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Article

Touring the magical North – Borealism and the indigenous Sámi in contemporary English-language children's fantasy literature

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Abstract

Discourses of exotic Lapland with its indigenous inhabitants, the Sámi, are widely circulated in the tourist industry and also surface in contemporary English-language children's fantasy fiction. In contrast to the 'self-orientalism' of discourses of tourism where places and people are represented as exotic to a tourist gaze, the portrayals of the North and its inhabitants gain different symbolic meanings in fictional texts produced by outsiders who rely on earlier texts – myths, fairy tales and anthropological accounts – rather than on their own lived experience of the North or indigeneity. This article applies the concept of Borealism to examine cross-cultural intertextuality and discourses of the Sámi/Lappishness in English-language children's fantasy by four contemporary authors. The Sámi and their folklore become recontextualised in fictional texts through a Borealist gaze that associates the indigenous characters with feminist and ecocritical discourses and frames indigenous ethnicity in stereotypical ways.

Keywords

Borealism, children's fantasy literature, ethnicity, feminist discourse studies, Lapland, postcolonial studies, Sámi

Borealism and the indigenous Sámi

In popular imagination, the Sámi, the indigenous people living in the Northern parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia, have for a long while been associated with two major discourses about indigenous groups around the globe. In the first discourse, indigenous people are viewed as groups that have a living connection to their own mythologies, belief systems and traditions, including phenomena such as shamanism. The exotic Lapland and the mythical North inhabited by magic people have featured in various types of texts for centuries. In the Nordic countries, the Sámi were for a long time associated with witchcraft and even seen as supernatural creatures in myths and folklore, as well as, for instance, in various historical and religious writings from the 17th and 18th centuries ([Mathisen, 2004](#): 21; [Partanen, 2006](#): 209; [Pentikäinen, 2006](#): 184). The second discourse associates the Sámi with nature and, presently, with ecological lifestyle. The nature discourse is not restricted to the Sámi but circulates globally and associates different local indigenous groups in various places with ecological, sustainable way of life that is significantly different from the modern, urban lifestyle; this can be seen as an extension of the earlier, colonialist discourse of noble savages (e.g. [Mathisen, 2004](#): 18–19; [Mathisen, 2010](#): 69–70; [Mills, 2005](#): 73; [Olsen, 2003](#): 7).

As several researchers have pointed out, these discourses maintain a certain image of the Sámi as the other who deviate from the modern, urban mainstream Scandinavian and Finnish culture (e.g.

[Kuokkanen, 2007a](#); [Mathisen, 2004](#); [Olsen, 2003](#); [Pietikäinen and Leppänen, 2007](#)). Kjell Olsen (2003: 7), discussing contemporary discourses of tourism, refers to the stereotypical image of the indigenous people as 'emblematic Sámi', and suggests that 'as a cultural construction indigenous people become noble savages ...[and] as a touristic product, the emblematic Sámi visualise this view of the indigenous as an asymmetrical counterconcept to the modern'. The two discourses merge in romanticised stereotypes in which the Sámi are viewed as a group living with an authentic, harmonious relationship with nature – a group from whom the modern people should learn in the brink of various ecocatastrophes ([Mathisen, 2004, 2010](#)). Yet, the two discourses also merge in negative stereotypes. In Finnish popular imagination, for instance – be it books, films or jokes – Lappish and Sámi¹ characters have featured regularly, and, until the last few decades, have been stereotypically depicted as superstitious reindeer herders who, in comparison with Finns, are strange, less developed, less civilised and weaker (see [Lehtola, 2000](#); [Pietikäinen and Leppänen, 2007](#)). In tourist brochures, the stereotypical images of the North do not only include wild, pure nature, the midnight sun and the Northern lights but also include reindeer, traditional dress and folklore associated with the Sámi who, thus, become to represent the traditional as opposed to modern, urban cultures of the nation states in which they live. These discourses can be and have been used for important political purposes by indigenous groups themselves: the discourse of the Sámi as ecological is, for instance, politically relevant when addressing the Sámi people's land-owning rights that still remain unsolved, whereas the distinctive mythological traditions, as well as the literature based on those, are important for the self-understanding of the Sámi (e.g. [Hirvonen, 2003](#); [Mathisen, 2004](#)). The romantic stereotypes of reindeer herders are also useful for those Sámi who earn their livelihood through heritage tourism, albeit that they have to engage in 'a permanent balancing act to make an economically viable tourism product for volatile markets but in a way that taps into local norms regarding the commodification of Sámi culture' ([Pietikäinen, 2013](#): 83). Sámi artists have also critically and ironically drawn on the hegemonic discourses in indigenous comedy ([Dlaske and Jäntti, 2016](#)). Nevertheless, the hegemonic, stereotypical depictions by outsiders enjoy a much wider circulation than texts by the Sámi themselves. It is rather telling, for instance, that in Finland, the first-ever primetime Finnish television comedy show by Sámi artists, featuring counter-parodies of earlier representations of indigenous ethnicity, was launched as recently as 2012 (see [Dlaske and Jäntti, 2016](#)). Hegemonic discourses representing the mainstream Finnish perspective on the Sámi have dominated the Finnish media, while the Sámi media need to tackle the language-political situation where producing content in the Sámi languages contributes to indigenous language revitalisation but, at the same time, limits the potential audience (see [Pietikäinen, 2003](#); [Pietikäinen, 2008](#); [Pietikäinen and Leppänen, 2007](#)).

