

THE TRICKSTER AND THE ENGINEER

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In the beginning of the 2000's a meeting takes place at one of the major hospitals in Northern Norway, between a Sámi patient Juvvá, and his roommate, a retired Norwegian engineer. The engineer shows a negative attitude towards his Sámi roommate. Based on a symptomatic reading of three stories, this article presents a character analysis of Juvvá's birgengoansttat, coping skills, in his encounter with the engineer. The analysis focuses on Juvvá as a trickster figure representing the Sámi people, and the engineer as stállu, a set of structures that represent the majority's values system. The engineer's negative mindset towards his Sámi roommate represents the shadow of centuries of repression and lack of knowledge about Sámi language, culture and history. The Norwegian government's assimilation politics, the Norwegianization policies, function as the contextual backdrop for the investigation and of the reactions of the engineer. In my role as a scholar and mediator of the stories, I also function as a character in this investigation, at a meta level. This requires some focus on the context that frames my reading. The analysis of the stories reveals how non-verbal communication and humor are used to show resistance towards derogatory attitudes in the majority system. Juvvá's agency is to cope, and take control of his own situation in the narrative of the hospital's white world. In his role as a trickster, Juvvá represents a boundary-crossing figure and demonstrates a flexibility in finding a creative space to exercise his abilities to coping in the meeting with his hostile roommate.

Keywords: *Trickster; stállu; coping skills; Sámi oral tradition; humor; non-verbal communication; Norwegianization politics; context*

Introduction

“You need to come! We have a patient here. He doesn't speak any Norwegian, and I think he is trying to leave. And he is probably psychotic!” I received this phone call from a nurse in the early 2000s. At the time I was working as a Sámi interpreter and consultant at one of the major hospitals in Northern Norway. My professional background is within literature, not healthcare. In 1999, I graduated with a master's degree in Sámi literature at the University of Tromsø, and in 2000 accepted a position as consultant and interpreter at the aforementioned hospital. I held this job until 2005, when I returned to the University of Tromsø. In 2015, I defended my PhD thesis in Sámi literature, written in the Sámi language. The thesis is an analysis of the coping skills in the novel trilogy *Árbbolaččat* (“The Heirs”) by the Sámi novelist Jovvna-Ánde Vest. I am now associate professor in Sámi literature. Coping skills is a fascinating research field. In many of the Sámi stories, in the traditional oral tradition and in the stoires we hear today, and in Sámi literature, coping is essential. It is also one of the main focuses in the events that frame the story of this discussion, starting with the nurse's call.

In response to the nurse's call, I went to and the nurse took me to his room. There were two beds in the room. An old man was sitting on the bed closest to the window. His name was Juvvá. I approached him and presented myself. He looked at me, but didn't say

anything. I also used to wear a white robe, the hospital color, but I spoke his language and that was the entrance to communication. He just looked at me, with a glimmer in his eyes like he was measuring me up, to see who I was and what I thought of him. I noticed that he was sitting on the bed with his jacket on and he was putting on his winter boots. What was extraordinary, was that the window next to his bed was open. I asked him: “Are you cold?”. “Yes,” he said, “the window is open.” I told the nurse that the man was simply freezing and that was why he was sitting with his jacket and boots on. “Oh,” the nurse said. She seemed reassured by the explanation, and started to talk about everyday things. I thought to myself, who would take off their jacket if it is freezing cold in the room? At least not an elderly Sámi man, who was used to dressing properly for cold temperatures. Where would he go? And how? The man was in his early eighties and could hardly walk. When he talked it appeared that he was not sure where he was, and how could he be? No one was able to communicate with him in his language, and he therefore might not have been told in a way he could understand that he was to be transferred from the local hospital to one of the major hospitals in the region. Anyway, the misunderstanding was cleared up. The man was not psychotic after all, just disorientated. By the interpretation both he and the nurse could relax.

The nurse appeared to be a friendly woman, she later told me a couple of stories about Juvvá and the man in the bed next to him, a retired engineer, whose wife visited frequently. The nurse told me that the engineer had let her understand that he was not comfortable sharing a room with a Sámi. “And you know what? Yesterday Juvvá went over to the engineer’s bed, took his glass of water, drank it, and went back to his bed. The engineer, and his wife, were so shocked that they did not say a word, but you could see that they were not comfortable with the situation. Later, he wrapped a blanket around his neck and walked around in the wing with it, again, with astonished patients and staff witnessing the whole thing.” The nurse seemed to find these incidents amusing. She told me the stories with a smile in her eyes, as if she was acclaiming Juvvá’s actions.

