

Dåajmijes vuekie: A Sami Aesthetic Paradigm

LENA KAPPFJELL
HARALD GASKI
THOMAS A. DUBOIS

ABSTRACT: The South Sámi concept of *dåajmijes vuekie* is used to discuss a nuanced system of evaluative norms operating in Sámi culture, past and present, in relation to objects, behavior, and activities. Where Western aesthetics may focus on surface appearance, *dåajmijes vuekie* emphasizes effective action in relation to practical needs, social interaction, and ethics. The authors suggest that evaluative norms associated with Sámi traditional knowledge and activities can provide valuable insights for understanding not only Sámi traditional life but also works of contemporary Sámi artists and writers who draw on Sámi cultural norms in conscious ways.

RÉSUMÉ: Le concept sami du sud de *dåajmijes vuekie* est utilisé pour discuter d'un système nuancé de normes d'évaluation opérant dans la culture samie, passée et présente, en relation avec les objets, le comportement et les activités. Là où l'esthétique occidentale peut se concentrer sur l'apparence de surface, *dåajmijes vuekie* met l'accent sur l'action efficace en relation avec les besoins pratiques, l'interaction sociale, et l'éthique. Les auteurs suggèrent que les normes d'évaluation associées aux connaissances et aux activités traditionnelles samies peuvent fournir des informations précieuses pour comprendre non seulement la vie traditionnelle samie, mais aussi les œuvres d'artistes et d'écrivains samis contemporains qui s'inspirent des normes culturelles samies de manière consciente.

Lena Kappfjell is an Assistant Professor in Sámi language and literature at Sámi allaskuvla / Sámi University of Applied Sciences at Guovdageaidnu, Norway. Her research field is within Indigenous methodologies and Sámi traditions.

Harald Gaski is a Professor in Sámi literature at Sámi allaskuvla / Sámi University of Applied Sciences at Guovdageaidnu, Norway. Gaski's research interest lies within Critical Indigenous Studies and Sámi aesthetics.

Thomas A. DuBois is the Halls Bascom Professor of Scandinavian Studies, Folklore, and Religious Studies, in the Department of German, Nordic, and Slavic at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA.

Arnold Krupat is Professor Emeritus at Sarah Lawrence College in Bronxville, NY.

In an exchange that began as an act of pigeon holing, but that became in one instance an act of substantive cultural exchange, Johannes Scheffer (a seventeenth-century German-born Swedish scholar of rhetoric) asked Olaus Sirma (a Kemi-born Sámi student of theology) to supply him with samples of Sámi songs. Scheffer was in the process of creating an encyclopedic work: a comprehensive catalogue of all aspects of Sámi society, culture, and beliefs, compiled and organized so that the Sámi could be comprehensively understood, and thereby controlled. Music was one of the categories to be filled. Yet Sirma had his own opinions. In his Swedish notes and Sámi texts—the first words ever written in a Sámi language—Sirma explains that Sámi don't "sing," rather they "yoik," employing a native Sámi term to underscore the fact that expressive acts, and broader expressive culture, are organized differently and for different purposes in Sámi culture than in Swedish:

Dhesze wijsor begynna dhe, på dhetta, och annadt sätt: Siungandes somblige mehra, sombl. mindre, effter som hwar och een inbillar sigh dhem bäst kunna fatta och componera. Stundom repetera dhe samma sångh åfftare. Icke håller hafwa de någon wisz thon, uthan siunga, eller Joiga, denna wiisan, hwilken de kalla Morse Faurog, eller Brude wijsa, effter dheras wahna och som dhem bäst tyckes liuda. (Kjellström et al. 1988, 11)

[These songs begin in this and other ways. Some sing more, others less, according to their own inclinations to create and compose. At times they repeat the same song over and over. Nor do they have any set tune but sing and yoik this song, which is called Moarsi fávrrot, the bride's song, according to their custom and as it seems best to them to sing.]

Sirma writes down in Kemi Sámi two texts that display distinctive ways of depicting and evaluating human experience, particularly in relation to nature and emotions. The first of these is like this in North Sámi and in English:

Guldnasaš

Guldnasaš njirrožan
eango jo ovddos jurddašisgoađe
Nuorta vuovdáí vuolgigoađe
guhkes eatnamiid mátkkoštit
fávrrigiid luđiđ juoiggadiđ

Ále munno ájit, Gáigavárri
báze dearvan, Gealfejávri
millii bohtet jurdagat
Gáigavuonaid vuojedettiin

Njolggás njirron buorebut
vai farggabut oččošin su
gii munnje lea oidnojuvvon
Sivdnádusas vuolggahuvvon

Jos jo fargga oainnášin
ráhkkásan bivddášin
Guldnasaš njirrožan, geahča
Oainnátgo don su čalmmiid?
(Gaski 2008, 17)

Dear Little One

Guldnasaš my reindeer cow
Shouldn't we be starting
Toward the east be heading
The long tracts to cross
Sweet courting songs to sing?

Do not detain us long, you Gáiga mountain
Goodbye to you, Gealfe lake
Much comes to my mind
As we ride along the Gáiga fjord

Trot faster now my reindeer
So that sooner I can get her
The one intended for me
Made for me by fate.

If I could see her soon,
My love, how I would hurry
Guldnasaš my reindeer cow,
Do you see her eyes?
(Gaski 2020, 27)

Sirma's speaker is talkative: he addresses his draft reindeer, a young female (which is quite unusual for a draft deer, but may have a mythological meaning in the text), but also the mountain, lake, and fjord by which he travels as he sings. His true love has been intended for him by fate, he thinks, which he will comply with by taking her as his bride. There is a proper way of acting, and in this text at least, Sirma's speaker intends to behave as he ought. And, in deference to Sirma's succinct but authoritative explanations, Scheffer comes to locate these works not within a chapter on "music," but rather within his chapter on courtship, the context and function for the two works Sirma provided. Scheffer came to the task of writing his book with categories of knowledge in hand; Sirma countered by supplying materials that demonstrated a Sámi way of seeing the world: an Indigenous aesthetics.

The work of "theoretizing," of translating into academic terminology, the categories of knowledge, evaluation, and analysis operative within an Indigenous community is fundamentally one of finding ways to make that community's knowledge comprehensible to a majority culture or to other cultures outside. As Sirma pointedly demonstrated by rejecting the Swedish term "sång", the very terms we use to identify and classify the phenomena we study can lead us astray. The potential for misunderstanding grows as we broach more complex phenomena, such as a community's modes of interpreting or employing expressive culture. So-called "Western" taxonomies or categorizations are seldom truly "neutral"—rather, they impose assumptions regarding form, function, or reception that privilege the norms of the originating scholars' own cultures, rendering Indigenous materials as exotic, imperfect shadows. Employing an Indigenous community's own categories—both in conjunction with that community's own aesthetic works but also potentially in the analysis of works produced in other cultures—offers the potential for a powerfully relativizing corrective.

In insisting on the use of the Sámi verb for yoiking, Sirma championed a native way of defining the cultural practices that he chose to share with his foreign interlocutor. In entitling one of his texts "Moarsi fávrrot" on the other hand, Sirma seems to have invoked a generic category that held great resonance for a reader or listener familiar with the broader expressive tradition. Sámi singers and audiences possessed more than just the term *juoigat* to describe their aesthetic communications. Sirma spoke the Kemi Sámi language, now extinct. But South Sámi yoik terminology can provide fascinating insights into the implicit terminology reflected in Sirma's title, even given the considerable differences between Kemi and South Sámi as idioms. In South Sámi, the term *vueledh* refers to the performance of a yoik in general and may be related to the verb *vueliedidh*, to kill, slaughter, lower, or submerge (Jåma and Brustad 2007). In this sense, yoiking may have been a means of settling disputes, putting disagreements to rest. The term *faavroehtidh* means to perform a yoik as a love

song. This is precisely what Sirma seems to intend by entitling his text *Moarsi fávrrot*, which we may thus translate as a “love yoik for a girlfriend.” His yoik encapsulates the feelings of a young man contemplating his true love, yearning to see her eyes again, anxious to be by her side. The fact that South Sámi has its own term for this type of yoik indicates that Kemi Sámi may have also had such a term, furnishing valuable further evidence for determining the cultural historical context and definition of the yoik. In North Sámi, the corresponding term is *livdet*, which means to yoik in a particularly beautiful manner. In this broader pan-Sámi context, it appears clear that Sirma’s title references this information for a knowledgeable audience member, although it was lost on Scheffer, or the many admirers who came after him, including Herder, Goethe, and Longfellow.

Attention to Indigenous terms and categories not only furnishes understandings of the types and natures of Sámi expressive culture but also of underlying aesthetic and philosophical values. And here the concept mentioned in our title—*dåajmijes vuekie*—comes to the fore. In traditional Sámi society, beauty did not exist without some sort of practical significance. The term *dåajmijes vuekie* reflects this fact: more important than any set of outward appearances was the ideal of acting in a useful, socially efficacious, ethically significant manner, all expressed as *dåajmijes vuekie*. To behave in such a way was to be “beautiful,” if beauty is to be understood as fulfilling the highest ideals and evaluative criteria of one’s culture. More to the point: to do so was more important than any other set of surface characteristics of the sort that Western societies often describe as beautiful and that can become enshrined in Western notions of “aesthetics.” Making something ideal entailed making it functional, ensuring that it was grounded in a solid foundation of knowledge, competence, and technique but also in a humility that signaled awareness of others and cognizance of one’s role in a wider collective. In terms of ethics and philosophy, drawing carefully on traditional knowledge to create things of effectiveness and usefulness was the *correct* Sámi way to behave, the aesthetically ideal way, the most beautiful course of action.

