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Taking Place: Place in the Construction of History in Nordic Literature
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Ryysyranta on torpan nimi. Olisi liian juhlallista, jos sanoisimme että se sijaitsee jossakin. Sellaiset mökonrähjät yleensä eivät sijaitse, vaan niitä yksinkertaiseksi on olemassa, ne kasvavat armaan isänmaan kamarasta kuin rumat lehmänsienet. Ilmari Kianto, *Ryysyrannan Jooseppi*, 7

[Ryysyranta is the name of a tenant farm. It would be too grand to say that it is located somewhere. Such ramshackle cabins are not “located”: they simply exist, sprouting out of our beloved native land’s soil like ugly toadstools.]

Thus opens Ilmari Kianto’s *Ryysyrannan Jooseppi*, one of the comedic masterpieces of early twentieth-century Finnish literature. In this opening, of course, Kianto is poking fun at a tradition that I hope to explore to some extent in the present paper: the romantic use of land as a means of inscribing and justifying national character. In the romantic and neoromantic movements that Kianto subtly alludes to—framed on Herderian notions of *Volk*, *Vaterland*, and *Volkspoesie*—the peasantry simply belongs to the land, growing up on it from time immemorial, shaped by its climactic and terrestrial eccentricities and demands, and expressing this undeniable linkage through expressive genres like song, poetry, and literature in general. Kianto deftly inverts this paradigm: allowing the linkage between peasant and land to occur (as the very title of the book illustrates—“Jooseppi of the Farm Ryysyranta”), but now making neither the land nor the peasant as idealized or as heroic as Herder would have expected. In Kianto’s text, the highflown rhetoric of *Volk* and *Vaterland* is urbane chided as a misty-eyed elite construction.

I begin with Kianto’s famous lines because they underscore one of the primary perceived relations between literary texts and their historical and geographic settings as chronicled in Nordic literary histories. It has been cogently argued that the Herderian land ideology chided by Kianto has played an important role in Nordic literary cultures. Using Benedict Anderson’s now classic *Imagined Communities* (1983) as well as articles like Roger Abrahams’ equally valuable “Phantoms of Romantic Nationalism” (1993), scholars of both literary history and folklore have argued that an important part of the literature produced in the Nordic region, particularly in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—was devoted to buttressing precisely this easy equation of land, people, and literature. As we shall see below, in fact, this paradigm had even earlier roots in Nordic literature, predating the era of romantic nationalism by centuries in some cases.

Yet it is not that story of being “of” the land that I hope to explore in this paper. Rather, I am interested in the ways in which Nordic literary works, and the politics which produced and received them, approached a different, but related topic: that of land *taking*. I would like to explore how, in the place imagery of a number of Nordic literary works,

complex narratives of historical *acquisition* of land have been incorporated into Nordic literatures, with the explicit or implicit agenda of justifying such acts of acquisition among a reading public. Such is not to say that the Herderian notion of a folk growing out of the land does not exist in Nordic literature—far from it—the Herderian land ideology is undoubtedly one of the primary geographic themes to be found in Nordic literary history. Yet the exploration of the theme of land *taking* allows us to sense that much more clearly the sociopolitical agendas which Nordic literatures have been expected to carry, both by their authors, their audiences, and their financiers.

Let me begin also with an acknowledgement of a simple fact: the narrative of land-taking is probably more familiar and more problematic for an American scholar than for a Nordic one. The United States, after all, was built as a political entity on an act of outright theft of land from a vast array of indigenous communities, whose cultures and populations were destroyed, languages and literatures decimated, livelihoods ended, and, crucially, lands confiscated for redistribution to a largely Euro-American population that defined itself unabashedly as the “American people.” This incredible act of theft has been one of the relative silences of American literature, despite the ample attention paid to images of “settling” and “breaking free.” Perhaps the often unarticulated guilt response of this great injustice lies at the foundation of the much-discussed notion of American “mobility,” the ability of persons to simply arrive at a place and make themselves at home (even if the home used to belong to someone else...). In contrast, perhaps Nordic nations invested deeply in the Herderian ideal of *Volk* and *Vaterland* in part because the model seemed to fit the cultures so well. People in the Nordic region can often trace their presence on the land back numerous generations, and have historically taken pride in the correlation of land, people, and language (with some obvious slippage) in a manner very suggestive of, if not altogether identical with, that posited simplistically by Herder for “true” nations. The deconstruction of this image in modern revisionist history is a valuable corrective, but does not lessen the fact that—at least for certain communities in the North—Herder’s model meshes well with some of the historical and ethnographic facts of the region.