Using and referring to events that I experienced during my work as an interpreter involves some ethical considerations. These events were not part of any investigative project at the time they occurred. They are based on my personal experiences as an interpreter, reflections of stories about meetings between people that took place a long time ago. All the persons mentioned are anonymized. Since several thousand people work at this hospital, and several thousand patients receive treatment there every year, I find the risk of identifying the individuals from this narrative minimal. This is my narrative, and my interpretation of the events referred to. Critical understandings and judgements are not aimed at individuals, but at an institutional level, to address asymmetric power relations.

Juvvá’s condition could also be questioned; was he psychotic, as the nurse claimed when she called me? Not being a professional in assessing his medical condition, I cannot know, and for this analysis it is not of interest either. The communication I had with him seemed adequate. He was an old man, a Sámi-speaking patient, surrounded by Norwegian-speaking staff. From what he told me, he had not received any information in his own language, and was therefore unable to orient himself in his situation. Juvvá was in reality silenced and placed in a situation of powerlessness. In such circumstances, who would not be silenced and disoriented? Very few Norwegians speak Sámi, and still Juvvá

was taken for being mentally unstable, without any direct communication on which to base this assumption.¹

In the following discussion, I analyze Juvvá's *birgenangoansttat*, coping skills, in the three stories in the introduction: the nurse calling me, the interpreter, about a "psychotic" patient; the patient, Juvvá, drinking his room mate's water; and Juvvá walking around in the wing with a blanket wrapped around his neck. Based on a symptomatic reading, I will do a character analysis of Juvvá as a *trickster* representing the Sámi people, and the engineer's role as *stállu*, a set of structures that represent the majority's system of values. Symptomatic reading is a theoretical frame that provides for a wide interpretation of culture and context. In my role as a scholar and mediator of the stories, I function both as a character in this investigation, and as the investigator doing the scholarly discussion of the stories. Focus on the context frames my reading of the stories. I will first draw an outline of the symptomatic readings as a theoretical framework, and then provide a picture of the Norwegianization policies as the contextual backdrop for the investigation. The terms *trickster* and *stállu* will be integrated into my reading of the stories. My analysis includes the important element of non-verbal communication and especially the ways in which subtle humor are used to show resistance against the majority system, and they show how Juvvá is a *trickster* and subversive of the power represented by the Norwegian engineer.

Symptomatic reading as a theoretical frame

The events in the hospital are the beginning of many stories, told by me as the interpreter, told by the nurse, and then translated into a written text for literary, symptomatic analysis. I have also used the events as a case for educational purposes, in lectures for medical students and nursing students, about what it means to use an interpreter, and why cultural knowledge is an important part of both using and being an interpreter. According to the Native American Laguna author, Leslie Marmon Silko, a story is only the beginning of many stories, a story within the story. A story is something that comes out of an experience, and out of an understanding that we are part of a whole (Silko 1996, 50). In the Sámi oral tradition, stories contain existentially important aspects of the culture. Different versions of the same story are sometimes used for teaching, and other times for reasoning over issues together. In this discussion, the events at the hospital are modified as a written version, for academic purposes, to discuss how an encounter between cultures with no common language can unfold.

The literary scholar H. Porter Abbot presents in his book *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* (2009) a summary of theories developed to interpret narrative: intentional,

¹ Still today the lack of Sami interpreters, and the lack of understanding of the importance of Sami interpreters, is a major challenge in the Norwegian society: <https://www.nrk.no/sapmi/forste-gang-det-tilbys-sorsamisk-tolkeundervisning-1.14031545> (09.05.18) <https://www.nrk.no/troms/samiske-pasienter-ma-bruke-familien-som-tolk--en-ydmykelse-1.13962527> (09.05.18)

symptomatic and adaptive readings.² As a grounding of the symptomatic reading in this article, I will very briefly outline Abbot's description of the intentional and the symptomatic reading. The intentional reading focuses on the formal parts of the texts, where, according to Abbot, the implied author as a creative sensibility is the key to one's reading and to find the wholeness in the text and grasp the intention behind it: "That sensibility has selected and shaped its events, the order in which they are narrated, the entities involved, the language, the sequence of shots" (Abbott 2008, 102). Structuralist, classic narratology emphasizes the formalist parts of the text, its literariness (Rimmon-Kenan 2002, 136–137). According to Shlomith Remman-Kenan, "[I]ike poetics, narratology saw itself as a theory, conceived at the time as an attempt to formulate a system of logically interrelated laws, underlying the regularity of phenomena or a group of phenomena" (Rimmon-Kenan 2002, 136). Such a theory would represent 'objectivity', 'neutrality' and 'scientificity' (Rimmon-Kenan 2002, 136). The classical narratology, its metalanguage and attempt at mastery have been challenged by deconstructionist and psychoanalytic approaches (Rimmon-Kenan 2002, 138–139, Abbot 2009, 104-105). Description is neither independent, nor neutral, as Rimmon-Kenan states:

