Conceptualizing the North:
Orientalism in the Arctic

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Abstract

In this article the purpose is to illustrate how the concept of 'north' has gathered its meaning through the social and cultural process of regional stereotyping, exoticism and mythology, and to scrutinize how the concept attains its meanings through a certain aspect of binarism. This will be elucidated through the example of Finnish northernness and its geographical manifestations. The theoretical stance comes close to the context of postcolonial criticism. The aim is to view how the mechanism of social and cultural power relations has worked at the institutional levels of Finnish northern art (literature) and science and especially, what consequences there have occurred in terms of northern cultural life.

Keywords: northernness, Lapland, postcolonial theories, orientalism, otherness, stereotypes, exoticism, myths, literature, art.

Introduction: The Multitude of Norths

Considering northernness purely semantically, its definition comes from the cardinal point of the compass, the opposite of south. With certain provisions, a point of the compass can be approached as being an objective, universal manner of perceiv-

ing northernness, but when 'north' turns into 'the North', the objective cardinal point becomes regionalized, transformed into "a mental region conveying specific ideological, cultural and political connotations" (Hagen 2003: 490). From this point of view 'the absence of coniferous trees', as a suggestion for a regional definition of the Arctic (Young 1988: 13), can be approached as a perceptual characteristic from within the natural sciences employed to define northernness, possibly as an act of science policy. The North is much more than a cardinal point: the North, whether in terms of economics, military regimes or environmental protection, has its own contextual and conceptual worlds. Similarly, people in the small villages of Lapland, Helsinki, Sicily and Nairobi all have their different norths (cf. Shields 2002), not only because the physical locations of the hands holding the compass are different, but because the cultural, social and political standpoints from which the boundaries of the North are viewed are in different positions. In the Kenyan context, for instance, northernness may refer to the unjustified wealth of capitalist society and to the history of colonialism, while in a British context the North stands for regionalized stereotypes of industry, depression, a cold climate and hoi polloi (see Shields 1991: 231). All this accentuates how imaginative the concept of 'the North' actually is. It is not a region located beyond a certain line of latitude, but rather beyond the social and cultural ambitions of the human imagination.

Although the North attains its meanings in various contextual circumstances, one thing that is common to almost all of them is that they become meaningful through a certain aspect of binarism. This will be elucidated here through the example of Finnish northernness. Considered internationally, the whole country of Finland is often associated with northernness, so that it represents a northern dimension in EU politics, for instance (see Moisio 2003), but the same process of binarism which separates south from north is also accruing inside Finland. In a Finnish context the North is perceived as the remotest corner of the

world, an excessively romantic and mythical natural environment with its looming fjelds, flaming northern lights, cold winds, reindeer and the ethnic minority of exotically primitive native Sami. Together these stereotypes form an imaginary contrast to culture and civilization, a homogeneous region without any contradictions, conceived by the southern culture for its own hegemonic needs. Even though cold winds, reindeer and northern lights can indeed be found there, you can still come across warm houses, cars and traffic lights. As mentioned, the contexts from which the North derives its conceptual meaning vary, but all the different definitions are a question of someone's power to signify someone else, and what is most important, on their own behalf. In post-structuralist approaches language is perceived more as a construction of reality than as a reflection of it, which means that because informed language is spoken within a certain historical, social and cultural contextuality, the information it carries is always somehow contorted (Bertens 1995: 6). Defining a region exclusively in terms of a binary opposition between nature and culture implies a multidimensional social process, an exercise of power in which culture and civilization justify their own existence by excluding their opposites. The outcome of this colonialist activity is an imaginary region with fluctuating boundaries – the region commonly known as 'the North'.

The point of view adopted in this article is mainly geographical: the focus is on the processes by which stereotypes and myths find their spatial manifestations. When the North is conceptualized as a binary opposition to the world of culture and civilization, an imaginative nature-world built up on overexaggerating stereotypes, the point of view comes close to the postcolonial critique. The aim is actually not to discuss the inner meanings of the northern wilderness as such, but rather to view how the mechanism of social and cultural power relations has worked at different institutional levels and what consequences it has had, especially in terms of northern cultural life.

The reason why cultural life is specifically discussed here is that according to the stereotypes through which the North has attained its definition there should not exist any cultural life there. Thus all the difficulties encountered in the establishment of northern culture over time constitute a fitting example of what northern subjugation has meant in practise. The focus is directed especially on the institution of literature, which has played a central and multifaceted role in the history of northern colonization. Northern literature is perceived here both as a constructor and a deconstructor of northern myths and stereotypes. But first it is important to ponder over whether the thematics of northernness actually fits into the context of postcolonial criticism at all.

