Geertz' queries regarding the advisability of someone from 'outside' seeking to adequately penetrate the 'native' point of view. By picking apart various yoik examples, seeking a 'grammar' in order to explain such phenomena, there seems all too often to be a conspicuous omission of the role that cultural inculcation plays in this process (139). All this is in support of questioning to what degree an outsider is able to reach the local meaning and function of a traditional art form like the Sami yoik. On the other hand, no one is disputing the worthwhile and the interesting challenge of

attempting to communicate between—or coping on the borderline between—an insider and outsider's view of these issues.

Local knowledge, postcolonialism and translations

In this context I will try to analyze a few Sami traditional texts within a Sami frame of understanding, at the same time as I emphasize that which is communicable in this insight from a theoretical platform that recognizes the culture's internal (intuitive) understanding of its own traditions and expressions, but which also demands an analytic ability and will in order to transmit this understanding to external readers. In a Krupatian approach this could be expressed in the following way: "Ethnocritical discourse regards border and boundary crossings, with their openness to and recognition of the inevitability of interactive relations, as perhaps the best means to some broadly descriptive account of the way things 'really' work in the material and historical world. Ethnocriticism thus wishes to develop and refine dialogic models whose claims to accuracy, systematicity, and knowledge would reside in their capacity [- -] to take in more context." (1992: 26).

In this matter it is important to place oneself into the entire context where, for example, yoik is performed. This applies both to creation and performance of yoik. I have also tried to problematize these aspects elsewhere,² but would like nonetheless to spend a little time on the topic again, in order, if possible, to describe the situation in such a way that it becomes clear how problematic, if not impossible, it would be to analyze the text-part of the yoik isolated from the situationally determined performance of an actual yoik. A total understanding of the context—and the meaning—of the yoik demands not just being there at a specific time and probably at a specific performance, but also a thorough knowledge of the yoik's musical aspects and its textual content. Beyond this is also needed an intimate acquaintance with the person being yoiked—often trifling enough, but nonetheless characteristic events which here befall the person. And not least is demanded a good deal of metaphoric competence, which also is often based in completely local conditions.

² See among others the yoik article in the *Festskrift til Vorren*, pp. 190-93.

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In other words, great demands are made on local knowledge, all the way in to the sphere of the intimate, in order to receive the full and complete understanding of a yoik's content, that it is nearly unachievable as a *literary* method at any rate, or perhaps more correctly, as *only* a literary method. It is naturally possible to interview the yoiker, the yoiked, the closest family members and friends and the local milieu, to get closer to the local comprehension of the yoik. This has been done, and even written down, and it is quite interesting reading in and of itself. Nevertheless the problem consists of how one could possibly methodicize such an approach without arriving at a "Gallup"-like poll, either as literary historical biography on the one hand, or as a reception-aesthetic approach on the other, where the registration of similar interpretations of the yoik's content would be definitive for what is regarded as the most adequate interpretation of the yoik.

In his latest work, *The Turn to the Native*, Krupat tries to relate his ethnocriticism to the so-called postcolonial approach to cultural expression, and introduces in this context a new term which is meant to cover the thematics in Native American Literature even better than the term "ethnocriticism" is able to do. He calls it "anti-imperial translation" which functions to "conceptualiz[e] the tensions and the differences of contemporary Native American fiction from 'the imperial center'." (1996: 32). The 'imperial center' refers to *The Empire Writes Back*, in which postcolonial texts are seen to have

emerged in their present form out of the experience of colonization and asserted themselves by foregrounding the tension with the imperial power, and by emphasizing their differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre. (1989: 2)

Because postcolonialism is primarily associated with previously liberated colonies, especially in Asia and Africa, Krupat feels that it is important to have a clearer distinction between the Native American reality as it, for example, is expressed in the USA of today, in contrast to the countries which have won back their freedom. The Native American situation is not postcolonial. The

Native Americans—and a host of other indigenous peoples throughout the world—still live, for the most part, under colonial control. Krupat tries to make the distinction with postcolonialism more precise by focusing on the consequences that colonialism's cultural dominance and, among other things, linguistic oppression, have had:

Because historically specifiable acts of translative violence marked the European colonization of the Americas from Columbus to the present, it seems to me particularly important to reappropriate the concept of translation for contemporary Native American literature. To do so is not, let me say, to deny the relationship of this literature to the postcolonial literatures of the world, but, rather, to attempt to specify a particular modality for that relationship. (1996: 32)