Let me also state that the discussion which follows grows out of a multi-volume *Histories of Nordic Literary Cultures* which is being added by Steven Sondrup and Mark Sandberg. In planning a new literary history—one that particularly foregrounds the contexts and institutions involved in the production of literature, we in the editorial board for the history came to believe that one volume of the work would need to contain a detailed look at the shaping role of geography as fact and factor in Nordic literatures. In our early stages of planning the study, we believed that geography—place—represented a useful alternative to the dominant constructs of “history” and “literary worth” that had shaped earlier literary histories. As the planning of the volume progressed, however, and as we began to plan what sorts of articles the volume would contain, it became clear that place, too, needed to be examined tropically, i.e., as a textual element constructed in order to achieve certain textual ends. Such is not to say that geography is not of fundamental importance in understanding Nordic literary history: there are aspects of geography—for instance, the existence of urban centers and rural hinterlands—that have greatly influenced the development and the diffusion of literary products in the Nordic region over time. It matters on a very concrete level whether a person lived in prewar Viipuri or post-war Oslo, or whether a talented writer from the Faroes went to

Copenhagen or stayed at home. All of these aspects of land use and spatial distribution will be explored in the history's geography volume. At the same time, however, it is clear that literary works employ and deploy settings, assertions of place, as elements in the structure and agenda of their narratives. And these textual settings deserve examination as historical products of literary activity just as much as particular character types or narrative devices deserve examination as elements in the changing mechanics and aesthetics of literary production. Further, I believe an examination of the *transitive* aspects of setting rather than the *intransitive* ones —i.e., of *settling* rather than *setting*—allow us to bring into focus better the quintessentially constructed nature of place as a device in Nordic literatures. By focusing on acts related to the land—“discovery,” “rootedness,” “emigration,” “exile”—we may sense more clearly the sociopolitical context and potential of literature as a situated political act.

In this article, I examine land taking in several texts—in the medieval Icelandic *Eyrbyggja saga* (Sveinsson and Þórðarson 1935) in Olof Rudbeck's *Atland eller Manheim* (Nelson 1937), in Elias Lönnrot's *Kalevala* (Majamaa 1993), in Knut Hamsun's *Markens grøde* (Hamsun 1919, Lyngstad 2007) and finally in Nils-Aslak Valkeapää's last poetry (Valkeapää 1985, 1988, 2001; Gaski et al. 1994). In each, as I hope to detail, place holds a key for unlocking the textual agenda of the work and the sociopolitical aspirations underlying its production and reception. I hope the discussion will serve as an illustration of the importance of *taking place* as a trope in Nordic literatures and indicate some of the approaches we planned in the literary history project.

Eyrbyggja saga

The term I have used in this paper so far, *land-taking*, evokes, of course, to the great, mythologized *landnám* of Icelandic family sagas. These literary works, composed by and large in the thirteenth century's tumultuous Sturlung Age and after the annexation of Iceland by the Norwegian crown, idealize the rugged and enterprising settlers who arrived from Scandinavia and the British Isles in the ninth century to establish farms on the newly discovered island. The settlers brought with them at least two sets of narratives and experiences: a narrative of constricting social mobility and liberty in a Norway coming under the sway of the rapacious and single-minded Harald Fairhair, and a British Isles world in which homes could be created, wives obtained, and alliances forged through direct acts of Viking aggression. Quizically, these two, seemingly directly opposed, narratives are seldom presented in such a manner that an irony of comparison might emerge. Or perhaps it is simply literary interpretation that has ignored these ironies. In *Eyrbyggja saga*, for instance, the ninth-century Norwegian clan progenitor Ketil Flatnose, son of Björn Buna of Sogn, finds himself under pressure from King Harald to lead a retaliatory expedition against former Norwegian landowners who have been pushed out of Norway by Harald's policies. He does so against his will, leading a force to the Hebrides where, the saga tells us: “átti hann þar nökkurar orrostur ok hafði jafnan sigr. Hann lagði undir sik Suðreyjar ok gerðisk höfðingi yfir; sættisk hann þá við ina stærstu höfðingja fyrir vestan haf ok batt við þá tengðir.” “[He] staged some number of battles, and had victory in them all. He subdued the Hebrides and made himself its lord; he made peace with all the greatest lords there in the west and formed marriage alliances with them] (ch. 1, 4). Ketil's new status in the Hebrides allows him to marry his daughter Auð off to Olaf the White, a chieftain described as “mestr herkonungur fyrir

vestan haf” (4) [the greatest warrior king of the western sea]. Auð eventually travels to Iceland, as does Ketil’s son Björn, each establishing important estates in the northwest region of Iceland, keeping large tracts for themselves, and dividing up additional lands they take among the followers who accompany them.

One of Björn’s allies, Þórólf Mostrarskegg, brings elements of Þórr (Thor) worship with him to Iceland, following beams from his old temple dedicated to the god, which he throws overboard when nearing the coast so as to determine where to settle. He eventually establishes a new holy mountain (Helgafell) on his property, and the saga states:

Þórólf kallaði Þórsnes milli Vigrafjarðar ok Hofsvágs. Í því nesi stendr eitt fjall; á því fjalli hafði Þórólf svá mikinn átrúnað, at þangat skyldi enginn maðr óþveginn líta ok engu skyldi tortíma í fjallinu, hvárki fé né mönnum, nema sjálf gengi í brott. Þat fjall kallaði hann Helgafell ok trúði, at hann myndi þangat fara, þá er hann dœi, ok allir á nesinu hans frændr.