Northern Orientalism: a Conceptual Dilemma?

When looking at the history of northern imagination from the perspective of postcolonial criticism one is automatically confronted with certain problems, mainly conceptual ones. The semantics of the word 'postcolonial' or 'post-colonialist' refers simply to something which has come after the colonial or colonialist era. According to Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (1989: 1), the semantic basis of the term refers to national cultures developed after the departure of the imperial powers, European powers such as Britain, France, Portugal and Spain, from the colonized countries. Following this definition, national histories in colonized areas can be divided into periods before and after independence, into a 'colonial' and a 'postcolonial' period. In their volume *The Empire Writes Back*, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin use the term 'postcolonial' to "cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of the colonization to the present day" (ibid.: 2). The arguments provided for this definition include "a continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process initiated by European imperial aggression" and "the new cross-cultural criticism which has

emerged in recent years and the discourse through which this is constituted" (ibid.: 2). All in all, the North does not easily fit in with these definitions.

In terms of social inequality, postcolonial research can be regarded more as an emancipatory strategy directed at the processes of maintaining otherness than as an objective analysis of it (Spivak 1988; Crush 1994: 334-335; Kahn 1995: 8; Philips 2001: 125-126). Postcolonial research explicitly admits that its conscious goals are to criticize the unevenly developed world and actively participate and intervene in discussions on social problems (Young 1990; Said 1993; Barnett 2005). From that perspective the postcolonial analysis of northernness is easily admissible, as any representation of otherness can be approached as a proper subject for postcolonial analysis (see Kahn 1995: 2). The postcolonial manner of perceiving history can be adapted to any relationship between centres and margins, such as the marginal position of northern art in relation to urbanized Southern Finland, regardless of the fact that there is certain lack of 'global relevance' or any history of colonialism acknowledged on an Anglo-American scale in this particular case (Savolainen 1995; Lehtola 1997: 26). The Finnish North has been colonized by the 'southern civilization' just as the African jungles were subordinated to the order of the European Empires.

Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) is a well established and remarkably worthwhile volume for research into the interrelations between social order, cultural practices and their geographical outcomes. Said gives particular recognition to the social power of culture by stressing how different scales of space and regions exist only because of history, the tradition of thought, human imagery and human vocabulary (ibid.: 4-5). According to Said, the spatial distinction between the East and the West, the Orient and Occident, exists only because of human creativeness; in this case because of 'orientalism', the (political) power of western man to imagine and articulate 'the Orient' on its own behalf (ibid.: 57). The consequences were not

always only political, but could be seen in other fields of culture as well. Said stresses how famous 19th century novelists such as Gustave Flaubert, Gérard de Nerval and Walter Scott, for example, were often severely constrained in giving descriptions of the Orient. In fact, their cultural way of understanding what the Orient was actually about was, according to Said, politically determined. Orientalism was a political way of perceiving the world as split in two, the known and the unknown, ours and theirs, two distinct halves that could be separated from each other conceptually (ibid.: 5, 43-44).

Said's research has stood for a long time as a perceptual signpost in the field of postcolonial studies and on the conceptual level 'orientalism' has moved away from its original context and turned into a general abstraction under which all discussion concerning imagined spaces and otherness can be gathered. In the same way as the representations of the African jungles and their history can be approached as an example of orientalism (Arnold 2000), so Kirsten Thisted (2002) has used the concept of 'arctic orientalism' in her narrative analysis of northern literature. She explains her choice of words by noting how the literature she is analysing, even though operating as a social criticism of Danish colonial politics, is also re-establishing same basic structures of otherness and marginalization which Said has considered the main causes behind social and cultural injustice. The rephrasing of the idea of polar postcolonialism in the form of 'arctic' or 'northern orientalism' is simply an act of putting one's research and criticism into the right theoretical framework.