Here, I will examine contemporary English-language children's fantasy novels in which the hegemonic discourses of the Sámi are framed by a *Borealist* gaze that freezes indigenous ethnicity in time as a museumised object. Moreover, these are novels where the Borealist, fictional representations of indigenous ethnicity are used as devices to rewrite Anglophone fantasy traditions from a feminist and/or ecocritical perspective. This article, thus, deals with what might be termed cultural colonisation of the North – fictional portrayals of the North and its indigenous inhabitants, the Sámi, from an outsider's perspective, that is, representations of Lappish or Sámi witches and shamans in contemporary English-language children's fantasy literature. As research on (children's) fantasy literature suggests, fantasy is a mode that not only offers ways to imagine things differently but is also grounded on earlier fantastic genres and narratives (e.g. myths and fairy tales), as well as on authors' and readers' shared knowledge of the real world (e.g. [Attebery, 1992, 2014](#); [Hunt and Lenz, 2001](#); [Manlove, 2003](#); Stephens 1992; [Warner, 2005](#)). The challenge with fantasy's reliance on earlier traditions is that earlier discourses and stereotypes of cultural identities may also be recirculated unless authors pay specific attention to those (e.g. [Attebery, 1992](#): 87; [Stephens and McCallum, 1998](#): 201). Similarly, identity discourses circulating in the real, contemporary world surrounding fantastic texts for children also find their way into the fictional fantasy worlds – this is the case with discourses of ethnicity, as well as, for instance, with discourses of age, gender, nationality and social class (e.g. [Bradford, 2007](#); [Cosslett, 2002](#); [Lehtonen, 2013, 2014](#); [Oziewicz, 2010](#); [Waller, 2009](#)). It is, thus, worth asking what kinds of fantastic images of the North and Northerners occur in children's fantasy novels, who produces them and what implications this may have for the real-world people and for the ways in which their identities and culture are perceived by others. From a critical discourse studies perspective, to make sense of the Borealism in the novels it is also necessary to compare and contrast the representations in the novels with discourses circulating about the Sámi in other media, that is, to consider meanings of literature in a larger discursive framework. If the stereotypical images of tourism and media already have the effect, for instance, that contemporary Sámi are not deemed 'authentic' or even 'Sámi' at all if their identity performances do not correspond to the stereotypes ([Mathisen, 2004](#):

26–27; [Olsen, 2003](#): 3–4; [Valkonen, 2010](#): 12), children's fantasy circulating the same discourses to future generations may add to the effect.²[\[AQ1\]](#)

Borealism as a concept has been used by a handful of scholars during the last decade to, in the spirit of Edward Said's (2003 [1978]) *Orientalism*, describe exoticising discourses of the North. Borealism has been identified in a range of texts and practices from ancient Roman accounts of the Germanic North ([Krebs, 2011](#)) and 17th- and 18th-century British and German writers' images of Iceland and Greenland ([Ísleifsson, 2015](#)) to representations of Northern shamanism in contemporary children's fantasy literature ([Bramwell, 2009](#)) and various media representations and lived practices in contemporary Iceland ([Schram, 2011](#)). Broadly understood, Borealism covers both historical and contemporary discourses about an exotic, strange, enchanting or frightening North and its inhabitants, often combining both admiration and fear for the Northern other. In this exoticising sense, the notion of Borealism may seem somewhat limited in relation to Said's (2003 [1978]: 3–4) discussion of *Orientalism* that is not merely an exoticising discourse but also a system of knowledge production where outsiders to and colonisers of the Orient define what it is, which, again, has not only discursive but material consequences for people actually living in or associated with the East. Nevertheless, as suggested above, even the 'harmless' exoticising discourses of tourism or fantasy may have very actual consequences for indigenous people performing or defining their identities in the real world. The concept of Borealism is useful, in the sense that it allows for paying attention to the specificity of discourses concerning the North(s); sometimes in postcolonial discussions the North is too easily collapsed with the West. In the case of Sámi, this collapse may mean, for instance, that in political discussions the potential problems that the Nordic welfare state may pose to indigenous groups are ignored; since the Sámi are doing well in terms of health, education and jobs – which is not necessarily the case with other indigenous groups in the West – from the mainstream political perspective they are viewed as similar to everyone else, and their ethnic identity is regarded as irrelevant (see [Kuokkanen, 2007a](#)). In contrast to [Schram \(2011\)](#) who also applies Borealism to people's ironic self-presentations and identity performances (cf. performances of 'self-orientalism' for the touristic gaze in [Olsen, 2003](#)), I will here focus on a Borealist gaze towards the North and its inhabitants by outsiders.[\[AQ2\]](#)

As is evident from the above examples, the centre from which a Borealist gaze is directed at strange, Northern others can shift, as can the sharpness and filter of the Borealist lens.[\[AQ3\]](#) Although [Mathisen \(2004\)](#) does not apply the concept of Borealism, his discussion of the varying accounts of the Sámi in a range of different historical and contemporary texts also illustrates this. As [Mathisen \(2004](#): 21–23) writes, the Sámi have for a long time been associated with nature but, filtered through each writer's interpretive frame, this association can have been rather different even during the same period in time. In the 18th century, for instance, Christian missionaries deemed the Sámi's primitive nature magic as demonic, while the natural scientist Carl Linné was admiring their abilities to survive in the nature, thus, being one of the first to circulate the 'noble savage' trope in the Sámi context. In the contemporary world, the notion of 'natural' Sámi is put into ethno-political uses by certain Sámi groups themselves; yet this filter blurs out those urban Sámi who do not (want to) fit the traditional image and is also contested by local environmentalists concerned about the effects of overgrazing and extensive use of motorised transportation in reindeer herding for the arctic environment ([Mathisen, 2004](#): 25–26). In my own discussion, the sharpness of the Borealist lens does not refer to the accuracy with which the fictional representations correspond with reality but rather to the different intertextual chains through which allusions to the Sámi may have entered the examined novels. Some of the source texts are supposedly more grounded in reality (anthropological accounts) than others (myths and fairy tales). Like Said (2003 [1978]: 5), who is not dealing with 'the correspondence, or lack of thereof, with a "real" Orient', my attempt is not to draft a picture of the 'real' North to serve as a comparison point – apart from suggesting that in actuality, the Sámi are a diverse group of people whose lives and histories are and have been affected by the national legislation in four different countries in different ways. In Finland, for instance, reindeer herding continues to be an important part of the Sámi culture, although its significance as livelihood has been decreasing due to unprofitability and the mobility of the Sámi towards urban areas: 60 percent of the Sámi in Finland live outside the Sámiland, a large group of them in the Helsinki metropolitan area ([Sámediggi, 2014](#)). At the same time, the Sámi languages are becoming valuable cultural and economic resources due to language revitalisation politics – a drastic change from the post-World War II (WWII) period when the use of Sámi languages was forbidden in schools (see, for example, [Lehtola, 1997](#)) – and while the traditional *joik* remains important, younger Sámi artists, in particular, are also using their own languages in new contexts, such as rap music and music video parodies of Finnish songs (see [Dlaske, 2016](#); [Karjalainen, 2015](#); [Valkonen, 2014](#)).