Þórólf called the land between Vigra Fjord and Hofsvag Thor’s Ness. On this headland stands a mountain; on this mountain Þórólf held such a belief that no man was permitted to look at it unwashed, and nothing should be killed on the mountain, neither man nor beast, unless it left on its own. He called the mountain Helgafell, and believed that he and his kin would travel into it once dead. (ch. 4, 9)

The saga’s details on this point are probably not entirely factually correct, although the customs described—following beams to shore or establishing a mountain on which family members will be buried—were certainly religious traditions brought to Iceland from western Norway. The saga gives us these details to help establish the notion of *settling* the new land: conferring upon it its boundaries, its names, and its customary usages, both ordinary and sacred. Narratively, Þórólf is depicted reestablishing the relation between populace and landscape that had operated for centuries before in Norway. In so doing, thematically, he is beginning the process of re-civilizing the land, a process that will eventually—inevitably—lead to the arrival of royal authority in Iceland, just as it had in the Norway from whence the disgruntled Ketil and Þórólf had fled. Land-taking is used within the text as a symbol of social shaping, of establishing a code of behaviors that will prevail in the new society over the coming centuries and which thirteenth-century Icelanders had come to look upon with a mixture of pride and nostalgia. Helgafell itself, at the time of the creation of *Eyrbyggja saga*, was the site of one of Iceland’s foremost monasteries, a symbol of the triumph of newly imposed social and religious orders from the heart of Europe in this far northern and western periphery. Within the saga itself, Þórólf will eventually establish Thor’s Ness as a site for the local thing assembly. One of his descendents, Snorri, will later become a great chieftain, renowned not only in the district but throughout Iceland. He will count the descendents of the nobler Ketil Flatnose as his supporters, and will manipulate cannily both friends and foes to monopolize his power in the district. Snorri’s canny politics will lead to his triumph over a longtime rival Arnkell and his relations. Near the end of the saga, the chronicler will declare:

En er Snorri tók at eldask, þá tóku at vaxa vinsældir hans, ok bar þat til þess, at þá fækkuðusk öfundarmenn hans. Þat bætti um vinsældir, at hann batt tengðir við in mestu stórmenni í Breiðafirði ok víðar annars staðar. (cap.65; 180)

And as Snorri aged, his popularity began to grow, and this was due to the fact that his enemies were waning. His popularity was assisted also by his forming marriage alliances with most of the great men in Breidafjord and in many other places.

The pioneering atmosphere of the saga's early chapters are replaced at its end by the triumph of a highly integrated kinship network, linking all prominent families into a single, hierarchically differentiated society. Land-taking no longer has any role to play, because all the land, and all the social potentials, have been taken. The saga closes with discussion of the bones of Snorri examined when the graveyard at Tongue in Sælingsdale was dug up in connection with the decision to relocate a church there in the early eleventh century. The age of land-taking has come to its end.

This thematic use of land-taking as a device for symbolizing the establishment of a social order in the new land is powerfully and subtly deployed in a host of different Icelandic sagas. Undoubtedly, narratives of the settling of local lands must have been important to local families, particularly prominent ones who commissioned and owned the vellum books in which the sagas first appeared. Yet crucially, for the purposes of my argument, we see that land taking and history are merged into a single complex entity, one that possessed its own resonances as an image and device within an emerging saga genre. In a post-Free State Iceland in which the stolidity of medieval social categories had finally come to prevail, the notion of carving livelihoods and alliances out of the wilderness lands of an unsettled Iceland must have carried powerful nostalgic potential (Byock 2001, 84-99).

Olof Rudbeck's *Atland*

Icelanders approached mainland Scandinavian topography with a similar interest in original settlers. Snorri Sturluson (1178-1241), the great Icelandic chronicler, begins his massive history of Scandinavia, *Heimskringla* with an account of the arrival in the region of the Asian chieftain Óðinn of Ásgard, a city east of the River Don in Russia (Monsen 1990, 2-3). Óðinn sees through prophecy that his descendents will live in the north, and so he travels through Russia and Germany, setting various sons as rulers there, before himself settling in Odense, Denmark. After settling various parts of Denmark he continues on to Sweden, where he eventually dies. The opening chapters of *Heimskringla*, the *Ynglinga saga*, are a chronicle of land-taking, of settling, battling, and displacing other populations (the Sámi) to establish a new society. *Heimskringla* is Nordic history viewed from the land-taking mentality of the Icelander.

In the works of Olof Rudbeck (1630-1702), however, we find a different approach to the land. Rudbeck, a Swedish scholar of high learning and great pretension, was intent on revealing Sweden in particular as the original Atlantis. Rudbeck was a giant of the intellectual establishment of his day. The son of Bishop Johannes Rudbeckius, who

served as chaplain to King Gustav II Adolf, Olof Rudbeck was professor of medicine and sometime rector of Uppsala University. He was a careful naturalist and student of human anatomy, who created Uppsala's botanical gardens (an inspiration for the later Karl von Linné) and the country's first operating theater for medical instruction. In 1679 the first volume of his great work *Atland eller Manheim* appeared in Swedish and Latin, to be followed by similarly massive second, third, and fourth volumes until the Great Fire of Uppsala in 1702 brought an end to Rudbeck's writing career.