The easiest way to connect postcolonial criticism with the case of the northern imagination is probably to analyse the social position of Sami minorities. The marginality of ethnic groups has been the most popular and probably the most comfortable way to adapt postcolonial theories (e.g. West 1994; Hall 1995; Lane 1996). At the conceptual level 'ethnicity' and 'race' are defined through colonialism and therefore are also 'natural'

subjects for postcolonial research, and in the case of Northern Finland, questions such as why Sami literary history is based on the doctrine of Christianity (see Seurujärvi-Kari et al. 1995: 120) are interesting and important, but also an easy way of combining social and cultural injustice with an emancipatory strategy. Whether postcolonial research actually means 'honest' political criticism or the nostalgia and romanticism of colonialist history is quite another question (see Cosgrove 2003: 852-853). Along with the globally noticeable ethnic renaissance of the 1990s, in which being marginal became something to be proud of, and with some discounters, even fashionable, the main reason behind this boom, the desire to approve 'the other' among 'us', was a representation of same old yearning for exotic cultural differences. The growing boom of tourism has transformed ethnicity into a transparent, easily approachable form of colonialism (Tuulentie 1999: 108), and this has also left its mark on postcolonial research. The emancipatory strategy is directed at social and cultural 'destruction', which often causes only unnecessary (and from the critic's point of view often harmful) pity for the minorities (see Ridanpää 2000). To be precise, if research is focused only on underdeveloped regions, counties and their subjugated minorities, on 'classic colonialism', as it were, the important question of the linkages between the problems of western society, colonialism and its own history will inevitably be pushed into the background (see Nash 2002: 227-228). The Sami people are a minority in Finland, but also a minority in Northern Finland, and therefore when the public image and identity of the North becomes entwined around myths, exoticism and the mostly untruthful stereotypes of Sami people, the colonialism of Northern Finland turns into a still more multifaceted social process.

Northern Mythology I: Scientific Legitimation

To make a myth believable requires there to be an enormous institutional guarantee behind it. Literature is one route for making stereotypes feel natural, but the institution of science makes them appear to be 'officially true'. Scientific information is a system of cultural, historical and social power structures (see Foucault 1972, 1973). The process of mapping, the intellectual colonizing of the unknown, can be perceived as an in-built vocation of geography. One of the most crucial motives behind all colonial activities, including science, has always been some form of spatial exoticism, mythology and romanticism. Regions are romantic before their romance is even discovered (cf. Van Noy 2002). For centuries it has been the continuing mission of scientists and novelists to explore strange new worlds, and it has been characteristic for the collected knowledge on these to come up against the problem of making distinctions between exact facts and fiction. On the other hand, this may have not been actually 'a problem', but rather a motive for conducting research. Making a difference between fact and fiction was not the purpose of the colonial explorers of the 19th century (see Driver 2001).

In spite of Edward Said's (1978) manner of perceiving orientalism as a fictive and distorted generalization of various social and cultural arguments, it is still important to emphasize that each shady myth requires an enormous amount of realism in order to become believable. In this context it is important to make a distinction between the concepts of 'fact' and 'fiction'. As Patricia Waugh (1985: 28) has suggested, 'fact' and 'fiction' can be perceived as abstract frames that form a continuum from where 'real' or something conceived as being real becomes defined (cf. Hutcheon 1992a: 113). From that perspective reality is always imaginative, although not fictive, but rather a myth, indistinguishable from the frameworks of both fact and fiction. As Roland Barthes (1973: 109) has rephrased it, every object in

the world can stand for a myth in that a myth is limited only formally and not according to its substance. A myth is depoliticized speech, which does not define or deny things, but rather "it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact" (ibid.: 143).

In the Finnish case the mapping of the unknown was mainly a practical question of politics and economics. The currently known version of the Lapland myth arose during the years between the world wars, a period when the Petsamo region, formerly and currently a part of Russia, belonged to Finland and offered attractive economic possibilities with its reserves of nickel and its important access to the Arctic Ocean. These economic and industrial possibilities were reflected in other fields of culture and society as well, and suddenly it was being emphasized, in the field of geographical studies, for example, how this unknown land must be thoroughly scrutinized. The economic exploitation of Lapland was possible only after more spatial and environmental data had been collected and, as sufficient topographical maps were drawn, for example. Suddenly the necessity to map Lapland turned into a written declaration among the Finnish geographers (see Rosberg 1919; Tanner 1928), and similarly it was the mission of literature to collect 'data', to map the unknown wilderness in order to lend more credibility and authenticity to northern romanticism. The northern explorations bore obvious similarities to the British colonial effort to conquer the Tropics in the 19th century. The idea of the Tropics can be perceived as a conceptual construct produced by the scientific institutions of the times, which along with the African expeditions of David Livingstone and the like, turned into the worship of mythology (Driver 2001: 68-89). For Alexander von Humboldt, the Tropics served as an exquisite demonstration of how holistic explanation required a simultaneous combination of artistic methods (fiction) and scientific accuracy (fact). Fact and fiction entwined into mythical and

romantic travelogues, which were also transformed into a paradoxical dualism between the aesthetics of the garden of paradise and a pestilential landscape of primitiveness, violence and destruction (Arnold 2000: 7-8). Science in the Tropics was not based on an interest in a certain climatic zone, but rather it functioned as a tool for making a categorical distinction between civilized culture and primitive nature (see Martins 2000: 22).