Even though Native American literature is mostly written and published in English, the point remains that much of its content nevertheless implicitly thematizes a centuries-long history of assimilation and attempts to deny Indians of their language as well as their culture.³ This is also underscored by another indigenous author, Mudrooroo Narogin from Australia, in *Writing from the Fringe: A Study of Modern Aboriginal Literature*, who writes "It is a curious fate to write for a people not one's own and stranger still to write for the conquerors of one's people" (148). In both of these texts the usage of English as the expressive agent for indigenous authors is made into a problematic issue, where the language of the dominant culture is used with intentions of double communication, both for non-Indian (or non-Aboriginal) readers and to say something more—between the lines—to one's own, who through a cultural codex, and a culturally internal preference, in a way "hear" "the Natives' language" under and behind the English surface. It is in this direction that Krupat also is thinking when he introduces the term "anti-imperial translation," where "translation" in this

³ This is also discussed in Louis Owens' book *Other Destinies: Understanding the American Indian Novel*, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 1992, especially in the introduction, pp. 6 and 12.

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context should be understood beyond a purely linguistic translation. It is a manner of using the majority language to translate one's own cultural situation and the understanding of it to a language and a description which can at the same time function in a collectivizing manner for one's own group and in an oppositional manner towards the dominant culture and the actual political situation one finds one's self in.

"Translation" is central also to those Sami authors who can not write in Sami although their cultural experience and knowledge is Sami. Translation is also important with regards to information about and the further dissemination of knowledge about Sami and Greenlandic literature. The translation situation is even thematized in this article through the fact that the yoik texts which I will analyze must be translated to English, and are referred to in a language other than Sami.

Tradition in transition

The yoik poetry's subtlety is undergoing a process of alteration and transformation. It has inspired our foremost poets, and in earlier times it was our foremost poets' form.⁴ Actually it's not quite fair to phrase it in this way, because also here, as in so many other contexts in our modern Sami way of life, we are experiencing a changing of traditions. It would be more correct to say that a "division of labor" has arisen between poets and yoikers, where the new Sami poetry has taken over the textual portion of the yoik's tradition and allowed itself to be inspired by yoik poetry's creativity and subtlety, while the musical side has been both maintained by individual "traditionalists" and changed by other "innovators" who have desired to create something new, in the form of both outside influence and genuine original creativity from their own standpoint. The traditional yoik is at any rate changing in its function, meaning and content. Today so little yoik poetry is created which is as rich in short statements that hit the mark and unsurpassed metaphoric certainty as that which one can find in the

⁴ See more about some of the processes of change and their background in my article in *Festskrift til Ørnulf Vorren*, pp. 191-93.

old personal yoiks that one must speak of a tradition in transition and transformation.

There are, of course, yoikers who are trying to preserve both the impressionistic aspect and the momentary characterization of a situation which are trademarks of the older yoiks, but on the other hand there are many more who completely omit words because they are of the opinion that yoik is first and foremost music,⁵ and that it is not fitting to characterize living people with an all too picturesque speech because this could be misunderstood and thereby cause offense. These are, of course, completely relevant arguments which are quite important in understanding the direction in which yoik is moving, but in this connection they are less important as I am trying to find an intermediary layer between the intimate sphere's understanding of a yoik—and in particular the poetic portion of it, as this treatment is primarily concerned with the textual aspect of yoik interpretation, exactly the area to which literary theory has the most to contribute—and a culturally-based total interpretation of the yoik. It is my opinion that it is possible to arrive at such an interpretation, and that the path to this interpretation can also be described in such a way that it can function as a methodological introduction in cultural interpretation with yoik as an example.⁶

The yoik may be viewed as both a traditional act of performance and as a modern art work in the same environment and context as that in which the yoik originates. This is comparable to contemporary singing and storytelling in Native American communities, as observed by Krupat:

I mean to say that contemporary singing and storytelling goes on in communities that use those performances as means of

⁵ It is furthermore in this context also important to stress the different practices that different areas have regarding whether or not a yoik should include words. Traditionally the yoiks in eastern Finnmark have been richer in words than the yoiks in western Finnmark. I will refrain from discussing here whether or not this has anything to do with the different yoik dialects.