In *Atland*, Rudbeck demonstrates his encyclopedic knowledge of a vast array of topics, from language change and dialectology to natural history, Classical literature, runology, the Poetic Edda, and world mythology. He marshals all his learning toward a singular goal: to demonstrate conclusively that Plato's fabled Atlantis of old was actually modern Sweden. According to Rudbeck, Sweden was settled by Scythians, descendants of the biblical Noah's son Japhet, soon after the confusion of the Tower of Babel dispersed human populations across the globe. Under the able leadership of kings who later became remembered as gods, these monarchs established a capital for their new kingdom in Uppsala. Their glorious kingdom became known to the ancients through a variety of different names, particularly Atlantis (Rudbeck's Atland), a marvelous isle or peninsula connected to the mainland, as Plato maintained, by a *Pontus*, i.e., the "Botn" of the Gulf of Bothnia.

Rudbeck notes that Swedes live longer and have bigger bodies than their counterparts in southern lands, and that while women in the South of Europe may have four, five, or six children, the women of Sweden may have five to fourteen children, and sometimes as many as 28 or 30. Rudbeck attributes these marvels to the particular natural endowments of Sweden, ones which make the country as prime for producing superior humanity as Hungary is for producing superior horses, Persia, great sheep, or Holland, great cows and milk (I: cap. IV 10; 59). "Thet är mechta tänkwärdigt att alla Land hafwa sin serdeles Natur och egenskap, så att alla Diur så wäll som Menniskian trifwas intet uti alla Orter lijka" [It is most noteworthy that all countries have their own particular nature and character, so that not all animals or people thrive equally in every place] (ibid.). Drawing on his scientific training, Rudbeck also notes that just as horses, oxen, apples, and pears gradually diminish in size when cultivated in Sweden, so human beings in turn diminish in size and vigor when exported from Sweden. Sweden thus becomes, in Rudbeck's view, precisely what Jordanes had called it, "Vagina Gentium," the womb of peoples, a land from which new and vigorous populations had to emerge to help restore the ever-declining populaces of Southern Europe. That Jordanes had been referring to the Goths of Central Europe rather than the Götar of Sweden was a small detail that Rudbeck disregarded.

Scholars of the twentieth century have questioned the seriousness of Rudbeck's text, noting its frequent satire and coy humor (Eriksson 2000, 651). Was it a send-up of the Gothicism of his day, or its most fervent embrace? In any case, Rudbeck's speculations were long taught as fact in Swedish schools until historians debunked the theories, rejecting the elaborate and fanciful etymologies upon which they were based. From the perspective of literary land-taking, however, Rudbeck's tomes enjoy an enduring prominence. Born in a country seemingly undeniable as a remote periphery of the cultured world of Europe, Rudbeck textually reinscribed Sweden as the source of all great science and culture in the heart of Europe from antiquity. This was a rhetorical

land-taking of singular proportion, and it illustrated the unmistakable fusion of geography and history in the minds of intellectuals during the seventeenth century. For Rudbeck, a great country needed a great land, and he was ready and able to depict Sweden in just such a light. In *Atland* the Swedish people may play prime roles as the decisive shapers of European history, but it is the soil and climate of Sweden, with marvelously salubrious qualities and proven powers, that ground and make possible their deeds. *Atland* is a homage to the Swedish landscape, argued in the most convincing terms of the day.

Elias Lönnrot's *Kalevala*

Much has been written about *Kalevala*, particularly about the extent to which Lönnrot can be described as a literary author or would-be proto-ethnographer (e.g., DuBois 1995, Kuusi and Anttonen 1999, Karkama 2001, Laaksonen and Piela 2002). From the point of view of literary history, of course, such questions are moot: *Kalevala* is as much a piece of literature as *Atland* or *Eyrbyggja saga*: each makes claims to historicity while adapting and contributing to inherited expressive traditions of the past. Lönnrot set about in the early 1830s to create a national epic, one which, by definition, would epitomize the *Volk, Vaterland, Volkspoesie* trinity of Herderian philosophy just as Snellman would later extol. Yet here Lönnrot met with an issue. According to the historical perspectives of the day, the Finns were no longer on their ancestral lands, nor had they ever possessed them in the way of an organized state. According to Porthan (1778) whose *De Poësi Fennica* became the foundation for the romantic embrace of all things Finnish within Finland, the ancestors of modern Finns must have arrived at some point during the Middle Ages, confronting and eventually displacing the indigenous Sámi. Lönnrot makes this point clear in his preface to the first, 1835, edition of *Kalevala*, where he suggests that the songs of the *Kalevala*, and by implication, the Finns themselves, derive from the medieval Permians of more easterly distribution. These would have arrived, Lönnrot suggests, under the leadership of one Kaleva: “Taisipa olla hän, joka ensin pysyvämästi Suomen niemelle asettautu ja jonka suku sitte maahan levesi” [It may be he who was the first to settle more permanently on the Finnish peninsula and whose clan spread into the countryside] (Majamaa 177). These people of Kaleva then came into conflict with the indigenous Sámi, Lönnrot suggests, whose antipathy toward Christianity and wonder at the Finns’ great stature led to the transformation of the figure of Kaleva into a giant character. The heroes Väinämöinen, Lemminkäinen, Joukahainen, Kullervo, and others, are all in origin sons of Kaleva, at least in the sense of *son* meaning “descendent.” As Lönnrot writes, “Vaikka näistä ei enää mitään selvää saane, olen kuitenkin uskova Kalevasta, hänen Väinämöistä, Ilmarista ja muita nimellisiä uroita paljon vanhemmaksi, ehkä kun sanoinki, siksi, joka ensimmäiset Suomalaiset näille maille saatatti” [Although it is no longer possible to say for certain, I believe that Kaleva is much older than Väinämöinen, Ilmarinen and other aforementioned heroes, perhaps, as I noted, the one who brought the first Finns to these lands” (178). Thus, he names his work *Kalevala*, “the land of Kaleva.”