The workings of this underlying value are implicit in Sirma’s two texts, and the other yoik he furnished to Scheffer—“Oarri Lake”—ends tellingly with the statement, rendered here in North Sámi and in English:

Bartni miella biekka miella
 Nuora jurdda guhkes jurdda
 Jos daid buohkaid guldalan
 Loaiddan rattái, vearre rattái

Ovttá lea miella mus váldit
 Nu ahte dieđán buorebut
 Ovddastan gávdnat
 (Gaski 2008, 16)

A boy's will is the wind's will
 And the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts
 If I listen to them all
 I will choose a course, the wrong course

One alone I need to choose
 That I may better
 Find my way
 (Gaski 2020, 26)

The idea of finding one's proper way, of doing what is right and therefore beautiful is evident as well in the writings of the two great early twentieth-century Sámi authorities, Kristoffer Sjulsson and Johan Turi. In Kristoffer Sjulsson's book (Bäckman and Kjellström 1979), a work based on oral interviews Sjulsson provided to O.P. Pettersson during the period 1904–05, we can find a number of examples of the fact that Sámi had no desire to categorize human activities or one's environment in any rigid either-or dichotomy but rather on the basis of an array of choices of varying utility. Value judgments are not based on outward appearance so much as the relation of a thing's form to its intended purpose. Concerning objects made by people, for instance, Sjulsson notes that *váties* "ugly" objects are those which are scruffy, uneven, with corners or edges that stand out, and that most objects are neither beautiful nor ugly (Bäckman and Kjellström 1979, 91). *Tjappies* "beautiful" things Sjulsson characterizes in the same passage as symmetrical and streamlined, with no protruding corners or edges, well adapted for their intended purpose. It is an interesting question for the student of aesthetics whether one can describe the good or less good aspects of an object or idea without resorting to the concepts of "ugliness" and "beauty." For example, one could describe a *gæjsa/giisa* (chest) as being ungainly, angular and with protruding corners, making it less easy and less safe to place in a pack on the back of a draught reindeer and less ideal to have underfoot in the limited floor space of a *goahti*. One can say that such an object is more or less "serviceable" or "well-crafted," but can we convey in such terms the powerful moral and aesthetic values that Sámi attached to such features in their evaluations? *Dáajmijes vüekie* refers to the degree of aptness, ingenuity, and understanding crafted into an object by a knowing artisan, qualities that become evident more through using an object than through glancing at its

outward form. It is a conglomeration of traits that have to do with the effective embodiment of established tradition rather than novelty or surprise.

Aesthetics

The question of how to theorize Indigenous knowledge or make it an object of academic research carries with it the question of how to communicate such knowledge to new users or make it applicable to broader scientific questions beyond its original specific field of reference. Adapting such concepts can prove challenging, particularly in more theoretical contexts. So-called “Western” scientific terminology often proves ill suited for describing the worldview and attitudes of an Indigenous culture; likewise, the norms of behavior and value system of an Indigenous culture can seem strange for someone operating with a Western sense of the world and self. Nonetheless, it is quite possible to adapt ways of understanding and modes of analysis from within a given community so that they can be applied to larger contexts. Even if a concept has developed within a highly localized and intimate arena of activity, it may possess transcendent aspects that make it potentially generalizable to a much wider set of situations. Researchers in the field of Indigenous methodology have taken up such issues particularly as they focus attention on concepts and understandings that operate within Indigenous cultures themselves. Many scholars within this field have argued for the notion that Indigenous cultures possess their own epistemologies, ones that can provide alternatives to Western scientific discourse (Kovach 2009, Kuokkanen 2009, 2007, Smith 2012, [1999], Wilson 2008).

In his *Muitalus sámiiid birra* (1910), the first book written entirely in North Sámi, Johan Turi provides analogous perspectives to what we may note in Sjulsson’s book. What is perhaps the most striking aspect of Turi’s work is the way in which he uses narrativity, particularly the intention to perform a *muitalus*— a true story—in every aspect of his work’s textual as well as visual components. Activities are described as they relate to the underlying goal of effective survival, of “managing well,” as expressed in the North Sámi verb *birget*. A community prospers when its members accomplish their tasks promptly and effectively, as Turi notes in his description of setting up camp:

Ja dál lea siida ollen luoitansadjái, ja de álget gođiid dahkat. Muhtumat álget dahkat goađi ja muhtumat čuhppet duorggaid. Muhto jos lea nissonis unna mánáš ja jos lea čirrolas, de son ii astta bargat ii maidege—son ferte njamahit máná ja vuohtut. Ja jos mánná nohkka dahje heaitá čierumis, de vuolgá dat nisu nai čuohppat duorggaid. Ja go goahti lea válmmas, de biddjojit duorggat vuohččan loidui ja de

gávnnit ja lihtit boaššogeahčái ja de dahkko dolla. –Ja de lea hávski go lea dolla goađis. –Ja jos ii leat čáhcebáiki, de fertejuvvo suddaduvvot muohta, ja de álget ohcat lávkkaid siste biepmu ja álget borrat. Ja de lea hávski. Ja dánáigásaš olbmot atnet gáfiid, ja gáffevuoššamuš lea dál dakkaviđe go cáhci lieggana dahje suddá muohta.—Ja go lea buorre guohtun, dalle ii dábbaš bohccuid reainnidit, jos eai leat návddit lahka. De lea hávski sámi mielas go lea buorre guohtun ja leat beassan sirdit varas báikái.

(Turi 2010, 46).

[And now the *siida* has reached the place where they will camp and they begin to set up the *goađit*. Some start to erect the *goahti* while others cut wood. The girls or women cut branches [for the flooring]. But if a woman has a little baby and if it is prone to crying, she has no time for any work: she has to nurse the child and rock it. And if the baby falls asleep or stops crying, this woman also goes out to cut branches. And when the *goahti* is ready, they place the branches on the floor on the lateral sides of the fire [the *loaidu*] and the bedding and containers in the *boaššu* area behind the hearth, and they start a fire, and it is pleasant when there is a fire going in the *goahti*. And if it is not a place with water available, then snow must be melted, and they start to rummage through the bags for some food and start eating, and that is pleasant. And people nowadays have coffee, and they get the coffee going as soon as the water is heated or snow melted. And when it is an area with good grazing, one doesn't need to herd the reindeer, unless there are wolves in the vicinity. From a Sámi point of view, it is pleasant when there is good pasture and one has made it to a new place.

(Turi 2012, 48–49).

The aesthetic ideal within Turi's idealized description of setting up camp is not visual appearance or organization but rather, practical effectiveness and skill. Each member of the community knows what to do upon arrival at the camping site, and when tradeoffs exist—like collecting firewood or nursing a needy baby—community members know exactly what to do. The *goahti* is erected with keen attention to function: its flooring is efficiently and effectively assembled, its contents are correctly stored, its necessities quickly supplied. With such preparatory acts in place, and the choice of a good spot with adequate grazing and few wolves having been made, the community members can settle down to well-earned and pleasant moments of eating and relaxation. Within in this all-encompassing discourse of effective living, even painful topics like death are treated in strikingly pragmatic fashion: Turi describes the methods of ensuring that the dead person's spirit is sent on its way without impediment, how to

prevent haunting, and how to effectively transport and store a body when the ground is frozen hard (Turi 2010, 74–5; Turi 2012, 80–1). Naturally there will be sorrow at the loss of a family member, but there is solace in treating the body properly and disposing of the person’s former possessions in proper fashion.

The illustrations that Turi produced for his book, even if they appear rough pen-and-ink sketches, present situations in as correct and complete a manner as possible. Turi works to depict the variations that occur in a reindeer’s coat, translating back into a visual medium the rich body of verbal terminology that Sámi reindeer herders possess for describing their animals on the basis of fur color and markings. Turi’s drawings are so detailed that one who is familiar with reindeer can easily recognize whether Turi meant to depict in a given picture a *gabba*, *čuoivvat*, *muzetčuoivvat* or any of the myriad other color variations identified in Sámi terminology (Jernsletten 2007). The Sámi concepts describe the reindeer’s appearance without judgment of whether a given pattern or color is “beautiful” or not. The aesthetic aim here is precision: terms should help users recognize and distinguish specific individuals within a larger herd. Although greatly varying in numerous aspects of outward appearance, every animal has its own charm and beauty, and they all play specific roles in the functioning herd.

Dåajmijes vuekie—effective living—underlies more than verbal communications, of course: as Sjulsson’s descriptions of objects make clear, it is evident in the Sámi approach to material culture, the set of practices and aesthetic principles expressed in the North Sámi term *duodji*. In South Sámi, this northern term has been adopted as *duedtie* and is used, as in North Sámi, to describe all manner of Sámi traditional handicraft, both that used with soft materials (e.g., fabric, leather, fur) and those employing hard materials (e.g., wood, metal, antler). The term can also be used to designate things that supplement or support (Bergsland and Magga 1993), a meaning that reflects the fact that handicrafts have become products to sell or exchange, items that provide a supplemental income or sideline.