⁶ In this article I shall only *suggest* such possibilities, but I hope to be able to deepen these viewpoints in subsequent works. I would nevertheless like to assert that the yoik analyses which follow are literary-critical, at the same time as they take account of the problematizing I have conducted earlier in this article regarding the limits which a generalizing scientific approach encounters in its meeting with traditional artistic expressions that are primarily intended for more intimate cultural relationships.

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... affirming and validating their identities as communities—communities, which insofar as they are traditionally oriented, do not separate those stories from their performers, audiences and occasions, and so have no reason to develop any distinctive category of "criticism" about them. This is not in the least to say that Indian people have no ideas or thoughts about the "literature" they perform or participate in; it is to say that they have no need to produce a body of knowledge *about* it that is separate and apart *from* it. (1992: 187).

This observation is relevant for the Sami situation as well, especially in previous times regarding the position of yoik. Traditionally the giving of a yoik to a person was like a naming process; by receiving her or his own yoik, an adolescent would be reckoned as a whole member of the local society. The ideology of yoik is thus communal, with a yoik linking the individual to a collective. On the other hand, it also confers a unique status and identity. A person's individuality is acknowledged by the act of receiving a yoik, but no individuality is possible without the interpretive community surrounding it.

The "reference function" of a yoik constitutes the identity of each individual melody, writes the profound Norwegian yoik researcher Ola Graff (1993: 399). The reference to the object of the yoik is not something which one may add to or leave out from the melody. It is always present, but it is "invisible" to an outsider. In the social context where the yoik belongs, people will, however, recognize both the yoiked person and her melody. The melody is closely connected to the referential object in an indissoluble relationship. Linguistically this is expressed through the fact that one does not yoik *about* somebody or something, there is a direct connection; one yoiks something or someone (399).

"...the thin, dark one untouched by a man's hand"

I have, on an earlier occasion, conducted a type of ethnocritical interpretation of the yoik "Gumpe borai soagnovuoján,"⁷ and will only summarize it briefly here as an introduction to a more

⁷ See among others *Festskrift til Vorren*, pp.190-91

thorough analysis of "Joatkka-Elle luohiti." The "Gumpe borai" yoik can be characterized as a humoristic-ironic commentary on an old bachelor who has had an eye for certain girls, but who nonetheless never has gone so far as to find himself a wife, for other men have run off with his sweetheart. In the yoik the subject, the old bachelor, comes up with good excuses to explain the fact that he hasn't yet made his proposal-journey.

Gumpe borai soagnovuoján
Sáhpán ciebai gabbabeaskka
Báhcán lei vel muzetsággi
Gean ii oktage lean guoskkahan

The wolf ate the deer hitched for courting
The mouse gnawed the white fur coat
Still left was the thin, dark one
untouched by a man's hand

On the surface the text tells us that the man couldn't make his proposal-journey because his driving reindeer had been eaten by the wolf. In addition the mouse had ruined the white reindeer-fur coat he had planned to wear, and naturally one can not go on proposing without beautiful clothes. But even though the wolf has devoured the draft reindeer, there is another reindeer, the dark one, that he could have traveled with. But it was not yet tamed, as the text expresses through the information that it had not yet been touched by human hand. And an untamed reindeer isn't a very good draft animal, especially for a proposal-journey where it is important to arrive in style.

The reindeer metaphors in the text serve a double function; they are intended to depict draft reindeer, but at the same time they also represent portraits of women. *Gabba* is a light-haired reindeer, but it can also be a light-haired woman, while *muzet* means a dark-haired reindeer or woman. *Sággi* tells us furthermore that she is slender. It is generally common in yoik texts to use different reindeer names as metaphors for different types of women.

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If we interpret *gabba* and *muzet* as metaphors for a light and a dark woman, and the wolf as the picture of another man, a rival, we bring out other aspects of the text. The man still fails to make his proposal-journey, but in this reading it is because another man has run off with the light girl whom the bachelor actually loved most. In the text the rival is represented as a wolf. In the meantime, the deceived man still has a chance at the thin, dark one, and the advantage with her is that she is as of yet still untouched. With this the yoik also hints at something about the light girl whom he didn't get. Of course it would be possible to interpret the text in an even more abstract way, but my point here is primarily simply to show how yoik texts can play with traditionally linguistic terms, such as different terms for reindeer, to also describe people, and through this comment on human relationships.