In the 1849 preface to the *Kalevala*, this theory of in-migration and ethnogenesis is further developed, so that the Finns are explicitly described as an offshoot of the earlier Permian people, one that migrated into Finland sometime prior to the 1300s. Lönnrot writes:

Montakin arvelua on näiden runojen syntyajoista ja paikasta ollut. Muita asianmukaisemmalle näyttää se, joka pitää niitä Permian vallan aikana syntyneinä Vienan (eli Valkean) meren kaakkoisrannoilla, taikka niiden isojen järvien, Voikojärven, Oniekan ja Laatokan, seuduilla, jotka kaareissa makaavat Oniekan lahden välillä Vienan merta yhdellä, ja Suomenlahden Itämerta, toisella puolella. (411)

Many have speculated about the time and place of origin of these songs. It seems more likely than other theories that they were born on the southeastern shore of the White Sea during the Permian era, or in those regions around Lakes Voiko, Onega and Ladoga, which lie in an arc between the Onega Bay of the White Sea on the one side and the Bay of Finland of the Baltic Sea on the other.

This originary people would have then given rise to at least the Karelians as an offshoot. And given that Karelians are in Lönnrot's view Finns, it would have probably been one of these Karelians who became the progenitor Kaleva, he who settled and subdued the lands of Finland itself, perhaps beginning from Ostrobothnia.

If the songs of the *Kalevala* thus describe the exploits of Permian people in the area of modern-day Karelia, then, who are the villainous people of Pohjola with whom they strive in Lönnrot's epic? By 1849, Lönnrot had come to reject a reading of these people as Sámi, despite the fact that the songs often use the term *lappalainen* as a synonym when describing the people of Pohjola. Instead, they are to be interpreted as another group of Finns, related to the people of Kalevala, but antagonistic toward them. In this way, Lönnrot transforms an interethnic struggle into an instance of "internecine strife," such as supposedly lies at the heart of every national epic according to the theories of nineteenth-century scholars. The people of the north (Pohjola), and the people of Kalevala, "the land of Kaleva" are one ethnic entity, sharing the same language, and competing for dominance within a territory which will eventually (but perhaps not originally) encompass the lands of present Finland. For Lönnrot, the Sámi were too small-scale and decentralized in their lifestyles to ever have represented a political entity capable of collecting taxes or demanding tribute in the way in which Pohjola is sometimes described. Writes Lönnrot:

Uskottavinta on siis Pohjolassaki jonkun Suomalaislahkokunnan asuneen, jolle Kalevalasta aikoinansa maksettiin veroa, kunnes Väinämöinen, Ilmarinen ja Lemminkäinen tekivät lopun veron-alaisuudelle. Juuri siinä onki Kalevala-runojen keskinäinen side eli yhteys, että kertovat, kuinka Kalevala vähitellen vauristui Pohjolan vertaiseksi ja viimein pääsi voitolle. (412)

It is likely then that some Finnish subgroup lived in Pohjola as well, to whom Kalevala formerly paid taxes, until Väinämöinen, Ilmarinen and Lemminkäinen put an end to their subjugation. It is precisely this topic which forms the center or union of the Kalevala songs, telling of how Kalevala gradually became as wealthy as Pohjola and finally won out over it.

The core narrative of the forging, presentation, theft, and eventual destruction of the Sampo thus becomes a struggle over taxation and dominance among tribes that would eventually come to settle all of the modern country of Finland.

In erecting this involved tale of land-taking, Lönnrot creates for the Finnish people an originary narrative that meets the demands of nineteenth-century epic theory. Here we see a *Volk* taking control of a *Vaterland*, through a series of battles that eventually subdue all other claimants to the same. The people of Pohjola are removed as competitors, or more likely, are absorbed into the identity of the Kaleva people through eventual intermarriage and social domination. Such a scheme for both the meaning of the Kalevalaic songs and the history of the Finnish people is startling when we consider how little it actually emerges in the songs which Lönnrot is able to draw on in creating his epic. In the most famous image of land contained in the epic's text itself, Väinämöinen expresses his preference for a drink of water from a birchbark shoe served in one's home tracts to the drinking of fine mead in the lands of someone else:

Silloin vanha Väinämöinen
 Itse tuon sanoiksi virkki:
 "Kylkehen kyläinen syönti
 Hyvissäki vierahissa,
 Mies on maallansa parempi,
 Kotonansa korkeampi;
 Soisipa sula Jumala,
 Antaisipa armoluoja,
 Pääsisin omille maille,
 Elomailten entisille!
 Parempi omalla maalla
 Vetonenki virsun alta,
 Kuin on maalla vierahalla
 Kultamaljasta metonen." (41: 275-88)

Then old Väinämöinen,
 Uttered himself these words:
 "Eating with people from elsewhere is hopeless
 Even if the strangers are nice.
 A man fares better on his own lands,
 Stands higher at his home.
 May dear God grant,
 And the Creator bestow,
 That I could get to my own lands,
 To my former dwelling places!
 Better on one's own lands
 A swig from a birchbark shoe
 Than in a foreign land
 Mead from a golden beaker."