And, indeed, even the labeling of events, [...], or the abstraction of the story from the text, are not free of interpretation. [...] It is often said that theory may gain by unmasking concealed ideologies, and theorists are often advised to 'position' themselves, to declare the perspective from which they write, rather than take shelter behind the appearance of objectivity and neutrality (Rimmon-Kenan 2002: 139).

Symptomatic readings deconstruct the intentional reading, and are referred to as "deconstructive reading". Symptomatic readings place the text in a contextual frame, which provides a different grounding from that of the implied author (Abbot 2009, 105). The contextual frame, pointing to the context outside the text, opens for both the real author, but also the reader of the text, to use lived experiences in culture to shape the construction of the narrative.

The contextual frame of the investigation in this article contains a brief look into the Norwegianization politics, and how hinting and humor are essential in Sámi oral and non-verbal tradition as coping skills. Due to my role as a bridge-builder and mediator of the stories, my personal background will be given some space as part of the context. This context is essential to grasp the historical backdrop of the attitudes of the engineer, and to understand Juvvá's reaction to the hostile atmosphere that he meets from his roommate.

The politics of Norwegianization

How can a symptomatic reading provide an interpretation of Juvvá's meeting with the hospital? Maybe it was not exactly a clash between civilizations, but it was definitely a

² The term symptomatic reading was first used by Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar in *Reading Capital* (1965). The term was developed for the reading of fictional texts by Macherey (1966) and Eagleton (1978).

http://www.blackwellreference.com/subscriber/tocnode.html?id=g9780631207535_chunk_g978063120753522_ss1-69 (08.05.18)

clash between cultures, especially in the story about Juvvá's roommate, the engineer. This could be the starting point based on the how the nurse experienced the communication between them, that the engineer did not feel comfortable being placed in the same room with a Sámi. It is impossible to say exactly what the engineer thought, and it is impossible to say exactly what Juvvá thought, as their voices are not represented by them relating their own experiences. Insecurity, anxiety and pain due to their medical conditions are also aspects that one must assume would influence the behavior of both Juvvá and the engineer. Not speaking the same language could have caused both misunderstandings and frustration between the roommates. This whole story started when the frustrated nurse called me because she was incapable of communicating with a patient and that led to insecurity and misunderstanding. This was not the first time Sámi patients were in a situation like this, interacting with public institutions, where the persons working there do not speak their language, where the routines seems alien, where the rooms are furnished and designed in manners not familiar to the patient. In short, where many of the "languages" used seem alien to the patient. I have heard many versions of such stories. The Norwegian population's lack of knowledge of the Sámi language has an explanation. It is the result of an intentional policy. That is why I choose to interpret the meeting between Juvvá and the engineer not as a conflict between an old Sámi man and a respectable Norwegian man, but as a cultural clash with references to a historical context and asymmetric power relations. Some of the backdrop of these interactions, such as why the engineer did not like to have a Sámi as his roommate, can be explained by a quick look into the history of the Norwegianization period. The aim of this policy was to assimilate the Sámi³ and Kven⁴ population so that they would be Norwegians and speak only Norwegian. This period had severe consequences both for Sámis and for Norwegians. According to professor of Sámi history Henry Minde, this period lasted from 1850 up to roughly 1980, after the Alta controversy.⁵ The Norwegian school educated teachers who would work in the Sámi areas, teaching Sámi and Kven children in Norwegian, and prohibiting the children to speak their own language. In 1889, the school instruction, called "Wexelsen decree", stated that the use of Sámi and Kven must be limited to what was strictly necessary (Minde 2005a, 7, footnote 2). In reality, this meant that the use of the language was forbidden, because the teachers were instructed to check that the pupils did not use their native language even during recess. The "Wexelsen decree" was formally in force until 1963, but active Norwegianization was carried out well into the 1960s (Minde 2005a, 14, 18–19).⁶

Controlling peoples' language was one of the means of power used by the authorities during the Norwegianization period. This school policy showed total disrespect for Sámi

³ The Sámi people are the indigenous people of Europe, living in four countries: approximately 40 000 in Norway, 20 000 in Sweden, 7500 in Finland and 2000 in Russia.