Joatkka-Elle's yoik exists at any rate in two versions. The first is found in Thor Frettes *Notatbok V: Joiketekster, notater om joik m.m.*, from 1961.

Joatkka lei stuorra
lei buoiddes lei Elle
go stuorra go buoiddes
go luosttat go biellu
go coalkkasa Ginosis

Buot oazzubehtet váldit mus eret
beare dan Joatkke Elle ehpet váldde

In English translation:

Joatkka was a big place
Ellen was chubby too
plump and hefty
the light colored reindeer
herd bells over by Ginos

You may take it all

just not Joatkka-Elle

The other version is found on Piera Balto's yoik LP from 1978:

Dan duoddara Giron go girddasa nu

Buot vikkaidet váldit
buot oazzubeht' váldit
dan bivnnut-go-vuoza dii ehpet ain váldde

Gea' duoddara Giron go girddasa nu

See how the ptarmigan flies over the tundra

You tried to take everything
you may take it all
but you can't touch my allure

See how the ptarmigan flies

A text like this is, of course, possible to understand, at least in part, without being familiar with either Sami yoik or Sami culture. In the first text one can sense something of either jealousy or a prayer about not loosing one's sweetheart. In addition, the English translation is, to a certain degree, adjusted linguistically and poetically in order to be easier to understand. A literal translation which also includes the filler word *go*, which really doesn't have any actual meaning, but is primarily there due to rhythmic demands, would sound like this in English:

Joatkka was a big place
Ellen was chubby too
go plump *go* hefty
go the light colored
go herd bells over by Ginos

You may take it all

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just not Joatkka-Elle

Joatkka is a place, or more precisely, a geographic area. The "light-colored" is a reindeer, a translation of "luosttat," which means a reindeer with a lighter stripe on its side.⁸ Ginos is also a place, or rather a mountainside, where the light-colored reindeer grazes. Joatkka-Elle means Elle who is from Joatkka.

The yoik opens by telling that Joatkka is big, and proceeds directly with a comparison with Elle from Joatkka. She is clearly a plump and hefty woman, or as the Sami text says, thick. The third line repeats the adjectives from the first and second lines and thereby underscores the parallels between the geography and the subject (object?) of the yoik. The discussion of subject and object in a yoik is always interesting. The fact that the ownership of a yoik is defined according to whose yoik it is, is actually a separate topic than my use of the terms here. The one to whom the yoik is addressed must be the receiver, and therefore the object, even though this person is considered the subject in the everyday understanding of yoik. In this context it is also interesting to consider the problematics of subject-object in relation to traditional communication models with sender-message-receiver. In one sense it is simple enough to place the yoik into this model, but the message becomes problematic because in connection with yoik it is not always a case of a single sender's message to a receiver; in some cases it can just as well be a message from the collectivity (evaluation, ironicizing, *cuiigesteapmi*) to the object of the yoik, or, for that matter, to all the listeners—which would be to say, in traditional society, to the entire collectivity. In other words the yoik could be seen to have an educational function for the collectivity, or it could be used as pure storytelling entertainment with underlying didactic intentions, as in the previously mentioned oppositional use of yoik during the colonization period in Sapmi.

In the fourth line we are presented with a new object, the reindeer with a lighter stripe of hair on its side, as well as this reindeer's bell. It is clear that a connection in appearance is also

⁸ See Konrad Nielsen, Vol. II, p. 585: "Reindeer with a streak of lighter hair along its side (where the hair grows thicker and more evenly)."

established between this reindeer and Elle. It is not, as already mentioned, unusual in Sami yoik poetry that reindeer terminology functions as metaphoric names for women. It is less commonly used for men, but that can also happen. From the comparison we can deduce that Elle isn't completely dark, but rather bears certain similarities with *luosttat*. The reindeer bell rings on Ginos, which is a mountainside south of Suossjávri, quite a distance from Joatkka. After this introductory presentation of the yoik's main character and geographic setting we go directly to another person's perspective on Elle; this must be the yoiker's point of view which is presented, we think or are misled into thinking. "You may take it all / just not Joatkka-Elle," with the implication being just as long as you don't take Joatkka-Elle from me.