The modern term *duodji/duedtie* is narrower in meaning than the earlier South Sámi term for handicraft—*vytnesjimmie*—which encompasses much more than the items generally regarded as *duodji* today (Jåma and Brustad 2007). When describing “hard” *duedtie* (i.e., items made of bone, wood, or metal), Sjulsson always uses the term *barkedh*, which means to work in its broadest sense. One term, however, **daajhtijh/daajhtodh*, is linked to the noun *daajhtije*, used to designate the producer or maker of an item, e.g., a belt-maker (Bergsland & Hasselbrink 1957 and Magga 1993). The term implies a recognized status as a professional in a given craft or at the very least, one who is known for skill and ability in the making of a certain kind of item. With this term, perhaps, we approach some of the degree of professional categorization inherent in the modern title *duojár* (*duodji* artist). The *daajhtije* is respected for

the ability to realize in the present the ideals of form and production developed over time, the capacity to make items that are serviceable in the most effective manner possible.

Interesting in this respect is the relation between the terms *duodji* and *dáidda*. *Dáidda* (art) is a relatively newly coined term in North Sámi, used to translate the Scandinavian term *kunst*. It refers mostly to objects produced by visual artists and dates from the 1970s, when professional artists argued that there should be a term that differentiated their works from the more traditional *duodji*, since *duodji* has less stress on innovation and novelty and more on an ideal of perfecting an established tradition. This example illustrates well some of the problems inherent in trying to adapt traditional terminology for new concepts. If Sámi artists had chosen to call themselves *duodji* practitioners, they would have potentially received criticism from more traditional Sámi for their lack of skill in the production of specific traditional objects and their lack of interest in continuing within well established traditional modes of production. The term *dáidda*—with the root *dáidu* (competence) as its base—offered artists a conceptual banner under which to organize their activities, while also sounding similar to the Finnish term for art—*taide*, derived from the Finnish verb *taida* (to know how to do something), and the adjective *taitava* (skillful, artful). Many of the more recently coined words in Sámi languages are modelled in a similar fashion upon Finnish, but they inevitably acquire their own distinctive associations and meanings within Sámi culture as the new word suggests its own implications and dimensions based on its etymology and related forms. One of the goals of the term *dáidda* was to free artists somewhat from the responsibilities inherent in the ideal of *duodji*, but it is interesting to examine the extent to which *dáajmijes vuekie* remains important nonetheless in Sámi production and evaluation of modern art.

***Gåetie/Goahti* as Metaphor**

*Ij leah datne gáessie otnerassine orreme mov gåetesne!*¹

You have never been a tent pole in my *lavvo*!

(Gaski and Solbakk 2011 [2003], 12)

The Sámi proverb above suggests a situation in which two Sámi are conversing. One responds to the other's criticism or characterization by stating that the other doesn't know what he's talking about. The *gåetie* here serves as a metaphor for the internal sphere of the family or community, along with its combined knowledge and support, the network that ensured that no Sámi person would have to go it alone. The same perspective can be noted among the Cree Anishinaabe, Fisher River Cree Nation (Hart 2007). In his attempt to orient

himself within the dominant Euro-Canadian educational system, Michael Hart found it useful to interview the elders of his community and build upon their ways of knowing and investigating. He noted that they often used the concept of the *mikiváhp* (corresponding to the Sámi *gâetie/goahti*) when describing (traditional) knowledge for the young researcher (2007, 85-87). When one erects a *mikiváhp*, one begins by staking out four tent poles, bound in pairs, so that they stand upright. These four poles come to represent metaphorically the community's shared and fundamental knowledge. One then adds further poles to form a round circle. These additional poles symbolize, according to Hart's informants, the knowledge and experience that individuals contribute to the collective. Finally, all the poles are bound together, symbolizing the synthesis of all the community's pooled knowledge, experience, and support into a single, solid edifice. This framework is then covered by a tent fabric that obscures the view of the individual poles, which remain visible only at the top of the tent, above the smokehole. Such is the view of the community's knowledge and traditions from the outside, among those who are not part of the community. One can step inside the *mikiváhp* to learn more about the community and its knowledge. Hart notes as well how the poles are joined together at the middle, while they stretch upwards toward the sky, which is all one is able to see from within. Such symbolizes how spirituality plays a central role in an Indigenous people's consciousness and worldview (Ibid.)

A Guest Enters

Michael Anthony Hart's use of *mikiváhp* as a metaphor for both the community and its knowledge, norms, and values can be easily translated to the South Sámi context and *gâetie*. To Hart's metaphor we may also add the ring of firestones at the center of the *gâetie*, the *aernie*—place of residence of the goddess Sáráhká and focus of the home's spiritual dimension. *Dâejmijes vuekie* stands in the center as the shared values and ideals of the community which the metaphorical *gâetie* represents.

We can see the workings of norms of effective living in the *gâetie*, as we shall illustrate below with reference to a dialogue recorded and published in the mid-twentieth century—the encounter of two South Sámi men within a *gâetie* (Kappfjell 2011). But first a little background. Within the traditional South Sámi *gâetie* there are many unwritten rules for how to behave and conduct oneself, rules that also belong to the body of knowledge designated by the term *dâejmijes vuekie*. These include norms for how to use one's voice, how work tasks are divided up and shared, how and where one sits (e.g., there are set places for members of the family vs. non-family members) and how one behaves so as not to disturb or offend others. Women of reproductive age could never step over

the leg of a man in the *gâetie*, particularly not if she were menstruating (Bäckman and Kjellström 1979, 220). Such could destroy the man's hunting luck and working abilities in the mountains. A further important portion of these rules pertained to the proper treatment of guests, both in terms of whom one should receive as a guest and also how a guest should behave. The dialogue below was first published in 1957 in a collection of texts based on the fieldwork of professors Knut Bergsland and Gustav Hasselbrink (Bergsland and Hasselbrink 1957). The dialogue may appear quite trustworthy and polite in translation, but for one who knows the original language and the rules of hospitality at work within the traditional *gâetie*, the conversation reveals the host's skeptical, even hostile, attitude toward the visitor from a neighboring district. The distrust becomes evident through a clear lack of the openness and generosity normally expected in hospitable treatment of a guest.

Guössie čájá goadán.

-Buörie biejjie!

-Buörie buörie biejjie! Vuajnáh čikk'edh volese!

-Jo gäjtuoh!

-Gubb'ede dállie dadne jis boadáh?

-Á, boadám gujt nuortelistie duoj dijjen gránnaj luvtie.

-O já, veasumes gujt áj sárnieh dâbb'ede dijjen luvtie?

-Juv, veasumes baddh.

-Buvzijgujmie áj čarres dijjieh?

-Juv, no iebie gujt mám návjuoh.

-Goabbh dállie Leah usš'edemienie?

-Ušš'edemienie huv leam duoguo oarjese, daj duv oarj'el-gránnáj goajguo, guh lin hels'eme dállie, ažžim manne dâkkuo boad'edh.

-O já, já –

-Á, im manne dájrieh mám lin usš'edamme, ažžem viekkietiedh rárk'edh jallh báldiedidh jallh –

-Dâggá numtie. – Dâbb'ene áj duv buvzh?

-Á, im dájrieh mah lin muv, men daj muv gránnáj lin gujthh.

-Hijv'en oažžuoh gieččediedh.

-Im manne dájrieh guktie, gusse sámien goadán boadá, mah dárbeše gičč'edh – goadie-luppiem?

-Eah sih baddh sámieh dárbešh gânná goadie-luppiem gičč'edh, iebie huv bruvkh gânná.

-Já gäjtuoh. – Ij sán duv učče čázeže?

-Já, nuv amma čázie nuagá.

-Dállie oažžuom dán muv briččh-geabnán.

-Já, men manne gujt ažžem briččegem jih učče böbmežh stealládieden guassán.

-Já gäjtuo!

-Čikk'edh barre dugguo jih vuardáh –

-Já men dállie gujt gámegh sigg'estem, juv vuajnáam duv duöljie duösnie, dállie gujt dállie disse vel'estem.

-Já, barre vel'eh jih – , gussege manne buökt'etem beabmuoh.

(Bergsland, Knut & Gustav Hasselbrink 1957, 14-15.)

A guest steps inside the *gâetie*

-Hello!

-Hello to you too! Take a seat!

-Sure, thanks!

-So where are you coming from?

-Well, I come from north of here, from your neighbor's.

-Aha. How are things up there?

-Just fine.

-Are the reindeer healthy and strong?

-Yes, we have no disease in the herd.

-Where are you headed?

-I am headed south to your neighbor's in the south, because they sent word for me to come.

-Oh right, yes—

-Yes, I'm not sure what they want, maybe help moving or separating the herd I suppose—

-Maybe so. Do you have reindeer there as well?

-Oh, I don't know, but my neighbors probably do.

-It is good to check on them.

-I'm not sure what's the custom when you come to a Sámi *gâetie*, do people ask to spend the night?

-No, Sámi don't generally have to ask to spend the night; we don't expect that sort of thing here.

-Well, okay, thanks. Maybe you have a little water?

-Sure you can have plenty of water.

-Then I'll go get my coffee pot.

-Yes, but why don't I fix a little coffee and food for the guest.

-Sure, thanks!

-Just sit down and wait.

-Yes, but I'll take off my shoes and I see that you have a reindeer pelt there, so maybe I can just relax a bit on that.

-Sure, stretch out there while I get some food ready.