The distortion of language means simply that it became basically impossible to separate facts, stereotypes and myths from each other, which in a northern context would refer to historical processes in which 'reality' and exotic fantasy have been squeezed in together. The 'Petsamo boom' materialized in the form of an increasing amount of non-fictional works and travel books, but in terms of northern stereotypes and Lapland identity, semi-fictive Lapland literature played more substantial role. As an example, we may consider Arvi Järventaus' novel *Risti ja Noitarumpu* (The Cross and the Shaman Drum, 1916), a work considered to have kick-started the genre of Lapland literature, which first emerged at the time of the Lapland romantics. Sami terminology played a significant role in the rhetorics of this novel, as the authentic feel of mythical strangeness is mainly constructed through the continuous repeating of unfamiliar Sami terminology. Sami expressions are unfamiliar to the southern reader, but what Järventaus has done is to opened up their meanings and semantics slightly and by the same token provide a certain authencity and feel of realism for a story which otherwise would probably be too unfamiliar and strange to be believed in or identified with. Järventaus makes voluminous use of Sami rhetoric, while here and there he translates occasional words and expressions into Finnish, as if enlightening readers as to what being a Sami is all about, revealing the truth behind the unknown. The novel is full of strange Sami words, but as a concession to the readers, their semantics are explained thoroughly, though not as a fluent part of the narrative itself but in the form of separate footnotes, a literary con-

vention commonly used in scientific works. In some cases the rhetoric makes it seem as if the book was actually an ethnic dictionary. For example, the clause "and the last time he was given a saivo baptism was when he became a witch" (Järventaus 1916/1928: 116) is accompanied by a footnote: "Saivo, orig. meaning 'holy', a commonly occurring appellation in the ancient Lappish religion. Saivo, Saivoland = underworld. Saivo baptism = the baptism by means of which witches were ordained"; like an extract from an explorer's diary. The manner in which Järventaus interweaves ordinary prose with rhetoric and the methods of science is somehow a similar literary style to that used by Herman Melville in his revolutionary *Moby Dick* (1851), where the exoticism of whale-hunting is conveyed by mixing mythological elements together with scientific narration and rhetoric (of the time), and Järventaus applies basically the same formal strategy to the exoticism and romanticism of Lappish primitiveness, an interesting way of eliminating the strangeness without losing its mythology. In the same way everyday expressions such as "burist, burist! = Hello" (ibid.: 45) and "Ibdel adde = Good evening" are intentionally translated for the readers, in case they were unaware of the backgrounds of Sami identity and northernness (as they mostly were) and Järventaus' mission was to be their guide. Instead, the equally unfamiliar Latin expression "Audiatur et altera pars" ("let us hear the opposite side") has been left without any explanatory footnote. Järventaus poses as an expert on northerness, while the Latin culture is not a territory to which his authority extends.

When looking at the North in the context of Finnish regional systems, it is intriguing to discuss the imaginative aspect of the scientific institution of regional geography. It is not that scientific institutions had been consciously active in the processes of northern romanticization. Felix Driver (2001b) has implicitly noted how current geography, both as an institution and in terms of the scientific work done inside it, is firmly grounded in the romantic colonialism of the 19th century. In the