⁴ Settlers and descendants of immigrants from Finland. Continuous migration took place from early eighteenth century to the northernmost regions of Norway, Troms and Finnmark (Minde, 2005b, 30, endnote 1).

⁵ The Norwegian government build a hydro-electric power plant in the Alta river in Northern Norway, despite massive protests from Sámi activists and environment activists in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Minde 2005b).

⁶ A testimony of how the racism, due to the Norwegianization politics, disturbs one's self esteem, is also told in the contribution "Min oppvekst som same", posted on mentalhelse.no, to the blog *Psykobolggen*, on 22 May 2015, written by an elderly Sámi woman, Inga Karlsen, from the Tysfjord area in Norway.

life, language and culture, and destroyed Sámi values (Minde 2005a, 25–31). Children were taken away from their parents and sent to boarding schools. Many of those who worked at the boarding schools also suffered trauma because they were not allowed to comfort the children. People suffered loss of language, identity, culture, family relations, education and self-esteem (Fredriksen 2016).

Another consequence that we see today, is that most of the Norwegian population is illiterate concerning Sámi history, language and culture. This ignorance and the negative stereotypes they have of the Sámis, inherited from generation to generation, even today motivate shame, racism, continued ignorance and negative attitudes towards Sámis (cf. Minde 2005a, 27). On the 17th of May 2017, at the celebration of Norway's National Day, some people in the town of Alta in Northern Norway shouted racist epithets at Sámis wearing their traditional costume.⁷ Even if the situation for the Sámis has improved over the last few decades, negative attitudes are still expressed. The engineer in the story in the introduction belongs to the majority population. He is identified by his job title, which indicates that he has some prestige in the Norwegian society, even if he is retired. Juvvá is just an ordinary Sámi man.

The hospital represents the majority culture in the story. It is an institution built by the majority system and the great majority of the staff is Norwegian speaking. From a Sámi perspective, the hospital is the narrative of white walls, white clothing and hygiene. It is a place where you go to get medical treatment, a place where your destiny is put in the hands of people in this white world.

A story illustrates both the dominance of the majority culture, and the challenges faced when the minority language is given space in the public place. Some years ago, an elderly Sámi woman arrived at the hospital. With her was a younger woman, accompanying her. At the entrance, the signs with the names of the wings are in Norwegian, and they are also translated into Sámi. The younger woman said to the old woman: “Isn't this great, all the names are in Sámi?” The old lady looked at the Norwegian signs, at the Sámi signs, and then said: “Thank God one knows enough Norwegian, so that one can find the way around here!”

Elderly Sámi people, especially of the old lady's generation, are not used to seeing the Sámi language in public places. The Sámi, translated names are not familiar to the woman in the story, she is only used to seeing and hearing the Norwegian names. The story's humorous side gives the story the extra seasoning so that it will be remembered, a mark of quality in Sámi oral tradition, but the serious undertone provides connotations indicating an oppressed language and an oppressed culture.

My role as a mediator of such stories started as an employee at the hospital, as narrated in the introduction. In this work, I met staff and Sámi patients in nearly every wing of the hospital. This experience gave me a solid basis to describe and make sense of the hospital world and Sámi patients' meeting with it. The Norwegianization policy and its consequences are familiar to me. I grew up in the municipality of Porsanger in Finnmark, the northernmost county in Norway. I spoke Sámi and Norwegian until I was five, then I moved with my mother from the village where we had been living at my grandmother's and grandfather's house. They spoke Sámi with me. My mother spoke only Norwegian

⁷ https://www.nrk.no/sapmi/sameforeningsleder-etter-17.-mai-hets-av-samer_-_-anmeld-til-politiet-1.13523329 (16.06.17)

with me. She started school in the mid 1950s, and was sent to a boarding school 50 kilometers from home, as part of the Norwegianization policy. She could come home only three times a year, for school vacations, because of the long distance and the transportation infrastructure of that time. The teachers did not speak her mother tongue, Sámi, and she did not speak any Norwegian when she started school. Despite that, she managed well at school, but she has told me many times that life at the boarding school was quite miserable. She did not want me to go through the same experience as she had, and therefore she spoke Norwegian with me, and we moved to the municipality center before I started school. I forgot the Sámi language, because my grandparents also started speaking Norwegian with me after I started school. As an adult, when I started my studies at the University of Tromsø in 1990, I decided to study Sámi and take back my language.