In comparison with the complex reality, the Borealist gaze in the four novels is producing a much simpler and consistent representation of the Sámi and the North – as with Orientalism, the knowledge production system of Borealism has an ‘internal consistency’ ([Said, 2003 \[1978\]: 5](#)) that may or may not have anything to do with the real world. In terms of discursive practices and intertextual chains, the novels examined here are examples of a spatio-temporal and discursive shift: earlier Borealist accounts and fictions – mythological texts, fairy tales and anthropological accounts – are retold from a contemporary Borealist perspective. Among others, [Sara Mills \(2005: 3\)](#) has drawn attention to the functions and meanings of spatiality in constructing social relations – including gender and ethnicity – in colonial contexts. Clearly, spatiality is at the heart of Borealism, reflected, among other things, in locating the indigenous people in peripheral wilderness as opposed to modern urban centres. Here, I also want to draw attention to the temporality of Borealism. As regards the two hegemonic discourses of the Sámi, the Borealist gaze has a museumising effect: the indigenous people have a distinctive tradition and culture developed in the past that remains ‘authentically’ unchanged in the present. As has been pointed out by several critics, the demands of authenticity in relation to cultural preservation are relevant for political purposes, both for indigenous groups themselves and for societies in which they live – yet authenticity is also problematic and disputed ([Mathisen, 2004: 28](#); [Olsen, 2003: 15](#); [Pietikäinen, 2013: 77–78](#)). The fantasy novels drawing on earlier texts featuring outsiders’ representations of the Sámi certainly situate their own indigenous characters in the past – not necessarily in the time frame of the novels themselves but in their depictions of the inhabitants of the North either living in pre-modern conditions or following traditional lifestyles.

Fantastic narratives of the North

I will focus on four contemporary English-language authors whose works feature Lappish or Sámi characters. These include the British authors Rosalind Kerven (*The Reindeer and the Drum* 1980), Susan Price (*Ghost World* trilogy 1987–1994), Philip Pullman (*His Dark Materials* trilogy 1995–2000) and the Canadian author Eileen Kernaghan (*The Snow Queen* 2000). The selection here illustrates how similar discourses circulate over time in various fantastic genres by English-language authors; while fantasy might allow for imagining things differently, the same hegemonic discourses of the Sámi recur in various places at different moments in time. In terms of narrative structure and (sub) genre, the novels differ from each other. Price’s and Pullman’s trilogies are secondary-world fantasies about the battle between good and evil, although Price’s three novels only share the same storyworld, not the plotline or characters. Both trilogies are set in an alternative, fantasy timeline with features from unspecified, historical past. Kernaghan’s novel is a feminist fairy-tale retelling of Hans Christian [Andersen’s \(2003 \[1845\]\)](#) ‘The Snow Queen’ – set, like the original tale, in the 19th-century Scandinavia. Kerven’s book is a primary world fantasy, set in Norway in the 1970s. Despite these differences, the representations of indigenous ethnicity involve the two hegemonic discourses of the Sámi in each novel, albeit through slightly different Borealist lenses. [AQ4]

The selection of novels also illustrates the various ‘routes’ that earlier discourses of ethnicity can enter contemporary children’s fantasy: fairy tales, mythologies and anthropological texts. In terms of source materials, the studied novels do not merely rely on Nordic mythology or discourses related to the Sámi: they are montages that combine and reframe formulas, motifs, settings, names and characters from various sources. Pullman combines elements from Nordic mythology to Christian mythology and literary references to John Milton and William Blake. Kernaghan has rewritten Andersen’s tale by adding elements from anthropological descriptions of Northern shamanism and the Finnish national epic *Kalevala*. Price’s mix includes Norse myths, Alexander Pushkin’s fairy tales and anthropological accounts of shamanism, while Kerven’s novel mainly echoes anthropological sources. I will argue that although the strategy of freely combining and recontextualising earlier stories or parts of them may be a successful way to produce feminist and/or ecocritical fantasies, in terms of ethnicity the cross-cultural intertextuality is a problematic issue.