Examples of a defective application of *dåajmijes vuekie* in this dialogue begin immediately after the initial greeting “Buõrie biejjie” (hello, literally, “good day”). It is customary even today to follow this greeting up immediately with a *buarastehtedh*, a handshake. After that, if the persons are not yet well acquainted but know each other at least somewhat, South Sámi will proceed to *laahkoem goerehtidh*, i.e., to inquire after relatives or connections to the locale. That a guest arriving from a neighboring community is not accorded this customary nicety is by no means a neutral omission: it signals that the host knows very well who the guest is but chooses to withhold customary signs of politeness. Immediately after such greetings, it is customary for the host to spread out a pelt in the middle of the *gâetie* beside the fire and invite the guest to be seated before continuing the conversation. At this invitation, the guest should ascertain first whether there is enough water in the house. If there is little water, the guest should offer to fill up a container of water for the household before accepting further hospitality. From the dialogue we can see that the host instead subjects the guest, though recognized and seemingly expected, to a long and prying interrogation about where he is headed and why. Finally, the guest asks whether it is customary in these parts that a guest must ask permission to spend the night there—a mild but also somewhat crass scolding, reminding the host of the universal custom among South Sámi that a guest should be invited to spend the night and never expected to have to ask for hospitality. This abrupt question serves as a corrective for the situation and leads the host to offer his guest food and drink.

It is difficult to know what the non-Sámi linguists thought who recorded this dialogue and published it in the textbook, and whether or not they were aware of its clear demonstration of how *not* to behave in a host-guest interaction. No commentary is included in the text nor in the foreword, beyond a perfunctory notation of source. The 1957 publication in which this text was first printed (Bergsland and Hasselbrink) became the basis of a later textbook for teaching South Sámi language *Lohkede saemien*, which appeared in 1974 (Bull and Bergsland 1974) and again, in revised form, in 1993 under the editorship of Bergsland and Ella Holm Bull (Bull and Bergsland 1993). The latter text appeared only in the 1993 revision. In these textbooks one can notice that the text “*Guessie tjaanga gâatan*,” has been altered somewhat so as to soften the host’s hostility evident in the 1957 text, although the foreword to the 1993 edition states that all texts are presented verbatim as recorded on tape or by hand (Kappfjell 2011, 39). Perhaps these later interventions are the work of Professor Bergsland’s South Sámi co-editor Ella Holm Bull, a gifted pedagogue and a person well acquainted with rules of hospitality that make up part of *dåajmijes vuekie*.

Another explanation, however, is that the text represents a Sámi way of instructing the reader about proper behavior through telling stories. *Dåajmijes vuekie* is maintained by narrating accounts of negative experiences, in which fictional characters fail to behave as they ought. Such narratives throw into relief underlying social norms and values so that the listener—particularly young persons—can become aware of how one ought to act without direct scolding. The story illustrates a breach in propriety, but its message depends on, and potentially further develops, an audience member’s ability to listen and think through the situation and draw the right conclusions as a result. Such an approach strengthens a young adult’s self-confidence and integrity, while equipping the person with the cultural information necessary for effective life within the community.

The Aesthetics of Linguistic Abundance

One linguistic phenomenon in Sámi languages that strikes non-speakers as interesting or even humorous is the plethora of different terms that exist for what in English would be expressed by the verb “to lie” in the sense of lying down, resting, or reclining. In Sámi languages there are over fifty terms for this single, usually unelaborated act. Again, the *gâetie* and the proper performance of the norms of *dåajmijes vuekie* serve to clarify the cultural or contextual meanings underlying the different definitions of the words. Sjulsson describes the way in which Sámi had come to receive non-Sámi guests to their homes during the nineteenth century: “If a *daró* comes to the *gâetie*, one spreads out a pelt and places a bucket for the guest to sit upon.” (Kappfjell 2011, 40) (Incidentally, Sjulsson notes that the custom of hand-shaking occurs with non-Sámi as well, further underscoring the irregularity of the situation portrayed in the dialogue described above.) There is a particular way that non-Sámi are assumed to prefer to sit, with back straight and legs bent beneath them, even inside the close quarters of a *gâetie*. But the description also makes it clear that there is a more normal way for Sámi to sit in such a space: by reclining on a pelt, with a prop of some sort (e.g. a sack, a rolled up pelt, etc.) alongside. Anthropologists and other guests often opted to perch themselves above their interlocutors in precisely the manner described by Sjulsson, using a pail or other object as a make-shift chair. There they could look down upon the people they had come to study or interact with, until the smoke from the fire, which rises and becomes more caustic the higher one positions oneself in the *gâetie*, would force the visitor to depart, coughing and shedding tears.

For those people who chose to behave properly in the *gâetie*, on the other hand, there were many options of different ways to perform the sitting/reclining act. If the *gâetie* was crowded, the person might not

stæhtjasjidh, i.e., lie with one's legs outstretched, but instead should *kråavhkasjidh*, i.e., lie with one's legs tucked up beneath oneself, or *kruvhkedidh*, to find oneself a secluded spot to lie down in (in an attempt to take up the least space possible). Under no circumstances should one lie in such a way as to hinder others from passing in or out of the doorway, a kind of obstructive lying known as *gaejvie* (Jåma and Brustad 2007).

Such a wealth of terminology means that one can often describe in Sámi exactly how something looks, smells, feels, or behaves. Often dictionaries translating such terms include descriptions from informants about whether a given action was considered “ugly” or “beautiful,” “polite” or “impolite.” Sometimes such dualism appears imposed upon the data by the outside researcher. The tendency to dichotomize in terms or the values or reasoning behind certain terms appears to lie outside of the Sámi way of understanding, which consists more often of fine distinctions between parallel items rather than rigid contrasts between seeming opposites. When O.P. Pettersson—a Swedish elementary schoolteacher with a strong interest in ethnography, ethnology, botany, geology, and philology—interviewed Kristoffer Sjulsson about his sensory perceptions, he found that Sjulsson could describe vividly the *dåbbdo* (feeling, taste) and *happsem* (taste) of various items. After a lengthy description of some of these perceptions related to various foods and raw materials, however, Petersson notes that items with strong smell were not said to smell “bad” but rather to smell “strong” (Bäckman and Kjellström 1979, 91-92). The riches of Sámi vocabulary, or the Sámi culture that supported such a wealth of different terms, allowed Sámi to focus not on categorizing but on specifying. Such a tendency recurs in many branches of Sámi terminology, from the several hundred different terms for snow, to a similar abundance of descriptors for the appearance of reindeer, to the wealth of terms for different ages, sizes, sex, and behavior of salmon (Jernsletten 1997). Such is perhaps a natural tendency in a culture based on hunting and gathering activities, in which the characteristics and behaviors of animals and nature are crucial to observe and to describe. So, too, given the small size of Sámi communities and the intense interreliance between families and *siidas* (the communities), it was natural that norms of proper behavior were carefully observed and maintained.

Good communication within social groups and between people and their surrounding world were essential to survival. Irritating or insulting one's neighbor, or damaging one's surroundings, could have grave consequences in a world in which assistance might be desperately required even the very next day. Good communication and proper behavior were also important with respect to the supernatural world, as reflected in myths and legends. The resultant Sámi approach to social control consisted of not directly criticizing one's neighbor but rather of providing input that allowed for one's neighbor to see the problem and respond without direct confrontation. This could often be achieved in a

pedagogical format through offering a situation in the form of a story that invited the listener to think through the details of the hypothetical situation and come up with a solution that might also, indirectly, be instructive to the listener's actual circumstances as well.

All of these considerations can prove challenging when attempting to create a culturally-informed system of aesthetic appraisal and interpretation for modern works of art that may not have been produced in accordance with traditional values or perhaps not with reference to social or cultural values whatsoever. Matters prove much simpler when the object of analysis belongs to the category of "traditional cultural product," where the producer's grasp of established cultural norms and techniques can be appraised by experts possessing similar knowledge. But it is also intriguing to examine the extent to which such analysis can be applied to non-traditional items of cultural production as well, for instance, in the areas of visual art, literature, and music. Do traditional values and perspectives still have utility in the analysis of postmodern or postcolonial products? The question is of great relevance to researchers in Indigenous studies. The Native American scholar and author, Gerald Vizenor (1994), has suggested that Native Americans, or Indigenous persons more generally, are today "Post-Indian," or "post-Indigenous": the expressive cultural products of contemporary American Indians, as well as those of contemporary Sámi artists, can be understood in deeper or more nuanced ways if we attend to the view of the cosmos and norms of interpretation that operated in the cultures of the past and that remain viable and may serve as bases for dynamic revitalization. Understanding the norms from which the modern artist's work has developed—the narrative traditions, myths, and worldview of the traditional culture—can shed valuable light on the formulations which we can observe in the present. Such knowledge provides a broader and richer context in which to interpret the work, sometimes revealing interesting carryovers or ironic commentaries regarding past norms that open up new and productive avenues for understanding an artist's work and its distinctive, culturally-informed aspects.

"The Man on Oulavuolie"

As noted above, if *dâajmijes vuekie* encapsulates a notion of the proper way to live, its lack also serves as a potent metaphor for ineffective or improper behavior. Nils Mattias Andersson's great yoik "The Man on Oulavuolie" can be seen on a descriptive plane to focus on one elderly Sámi man's recollection of his former wealth and power, his impressive herd and busy family engaged in a lively dance around the glacier that dominates the mountain Oulavuolie.² It stands as a poignant, elegaic reflection on a livelihood that was once thriving but had since fallen into oblivion. It is presented as the final, lingering memory

of a way of life shared by two elderly people but soon to disappear forever. On a philosophical plane, the yoik represents something universal in Indigenous experience: we live as long as we remember and as long as we are remembered by others. But when those memories fade, we are wiped out of existence like tracks in snow blown away by the north wind during the night. Certain moments stand out in such memories, particularly those connected with the wider landscape and nature. The long-enduring glacier of Oulavuolie, alongside of which the yoiker's fine herd grazed and prospered, changes character after an event involving the household's children. The narrator's children are depicted out in a boat trying their hand at fishing, when they suddenly begin to shriek in fright, so much so that others of the *siida*'s members rush to the scene to see what is the problem. The children have caught a long strange fish, so large that they are afraid of it. They beg their mother to throw it back into the water for them. The mother tries to explain to them that it is just a fish, but to no avail: the children continue their wailing until it is gone.