Finnish context the geographical 'facts' that the scientific institution brought along with the research results fitted perfectly with the imaginative maps of the northern romantics. When the Finnish geographer J. G. Granö, for instance, considered the categorization of regions, a needful subject for study, the outcome was a map on which Finland was split into 65 geographical sub-regions, and what is more interesting, into 2 major regional categories: Culture-Finland and 'Nature-Finland' (Granö 1951: 379). This latter categorization naturally makes it easier to justify the exoticism of northern nature and at the same time to hinder the activity of northern culture life, to make its appearance a semantic paradox. The primary motives behind colonial activities may have been ambitions to obtain financial benefit, but the motive for colonial romanticism lies basically in the urge for modernized society to re-establish its paradise lost. As a conceptual definition, nature is primarily subaltern, a semantic lifeline to culture, history and society, dependent on dualism between the concepts of 'gained' and 'lost', 'modern' and 'primitive'. The existence of society requires the conceptual distinguishing of 'history' and 'order' from 'traditional' and 'mythical' (Said 1978; Willems-Braun 1997; Clifford, Dominguez & Min-ha 1987), and the outcome is a paradoxical abstraction, 'nature'. James D. Proctor (1998: 354-358) has emphasized how the social construction of the ideal of pure virgin nature is a conceptual impossibility, simply because all conceptualizing means semantic touching and the untouched can certainly not have been touched already. In fact, it was actually Granö's specific problem to discuss the difficult position of the town of Rovaniemi, a populated anomaly in the throes of an unpopulated wilderness. At the same time the imaginative and harshly simplified conception of the North as a categorical counterpart to the world of culture and civilization attained its institutional justification.

Northern Mythology II: Literary Legitimation

The institution of science has had a specific role in the process in which northern stereotypes and myths have been regionalized, transformed into two opposing regional categories of Culture-Finland and Nature-Finland. The other and probably more multi-faceted 'actor' in this process has been the institution of art, especially literature. Finnish literature, 'national literature', as it was defined when it originated, was born in the South and simply did not live in the North (Lehtola 1997). Following the red line of northern stereotypes, it would be a paradox for culture to live in the North. This didn't mean that that there weren't any writers in northern regions - there were. The problem was that just as Goethe's concept of 'Weltliteratur' precludes a huge quantity of European literary classics (Said 1993: 52), the northern literature was unable to fulfil the criteria for national literature. It may be that these works were never presented, because of the lack of northern publishers, which may have been linked with and converted into the stereotypic image of Lapland having certain lack of cultural credibility. But the most important thing is that the dividing line between the centre (the South) and the margins (the North) was drawn in accordance with these literary choices and that at the same time northern Finland received one of its regional and cultural definitions, no matter how imagined or imaginative that was.

One of the key reasons why it has been a difficult task for all northern literature to ascend to the context of the national literary canon has lain in the stereotypes concerning Sami culture. As an object of stereotypes associated with Nature-Finland, it has been basically impossible to regard the Sami culture as a culture at all. The Sami people were expected to occupy the role of the 'noble savage', the idea familiar from all centre-margin relationships, based principally on the colonial paradox of 'culture in nature' (see Hall 1997; Young 1990; El-

lingson 2001; Kuklick 1991). In a national context the Sami identity has been associated with the concepts of primitive fishing and hunting communities, but on the other hand this has also been connected in a positive manner with originality and indigenousness, qualities which the decayed southern modernity had already lost. Primitiveness was related to excitingly mystical features of nature's children being dependent on their instincts, living in their own unique elemental world where moral and sexual values were on the level of puerility, as was the case with all primitive people (Lehtola 1999: 19). Interestingly, the history of Sami primitiveness is entwined together with the history of the Finns in that the first literary references to 'the Fenns', a race that hinged on the resources of hunting and fishing, appearing in the recognised classic *Germania* (98 AD), written by the Italian explorer-adventurer Publius Cornelius Tacitus (c. 55-120 AD), was taken it's model from the Sami people of the time. One interesting point in this relatively short and mainly fictional excerpt (Niemi 2000: 17) was that the stereotypes of primitiveness and northernness were grouped together for the first time (Julku 1985: 85). Tacitus' descriptions of the Fenns and the common European race discussion of the 17th century, in which the Finns were represented as Mongoloids, turned out to be a problem for a nation striving for its independence, self-esteem and identity (Tuulentie 2001: 82-84). The stereotypes concerning the Sami came too close to those of the Fenns, a Finnish, Mongoloid identity, and therefore the Sami were given the role of marking the distinction between civilization and primitiveness, standing for a juxtaposition with the discourses of developing Finnish nationality. In the literature of Lapland the Sami identity was presented as an opposite to civilization and what lay inside its cultural features was never even intended to be described (Lehtola 1997: 163-164).

'The golden age' of northern literature was the period when the Petsamo region was a part of Finland, a time when an overtly exoticized perception of northernness was generated.