In his study of pagan themes in contemporary English-language children’s literature, Peter [Bramwell \(2009: 10; 84ff\)](#) argues that the exotic North is a recurring theme, often combined with representations of Northern witchcraft or shamanism. This is reflected in all the studied novels. For the assumed audience, the European North is a distant fairy-tale country where marvellous and frightening events take place and where one can encounter magic people and creatures. In Kerven’s, Pullman’s and Kernaghan’s novels protagonists travel to the North from a setting that functions as an urban starting

point for the reader – Kerven’s Anna leaves Oslo to visit her ‘Lapp’ relations in the North, Pullman’s Lyra begins her quest from Oxford, England and in Kernaghan’s story – as in Andersen’s original tale – Gerda’s journey to the North sets from a small Danish town. Price’s novels are exceptional in this sense, since the protagonists are already in the (high-fantasy) North. Yet also her novels frame the stories for a reader located somewhere else: the narratives open by opening with fairy-tale formulas referring to a far-away setting.³ If one wants to read the novels as purely symbolical representations of construction of identity and growing up – which are typical themes in children’s fiction – the North, or Lapland can be interpreted as a foreign space to which the protagonists travel to realise their own selves. Yet, exotic as it is, the North in the books by Kerven, Price, Pullman and Kernaghan is not purely symbolic but resembles very much the Northern Europe of the real world. The novels are alternative versions of the real world and, thus, descriptions of the climate, as well as names of countries, places and groups of people are not fantastic innovations but have real-world equivalents.

In these tours to the North, earlier fictional, mythological and anthropological texts serve as the maps that involve not only geographical information but also images of the Northern inhabitants. Pointers towards the real world occur by categorising characters with recognisable labels. In Kerven’s narrative, the protagonist Anna goes to Alta to visit her ‘Lapp’ relatives who keep reindeers; while there are no witches in the book, there is a grandmother who remembers the magic past. In Price’s novels, the witch-shamans in the Northern Czardom wear ‘Lappish’ outfits, in Pullman’s novels the witches are referred to as ‘Lapland witches’, while in Kernaghan’s text the word ‘Saami’ is used in reference to an ethnic group with shamanistic practices living in Northern Sweden. These narratives are not at all naïve, in the sense that they would be ‘only’ exciting adventure tales – on the contrary, they address very real societal concerns, including the challenge of modernisation to indigenous lifestyles (Kerven), the colonialism of religion and totalitarian governments (Price and Pullman) and gendered hierarchies in society (Price, Pullman and Kernaghan). The figures of Northern witches and shamans, in specific, offer possibilities for feminist and/or ecocritical rewriting of earlier fairy tales and mythological stories.^[AQ5] In the following, I will first discuss the gendered aspects of the ‘Lapp’, ‘Lappish’, ‘Lapland’ or ‘Saami’ characters and then move on to address the ecocriticism in the novels. I will discuss Kerven’s novel only in the latter section, as the magic in its narrative is literally sold for a chance to keep up a traditional reindeer-herding lifestyle, and the novel as a whole is rather an ecocritical than feminist take on the Northern tour.

Northern women of power

In Pullman, Price and Kernaghan – with the exception of Price’s *Ghost Song*⁴ – the Northern witches or shamans are associated with ‘Lappishness’ or ‘Saami’ and, moreover, matriarchal traditions. The matriarchal Northern groups are not unexpected: the revised witch or shaman characters in contemporary fantasy for children and adults typically reflect a radical-feminist discourse of witches where the negative stereotypes of old wicked crones and evil enchantresses are replaced by wise, sympathetic sages, healers or shamans, often living in matriarchal communities (see [Purkiss, 1996](#): 21–22; [Stephens, 2003](#)). These revisions have often been coloured by nostalgia – as are the radical-feminist discourses that fantasy fictions frequently draw on. Diane [Purkiss \(1996](#): 8) suggests that the radical-feminist discourses invoke a ‘myth of an originary matriarchy, through the themes of mother-daughter learning and of matriarchal religions as sources of witchcraft’. Although Justyna [Sempruch \(2004](#): 123) has suggested that the radical-feminist myth of the witch ‘was logically unavoidable at one stage in the feminist past’ but has later lost its usefulness, in contemporary children’s fiction the wise witches continue to thrive. ^[AQ6]

The appeal of shamanism may also lie in the gender-bending practices of some shamanist traditions ([Eliade, 1972](#); [Raninen, 2008](#); [Tedlock, 2005](#)) that offer queer possibilities to rewrite conventional gendered stock characters. As cross-dressing, gender-bending characters, the shamans challenge the fixed, conventional notions of femininity and masculinity and the notions of normative behaviour and ways of life. Also, Sámi shamanism has involved cross-dressing, albeit that the cross-dressers have been male; unlike in Siberian traditions, in Sámi traditions shamans have, in general, been mostly male ([Pentikäinen, 2006](#): 182–183; [Raninen, 2008](#): 26). In literary discourses, this historical fact may have been obscured by Nordic mythological texts where hostile shamanist magic is associated with females ([Raninen 2008](#); Raudvere 1996). Also, in the Finnish national epic *Kalevala* the hostile magic is feminised, located in the North and associated with Sámi, as a result of the writer Elias Lönnrot’s

patriarchal-nationalist project ([Kailo, 2001](#)). Whereas in the mythological texts, the strong magic females have negative associations, the images of Northern women of power have been positively appealing in (real-world) sociocultural contexts: the discourses of strong Northern women, in general, are circulated in international gender equality discussions, and the myth of strong Sámi women, in particular, persists in Sámi society ([Kuokkanen, 2007b](#)). In this discursive context, the literary Northern matriarchal societies begin to seem like a logical, feminist-Borealist blend of associations with women, gendered power relations and the North. In the novels, the references to ethnicity also occur in a free, Borealist mix of names that come from the North; the names index foreignness in relation to the non-Northern protagonists and implied readers and, together with mixed mythologies, blend into a collage image of the fantastic North. [AQ7][AQ8][AQ9]