The investigation in this article is thus grounded in a symptomatic reading of the text, where I use knowledge about Sámi history and Sámi traditional means of communication as a frame in which I place the story. In the discussion I then ask how both textual literary analytical tools and cultural knowledge may provide fruitful means for their interpretation? The story takes place in a post World War 2 context, but the historical context and the Sámi traditional means of communication, framing the reading, go further back in time.

Birgenjoansttat – Coping skills

Through a symptomatic reading, what is the situation for Juvvá at the hospital? Juvvá does not speak any Norwegian. As revealed in the stories in the introduction, Juvvá is placed in the narrative of the white hospital world, a place in which he is totally decontextualized. One of the things I asked him when I first met him, was: “Do you know where you are?”. He did not know, so I explained to him where he was. What kind of possibilities does Juvvá have then, to cope and to empower himself in such a situation? In Sámi oral tradition we have many stories about Sámis who get into situations where they have to *birget*, cope, in situations where they find themselves powerless. The term *birget* means ‘to cope’, practically in life, both existentially and socially. In the dictionary by Konrad Nielsen it is explained as “to be able to live, manage” (Nielsen 1979, s.v. *bir’git*). In the book *An Account of the Sámi* (original title *Muitalus sámiid birra*, 1910) written by Johan Turi, the first Sámi to publish a book in Sámi, we find an example of the use of *birget* [get along]: “Niilas was a hot-tempered guy and Elle was a very sensible person. Elle wondered how she could get along so well with Niillas, when he was so hot-tempered” (Turi 2012, 192). From the verb *birget* the noun *birgen* is derived, which means *coping*.

The term *birgenjoansttat*, *coping skills*, I have borrowed from the Sámi yoiker (chanter) Ánte Mikkil Gaup. In an interview, he explains that to know how to adapt yourself has a great value in the Sámi culture. You are strong if you manage to adapt yourself to different new conditions and situations. The philosophy that you find in yoik, the Sámi traditional way of chanting, shows that a human being is good at adapting to new conditions, because in the yoik tradition you find a kind of coping art (Gaup 2001, 21–22). My discussion of the coping skills that are in play in Juvvá’s actions, will show how he manages to adapt to the conditions he faces during his stay at the hospital.

Stállu and Trickster

In the Sámi oral tradition, we have many stories about the Sámi, generally a man, who meets a stállu, a big evil giant who is very strong but not very smart. *Stállu* is literal in its reactions and ways of doing things, it does not understand connotations and is not flexible in a creative way. *Stállu* has two important helpers: his wife *luhttáš* and a little dog, *ráhkká*. To defeat stállu, who often wants to kill and eat the Sámi or keep him as a slave, the Sámi has to be *juonalaš*, cunning and smart. If you kill a stállu, you have to kill his *ráhkká* as well. If not, the *stállu* will come back to life and appear again in another shape, in another situation (cf. Qvigstad 1927, 441–506, 1928, 627–669, Qvigstad 1929, 413–431, 531–551, Turi 2012, 157). Juvvá's situation at the hospital can be looked upon as a *Sámi-Stállu*-narrative, a masterplot in the Sámi culture, as we can see from the number of stories in the Qvigstad-collection. At the hospital Juvvá is the underdog. He did not know where he was before I told him. He cannot not speak with the staff, nor with the engineer, because they do not understand each other's language. That does not mean that they cannot communicate. Non-verbal, body language and actions are important ways to communicate, and this becomes Juvvá's means to cope in the situation. The Sámi song tradition has been used to fight stállu, which in some of the songs was represented by Norwegian authorities and the repression that they carried out, with their lack of understanding of Sámi culture and sense of justice. Cunningness, and double meanings in the text, were important elements in the fight against stereotypes and oppression. This kind of resistance was described in the song texts, in newspaper articles and in stories told by local people (Fredriksen 2001, 40–79).