Although the writings of the 1920s and 1930s did not form any solid group with a given aesthetic programme, common name, known leader or common forum, Veli-Pekka Lehtola (1997: 9-10) considers these 'Lapland writers' to have constituted some form of circle with shared topics and themes. He notices that the reason why these 'Lapland writers' were marginalized and peripheralized relative to the literary canons was more a matter of intellectual distance than physical distance. On the one hand, the northern literature of that time was regarded only as a manifestation of one geographically limited region and the criticism was often infused with the critics' own opinions about what Lapland is about and what writings about it should be about (ibid.: 234). The romanticized concept of the North was politically determined, although the politicality of those days was a slightly different question from what the politicality of literature institution currently means, for example (see Bhabha 1984; Ploszajska 1999). In the case of the Lapland writers the literary 'discrimination' was more about ignorance and ostracism than systematic publishing politics.

The majority of Lapland writers came from the South, being mainly public servants and officials by profession (Lehtola 1997: 31). In terms of the generic theme of their novels', Lappish nature, the perspective remained that of an outsider; the North was approached as an imaginative colony, a categorial opposite to the (imagined) self-portrait of southern culture (Tuohimaa 1997: 48; Lehtola 1997: 24-25). Some authors attained a certain northern authenticity through spending several years, even decades, as insiders in northern communities, but in many cases the main function of subjective experiences was to confirm one's own romantic and stereotypic presuppositions (see Jama 1995: 121), to entwine a feel of realism into the myths and romanticism. Although these stereotypes did not often come face to face with the so-called 'reality', this did not prevent Lapland from turning into a romantic wilderness of exotic exaggerations. In the same way as literature as an institution and

literary stereotypes have maintained the social process of orientalism over centuries, Lapland literature has made use of the northern myths by confusing the old mythology with the later body of collected information.

Re-Imagining the North

"Truth to tell, the best weapon against myth is perhaps to mystify it in its turn, and to produce an *artificial myth*: and this reconstituted myth will in fact be a mythology. Since myth robs language of something, why not rob myth?" (Barthes 1973: 135)

Alongside its capabilities for working as a colonising practice, literature also has an important role in the processes of cultural and social decolonisation. Literature represents a tool through which prevailing norms, hegemonic myths and codes of behaviour can be breached, either unconsciously or in a goal-oriented manner (cf. Kadanoga 1998). The reformations in children's literature that have taken place in Britain, for example, represent a successful campaign of decolonization concerning children's ideological attitudes towards social stereotypes (Phillips 2001). In the same way, literature has been used in South Africa as a tool for attempting to struggle against apartheid politics, in order to realize some conformity in national identity (Crampton 2003). The author does not have to represent and write a certain ideology actively, but rather the message of his/her 'ideology' transfers itself into text automatically. To be precise, perhaps even more important 'gatekeepers' than the authors themselves are often the publishers, libraries, bookshops, literary critics, reviewers and customers (Phillips 2001: 132). The intriguing question is therefore whether northern literature could actually be capable of writing itself out of same stereotypes which stand for its own symbolic substance. Is it possible that northern literature could challenge its own conventionality without losing the essence of northernness? Some

of the most important and interesting attempts to do this will be introduced here.

In the case of northern literature the gatekeeping processes have taken place in various ways and at various institutional levels, finally becoming evident in the constrained thematic subject matters of the works. In order to maintain its northern status, a work was supposed to fulfil all the expectations familiar from the stereotypic myths, while literary works somehow conflicting with northern romanticism encountered insurmountable publication difficulties. One of the key issues was the overflowing admiration of the romance of dangerous defiance of northern nature, and at the same time northernness as a mental space became strongly charged with gender overtones (cf. Rose 1993). A boom in northern literature took place in the 1920s and 1930s, but the first northern novel written by a woman, *Poro-Kristiina* by Annikki Kariniemi (1913-1984), was not published until 1952. In conventional Lapland literature the man was active, geared to encountering the fear of the wilderness, while the woman's part was more passive, remaining in the background and staying at home (Lehtola 1997: 120). As a northern author, Kariniemi was on the periphery as far as Finnish publishers were concerned, and as a woman, she also represented a gendered minority in a context which conventionally had been intensively masculine. Sinikka Tuohimaa (1997: 47) has asserted that Kariniemi's marginality was actually two-fold. As a female author she represented a critical attitude towards conventional northern romanticism, which also meant that her own northern romanticism, often based on popularization of the old myths and stereotypes, evoked some polemic (Kontio 1998: 81), although she has often been interpreted as a bridge-builder between the southern culture and the northern margins (Tuohimaa 1997: 50).