In Pullman's trilogy, the Lapland witches who 'live in forests and on the tundra' ([Pullman, 1998 \[1995\]](#): 165) are sympathetic minor characters who help the British protagonists during their quest. Pullman's Lapland witches live in the 'Lake Enara' area (cf. lake *Anár* in Northern Sámi), although there are also witches in Latvia and in Taymyr, Siberia. The witches have names associated with the North: Serafina Pekkala (Finnish), Kaisa (Finnish/Swedish), Lena Feldt (Swedish) and Ruta Skadi (cf. the goddess *Skaði* in Norse mythology). All the witches share a belief system where the goddess who appears to the witches before their death is called Yambe-Akka (cf. *Jábmíidáhkká*, the goddess of the Underworld in Sámi mythology). Although parts of the story are focalised through the witch characters, readers do not learn very much about witches, and they remain, in terms of gender, as fairly stereotypically represented characters. In terms of ethnicity, there is, in fact, a very small amount of Lappishness – or aspects of Sámi culture – in Pullman's witches. This may be deliberate – the stereotypes might also be interpreted as an ironic strategy to question the English protagonists' colonialist, limited perspective, particularly because Pullman is also drawing on the tropes of (Northern) exploration typical of 19th-century English-language boys' adventure stories (see, for example, [Butts, 1996](#)). Nevertheless, the stereotypes are there; as with all double-voiced discourse, treating stereotypes ironically or subverting them through counter-discourse necessarily also invokes the same stereotypes (see, for example, [Bacchilega, 1997](#); [Lehtonen, 2013](#); [Weaver, 2010](#)). In contrast, in Price's and Kernaghan's novels the Northern shamans are among the main characters; they also have more obvious links to the Sámi. Price's texts locate the fictional events in Northern Russia and mix names, for instance, from Nordic mythology (Loki, Hel), Ojibwe tale (Shingebiss), real-world history (Chingis) and characters from Russian fairy tales (Baba Yaga). The Lappishness of the shamans in Price's novels – indicated not only by the use of the term 'Lappish' but also through reindeer-hide 'Lappish' clothing – is presumably a reflection of the Norse mythology, although the term Lappish seems to be appropriated as a sort of general reference to any group of Northern hunter-gatherers rather than to a specific ethnic group of people. Significantly, the 'Lappish' people are represented as culturally and ethnically different from the Czarism's imperialist rulers. In Kernaghan's novel, the indexes are more precise: the main shaman characters Ritva's mother and grandmother are 'Saami', and they also speak 'Saami' (Ritva herself also speaks Finnish and Swedish); other clear references to the Sámi are the reindeer that Ritva owns, the 'Saami joiks' that she sings, the shaman tradition involving a drum and singing and, at one point, a mention of Christian missionaries destroying the shaman drums ([Kernaghan, 2000](#): 77). However, the novel mixes associations with Sámi traditions (e.g. *Baei*'ve the sun god; nature spirits) with names and cited extracts from *Kalevala*. This mixture might be explained by the fact that in the original tale by Andersen, it seems that all the Northerners, whether Sámi or Finnish, have magic abilities. As regards Andersen's possible sources, in Scandinavian sagas the people living in Finnmark, *finner*, are associated with witchcraft, yet the term *finn* may refer to either Finnish people, Sámi people or simply witches ([Pentikäinen, 2006](#): 185). As within the earlier narratives, in Kernaghan's novel these groups are not clearly distinguished from each other.

The Northern witches in Pullman's trilogy are not explicitly associated with shamanism but their communities share several features with those of shamans in Price's and Kernaghan's novels. The skills of the witches and shamans are similar in each case, including herbalism, spells that are sung and spirit travelling. Each trilogy depicts magic/shamanism as matrilineal and witches/shamans living in matriarchal, democratic witch communities consisting of good, wise women. In the two trilogies, the magic women also have their own economical and political arrangements; in Pullman's novels, it is explained that the witch clans have their own democratic government (a kind of witch parliament), and they do not use money or gather property but mutually help each other ([Pullman, 1998 \[1995\]](#): 308–309) – also in Price's books, the witch-shamans gather together to make important decisions and rely on a sort of gift economy. In Kernaghan's novel, the characters do not live in matriarchal communities

but shamanism is matrilineal. In each case, the representation of the witches/shamans follows radical-feminist conventions: they all are sympathetic outsiders whose way of life offers an alternative to the patriarchal Magisterium/the totalitarian Russian czardom/lazy, smelly male robber community in the storyworld. However, in Pullman's novels, it seems that the witches have moved into Lapland straight from the English-language traditions where witch often occurs in the form of a beautiful female enchantress. In a sense, the novels rewrite the trope of the evil, beautiful sorceress by portraying the Lapland witches as morally good. Yet, in other ways, they merely circulate stereotypes: witches are attractive, heterosexual women who stay young for several hundred years. For instance, the first time Lyra meets Serafina Pekkala, she is amazed and can understand why a mortal man could love her, a woman who is 'young ... and fair, with bright green eyes; and clad like all the witches in strips of black silk, but wearing no furs, no hood or mittens' (Pullman, 1998 [1995]: 302). It is later explained to readers that this is because she can sense things better with less clothes on – this further emphasises the connection with witches in English-language traditions: wiccans are traditionally 'skyclad' or nude in their rituals (see, for example, Harrington 2006: 108). Readers only learn to know a few witches by name in the novels, and in most cases, they also learn whose lover the witch has or has not been. Even though the young, sexually attractive witches dressed in strips of silk in Pullman have few similarities with the portrayals of the Sámi in traditional costumes in tourist brochures, they are put into a similar position: they become exotic spectacles for the touristic gaze of the English protagonists.