Even though body language is not written language, with the possibilities to literally read between the lines, body language also transmits blurred meanings that need interpretation. Juvvá takes on the role of a Sámi trickster, to fight the stállu. A trickster is, in most cases, a male figure that is much described in the oral tradition of the indigenous peoples in North America. A trickster is cunning, crosses lines, has a sense of humor and seeks for opportunities to survive and cope in different situations in a shifting world. A trickster is a boundary-crosser (Hyde 1999, 6–8). In North America, the trickster often appears in the shape of an animal. In the Sámi tradition, the trickster is often a male person who uses humor and cunningness to solve delicate and problematic situations, but we also have stories where women are tricksters. The trickster often appears as quite a character in his community. In the Norwegian oral tradition the fox is often the trickster, and in Norse mythology the god Loki is a trickster. In the Sámi oral tradition, cunningness has been essential in the Sámi resistance against those in power. Sámis have always been a minority, struggling against a majority with access to much greater resources of power. The Sámi means of resistance has been to use one's brain, as the stállu-stories can tell.

Starting with the knowledge that Juvvá did not even know where he was at first, we can see the three events narrated in the Introduction in a wider perspective, where the symptomatic reading unveils a more disguised or hidden meaning.

The look

The first act, of sitting fully dressed on his bed, does not necessarily mean that he does it only because he is cold. It is also a very harsh protest against the whole situation. Through his act, the nurse feels insecure, she calls me and ends the conversation with “and he could be psychotic!”. Why would she say that? Because Juvvá is behaving in a way that is not

“normal”. In Norway, it is expected that you take off your jacket and shoes when you are indoors, also at the hospital. By not doing that, he makes the staff insecure. This is a way for Juvvá to empower himself. The look that is mentioned in the introduction, how Juvvá looks at me the first time we met, is a very important situation in this story. With my background as a literary scholar, I do not “belong” to the hospital world as such. The white robe I wear gives me an insider position in the way that I can enter different parts of the hospital without any questions. Still I am an outsider, who looks at things with other eyes than those who have their education within the health sciences. Things and routines that they take for granted, may not be obvious for me. It makes me a liminal figure who operates in the domain between the hospital and the Sámi patient. I know something about the structure of the world of stállu, something about the world that we live in and something about the world of the hospital. In the exchange of glances between Juvvá and me, Juvvá sees someone who sees him, without prejudice, and someone who maybe understands him a bit. In that look, we share context, which is comforting for a person who is decontextualized from his world.

The creative space

The situation with the engineer’s water glass can be seen in two ways, with reference to the trickster’s position: The functional way is that Juvvá actually gets thirsty and just grabs the engineer’s glass and drinks his water. The other way, which I will elaborate, is that the situation is a creative space that the trickster uses to cope or solve a situation. Juvvá finds his own space, how to *birget*, and to break the narrative of the hospital’s white world. Humor is an essential ingredient in this creative space and a way to express disagreement. Humor and irony in the Sámi folk song tradition at the beginning of the 20th century, in the municipality of Porsanger in Northern Norway, were important means to show opposition to regulations set by central authorities, and to articulate cultural identity. In the songs, which were in the Sámi language, the language was a means to empower the Sámis, using humor, irony and satire to mock the Norwegian authorities (Fredriksen 2004).

In Juvvá’s case, he cannot use verbal language to plead his case, but he has other resources. On the one hand, Juvvá, by drinking the engineer’s water, is very clearly protesting against his neighbor’s attitude, and giving him a message. The message, though, which is non-verbal, might not be very clear for the engineer. The action itself is explicit, but the message could be difficult to grasp for a person who does not know how to “decode” it. The Sámi implicit way of communication is both verbal and non-verbal, and this knowledge is depicted as an essential art to master in the life of a small community. Verbal communication works by hinting and allusions i.e. as a way to deliver a message in a softer tone rather than saying things directly and as a way to avoid conflicts. This is a characteristic of Sámi interpersonal communication, as professor of Sámi literature Harald Gaski states in an interview on the Sámi radio channel NRK Sápmi 18.2.2011 about Sámi traditional ways of communication (cf. Fredriksen 2015, 117-120). Juvvá’s non-verbal communication, using body language, is a way of communicating a rather sharp message to the engineer. It is not a normal way to act to drink another person’s water, and certainly not if you do not know the person, and by that Juvvá gets the engineer’s attention and delivers his message. The engineer is left back in his bed, confused and maybe a little anxious. He is a metonymic extension of the hospital, its

white world and its attitudes. In his limited, but essential role, we can read the history of Norwegianization and see the engineer as the stállu's assistant. Considering Juvvá's situation, it should be unnecessary for an old man to use his resources to defend his own person and make a performance to express his displeasure with his roommate's attitude. It is the hospital that has the responsibility to provide enough Sámi speaking staff to make the situation and communication better for the Sámi patients, something the hospital is not able to do. This is actually a crisis for the hospital, but it is transformed into a crisis involving Juvvá. He has to take action to cope with the situation. This was back in the beginning of the 2000's. One can ask how the situation is today, for Sámi patients in their encounter with the health care system. Juvvá's situation is first and foremost a situation where the staff, and other patients, do not speak his language, and he does not speak Norwegian. The communication with the medical staff goes through the interpreter, who is not present on the wing most of the time.⁸ This is not good enough, the Sámi language has been an official language of Norway since 1992,⁹ but the great majority of the Norwegian population, and many Sámis, do not speak Sámi.