This narrative situation is a foreshadowing, a sign that things are about to change or that the change has already begun. The images of a proud and prosperous father, a healthy herd, and thriving children are soon to be replaced as the glacier abruptly becomes dangerous. If one considers that the important Lutheran missionary Thomas von Westen spent little time in this part of the South Sámi region, and that the minister Shjeldrup from Hattfjelldal writes to his north Norwegian colleague J. Qvigstad as late as 1925 that the Sámi of Hattfjelldalen, Namdalen and Åsele lappmarks of Sweden are still largely mired in their "ancient superstitions," it is easy to imagine that some of the images in the yoik may touch on pre-Christian symbols or understandings. The fish is an important symbol in traditional Sámi belief, both as a gift and protector of children in the baptism ritual and an aide in supernatural passage between spirit worlds, the land of the dead and the realm of the *saajviaajmoe* spirits. The children reject and discard the mysterious fish and the adults of the camp fear the repercussions: "sovmeminie, sovmeminie, sovmeminie" (they understood, understood, understood) (Gaski and Kappfjell 2004, 33; Gaski 2020, 81).

Immediately after, the glacier on Oulavuolie changes name from *speatnoe* to *sielke*, a shift that reflects a change in its physical character. From being a repository of cooling ice even in the height of summer, covered by a powder of snow at the top, it becomes instead a mass of granular corn snow, a porous sheet that disguises but does not protect passing walkers from the dangers of underlying ravines and crevasses. It sucks away the lifeblood of the herd in the bodies of unfortunate reindeer, while the man of Oulavuolie with increasing desperation labors to locate his missing reindeer, sometimes tracking down animals that are now on neighboring mountains, but with other owners' earmarks instead of his own. The man reflects with fondness his "many mottled, mottled, untamed, white-furred, light-coated with stripes [reindeer], those with

antlers pointing forward, those that stay close by, tame” recalling his former pride:

Goh lib manne
 Ávlavuelien, Ávlavuelien, Ávlavuelien
 Ávlavuelien álmaj
 álmaj, álmaj
 die lib gidtjh amma álmaj
 Ávlavuelien, Ávlavuelien, Ávlavuelien, Ávlavuelien,
 Ávlavuelien álmaj
 álmaj nov aaj, nov aaj
 nov aaj raanhke
 (Gaski and Kappfjell 2004, 35)

When I was
 the man on Oulavuolie
 Oulavuolie, Oulavuolie, Oulavuolie
 The man on Oulavuolie
 the man, the man
 Back then I was quite the man
 The man on Oulavuolie, Oulavuolie, Oulavuolie
 The man on Oulavuolie
 The man
 also long-legged
 (Gaski 2020, 85)

But now he regrets his confidence, which he blames for his misfortune, and which is encapsulated in the name he so proudly bore, a name that made him synonymous with the mountain and with its character and fortunes. In accordance with traditional Sámi naming practices, he did not simply share in the mountain’s name: he was the mountain’s human representative, and thus, when the mountain changed, so did he. He yoiks his youthful arrogance, a man who had once been known as the cleverest and most capable wolf hunter of the district. That he became proud and overconfident with his mighty herd, which is also likened to him, is understandable. But if we take into account Sámi proverbial wisdom in the manner that Nils Mattias seems to have, then it is clear that such pride is a sure method of destroying one’s reindeer luck, *goerpedidh*. Inappropriate behavior has led to envy and tempted cosmic retribution, swallowing up the herd and its associated wealth over time:

Mov lih raanhkh
 Ávlavuelien speatnoen

ij sepkieh mov
 daate lea stoerre jealoe
 njammem-, njammeme, njammeme
 stoerre sielke
 Ávlavuelien sielke
 Ávlavuelien sielke lea ovmese raanhkeeb njammeme
 njammeme, njammeme
 (Gaski and Kappfjell 2004, 33)

I had all sorts of reindeer
 I had reindeer
 On Oulavuolie's glacier
 Not mine, they whisper
 a big herd
 swallowed, swallowed, swallowed up
 The big glacier
 Oulavuolie's glacier has swallowed so many a reindeer herd
 swallowed
 swallowed, swallowed up
 (Gaski 2020, 82)

Such retribution leaves Andersson's narrator a shattered shadow of his former self, peering up at the mountain's glacier with a combination of sorrow and respect:

Ávlavuelien speatnoe lij
 Ávlavuelien speatnoe lij gídtjh
 veerehks, veerehks
 veerehks, veerehks
 Men die Leah ean vielie
 men die Leah ean vielie
 vâjá, vâjá
 vâjá, vâjá

Mubpien sijnen áadtjoeh båtsoe,
 båtsoe, båtsoe
 vovejnedh, vovejnedh
 sijnene, sijnene
 båtsoe, klovse
 gusnie Ávlavuelien, vuelien
 speatnoe, speatnoe

nomme gidtjh hov
nomme gidtjh, gidtjh
(Gaski and Kappfjell 2004, 34)

Oulavuolie's glacier
Oulavuolie's glacier
dangerous, dangerous
dangerous, dangerous
But we are no more
We are no more

voya voya
voya voya

Other places one sees reindeer
reindeer, reindeer
see, see
places, places
Reindeer, white-furred
where Oulavuolie is, vuolie
glacier, glacier
the name, you know
the name, you know, you know
(Gaski 2020, 84)

Had he remembered the Sámi value of proper balance and effective living, the yoik seems to suggest, life might have been very different for Andersson's narrator.

“Man is But a Part of Nature, of Life”

As we have already noted, our use of the term *aesthetics* in this paper differs from what one typically finds in Western scholarship. Yet the processes and values we describe can be profitably compared with Western aesthetics as Indigenous counterparts or answers and thus, we have wanted to underscore the equality of these viewpoints—their parity with Western terms and standards—by employing the same prestigious term. We wish to indigenize analytical approaches to what counts as “beautiful” in Indigenous expressive

remembering, and applying the myths and traditions handed down from the past. Valkeapää's respect for myth in particular is reflected by his portrayal of the Sámi as the descendents of the Sun, a viewpoint he advanced most eloquently in his magnificent work *Beaivi, áhčážan* (*The Sun, My Father*), for which he was awarded the Nordic Prize for Literature in 1991. In his final years of life, Valkeapää was often portrayed as a *noaidi*, not because he wished to be perceived in such a way, but because he seemed to possess skills and insights traditionally associated with *noaidit*: a capacity to see what others failed to see, an earnest wish to guide his fellow human beings toward a better way of living, and at the same time, an increasingly retreating and quiet nature. He became much like his sculpture *Eaidánas ealli* – one who lives best on his own, like a reindeer who prefers to stay off at the edge of the herd. From there he could better observe what was happening and watch out for the harm and for the good that lay in wait for his people and culture.

In a manner that reflects the holistic and interconnected nature of *dáajmijes vuekie*, as well as its central attention to the goal of instructing through example, Nils-Aslak Valkeapää wished to complete his career by making a full circle in his writings. His *début* work had been a collection of polemic essays that appeared in 1971 (Valkeapää 1971). Twenty years later, he received the most prestigious award of his career for *Beaivi, áhčážan*, a multimedia work that examines Sámi experience through poetry, sound and image (Valkeapää 1989). Ten years after that, *Eanni eanmážan* (*The Earth, My Mother*) returned to the multimedia poetic work in a manner that broadened its focus to embrace Indigenous experience throughout the world (Valkeapää 2001). And finally, if an untimely death had not intervened, he planned to write a new work of poetic essays that would bear the same title as his sculpture *Eaidánas ealli* – a work that stood, and still stands, in the bedroom of his home *Lásságámmi* in Skibotn, northern Norway. The sculpture became his alter ego, a self portrayal that he said good night to each night and greeting each morning in his lifelong effort to understand himself, and others, better.

Even as a child, Valkeapää had spoken with the birds, with trees: he esteemed Nature, and in his career as an artist he became one of the strongest spokespersons for Nature and its message. One must be humble and have an open mind to be able to hear and understand the Earth's voice; as he put it in one poem:

Gulat go eallima jienaid
joga šávvamis
biekka bossumis?

Dat lea visot maid áigon dadjat
dat lea visot
(Valkeapää 1985, n.p.)

Can you hear the sounds of life
in the roaring of the river
in the blowing of the wind?

That is all I want to say
that is all.
(Valkeapää 1994, n.p.)

Comment

ARNOLD KRUPAT

The very full and rich essay by Professors Kappfjell, Gaski, and DuBois urges the use of “an Indigenous community’s own categories” (3) for understanding Sámi song and text rather than to rely on the dominant, often colonial categories common to Europe and the United States. The essay thus provides an “indigenist” Sámi critique centered, as I read it, on the concept-phrase, “Daajmijes vuekie.”¹ In the interest of providing context, and, for the possibility of comparison and contrast—a trans-indigenist occasion—I offer some historical and theoretical reflections on these matters based upon my own work not with Sámi verbal expression but, rather, with the Native American literatures of the U.S.