Playing with perspectives

It is, in fact, not the yoiker's perspective we are presented with. It is quite common in yoik texts that the perspective shifts between the first and third person, and that the yoiker is actually yoiking about another person, even though she or he performs the yoik in the first person. The Sami literature researcher Vuokko Hirvonen, who handled yoik texts, among other things, in her *pro gradu* thesis, writes that a sense of excitement is created in the understanding of the content through the shifting of perspective between first and third person. The listener is alternatively drawn further away from and again nearer to the object of the yoik, while the yoiker herself in fact takes the place of the object. The object is changed into the subject, a metamorphosis occurs (1991: 22).

Such is also the case in Joatkka-Elle's yoik. It is, for that matter, unusual that the yoik has the name of one who isn't actually the main character of the yoik, in this case the absent man who is afraid of losing Elle. She seems to be a much-courted woman with whom many would like to become better acquainted, and that is also the main point of the yoik—and the reason that it bears her name, that is to say, is dedicated to her—that it primarily describes Elle's popularity. She is the only person directly named in the text, the "I" character is only present in his absence through his fear of losing Elle, or perhaps this is a case of direct jealousy.

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The yoik shifts, as Hirvonen also points out (23), from a collective perspective in the introduction where we hear how Elle looks, about her home area, and about Ginos. From this introductory phase we go directly over to a subjective level, where "I" expresses his love for Elle in his somewhat peculiar way, or according to Hirvonen; this represents words which another has said about Elle, who is the yoik's actual lyric ego. (23) The yoiker is in this interpretation only a pure performer of this *luohti*.

The interpretation can be made even more subtle, if one wants, because both form and content allow it. I am speaking here in the sense that it is only the yoik text that we are analyzing, not the whole yoik in its total context, because my "freer" interpretation of only the text in such a case would be limited by the yoik's referential function. This is a *luohti* about people who have actually existed or still are living, and where the yoik in the close milieu, in its local context, is still understood as an indivisible whole which actually makes an interpretation and analysis of the content difficult because we then will meet with a few (research) ethical problems which can not simply be dismissed as irrelevant, even though they might not necessarily change the interpretation. They will, on the other hand, lead to a Sami—at any rate—possibly having problems interpreting the text freely in a public setting—because the text concerns itself with people whose near relatives are still alive, and who could regard the interpretation—or the exposé—as impolite and rude. I also underscore here that even though I have retained the original names of the characters, all my interpretations and analyses are removed from the exact local understanding of the yoik. The local understanding also includes—and is actually impossible without—the yoik melody and cultural context.

At the same time one can, of course, maintain that this problem exposes and lays bare a critic's limitations in the attempt to arrive at the original understanding of "the performed piece of art or tradition"—if that is the wish of the critic. For an indigenous critic it probably will be a point to reach the original aim and intention of the (yoik) text, as for an ethnocritic the consideration would be to take what is culturally internal into account even as the culturally external critical act is performed. Claims of this kind absolutely do

have a point, but they nonetheless are subordinated to other factors in this situation, such as respect for tradition and for the yoiked person.

The three first lines still bear the same meaning and are an introductory presentation. It is, however, puzzling whether Ginos is mentioned as just another place name where Elle spends time, as Hirvonen, among others, interprets the yoik, insofar as it is another person who actually presents the "I"-character's yoik here. Furthermore, both Elle and the area are already described and shouldn't therefore need (yet more) repeating. In Hirvonen's defense it should be mentioned that she does not try to remove herself too far from 'the local cultural context's' interpretation of the yoik's context, but she nonetheless leaves out both the melody and the melody handling as an important factor in an adequate-authentic rapprochement-based total interpretation of the yoik. By this I mean an interpretation which tries to make itself identical to the local society's "reading" of the yoik. This can be interesting, and in some cases also exciting, but methodically one will, through such an approach, encounter the same problems as in a literary-critical reading of poetry in which one uses a purely historical-biographical approach to the texts. To be more precise, I have a good deal of sympathy and understanding for the culturally internal, insider's way of using the yoik as a communications medium,⁹ but it is nearly impossible to generalize from this communication's intended limited frame of understanding to a broader common reception of both linguistic and musical expression, together with suggestions and references to familiar and quite local events which would be completely impossible for an outsider to fully understand without constantly having a local interpreter as an informant. I believe that just this type of theoretical and methodological difficulties with yoik research are part of the reason that yoik research has become so popular recently.