Väinämöinen's lines are actually drawn from Karelian bride songs, and express the

homesickness of a bride when obliged to move to her new husband's home. In the peasant songs at the heart of Lönnrot's source materials, internecine strife and grand exploits of land-taking or subjugation seldom, if ever, occur. Lönnrot must thus graft his image of acquisition of lands onto a song tradition that has no place for it. That he does so marks his identification with the thematic and sociopolitical foundations of the national epic, ones powerfully and unmistakably inscribed through images of land-taking.

Knut Hamsun's *Markens grøde*

The great homage to land-taking in Norwegian literature is undoubtedly Knut Hamsun's *Markens grøde* (1919) translated into English as *Growth of the Soil* (Lyngstad 2007). Its opening images extol the solitary farmer-pioneer, whose arrival in the north transforms the wilderness to a working farm. Before his arrival, Hamsun asserts, there are no real land owners, merely wanderers across the landscape like the Sámi:

Den lange, lange Sti over Myrene og ind i Skogene, hvem har trukket op den? Manden, Mennesket, den første som var her. Det var ingen Sti før ham. Siden fulgte et og andet Dyr de svake Spor over Moer og Myrer og gjorde dem tydeligere, og siden igjen begyndte en og anden Lap at snuse Stien op og gaa den naar han skulde fra Fjæld og se til sin Ren. Slik blev Stien til gjennom den store Almenning som ingen eiet, det herreløse Land. (5)

The long, long road over the moors and up into the forest—who trod it into being first of all? Man, a human being, the first that came here. There was no path before he came. Afterward, some beast or other, following the faint tracks over marsh and moorland, wearing them deeper; after these again some Lapp gained scent of the path, and took that way from field to field, looking to his reindeer. Thus was made the road through the great Almenning—the common tracts without an owner; no-man's land. (Lyngstad 2007, 3)

Eventually, however, Isak arrives, a taciturn pioneer with the will to establish a farm in the vicinity. He wanders the valleys, looking for the ideal site for a hut until he finds a green hillside with plentiful game and a stream for water:

[N]aar han stanser hist og her og graver med et Jærn i Jorden finder han her Muldjord og der Myr, gjødslet av flere Tusen Aars Løvfald og rotten Kvist. Manden nikker at her slaar han sig ned, jo det gjør han, slaar sig ned... Han sover om Nætterne paa et Barleie, han er blit saa hjemme her, han har alt et Barleie under en Berghammer. Det værste hadde været at finde Stedet, dette ingens Sted, men hans... (7)

Here and there he stops to dig with an iron tool, and finds good mold, or peaty soil, manured with the rotted wood and fallen leaves of a thousand years. He nods, to say that he has found himself a place to stay and live; aye, he will stay here and live... He sleeps at night on a bed of stacked pine; already he feels at home here, with a bed of pine beneath an overhanging rock. The worst of his task

had been to find the place; this no-man's land, but his.... (5)

Isak soon meets a passing Sámi, “en vandrende Lap” [a nomadic Lapp] who asks him about his settling but offers no resistance: “Skal du bo her for godt? —Ja, svarte Manden” (7) [“You going to live here for good?” “Aye,” said the man (5)]. Isak has taken his land, and the entirety of the subsequent novel will trace his transformation of it into a prosperous farm, with livestock, a wife, farmhands, and neighbors. Eventually, at the urging of an official, he will register his deed and acquire the property as his legal homestead.

Hamsun's work appeared in 1917, during the era of Norway's Land Sales Act. In 1848, the Norwegian Department of Finance had defined all Sámi as “nomads”, denying them the right to own land. In 1863, the government had begun to sell off tracts of northern land to all settlers willing to “improve” it—i.e., establish farm fields, cut down trees, build fences. This policy, a direct parallel of the Homestead Act of the United States, had been emended in 1902 to restrict ownership to only those settlers who spoke Norwegian, and was not repealed until 1965 (Pedersen 1991, 80). It is in this context of colonial usurpation that Hamsun unabashedly and uncritically situates his novel. If Hamsun means his opening sequence to present this situation ironically, that fact was lost on most of his Nordic readership. Such is made evident by the statements concerning the novel made by Harald Hjärne, head of the Swedish Academy, when awarding it the Nobel Prize for Literature in December, 1920:

In spite of current opinions of our time, those who want to find in literature above all a faithful reproduction of reality, will recognize in *Markens grøde* the representation of a life that forms the basis of existence and of the development of societies wherever men live and build. These descriptions are not distorted by any memories of a long, highly civilized past; their immediate effect is due to the evocation of the harsh struggle all active men must in the beginning endure (in varying external conditions, of course) against an indomitable and rebellious nature. It would be difficult to conceive of a more striking contrast with works usually called «classic»...Hamsun's work is an epic of labour to which the author has given monumental lines. It is not a question of disparate labour which divides men within and among themselves; it is a question of the concentrated toil which in its purest form shapes men entirely, which mollifies and brings together divided spirits, which protects and increases their fruits with a regular and uninterrupted progress. The labour of the pioneer and the first farmer with all its difficulties, under the poet's pen, thus takes on the character of a heroic struggle that yields nothing to the grandeur of the manly sacrifice for one's country and companions in arms. Just as the peasant poet Hesiod described the labours of the field, so Hamsun has put in the foreground of his work the ideal labourer who dedicates his whole life and all his powers to clearing the land and to triumphing over the obstacles with which men and the forces of nature confront him. (Hjärne 1920)