In 1981, the poet and short story writer, Simon Ortiz, from Acoma Pueblo in New Mexico, published an essay called “Cultural Authenticity in Nationalism” (Ortiz 1981). Ortiz’s concept of nationalism was not based upon—it did not even use—the term *sovereignty*, a term that would become central to subsequent nationalist criticism in the United States.² Rather than look to the government and the law, Ortiz claimed that the ongoing colonial situation of Native American peoples in the United States was best contested by the politics of what he called “cultural authenticity.” “Cultural authenticity” for Ortiz had little in common with anthropological accounts of culture nor did it involve a nostalgia for an imagined pre-contact past. Rather, he claimed that “cultural authenticity” was to be found in a broadly-conceived indigenous “oral tradition” that persists and changes. In the struggle against colonialism, Ortiz asserted, “resistance—political, armed, spiritual—... has been carried out by the oral tradition” (Ortiz 1981, 257).

Like the authors of the present essay, in arguing for an indigenous criticism of Native American oral traditions, Ortiz sought to deflect analyses that would, however unconsciously or unintentionally, amount to critical neo-colonialism. Having first colonized Native lands and cultures—rationalized and economized them, imposing as “natural” an agricultural calendar—EurAmericans, so his argument went, should not now colonize Native literatures by submitting them to Marxist, structuralist, and post-structuralist critical paradigms that were as oblivious to their internal and culture-specific criteria as—say—Johannes Scheffer was to the complexities of *yoik* as both a noun and a verb; as oblivious as a settler/outsider would be to the nuances of the dialogue quoted by the authors, or to those in the beautiful translations of Sámi poetry in the essay.

The authors underscore differences between Western and Sámi epistemologies—ways of seeing and “knowing” the world—as these undergird

aesthetic differences. As they write in the section of the essay titled “Aesthetics,” “So-called ‘Western’ scientific terminology often proves ill-suited for describing the worldview and attitudes of an Indigenous culture.” (5) An Indigenous account, however, would offer “the potential for a powerful relativizing corrective.”³ (3) In that many outsider analyses produce something like a very poor translation of the original, as it were, the authors’ project may be described as an attempt to achieve instead what I have elsewhere called an anti-imperial translation.⁴ I’d quoted as a central text for this project a quotation from Rudolph Pannwitz. Pannwitz (in English translation) said that:

Our translations, even the best ones, proceed from a wrong premise. They want to turn Hindi, Greek, English into German instead of turning German into Hindi, Greek, English....The basic error of the translator is that he preserves the state in which his own language happens to be instead of allowing his language to be *powerfully affected by the foreign tongue*. (quoted in Krupat 1996a, 35; my emphasis)

An attempt at this sort of translation of an indigenous *culture* may be traced back at least to Michel de Montaigne’s essay “On the Cannibals,” in which, as Eric Cheyfitz (1991, 155) has shown, Montaigne “uncannily imagines the language of the cannibals so he can *alienate his own language in it*” (my emphasis). To do this required nothing less than—consistent, I believe, with the authors’ purposes—what Talal Asad has called “learning to live another form of life” (Asad 1986, 149).

Can the West translate—learn “to live another form of life”—in this way? Not all from the dominant states have thought so. Thus Jean-Francois Lyotard (1968, xi) asserts that the “narrative knowledge” of traditional societies—the *yoik* and the Native American oral tradition, for example—and the “scientific knowledge” of modern societies are so radically distinct as to constitute what Lyotard calls a “*differend*,” a “case of a conflict between two parties that *cannot be equitably resolved for lack of a rule of judgment applicable to both arguments*” (my emphasis). Much to the contrary, I would cite Peter Whiteley’s observation that

a cross-cultural intersubjectivity of the experienced phenomenal world strongly suggests parallel systems of referentiality in many conceptual domains; indeed, this is the *sina qua non* for much *intertranslatability* and the pre-condition for more fine-grained, context-sensitive translations. (Whiteley 1997, 45; my emphasis)

An anti-imperial translation from *that* language to *this* one, seems to me not only possible and worth the effort, but an ethical imperative as well. It is good and right and proper to seek an Indigenous “relativizing corrective” to any number of apparently-monolithic Western “truths.”

Before turning to the authors’ detailed sketch of a Sámi Indigenous criticism, let me describe just a few of the recent culture-specific paradigms proposed for the criticism of Native American literary expression. Daniel Justice’s (2006) *Our Fire Survives the Storm: a Cherokee Literary History*, “a work of tribal nationalism,” as Justice calls it, focuses on Cherokee histories of Tsiyu Gansini (Dragging Canoe) and Nanye’hi (Nancy Ward) whose respective duties as Chickimauga war chief and Beloved Woman, exemplified the white/peace and red/war spheres that defined eighteenth-century Cherokee politics. (Justice 2006, 15-16)

The “complementary philosophies” of what Justice calls “the ‘Beloved Path’ of accommodation and cooperation, and the ‘Chickimauga consciousness’ of physical and/or rhetorical defiance” become “the foundational methodology for [his] readings of subsequent texts,” (Justice 2006, 16) a Cherokee aesthetic paradigm.

Lisa Brooks’ (2008) *The Common Pot: The Recovery of Native Space in the Northeast* asks the important question, “What happens when we put Native space at the center of America rather than merely striving for inclusion of minority viewpoints or viewing Native Americans as *part* of or on the *periphery* of America?” (Brooks 2008, xxxv). *The Common Pot* opens with a number of maps of the northeast in which the place names are all Abenaki names (with the exception, to be sure, of places like Fort Niagara). In this way Brooks attempts, as her subtitle attests, to recover “*Native Space in the Northeast*.” In her focus on early Native writing, she uses the Abenaki word *awikhiqan*, a term that initially referred to birchbark messages and maps, but eventually extended to scrolls, and, in time, to books, as providing a paradigm for literary criticism.

Stephanie Sellers (2007), in *Native American Autobiography Redefined*, attempts to articulate a concept of what she calls “Indigenous Communal Narrative.” In her subsequent *Native American Women’s Studies: A Primer for the Classroom* (Sellers 2008), Sellers’ Chapter IV offers “Native American Terminology for the Women’s Studies Classroom,” a move away from first-world paradigms. Two books by Canadian First Nations scholars are also worth noting here: Shawn Wilson’s (2008) *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* outlines an Opaskwayak Northern Manitoba Cree perspective on “research,” while Margaret Kovach’s (2009) *Indigenous Methodologies* attempts to construct a Nehiyaw Plains Cree “epistemology,” one that would undergird a Plains Cree aesthetic.

It's not clear to me the degree to which resistance/accommodation for Cherokee people or *awikhigan* for Abenaki people are central to those cultures' ways of construing the world, at least not to the degree that—if I've understood correctly—*Dåajmijes vuekie* is central to Sámi peoples. The authors note that, broadly, “beauty did not exist without some sort of practical significance,” (4) a comment that echoes Eric Cheyfitz's observation about Native verbal (or material) art. Cheyfitz wrote that “Practical social power, not esthetic originality or genius, is the category of understanding in Native art, [so that] for a Native community the beauty of expressive oral culture is synonymous with its practical social power” (Cheyfitz 1991, 68-9). This seems near to what the authors describe for Sámi aesthetics.

Dåajmijes vuekie names a social principle that is at once ethical and esthetic; thus “acting in a useful, socially efficacious, ethically significant manner... was to be ‘beautiful’.” Similarly, “finding one's proper way, of doing what is right...[is] beautiful.” (4) Beautiful behavior of this sort, an aspect of “effective living,” (8) includes matters large and small, such as, for example, the proper way to sit in a *gåetie!* The nearest Native American concept to *dåajmijes vuekie* as ethic and esthetic that I know is the Navajo concept of *hozho*. I'll describe it here briefly.

Gary Witherspoon (1977), not the most recent, but still, I believe, a deeply insightful commentator on these matters, says that “The goal of Navajo life in this world is to live to maturity in the condition described as *hozho*” (Witherspoon 1977, 25). He describes *hozho* as “everything that is good, harmonious, orderly, happy, and beautiful. The opposite of *hozho* is *hochzo* which is the evil, the disorderly, and the ugly.” (34) He notes that “In the Navajo world... art is not divorced from everyday life, for the creation of beauty and the incorporation of oneself in beauty represent the highest attainment and ultimate destiny of man... [B]eauty is not separated from good, from health, from happiness, or from harmony” (151). When illness or bad fortune occur, curing ceremonies need to be performed to restore proper order and balance. One aspect of these ceremonies often involves the creation of elaborate sand paintings, drawn from the center outward. These, once they have achieved their ceremonial function, are destroyed—much to the consternation of Western observers who reasonably find them beautiful and wish to preserve them as aesthetic objects apart from their function. (They are sometimes allowed to do so in photographs.)

Another difference between Sámi peoples and the West alluded to by the authors—it is a difference as well for Native American peoples and the West—involves the difference between *history* and *myth*. The authors briefly raise the question as to what might count as *true* stories—as Johan Turi insisted his were (6)—as these are differentiated from what the West calls *fiction* or, again, *myth*.⁵ A number of commentators have affirmed the anthropologist Donald

Bahr's sense that Native American "tribal societies do not have *fictions* in the modern sense of stories that people make up with no pretense or faith that the characters in the stories really lived or that the characters' actions really occurred" (Bahr 1993, 47). Wendy Wickwire, who worked with Harry Robinson, a Salishan oral storyteller in British Columbia, stated that "Harry never fictionalized stories. Indeed, the very concept of fiction was foreign to him" (Robinson 1989, 20). Mrs. Kitty Smith, a Tutchone elder, telling a traditional tale to Julie Cruikshank, asserted that "This is a *story*, you know, not 'story.' It's *true story*" (Cruikshank 1998, 12; italics in original). Reflecting on his work with Menomini peoples, Leonard Bloomfield (1962, xii) affirmed that "Inventing stories is not the Menomini way." Nor does it seem to be the way of most Indigenous people.