Price's *Ghost World* novels and Kernaghan's novel are different in their representation of gender – their cross-dressing shamans challenge conventional fairy-tale gender representations and puzzle other characters who, for instance, may wonder about their outfits and, sometimes, also faces that could be those 'of a pretty boy or a handsome girl' (Price, 1995 [1994]: 3). In their depictions of mystic initiations, tutor-acolyte relationships and spirit travelling, the novels clearly echo, for instance, Eliade's (1972) anthropological accounts of Northern shamanism. However, in Price's and Kernaghan's novels, shamanism is mainly described as a feminine sphere, female co-operation and interdependency are emphasised and the phrase 'woman of power' is used for the female shamans (Price, 1989 [1987]: 5; Kernaghan, 2000: 155). In each Price's novel, the 'Lappish' shaman grandmothers, reworkings of Baba Yagas, have adopted the girl protagonists to train them. In relation to the fairy-tale tradition, the protagonists Chingis and Shingebiss might also be regarded as rewritings of Baba Yaga because they are witch-shamans who grow and develop; the stock characters are turned into representations of more complex persons with histories. Similar rewriting of the witch takes place in Kernaghan's novel that involves two girl protagonists, the Danish Gerda and the robber girl Ritva, living in the North, as well as two wise, magic Lappish and Finnish women who help Gerda and Ritva on their way further north to confront the Snow Queen. A central rewritten element is the robber girl Ritva: the minor character from Andersen's tale has been turned into the second protagonist and a 'Saami' shaman.

Although the novels describe female shaman communities as sources of strength, in each novel, the protagonists rebel against the patriarchal traditions. As in the original tale by Andersen, at the end of Kernaghan's novel, the robber girl decides to leave her home and go travelling in the wide world. Her decision is unsurprising because her mother, as well as her father, and his robber mates are represented as filthy, violent and uncaring: Ritva is 'sick of stepping in spilled beer and vomit ... sick of always having to sleep with a knife under my head' and regards her shaman mother as a 'foul-tempered, drooling old hag' (Kernaghan, 2000: 22–23). Ritva's individualist escape from her community seems a liberal-feminist solution, yet, in terms of ethnicity, the fact that Ritva refuses to follow her mother's path to become a healer shaman for her community and, thus, abandons her family and cultural traditions is not necessarily a celebratory ending. Individualism rather than one's membership in a community is valued – this reflects the liberal humanist metaethics that inform a lot of Western children's literature that deals with growing up into an independent individual (e.g. Stephens and McCallum, 1998: 19; Waller, 2009: 196). The focus on the individual echoes the liberalist equality discourse also in contemporary political discussions of the Sámi. Rauna Kuokkanen (2007a: 148) has drawn attention to how the discourse of the welfare state in Finland has tended to treat the Sámi as individuals who have the same rights as everyone else – at the same time, the discourse maintains the Sámi and their traditions as a people, or the collective identity of the Sámi invisible and irrelevant. In contrast, Price's novels challenge the liberalist, individualist discourse and question notions of individual agency and power. Although each shaman protagonist disobeys her grandmother and challenges her traditions, in their closures the novels involve criticism of individual heroism: *The Ghost Drum* shows how remarkable results can be achieved through female co-operation – in the end, the spirits of four women literally occupy the same body to fight the oppressive characters – while

Ghost Dance demonstrates how a hero who acts alone fails in her task to save the environment. The call for collective action sits in well in the anti-colonialist, anti-capitalist and environmentalist discourses operating in Price's novels. All in all, whether the discussed novels reflect anti-capitalist or liberalist discourses, in each of them, the strong Northern women are viewed through a Borealist lens that connects magic/mythology and the strength achieved through those with the 'Lapps' or 'Saami'.

'Natural' ecologists

The radical-feminist discourse of the witch also involves the stereotype of the green woman – a woman who may or may not have supernatural abilities but who leads a simple life close to the nature (cf. Pratt 1982, on 'green-world' women's fiction). These kind of 'green' witches are alive and well in contemporary children's literature ([Stephens, 2003](#): 198). The connections between indigenous people and nature, and moreover, between indigenous people and environmentalism are not foreign to children's literature either: as [Bradford \(2007](#): 75) notes in her study of postcolonial texts for children, 'notions of the Indigenous person as "natural" ecologist abound in children's texts'. In all the studied novels, the associations between women and nature, and indigenous groups and nature conveniently merge. [\[AQ10\]](#)

In Pullman's trilogy, the witch clans are told to have a special relationship to and knowledge about nature: 'there business is with the wild' ([Pullman 1998 \[1995\]](#): 165) and the witches' literacy is associated with reading signs in nature: they can 'track any animal, catch any fish, find the rarest berries', and 'read the sign's in the pine marten's entrails, or decipher the wisdom in the scales of a perch, or interpret the warnings in the crocus-pollen' ([Pullman 2007 \[1997\]](#): 41). Also, Ritva in *The Snow Queen* carries a hunting knife everywhere she goes and is a seasoned trekker who knows what to pack: 'dried meatstrips, coffee, fur mittens, fur-trimmed caps, rain-capes to wear over their tunics when the weather turned wet and cold. ... With plenty of small game, and fish in the streams, they would not go hungry' ([Kernaghan, 2000](#): 87). In a similar vein, the shamans in Price's novel learn to be 'herb-doctors' that know 'the different plants, their shapes, their scents, the soils they grew in, and their uses' ([Price 1989 \[1987\]](#): 32–33). All these witch-shamans know their way around the wilderness. Some of them also try to save it. In *Ghost Dance*, Shingebiss's main quest is to save Northlands from Czar's men who

hunt and they fish and they cut down trees ... until there is nothing left beneath the stars here but snow and tree-stumps ... there are no northern people left and the only animals are rats and mice and fleas ([Price 1995 \[1994\]](#): 17).