Kariniemi's semi-Sami origins automatically placed her in the context of a certain romanticism, which she has self-consciously maintained in her literary production. On the other

hand, the values she had internalized in the course of her childhood upbringing were distinctively anti-traditional and strongly influenced by southern culturalism (Kontio 1998: 78-79), so that a certain in-betweenness has actually always been accented in her production. Actually, to become a nationally famous but still somehow progressive northern author, you have to be more or less in between, partly shattering the old stereotypes while partly grasping on to them to remind yourself of what stereotypes are in question. The effort to remain in between is the life-blood of culturally and socially emancipatory activity, which in case of postcolonial research has become apparent in the works of Gayatri Spivak, one of the leading personalities in the research field. Born in Calcutta, West Bengal, this Third World woman represents automatically a (two-fold) marginality, but her educational position as a university professor makes her a part of the world of power, hegemony and elitism. And what is most interesting here is that Spivak is especially conscious of this (Selden & Widdowson 1993: 193) and makes her contradictory position a thematic topic in her own studies (cf. Bonnett 2000). In the same manner Kariniemi has turned her northern in-betweenness into a thematic subject for literature, illustrating at the same time that the regional categories of Nature-Finland and Culture-Finland should not be taken as a matter of course.

Kariniemi's effort was to remove some of the institutional conventions of northern literature and even though she approached such taboos as sexuality more courageously (Lehtola 1999: 19), it was Timo K. Mukka (1944-1973) who consciously proclaimed new reformations in northern literary themes for the first time. Instead of frighteningly cold winter nights, beautiful fjelds and northern lights, Mukka assembled his first novel, *Maa on syntinen laulu* (1964), around the themes of religion and wretched sexuality. The novel was nationally well-recognized and in the footsteps of Henry Miller and his Finnish 'colleagues' it aroused a fierce polemic over whether it was respectable to

connect the theme of lecherous sexuality with that of religion. Although Mukka abandoned the conventional thematics of northern literature almost totally, the stigma of northernness and all the romanticism attached to it were firmly retained by the literary gatekeepers (Jama 1995). Reviewers and critics did not abandon northern romanticism, but attached some other stereotypic flavours to it, and suddenly a partly humorous concept 'The sexus of the wild North', invented by a literary critic Pentti Saaritsa, turned into a symbolic road sign for all literary critics and an advertising slogan for Mukka's publisher (Paasilinna 1988: 91-92). The descriptions used in the novel's sales drive, such as "the work depicts a northern community dependent on instincts" (ibid.: 65), illustrate what kind of literary image Mukka was given to bear. Mukka's publisher was his gatekeeper, making the abandonment of exotic myths extremely difficult.

If Mukka launched the process of literary decolonisation in the North, Rosa Liksom, the pseudonym of Anni Ylävaara (1958-), has been regarded as a female sustainer of that emancipatory project. Liksom is a postmodern novelist/visual artist who has semi-consciously turned her artistic expression into a strategic tool against northern colonialism. Finnish cultural life in the late 1980s was not really yet integrated into the world of Western/European culture, and thus ever since her first collection of short stories, *Yhden yön pysäkki* (1985) Liksom has been on the cutting edge of Finnish cultural modernization. Her postmodern flirting with the mixed themes of urban angst, sex, violence and northern tradition became nationally and to some extent internationally recognised, but the fact that all this was happening in the context of northernness put her works, and northern art as a whole, on a new level of cultural appreciation. Intriguingly, though, Liksom's own literary identity has been structured on the base of exoticism, myths and otherness, hiding behind her pseudonym, her comically stupid sunglasses and her systematic refusals to give any interviews. But her

northern mythicism has become still, more diverse in the course of time: a mishmash of periferiality and cosmopolitanism, a jumble of authentic countryside dialects and urban slang, a farrago of violent literary expression, irony, childish paintings, cartoons, jigsaw-puzzles, t-shirts and wrist watches turned into a project named 'rosa liksom' (cf. Karkama 1994: 317). If the North of the old stereotypes was exaggeratingly romantic, her version of it was ironic, feministically self-assertive and childishly absurd, a contrast to the masculine seriousness that the stereotypes of northern nature were about. In her 'absurd folktales', as they have been called, northern themes were not rejected, but moved into a new level of sarcastic dalliance, by making fun of the public discussion that centred around the social and cultural inequality between the South and the North (Ridanpää 2003a). All this new 'crazy northernness' was very self-consciously established, not necessarily as a political project to fight against social disadvantages, but more as an artistic project with emancipatory consequences, of which Liksom was definitely somehow conscious (see Ridanpää 2004). Liksom uses her irony as an emancipatory strategy (cf. Hutcheon 1992b: 13), by taking northern themes, myths and stereotypes into the contexts in which they simply do not fit, creating a new version of northernness.