This may well be because, as Bloomfield noted, "stories dealing with a far-off time when the world as we know it was in process of formation... are told to *inform and instruct*" (Bloomfield 1962, xii; my emphasis). The elders who tell these stories to "inform and instruct" the young (and also to confirm the socio-cultural knowledge of those who are not so young) believe them to be *true*. What would be the point of passing along something one knows *not* to be true? Traditional narrators insist on the truth of the oral stories they tell because these stories are the cornerstone of Indigenous pedagogy. Angela Sidney, a Tagish and Tlingit woman, and the last fluent speaker of Tagish, told Julie Cruikshank, "*They used to teach us with stories/ They teach us what is good, what is bad, things like that.../ Those days they told stories mouth to mouth./ That's how they educate people*" (Cruikshank et al. 1990, 73; italics in original).

Harry Robinson remembered being instructed by his grandmother's stories most particularly, but by those of others as well. He told Wendy Wickwire, "I got enough people to tell me. That's why I know" (Robinson 1989, 12). As John Farella (1993, 130) has noted, Native stories "provide a template, a standard through which [Native lives] can be ordered and understood"—a statement which, as it happens, closely paraphrases the title of Julie Cruikshank's (1998) volume of northern Native women's autobiographies: *Life Lived Like a Story*. To make this list no longer, I'll mention, finally, only the Navajo, Hugh Yellowman's answer to the folklorist, Barre Toelken's question of why he tells Coyote stories to children. "If my children hear [the stories]," Mr. Yellowman replied, "they will grow up to be good people; if they don't hear them, they will grow up to be bad" (Toelken and Scott 1981, 80). Thus, as the authors note here, Johan Turi's performance of "a *muitalus*—a *true story*" (6 second emphasis mine) is at least in part devoted "to the underlying goal of effective survival," to teaching the young (and, again, reminding the not-so-young) the art "of 'managing well'" (6).

It is sometimes the case that stories teach by means of what might be called a negative narrative pedagogy; they teach, this is to say, by showing

what *not* to do—very much in the manner of the dialogue the authors cite. Among Native American peoples, Trickster tales are a common negative narrative pedagogical genre. Trickster, as in Hugh Yellowman’s “Coyote and the Prairie Dogs,” is shown doing all the sorts of things a good Navajo person should *not* do. The laughter that follows each account of Coyote’s adventures testifies to the audience’s recognition of the inappropriateness and outlandishness of his behavior. I’ll return to Trickster tales briefly below.

There is also the western Apache practice of what Keith Basso (1984) has called, in an important paper of the same name, “stalking with stories.” Western Apaches use the narrative genre of ‘*agodzaahi*, or historical tales, “to criticize [,] to warn [,] or to ‘shoot’” (36) at people who have behaved in a manner inappropriate to the Apache way. Basso tells of a young Apache woman, recently returned from boarding school, who attended an important girl’s puberty ceremony “with her hair rolled up in a set of pink plastic curlers,” despite the fact that “Western Apache women of all ages are expected to appear at puberty ceremonies with their hair worn loose”(39). Not to do so is not only disrespectful but potentially threatening to the ceremony’s “most basic objectives which are to invest the pubescent girl with qualities necessary for her life as an adult” (40).

Two weeks later, as Basso relates, this young woman was present at a birthday celebration, and, after a meal had been served, her grandmother narrated an historical tale, said to have occurred in the late nineteenth century, about a foolishly forgetful Apache policeman. Immediately the young woman stood up and left the gathering. She left so abruptly because, as the grandmother explained to Basso, “I shot her with an arrow” (40). This is to say that the young woman understood the story to be “stalking” her; she recognized that the communally-agreed-upon moral of the story her grandmother had told was a warning not to behave too much like the arrogant “whiteman.”⁶

The Sámi practice of attending to “fine distinctions,” rather than dichotomizing or reasoning by means of binary oppositions as the West does, is a practice also found among Native American peoples. Just as a failure to recognize those distinctions can distort perceptions of Sámi verbal expression, so, too, to cite an important example, had the post-Aristotelean Western determination to reason according to an *either/or* logic for years distorted critical understanding of the important oral narrative genre of Trickster tales. These stories, told by many Native nations, recount the adventures of a figure who is at once powerful and possessed of more-than-natural powers, and at the same time—like the Navajo Coyote—foolish and buffoonish. Western critical categories are based upon an *either/or* mode of cognition that proceeds from the establishment of apparent oppositions. Westerners had for long sought to establish that Trickster was *really* either a culture hero or a foolish

misfit, thus badly misconstruing the Native sense of Trickster as *both/and*, a figure who could not be accounted for by the dichotomous abstractions of Western logic, but, rather, by the perception of narrative fine distinctions.⁷

Another illustration of these sorts of cognitive differences appears in an anecdote from the work of the Russian psychologist, A.R. Luria. In the early 1930s, Luria worked with some illiterate persons in Uzbekistan and Kirghizia. One of Luria's exercises presented his subjects with pictures of an axe, a saw, a log, and a hatchet and asking them which item did not belong in the group. Everyone reading this will know the answer wanted. This is because, in learning to read, we learn the sort of abstract logic necessary to provide "correct" answers to questions of this kind. But Luria's unlettered subjects insisted that all the items fit together. Their comments made clear that they thought about what they'd been shown in terms of concrete narrative rather than abstract logic, a story—surely one about cutting down a tree—in which all four objects "belonged" (Ong 1982, 50-2). When Luria explained to them why it was the log that was out of place, they understood him perfectly well, but insisted that his way of thinking was very strange.

A little-known testimony to the Indigenous capacity for making fine distinctions not only in narrative but in the material world appears in a lecture the Army doctor, Washington Matthews, delivered in 1884 (Matthews 1997). Some of the rhetoric of Matthews' lecture, typical, unfortunately, of the late nineteenth century—and surely of Johannes Scheffer's earlier time as well—is, today, almost blood-curdling. Matthews, that is to say, for all his enormous respect for Navajo lifeways, nonetheless speaks in unselfconscious and ostensibly benign fashion about "savages," "primitives," and "lower orders." But what his talk powerfully shows is that Navajo people, among whom he lived and worked for many years, were infinitely better at making "fine distinctions" among grasses and plants than any of the white settlers who'd come to their lands, just as Sámi people could see many more distinctive reindeer colors than the Europeans. Matthews (1997, 198) wrote, "I never found a non-scientific white man who could distinguish a single species of native grass." But Navajos, making "fine distinctions," perceived many species.

The authors' essay spends quite some time on Nils Mattias Andersson's narrative yoik "Man on Oulavuolie." The little I know about Sámi culture, and the little bit more I know about Native American cultures, do not especially well prepare me to offer anything approaching a comprehensive "reading" of this lovely text. But they do, at least, permit me to remark on the "Man's" relation to what might weakly be called the environment, or, perhaps a bit less weakly, the land. Indigenous people tend to think of the land differently than do Europeans. As Vine Deloria, Jr. wrote,

When an Indian thinks about traditional lands he always talks about what the people did there, the animals who lived there and how the people related to them...and the ceremonial functions it was required to perform to remain worthy of living there. (Deloria 1989, 261)

The Houma law professor, N. Bruce Duthu, offers commentary that parallels Deloria's. Duthu (2008) writes:

From the Indian perspective, the relationship with their ancestral lands operates in the form of a sacred covenant between the community and the land, in which Indian peoples regularly minister to the land as stewards and the land reciprocates by supporting, nurturing, and teaching the community to live in proper balance with its surroundings. (Duthu 2008, 79)

This seems to me not unlike the Man on Oulavuolie's relation to the glacier, although one must not omit his awareness that this landscape or natural "surround" could also be very dangerous.

There is as well a strong elegiac dimension to the text. It is deeply retrospective, vividly recalling a past richer in the good things of life—although not without hazard—than the present. There is in this retrospection both an individual and a collective/cultural dimension. In that we have here an old man looking back on his life, I think of a Havasupai (the Havasupai are a Yuman-speaking tribal nation in Arizona) elegy, Dan Hanna's "Farewell Song," recorded by Leanne Hinton about 1964. Central to it is the deep belief that, as a Havasupai woman told Hinton, "the land knows you're there, and it misses you when you're gone" (Hinton 1994, 693). Mr. Hanna's song concludes,

I'd always be with the mountains,
it seemed;
 that's how I was,
that's what I believed.
 I felt
So proud.
 I thought I'd be that way forever.
But now my strength is gone.
 I thought I'd be that way forever.
That's how I was,
 how I was,
 how I was.... (Hinton 1994, 702-3)

So, too, does the “Man on Oulavuolie” remember

When I was
 the man on Oulavuolie
 Oulavuolie, Oulavuolie, Oulavuolie
 the man on Oulavuolie
 the man, the man
 Back then I was quite the man.
 (Gaski 2020, 85)

But as Harald Gaski had written earlier (2000), the *yoik*, recorded by Andersson in the early 1950’s, when he was already an older man, may not just mourn the passing of one man’s traditional life, but also the fact that “the whole Sami lifestyle....is disappearing” (Gaski 2000, 194). Andersson’s *yoik*, thus, may be a Sámi example of what W. David Shaw, in a study of Western elegy, has called “apocalyptic” elegy, “a lament...for the passing of a world” (Shaw 1994, 155; my emphasis). Gaski notes that the *yoiker* ultimately finds “solace” and “perhaps happiness in the fact that his text is preserved in the recording. In this way Andersson’s *yoik* “enters the collective Sami consciousness” (Gaski 2000, 194; my emphasis).