In Pullman's trilogy, the witches also side with those who fight against the people attempting to take control of the world(s). The nature connection, however, also involves representing the democratic, matriarchal witch societies as more primitive than the urban cultures in the novels. In his article on representations of Eastern Europe in contemporary British fantasy series, Mark [Oziewicz \(2010\)](#) argues that in these texts, the people living in Eastern and Northern parts of Europe – including Pullman's witches – are depicted as primitive and subordinate to the British. In Pullman's novels, there is a rather familiar hierarchy between the civilised, urban Western Europeans and the more primitive people living in tundras and forests. The witches are others – or noble savages – who can be appreciated but who remain significantly different from the British main characters in the novels. Similarly, in Kernaghan's novel the Danish, bourgeois focaliser Gerda sees the living conditions of the Northerners as primitive and in comparison to Gerda's urban skillset, Ritva seems an uncivilised, illiterate savage that has the necessary skills to survive in the wilderness but no knowledge of the modern world. The juxtaposition between urban characters and witches in the wilderness also functions in Price's novels, even though the urbanisation and modernisation are connected with destruction of the nature and slavery of people.

In contrast, while Kerven's *The Reindeer and the Drum* builds up a similar contrast between modernity and traditional close-to-nature lifestyle, at its closure, it offers a combination of these – a combination that yet remains a Borealist vision that focuses on the emblematic aspect of the Sámi culture: the reindeer. Kerven's novel differs from the others in its depiction of the 'Lapp' characters, as well as their relation to magic. This is partly due to the fact that Kerven's book is not a secondary-world

fantasy, nor a fairy-tale retelling set in the past, but situated in Norway in the 1970s: thematically the story is about the effects of modernisation on the traditional life of reindeer herders. In comparison with the other novels, Kerven's narrative includes a more detailed account of 'Lappish' life. Unlike the other novels, it does not mix Sámi mythologies with other Northern traditions; the mythologies, here, consist of old Grandma's tales of nature spirits, as well as the Holy Men and their Magic Drums. Taking their cue from Grandma's tales, the three child protagonists, the urban Anna and her Northern cousins search for a family heirloom drum in the hope that its magic might save the family's reindeer herding trade. The book might be characterised as a magic-realist novel since it is never revealed whether the curious events leading to the finding of a lost family drum are interesting coincidences rather than evidences of nature magic in action. In any case, the events are associated with Sámi mythology that is literally sold to outsiders to be able to maintain a traditional reindeer-herding occupation in a modern world: at the end of the novel, the Lapp family decides to sell its family drum to a museum to get money for 'a snow-scooter', 'a car', 'a walkie-talkie radio' and 'another two hundred head of reindeer', among other things (Kerven, 1980: 124). This update will take the family to the level of modernisation where other more 'efficient' herders from Kautokeino have already been (Kerven, 1980: 25). In some ways, the novel, thus, does not suggest that all Sámi or 'Lapps' are the same, although the ending does seem to suggest that the time of modernisation has now reached even the last old-fashioned reindeer-herding family. Yet, the depiction of Anna's relatives in Lapland draws heavily on the hegemonic discourses of the Sámi. The reindeer acquire here a specifically important role, even though readers learn early on in the novel that only 'most Lapps' keep reindeer (Kerven, 1980: 9). Anna's relatives keep reindeer, travel with reindeer, eat stew of reindeer meat and sleep in reindeer-fur sleeping bags. The reindeer connections here characterise the Borealist lens: as suggested, in the end, the reindeer are more important than the old family heirloom associated with old beliefs. The 'naturalness' of the traditional trade is depicted through the urban Anna who finds her Lapp identity in the North.

At the beginning of the novel, the contrast between the urban Anna and her Northern pre-modern relatives is represented through stark comparisons. Anna is 'taken aback' when she first sees her cousin Aslak who 'looked more like a medieval court-jester than a modern boy' in his Lappish-embroidered outfit (Kerven, 1980: 15). Aslak wears the Lapp costume every day, as does every other member of his extended family, apart from his mother. The family lives in an old-fashioned house that lacks electric gadgets and smells of 'an odd combination of sweet, summer-dried hay and animal skin' (Kerven, 1980: 16) – this is their winter house; their summer habitation is a camp in the wilderness, as they follow the reindeer according to the changing seasons. [AQ11]. Anna quickly gets used to the new – or, rather, old – way of life, and learns skills related to the reindeer and the nature. At her first meeting with her Grandma, the keeper of the old tales, she establishes a special connection with her, and Grandma announces her 'a true Lapp', unlike her father who 'doesn't come back' to the traditional reindeer-herding life that Grandma views as 'the only way' (Kerven, 1980: 34). The narrative describes in great detail the traditional reindeer-herding and outdoors life that Anna learns in the summer camp and emphasises the 'natural' connection between this kind of lifestyle and the oldest and youngest generations, Grandma and the children who are also the ones who believe the old tales. Unlike their parents, who would be ready to sell the reindeer, stop being poor and get new jobs in Alta, the children insist on keeping up the traditional trade in a key scene where all three children, Aslak, Berit and Anna express their concerns: they 'don't mind being poor, so long as we can live with the reindeer – and spend the summer out in the wild!', and they 'want to carry on being proper Lapps! [...] part of everything that's important in the reindeer life – now and always!' unlike Anna's urbanised father who 'left it and he soon forgot it all' (Kerven, 1980: 81). Fortunately for the children, the finding of the drum enables the family to continue with their old ways with the help of modern gadgets. In the end, Anna's 'proper' Lapp identity is confirmed when the family decides to register a new ear marking for Anna's very own reindeer and invite her back for the next summer. In the closing scene of the novel, viewed through a heavily romanticised Borealist lens, everyone goes out 'on the hills once more to look at the reindeer. *Our* reindeer, thought Anna, lingering a moment behind the others to watch their quietly grazing forms disappear, as the sun sank gently down behind the tundra' (Kerven, 1980: 125, italics original). This emblematic closure seals the Lapp family in their reindeer life for eternity; even if slightly modernised, they maintain their strong connection with nature and an understanding and respect for the old tales, even if they mainly believe in the reindeer.