For Hjärne and his associates, then, the novel's central conflict was man against nature, not culture against culture. The Sámi in Hamsun's novel will recur only as shady,

villainous wanderers, mean-spirited folk that frighten the innocent Inger and that sow discord in the vicinity. Hamsun's land-taking is not presented as territorial acquisition from a displaced people. Rather, Sámi ownership of the land is simply *erased*, as it had been already in Norwegian law. The Sámi are nomads, and the work of heroic land-taking falls to the ethnic Norwegian. And the Norwegian enacts this sacred duty through becoming one with his land: through wrestling it into submission, coaxing it into fruitfulness, and devoting heart and soul to its maintenance as an agricultural engine. Land-taking, land *making*, is the heroic epic act of *Markens grøde*.

Nils-Aslak Valkeapää's poetry

If, as I began, an American perspective on the literary trope of land-taking necessarily entails recognition of the confiscation of lands that once belonged to the myriad Native peoples of North America, so, as I have tried to show thus far, land-taking in continental Nordic literature often includes accounts of the forfeiture of lands by Sámi people. These are the opponents of the medieval Scandinavians, the primitive neighbors of the Atland socialites, the disorganized opponents of a superior Kaleva, the shifty nomads of Isak's wilderness farm. Yet they are also a people in themselves, one whose literature reached an international audience particularly through the poetry and multimedia art of Nils-Aslak Valkeapää, Áillohaš (1943-2001). In his poetry, Valkeapää chooses to meet the imagery of land-taking and to present a Sámi response to this central Western trope. In his 1985 *Ruoktu váimmus*, ("Home from/in the heart"), which Harald Gaski and associates translate as *Trekways of the Wind* (Gaski 1994), Valkeapää resists a Western concept of indigeneity which would depict Sámi people as integrally "of" the soil. Rather, the Sámi live in relation to the land, moving across it in a manner not unlike that which Hamsun depicted the Sámi in his *Markens grøde*, but presented now as an act of loving constancy and respect for the land rather than as an act of disregard. "Mu ruoktu lea mu váimmus ja dat johtá mu mielde" [My home is in my heart and it migrates with me]. In contrasting this feeling of relationship upon the land with the dominant society's notion of land ownership, Valkeapää addresses his fellow Sámi, saying:

Don diedát dan viellja
don ipmirdat oabbá

Muhto go dat jerret gos lea du ruoktu
dajatgo don ahte dát visot
Skuolfedievás mii lávostalaimet
giddajohtolatáigge
Čáppavuomis mis lei goahti ragatáigge
Min geasseorohat lea Ittunjárga
ja dálvet min bovccot leat Dálvadasa guovlluin

Don diedát dan oabbá
don ipmirdat vielljá

Min máddarat leat dolastallan Allaorddas

Stuorajeahkke balssain
 Viidesčearus
 Áddjáróhkki hohkai vuonas guollebivddus
 Áhkkováidni lávii suidnet Šelgesrođus
 Áhčči riegiid Finjubávtti vuollái boaldi buollašii

Ja vel dat jerret
 gos lea du ruoktu (Valkeapää 1985)

You know brother
 You understand sister
 But when they ask where is your home
 Do you answer them all this
 On Skuolfedievva we pitched our *lávvu*
 During the spring migration
 Čáppavuopmi is where we built our *goahti* during rut
 Our summer camp is at Ittunjárga
 And during the winter our reindeer are in Dálvadas

You know it sister
 You understand brother

Our Ancestors kept fires on Allaorda
 On Stuorajeaggis's tufts
 On Viidesčearru
 Grandfather drowned in the fjord while fishing
 Grandmother cut her shoe grass in Šelgesrohtu
 Father was born in Finjubákti in burning cold

And still they ask
 Where is your home (Gaski et al. 1994)

The “nomadism” of Nordic law definitions is revealed through this plethora of placenames and personal associations as a serenely distributed relationship between land and people, or land and individual. Valkeapää's narrator counters the outsiders' law books and pronouncements with a simple gesture to the landscape that the Sámi have always lived with:

Dat bohtet mu lusa
 ja čájehit girjjiid
 Láhkagirjjiid
 maid sii leat ieža čállán
 Dá lea láhka ja dát guoská dunai
 Geahča

Muhto in mun geahča viellja
 in geahča oabbá
 in jienát maidege
 in sáhte
 Čájehan fal duoddariidda

Ja mun oainnán min duoddariid
 min orohagaid
 ja gulan váimmu dearpame
 dát lea mu ruoktu visot dát
 jam un guottán
 dan iežan siste
 váimmustan (1985)