If all discussion related to the categories of 'marginal' and 'hegemonic' is perceived as an evocation of otherness, then establishing emancipatory ambitions via its own arguments and rhetoric may not prove to be the best strategic option. A subjugated voice is often a voice of bitterness, which in itself does not deconstruct cultural and regional inequality, but rather maintains the discourses behind it. Any reference to a struggle between 'us' and the 'other' naturally represents a speech against subordinating practises, but in many cases this form of rhetoric does not advance the actual purposes. Even though the status and position of northern literature can be perceived as a subjugated outcome of southern hegemony, it has also in itself been

an active part of the social processes by which northern marginality has been strengthened and legitimized. Northern authors have been willingly and actively anxious to assume control over 'their' own subject matter (Lähteenmäki 2001: 240), which inevitably underlines the categorial distinction between North and South. On the other hand, it is natural for the marginalised party, shut off from the national discourse, to continue adhering to its privileges and the few rights that it has as a cultural minority. What makes Rosa Liksom an especially important figure in the process of northern emancipation is that she has actually (probably by accident) turned the postcolonial critique, an attempt to replace 'distorted truth' with 'true truth' into an object of laughter. It is obviously not the question of social injustice between 'us' and 'them' that Liksom is trying to criticize, but rather the whole arrangement of strict oppositional categories through which all social criticism is represented (see Ridanpää 2003b).

Northern influences have become ever more present on the national (popular) culture scene in recent years, and at the same the themes of northernness have been transferred into relatively new contexts. The most prominent northern author recently has been *Mikael Niemi* (1959-), whose breakthrough came with the novel *Populaarimusiikkia Vittulanjänkältä* (orig. *Popularmusik från Vittula*) (2000), a mix of different manifestations of current popular culture and northern tradition. This was a success story which soon found its way onto the stage, was made into a movie and translated into several languages. Although a Swede rather than a Finn, Niemi has still gained publicity in the Finnish media. Besides literary projects one of the most fascinating postcolonial evocations of contrast and emancipatory activity has been the informal collective of Inari rap musicians, *Guarra Norte*, predominantly represented by its Sami singing *Amoc*. Rap music has its cultural roots in the social problems of American urban ghettos and therefore the act of combining it with the pictorial images of northern myths - flam-

ing northern lights, reindeer and the cold winds – makes it an interesting mix of stiffened tradition and the latest pop trends. The mixed themes of Amoc's music and his personal interest in keep alive a minority language spoken by only 300-400 people have aroused not only local, but also national and international responses. Music, literature and science are all forums/tools through which the romanticism and mythology of the North can be established, but on the other hand, they all work as routes for deconstructing spatial otherness as possibilities for conceptualizing the North by other means than just making a binary division between nature and culture.

Finally: The Updated Version of Exoticism

The starting point here was to illustrate how the concept of 'north' has gathered its meaning through the social and cultural process of regional stereotyping, exoticism and mythology. The North was perceived here in a Finnish context, as an imaginative land, imagined by the southern civilization in order to justify its own existence by excluding its opposite and transferring it to a romantic dream of exoticism. The northern culture has been marginalized by the South for centuries via normative institutional practices such as science and the arts, but on the other hand it has been interesting to see how attempts have occurred within same institutions, as in the case of northern literature, to construct counter-discourses against cultural subordination. Still, it is important to remember that perceiving the romanticism of northern nature as a crossroads of subordinative stereotypes is an oversimplication in itself. So it can be fairly asked whether northern marginality is an imagined social discourse in the same way as the emancipatory criticism of it is? To be precise, hardly any artistic works exist that fulfil all the expectations of northern stereotypes, and one can find among the many classics of Lapland literature not only rhetoric constructing northern stereotypes but also deconstructive shades as

well. In modern northern literature, for instance, emancipation is not actually about the author's manner of writing but rather about the reader's emancipatory manner of reading, while the stereotypic nature of reading means that the reader wants to be blind to the multidimensionality of northern romanticism and to sudden flaws and distortions in it. Otherwise the lifeline of the northern romantics, the regional categorization between the North and the South, could collapse. But it must also be remembered that the purpose of authors in re-imagining the North has probably not been to bring about a total collapse of northern romanticism and exoticism but to offer a new, updated version of it.

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