Conclusion: a freezing Borealist gaze and the indigenous spectacle

It is perhaps unsurprising that the Borealist gaze in children's fantasy and tourism is so similar – a great deal of fantasy is about travelling to foreign places. Both fantasy fiction and tourism play with myths and stereotypes and present a romanticised image of the North and its inhabitants. Both also offer an exciting 'experience' for the foreign visitors or readers – the fantasy novels in this sense bear similarity to theme parks, such as the Sápmi Park discussed by [Mathisen \(2010: 54\)](#), where the 'staged' Sámi spirituality is offered for tourists as entertainment. The novels that I have discussed reflect the earlier hegemonic discourses of Sámi people and circulate the old stereotypes even while rewriting the earlier, negative representations of Northern and Western witches. Although these are only a small corpus of novels, they demonstrate that the Borealism and the hegemonic discourses persist through decades and different genres. While the Northern characters, here, are portrayed in positive terms, they remain exotic, strange and, for the most part, primitive – that is, as cultural and ethnic others from the implied readers' perspective. Readers of these texts are, in a way, taking a touristic trip to the fantastic North to observe its exotic inhabitants. These are novels that are political in the feminist and/or ecocritical sense, yet they do not deal with ethnic stereotypes present in earlier myths and contemporary touristic discourses in an equally critical way. Their Borealism museumises indigenous ethnicity; inspired by past stories and representations and circulating the two hegemonic discourses of the Sámi, they leave the diversity of the contemporary indigenous people invisible. Even the feminist elements – liberated individual indigenous heroes, decisive girl protagonists and strong female communities – echo contemporary, widely circulated discourses about Northern equality and strong Sámi women. As [Kuokkanen \(2007a, 2007b\)](#) argues, these discourses can be not only helpful but also problematic, in that they hide, on one hand, the value in Sámi collectivity and, on the other hand, the differences and inequalities in Sámi and Nordic societies.

Moreover, these novels belong to a larger pattern, if one considers [Bradford's \(2007: 10\)](#) observation that 'In the field of children's literature ... Indigenous children rarely encounter texts produced within their own cultures, so that representations of Indigeneity are filtered through the perspectives of white culture'. According to Bradford's study of a wide range of English-language literature, the texts by non-indigenous writers are more likely to circulate the hegemonic cultural assumptions and stereotypes about indigenous people. This seems to be the case here as well. There is a need to pay more attention to the hierarchies of international publishing industry and language politics: whereas English-language children's literature is often translated into other languages, translations from other languages to English are rare ([Lathey, 2006: 2](#)). Thus, even though there exists children's literature and fantasy about Sámi by Sámi writers (see, for example, [Hirvonen, 2003](#)), it is unlikely that this reaches wider audiences – it is, in fact, difficult to get published in Sámi at all ([Paltto and Kuokkanen, 2010: 55](#)). The Anglophone bestsellers and their translations – and whatever discourses of indigenous ethnicities they circulate – have better chances to enter global markets. While in terms of poetics of children's fantasy fiction what matters may be the artistic vision of authors who borrow stories by others to weave their own, new literary creations, it is problematic that their representations also point towards real-world groups of people. Historical or geographical authenticity is not the aim of fantasy novels. Yet, despite their fictional elements, fantasy novels also rely on real-world discourses of power and ethnicity – in their part, children's fantasy novels can either reproduce or deconstruct ethnic stereotypes, and, moreover, potentially circulate the stereotypes across time and space to audiences who might not otherwise encounter them at all. If one reads fantasy only as entertainment, as a fictional theme park ride or as a mere aesthetic play with earlier texts, these issues may be irrelevant. If one views fantasy as a potential arena of societal critique that functions as a part of a larger discursive framework, these considerations are crucial.

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Notes

1. I will use the terms Lappish and Sámi varyingly based on which terms are used in the cited source texts. The terms ‘Lappish’ and ‘Lapps’ were earlier commonly used for Sámi people and appear both in studies of shamanism (see [Eliade, 1972](#): 15) and in Scandinavian mythology (see Ellis Davidson, 2004: 30–31; Simpson, 2005: 170–171). In the original sources, the terms are not necessarily evaluative, even though ‘Lappish’ as a name of an ethnic group referring to the Sámi people is now considered a derogatory term (see [Partanen, 2006](#): 202). When I refer to the real-world indigenous people, I will use the word Sámi.

2. When talking about ‘authenticity’ here, I am referring to discourses in tourism, media and everyday life – not legal definitions of who is considered a Sámi. In all Nordic countries, the latter is based on linguistic identity: a Sámi is someone who has learned one of the Sámi languages as her or his first language or who has at least one parent or grandparent who has learned one of the Sámi languages as her or his first language; see, for example, [Kuokkanen \(2007a\)](#). In actuality, the negotiations around the borders of Sámi ethnicity are much more complex, and genetic heritage and the performance of ‘cultural’ Sáminess are part of the play ([Valkonen, 2014](#)).

3. For a more detailed analysis of the rewriting strategies in Price, see [Lehtonen 2010](#) and 2013.

4. Price’s *Ghost Song* ([1994 \[1992\]](#)) makes an exception – there the main characters are all men. The shaman wearing ‘Lappish’ clothes is portrayed as a heartless man who needs an apprentice and wants to claim a boy he has helped to create from his father who is a slave to the Czar. The boy and his father are not associated with ‘Lappishness’, and in the end, the boy refuses to become a shaman – since the connection to indigeneity is minimal, I have left the novel outside the discussion here. Yet, in its portrayal of the male shaman as misguided and evil, the novel emphasises the wisdom of the matriarchal shamanist practices depicted in the two other novels.

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