There are several Native American elegiac texts that also seem to mourn “the passing of a world,” an entire culture and its lifeways. From my reading of them, I will tentatively suggest a possible extension of Gaski’s insight. This is to say that insofar as Andersson’s *yoik* enters “the collective Sámi consciousness,” it may thereby work to preserve the life it appears to mourn. We have seen that for the Sámi, as for Native American traditional expression generally, it is the ethically practical, social power of a discursive act that is inseparable from any sense of its beauty. Thus an elegiac lament for the times that were, by the very fact of its performance, can serve as a symbolic act working to preserve those bygone times, the articulation of loss itself serving as an attempt to overcome loss. These are acts, that is to say, of what Jahan Ramazani (1994, xi) has called “melancholic mourning,” in which the mourner does not entirely release the past in the hope it might be included in any possible future.⁸

Gaski notes that the 1950s, when Andersson recorded his *yoik*, was a difficult time for Sámi people in their several national states. So, too, did difficult times for their People urge the Sauk leader, Black Hawk, and the Lakota (Sioux) warrior, healer, and holy man, Black Elk, to “perform,” as it were, in similar circumstances, agreeing to record their life stories at length in the form the West called autobiography.

After his defeat in the so-called Black Hawk War of 1832, Black Hawk was taken to Washington to meet his conqueror, President Andrew Jackson, whose

determination to enforce the Indian Removal Act (1830) would soon “remove”—displace—a great many more Native nations than Black Hawk’s, the Cherokees first among them. After a tour of the east, Black Hawk returned to his (displaced) nation, and agreed to the request of the government interpreter for his Sauk and Fox people, Antoine LeClair, to produce a life history that was then edited and published (Black Hawk 1833) by a young newspaperman named John Barton Patterson. Patterson was mostly interested in why it was that Black Hawk had led his Sauk band to war against the whites, and Black Hawk detailed his reasons at some length. But he also spoke a good deal about his People’s traditional lifeways, at one point apparently lamenting—there are no transcripts or notes from the collaboration among Black Hawk, LeClair, and Patterson, so that it is impossible to know just what Black Hawk himself actually said—that “these were the times that were,” (51) a sharp contrast to the present.⁹ Indeed, as Black Hawk had said earlier: “Now we [Sauk people] are as miserable as the howling, hungry wolf in the prairie.” (46) But as with some of the Ghost Dance songs later, in the 1890s, this elegiac lament for “the times that were” does not presume those times are gone for good.¹⁰

Jeffrey Anderson (2005, 453) has remarked that traditional Arapaho rituals concentrated on suffering or “life-negating” conditions in order to “release or discard them for lighter, life-generating movement.” I think it is likely that Black Hawk’s expression of grief for the present state of his People may also seek to work ritually to transvalue present sorrow into a “condition that could be discarded,” a symbolic act of recovery. Thus, in the manner of Native American elegy generally, Black Hawk’s telling his *Life* may intend to heal and restore his People by narrative means, so that they may move beyond defeat and loss.

Although the Lakota warrior and holy man Black Elk did not tell his story until the 1930’s, it was the period just before and after 1890 that made it crucially important for him to undertake the project (Black Elk 1932). As a boy, Black Elk had had a series of powerful visions intended to be used on behalf of his Oglala Sioux people. He had also, late in the nineteenth century, traveled to Europe with the Buffalo Bill Wild West show, in large part as a means of gaining an understanding of the power of the whites. Upon returning home in 1889, as Black Elk would later note, he found “Our people were pitiful and in despair” (231). So, too, were other of the Plains tribes in despair, with the buffalo herds gone and the sacred Sun Dance prohibited by American authorities.

It was just about that time that a number of Native nations began to hear of a Paiute prophet—in the Great Basin southwest, what is now Nevada—named Wovoka, who inspired the Ghost Dance movement. Thinking that Wovoka’s vision might have been similar to his own, Black Elk participated for

a time in the Lakota Ghost Dances. These came to an end with the massacre of Minneconjou Sioux at Wounded Knee Creek in South Dakota in late December of 1890. It was only much later, in 1930, that Black Elk met John G. Neihardt, a poet and a Christian visionary from Nebraska. All accounts agree that although neither man spoke the other's language, they were nonetheless strongly impressed with one another. Neihardt elicited from Black Elk the materials that would appear in 1932 as *Black Elk Speaks*, the best-known of all Indian autobiographies.

Black Elk Speaks was for many years read exclusively as an "apocalyptic" elegy for the traditional life of the Lakota people. Black Elk's story, after all, had concluded with the words, "I did not know then how much was ended...A people's dream died there" (270), referencing the 1890 massacre of Lakota People at Wounded Knee by the U.S. Army. But in 1972, examination of the transcripts—for this collaboration transcripts did exist—revealed that those were Neihardt's words, not Black Elk's! And, in 1985, when Raymond DeMallie (1985) published the full transcripts of the interviews between Black Elk and Neihardt, *The Sixth Grandfather*, it was further learned that whereas Neihardt had called the final chapter of their collaboration, "The End of the Dream," in the transcript it was called, instead, "Teaching Flaming Rainbow," the name Black Elk had given to Neihardt.

But although Black Elk had again and again lamented the decline of his People's traditional lifeways, mourning the fact that the "tree"—the metaphor for the life of the People—did indeed seem to have died, he also had at one point stated that "there may be a root that is still alive." In the transcripts, he had told Neihardt that "In sending up my voice I prayed that you may set the tree to bloom again so that my people will see many happy days" (DeMallie 1985, 295). Thus like Black Hawk before him, Black Elk sought to heal and restore his People by telling his story in an act of "melancholic mourning," one that might yet keep them alive in a manner consistent with his vivid memories of what once was.

It seems to me entirely possible that despite culture-specific distinctions, one might read "The Man on Oulavuolie" in the manner of Native American elegy. The great *yoik* concludes,

And that was the memory
 Our memories
 little memories
 And that was the memory
 Our memories
 little memories
 It was done
 it was done

all done
 forgotten
 forgotten
 They are old

The memories are “old” in that they are memories of a time long ago, but clearly they are also vividly and intensely alive; for the Man on Oulavuolie, they are *not* “done,” not all “forgotten.” Here they are, living still, remembered, so that perhaps the People’s old way of life may yet in some fashion be remembered, that all these many things, however “old” may not be released as “done” and “forgotten” but continue to work that the Sámi People might live.

NOTES - Dáajmijes vuekie: A Sami Aesthetic Paradigm

1. The North Sámi version of this proverb is “It don leat mus goahtemuorran orron.”
2. The text first appears in Arnberg, Matts, Håkan Unsgaard, and Israel Ruong 1969 (1997), record side 2, track 2, liner notes 158-162; quotations from the South Sámi text below appear in Gaski and Kappfjell 2004, 31-36; English translation appears in Gaski 2020, 79-86.

NOTES - Comment

1. See my “Native American Literary Criticism in Global Context” (Krupat 2015) for an account of the critical perspectives I broadly call nationalism, transnationalism, trans-indigenism, and cosmopolitanism.”
2. The *sovereignty* of Native Nations is based upon the fact that the U.S. government between 1778 and 1871 had made some 368 nation-to-nation treaties with the indigenous tribes, giving them a relationship to the federal government different from that of any other American minority.
3. Consider, in this regard, Karl Kroeber’s observation that Native American narratives “offer...unique insights into the sources of unfamiliar modes of human imagining,” (Kroeber 1998, 248 n. 7)—unfamiliar, of course, to the West.
4. See my “Postcolonialism, Ideology, and Native American Literature” (Krupat 1996a).
5. In “America’s Histories” (Krupat 2002), I argue that a story told about the past can be *true* even when it is not *factual*, and that the West’s insistence on

factuality as an absolute requirement for historicity, is a culture-specific preference, in no way a scientific necessity.

6. See Basso's (1979) *Portraits of the "Whiteman"* for accounts of some of the western Apaches' satirical mock imitations of the behavior and demeanor of the "whiteman."
7. I've developed this idea in "Trickster Tales Revisited" (Krupat 2009).
8. In Freud's early distinction between mourning and melancholia, he described the first of these as "normal" and the second as pathological. He later attempted to complicate the relation between the two; subsequent theorists have further relativized the original Freudian dichotomy. I discuss these matters in "*That the People Might Live*": *Loss and Renewal in Native American Elegy* (Krupat 2012).
9. There are several contemporary editions of Black Hawk's account of his life. I cite from the most recent, edited by J. Gerald Kennedy in 2008.
10. The Ghost Dance was a revivalistic or millenarian movement that spread from the Great Basin to the Southern Plains and Plains around 1890. Central to it was the performance of a dance based on a variety of Native "round dances" and the dreaming or conscious composition of songs for the occasion. An account of the elegiac dimension of some of these Ghost Dance songs appears in "*That the People Might Live*" (Krupat 2012).

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