On the other hand, the message has a humorous undertone. As an interpreter, I experienced that issues other than language and visible parts of culture need translation. One of the experiences is that there are some aspects of culture that are easy to translate and perceive, such as language, dress and food. Then there are aspects that are not that easy to translate, such as world view, core values, pride, aesthetics and humor. Humor is an important aspect of the narrative in this discussion. For a reader from another culture, such dimensions can be challenging. Often the humoristic energy lies in assumptions that are established and triggered, and then broken down by an unexpected revelation. Sámi humor is often subversive, subtle and ironic, a way to turn power dynamics around and a way to *birget*, 'cope' in meetings with the *stállu*. In the Sea-Sámi folk song tradition, irony was used in satirical songs about persons who occupied positions of some importance, to remind them that they are not better than anyone else and to empower the local people. This is done by means of satire and subtle ironic assumptions in the text (Fredriksen 2004, 47–49). In the Russian literary scholar Mihail Baktin's analysis of the carnivalesque in Dostojevsky and Rabelais, social hierarchies of everyday life are turned around. In the carnivals of popular culture, the king is dethroned and the fool becomes king. This is part of popular laughter culture. Satirical irony reveals carnivalesque features of the Sea-Sámi song tradition, as part of popular laughter culture and reversed power relations (Fredriksen 2004, 69–70). In the story about Juvvá and the engineer, subtle irony and a trickster strategy cause the *stállu*, the majority, to be the real fool. Making his roommate insecure by drinking his water, is like saying: "I know that you don't like me because I am Sámi, I am not stupid. And since we are in this situation, why not have some

⁸ It is beyond the scope of this essay to elaborate on how Sámi patients in general experience the health services in Norway, I will just mention some surveys: A survey from 2005 done on treatment satisfaction and psychological distress, finds that lack of opportunity to speak their own language may have been one of the reasons why Sámi patients, compared with non-Sámi patients, were less satisfied with psychiatric hospital treatment (Sørliie and Nergård. 2005). Several studies provide evidence for a link between ethnic discrimination and negative health indicators and health inequalities in the indigenous Sami population of Norway (Hansen and Sørliie. 2012, Hansen 2015, Friborg, Sørliie and Hansen 2017).

⁹ <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/tema/urfolk-og-minoriteter/samepolitikk/samiske-sprak/samelovens-sprakregler-og-forvaltningsom/id633281/>

fun?” By being *juonalaš*, cunning, Juvvá switches the power relations and takes control of his own situation, as part of coping in a situation where he is in fact speechless. It will probably not have anything to say for the medical treatment and the surgery he is going to have, but something is better than nothing, and you can't have it all, can you?

Control your own situation

By taking control of his own situation, Juvvá is able to give some meaning to his stay at the hospital. He figures out how he can control the response he receives from other persons at the hospital. The body language expressed in Juvvá's performances, is his way of using language as a medium of power. Language, and culture, as the North American literary scholar Arnold Krupat points out, is not only determinant in defining identity, but serves as a cultural model. Referring to Mikhail Bakhtin, Krupat states that language is never something that belongs only to you. Society is a pluralistic construct, and the language used always operates between oneself and others (Krupat 1992, 17–19). This mutual understanding of language, also body language as I see it, depends on our understanding of the language and the culture, and the codes in it. If not, there will, obviously, be no clear communication, and language can intentionally be used as a medium of power. This is illustrated by Juvvá's third non-verbal act, where he walks around with a blanket wrapped around his neck. This also makes the staff and other patients insecure. It is not a normal thing to do, not even in Sámi culture. Again, Juvvá is playing with the insecurity and prejudice that people have towards Sámis. This insecurity is historically related to the idea that Sámis have supernatural powers, connected to the old shamanistic religion. Powers that often are associated to the ability to heal and to put the evil eye on other persons. These prejudices actually played an important role in relation to the first original Sámi literature that was published in 1673, in the book *Lapponia*, edited by the German intellectual Johannes Schefferus. The book was ordered by the Swedish Imperial Chancellor to provide unbiased knowledge of the Sámi people, against foreign propaganda claiming that Sweden got assistance from pagan Sámi shamans to win battles in the Thirty Years War. The book was published in Latin. Ironically, in the English and Dutch translations, only the chapters that focused on the exotic, spiritual parts of Sámi life were published, so the prejudice and the diabolic descriptions of the Sámi shamanism remained (Store norske leksikon 2013).