A conceited ptarmigan and a much-courted woman

That which, on the other hand, is natural to suppose is that there is another suitor on Ginos who competes for Elle's favors with the

⁹ Cf. Nils Jernsletten "Om joik og kommunikasjon", 1978.

absent "I"-character. This rival resides at Ginos, at least part of the year, and may have noticed Elle there. One possible interpretation of the meaning of *luosttat* in this context could be that it doesn't indicate Elle at all, but instead designates the rival—that it is the hair color of the man at Ginos that is described as *luosttat*. In this case we have no other description of Elle than that she is round and in addition is juxtaposed with Joatkka, while *luosttat* is the dark blonde man who resides at Ginos and competes with the yoik's "I" character for Elle's favors. In this interpretation possibility we get no description of the yoik's subject, only of the object and the rival. Seen from such a perspective, the first version of the yoik tells of a triangle drama, where the concluding subject in the yoik—the jealous and rivalized man—expresses his fear over losing his sweetheart to another man, a sort of parallel to the "Gumpe borai" yoik. It may, in this case, seem strange that the yoik nevertheless bears the woman's name as title, but this can easily be explained, as the yoik still deals primarily with Elle, because it is she who is so popular that her suitors end up in worried "don't-take-her-from-me" yoiks.

Elle's popularity is also the theme for the other version of "Joatkka-Elle luohiti", that which Piera Balto, among others, has performed on LP. Here Elle is the main character and the yoik's subject, even if her yoik is, of course, made and performed by another. With the words that are put in Elle's mouth the yoiker brings out the other women's jealousy of Elle because she is so popular, but at the same time Elle emerges as a somewhat conceited and proud woman in the yoik. Of course no one would yoik themselves in this way, but here it is a case of her competitors—the other women—projecting their own frustration onto Elle, because she can pick and choose men while they themselves remain completely without suitors.

The beginning and end of the yoik are in a way objectified in such a manner that the listener is supposed to get the impression that that which is now being told is something everyone knows and agrees upon, while the middle portion quite clearly expresses the subject's opinion of herself and her own situation. The tundra ptarmigan is a beautiful bird, a little rounder than the forest

ptarmigan, but at the same time rarer and therefore more special — more attractive, as it were. The parallel with Elle is clear, also in regards to appearance and figure as the first version substantiates. At the same time as the mountain ptarmigan is regarded as a beautiful bird there is something pretentious in the way that it (read Elle) flies around and shows itself off. In other words we are once again dealing with the theme of covetousness, this time from the other women. There is a distinction between the first and last lines precisely in that the first merely registers that the mountain ptarmigan flies, while the last underscores that it flies beautifully. One can do this at the end because so far along in the yoik it should be clear to all listeners that the Elle discussed is a little *gáddálas*, a little conceited. Therefore the concluding stanza bears a stronger sense of irony than it first appears to.

One could have continued in this manner with yoik after yoik, placing the individual text in its cultural-historical context, all the way down to the intimate sphere, in order to bring out the entire spectrum of interpretation which represents the text from a so-called "internal" perspective, or from a frame of reference that one could perhaps instead call the context of the primary addressee. The intention has primarily been to indicate the interpretation possibilities which, perhaps, go beyond the most clearly literary readings of the yoik texts presented, readings which are limited by cultural differences, or perhaps rather by a scarcity of comparable experiences between two languages and cultures. In addition to these limitations there is the yoik's special character as something other than, and more than, merely a literary expression. It is in the (musical) performance that the cultural peculiarities are underscored, emphasized or subdued. We therefore need an interpretation method that is broad enough and open enough to take into account multiple sides—or rather, all sides—of the yoik's complete richness of expression.

In this article I have tried to use ethnocriticism in a "Samified" exegesis in such a way that it opens possibilities for interpretation of the yoik that make allowances for its peculiarities *qua* yoik as cultural expression, but which at the same time also give us the opportunity to interpret yoik texts as *literary* forms of expression. If

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one doesn't allow for this, then the yoik's textual aspect will not be so interesting for scholarly research any more either. It is perhaps such a development we detect in the process which the modern Sami yoik tradition is entering into, with the aestheticizing of the yoik as primarily a musical genre, where the text is left out, or quite simply no longer created.

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