They come to me
 And show books
 Law books
 That they have written themselves
 This is the law and it applies to you too
 See here

But I do not see brother
 I do not see sister
 I cannot
 I say nothing
 I only show them the tundra

I see our fells
 The places we live
 And hear my heart beat
 All this is my home
 And I carry it
 Within me
 In my heart (1994)

In his Nordic Literature Prize winning work *Beaivi áhčážán*, (The Sun, My Little Father 1989), Valkeapää continues this image of a noninvasive yet intimately linked relation to the landscape through depicting the Sámi as the wind, an identification that allows Valkeapää to tie his imagery of Sámi consciousness to other prime symbols in his poetry: birds, shamanic trance, and *joik*. All merge seamlessly in his poem 546:

546 bieggá,
 bieggá mii leimmet
 šuvaideaddji eallima bieggá
 njávkame duoddara muođuid

vuomážiid, gorssaid
 láhppovaš luohti
 eahketroađi ruoksadin, bieggá
 bieggá mii leimmet
 ja mii bođiimet ja manaimet
 iige mis eará báhcán
 go luohti bieggá šuvas
 niehku leahkimis

546 wind,
 we were the wind
 a murmuring wind of life
 stroking the mountain's cheeks
 forested valleys, meadows
 a disappearing *luohti*
 in the reddening light of sunset, a wind
 wind, we were
 and we came and we went
 and nothing remained behind
 but a *luohti* in the wind's murmuring
 a dream of being

In his final work *Eanni, eannázán* (“The Earth My Little Mother” 2001), Valkeapää returns to the transcultural discourse of indigeneity which had characterized his *Ruoktu váimmus* and juxtaposes poetry and photographs drawn from Fourth World communities from throughout the earth. Lands are depicted as homes, but ones in which communities live with respect and affection, not ownership. He writes:

Ruoktu

mii orrut ruovttus
 ruovttu
 dát
 lea min ruoktu

gáisi duottar várri vuopmi
 arvevuovdi
 jietnja jitnjon ábit

dát lea min ruoktu (119)

Home

we live at home
 home
 this here
 is our home

snowcapped fell, mountain, meadow
 rainforest
 voice voiced in flowing

this here is our home

Followed by photographs of a windstorm in Canada, indigenous people in a red-clay landscape of Latin America, and the round branch huts of Pygmy communities in the Congo, Valkeapää's poem asserts a worldwide relationship between indigenous communities and the lands they live with, while the brother and sisters of his earlier poetry become similarly internationalized:

Min ruoktu
 mii,
 min giella

 eanni
 áhčci
 ja mii
 dušše oasis
 DUŠŠE

vieljaiguin
 oappáguin (299)

Our home
 we,
 our language

 land
 father

 and we
 only parts
 ONLY
 with brothers
 and sisters

For Valkeapää the quintessential meaning of indigenous identity is to refuse to “take

land” but instead to respect the landscape as a partner in survival and creation.

In this necessarily brief overview, I hope I have demonstrated some of the ways this particular trope of “taking place” has been used in Nordic literary traditions for nearly a millennium. In the medieval Icelandic *landnám* of *Eyrbyggja saga*, we see land-taking as a metaphor for civilizing both the environment and the social relations of pioneers in the new country of Iceland. Human relations come to dominate over time, gradually transforming the landscape into the possessions of empowered chieftains and families, whose preeminence is by the time of the sagas thoroughly entrenched in Icelandic society. In Rudbeck’s *Atlantida*, these settlers of the land are pushed back into the mythical reaches of time, in the aftermath of Noah’s Flood and the Tower of Babel. Identified with the Classical locus of Atlantis, Rudbeck’s Sweden is a land flowing with milk and honey for its human denizens, a place where humanity grows to a physical and cultural stature unparalleled in the world. In Lönnrot’s *Kalevala*, Finland is a land taken by a now murky hero Kaleva, who battled kinsmen of a nearly related tribe of Pohjola for dominance in a medieval tract somewhat to the east of present Finland. Kaleva’s descendents came to settle Finland, and their earlier decisive victory over the the Pohjola tribe is chronicled in epic fashion in the tale of the Sampo at the heart of Lönnrot’s epic. In Hamsun’s early twentieth-century *Markens grøde*, land-taking is again depicted in epic terms, but it is, as the Nobel Prize committee stated, an epic of human labor, triumphing over the rugged landscape that had purportedly belonged to no one before the arrival of the Norwegian settler. Finally, in Nils-Aslak Valkeapää’s poetry from 1985 through 2001, land-taking is stigmatized as an act of violence and ultimate disrespect for the land itself, something quite distinct from the respectful relations between landscape and community that prevailed, Valkeapää asserts, in indigenous cultures. Land-taking, taking place, is a prime tool of narratives of spatial identity in Nordic literature, a means of exploring textually an asserted relation between people and land that has stood as a prime motivation of literary text-making since the very inception of literary activities in the Nordic region well over a millennium ago. I hope this paper has demonstrated the usefulness of following this particular red thread through a selection of Nordic literary texts and of interrogating its meanings in different literary contexts and movements over the course of centuries. To invert the words of Ilmari Kianto with which I began this paper, land never simply “exists” in literary texts; instead, it is “located” by knowing authors and audiences.

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