As trickster, Juvvá in his actions could be the creative idiot or the wise fool. The trickster is a figure that represents ambiguity (Hyde 1999, 7). If the intention is to create uncertainty, the ambiguity that the trickster represents, can be used to his advantage. Juvvá, as trickster, could be perceived both as a somewhat 'flat' character and a 'round' character, to put it in E. M. Forster's¹⁰ terms. If trickster is seen as a fool, he could be regarded a flat character. The literary critic James Wood is ready to abolish the idea of 'roundness' in characterization. He says something interesting concerning flatness though: “But if by flatness we mean a character, often but not always a minor one, often but not always comic, who serves to illuminate an essential human truth or characteristic, then many of the most interesting characters are flat” (Wood 2009, 99). Abbot also comments on the function of a type in a masterplot. Abbot in this case not only refers to literary persons as types, but to stories about real persons: “As such, they can be powerful

¹⁰ I will not in this article go deeper into the discussion about E. M. Forster's terms flat and round characters.

rhetorical tools when activated. They can absorb the complexity of the defendant's human nature into the simplicity of type" (Abbot 2008, 185). Juvvá is not a fictional figure as such, but is fictionalized as trickster in the stories in the introduction. The flat character is a literary type with limited characteristics of human complexity. Actually, all literary characters will, compared to a real human, suffer some kind of flattening. The flat character though, does normally not create moments of surprise (Abbot 2008, 133–134, 136). Juvvá definitely has the capacity to surprise, even if we do not hear Juvvá's own voice, literally, in the stories. In the beginning, he could be seen as the stállu's prisoner, but when he starts to cope with the situation, he turns into a trickster. Therefore, between the lines of Juvvá's actions and the context, he appears as quite a complex character.

Conclusion

In the first story there is an explanation to Juvvá's actions, given by Juvvá himself, but there is not a deeper knowledge of his thoughts. In the other stories, no explanation for his performance is provided. His audience, in this article with focus on the engineer, as the stállu, remains like a shadow in the background. Neither the nurse in the first story, nor the engineer in the second story, nor the staff and the other patients in the third story, know what to do with the behavior they witness, but they represent the shadow of centuries of repression and lack of knowledge about Sámi language, culture and history. As Abbot states: "But the more culturally specific the masterplot, the greater its practical force in everyday life" (Abbot 2008, 47). This is why context is important. As trickster, Juvvá wants his "audience" to see the fool, without knowing that they are the ones being fooled. Of course, the trickster's play can be turned against himself (Hyde 1998, 56), but that is part of the game. In this case, the trickster's performance does not have any consequences that could hurt himself or anyone else. The trickster is, as Hyde points out, a boundary-crosser, but he also creates a boundary (Hyde 1999, 7). Juvvá makes a statement to the white hospital world: he is not to be fooled around with, he prefers to enter the scene himself, do the fooling and tell the staff and other patients, if they get the point; he has his limits, and they should not consider him to be just a simple-minded old Sámi man.

All this historical contextual information, and the trickster's multiple and disguised meanings are in play during Juvvá's stay at the hospital. Juvvá's agency, through his use of the creative space, is to cope, and take control of his own situation in the narrative of the white world. Juvvá is used to coping. He is an old man, and a man of his generation was raised to manage on his own, to work hard, to be independent and not to complain about anything. He did not talk much, not even with me, who spoke his language. Silence, and being silent together, is also a language of its own. The presence of another person is often enough to make one feel better. Juvvá's actions in the stories told in the introduction, read in a wider context, show his birgengoanstat, art of survival, and make him a symbol of the creative, underlying Sámi resistance against the stállu, where humor is a key element. I have no doubt that Juvvá was observing and paying close attention to what was going on around him. Juvva was probably enjoying his role as trickster in his room at the hospital. What a symptomatic reading of his situation helps us see, is that performances such as Juvva's give at least some measure of power to the powerless.

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