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Book Reviews

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Lauri Pitkänen, Jouko Alapartanen, Petri Hiltunen, Lea Kaulanen, and Elsa-Maria Kaulanen: *The Night's Edge – Old Lapland Tales* (English edition, translated from Finnish into English by Peitsa Suoniemi). Salakirjat. Tallinna Raamatutruikikoda 2018. Hardcover; pp. 170.

The collaborative work of each of the authors/artists behind *The Night's Edge – Old Lapland Tales* forms a graphic novel based on ethnographic studies by Finnish folklorist Samuli Paulaharju. Samuli Paulaharju (1874-1944) was a well-known Finnish ethnographer and writer, who travelled extensively throughout Lapland and Finnmark, collecting stories and tales from folklore about old beliefs and practices pertaining to magic and the realms of the supernatural powers residing in mountains, forests, lakes, rivers, and the sea. Paulaharju also worked as a curator for the Northern Ostrobothnia museum in Oulu, where there is an exhibition and books about his work and teaching.

The Night's Edge – Old Lapland Tales brings together old stories and narratives from the border areas of Norwegian, Swedish, Finnish, and Russian Lapland, as well as the Finnmark coast in northern Norway. These stories and narratives are presented for the first time as painted illustrations in book form. The techniques and styles applied to such a narration are very effective in capturing details, symbolism, and

landscapes associated with each of the stories it presents. Conversely, such approaches help demonstrate how beneficial they are to the narratives as a whole, because they help to reveal many of the different perspectives presented within Paulaharju's original texts.

The role and function of the organic landscape, which is very much intertwined with peoples and identities in Arctic cultures and civilizations, plays a central role in relation to the contemporaneous creation of a foundation for the works. In this sense, the landscape provides a basis to elaborate the ways the past has been used as a source of inspiration and focus in a variety of settings. Some of the mythical locations the book presents contain numerous sensory thresholds and landscapes encompassing sacred places in connection with contrasting spheres. These spheres incorporate both besetting darkness and dramatic light depicted on and across the vast open spaces and wildernesses typical of Arctic landscapes. Moreover, topographies are themselves often comprised of great lakes and winter landscapes, and in the furthest north the land reaches the shores of the Arctic Ocean, which is also known as the land of the midnight Sun.

Within its fifteen colourful chapters, human beings encounter night creatures and monsters, as well as mythical beings and witches-shamans, some of whom are victims of

sorcery, cursed by spells and charms – processes that help to enhance and convey many of the concepts and principles, as well as taboos and customs, familiar to those versed in the art of magic. Moreover, the richness of the artwork influenced by Paulaharju's stories inspires each of the authors/artists to produce captivating illustrations of sometimes bright and warm landscapes, whilst others are more chilling and terrifying. However, in each case, their depictions effectively draw attention to the power of imagination and the importance of mythical thinking, and what can sometimes be a chilling vapor that emerges from within stories in relation to culture and traditions, especially those set throughout the course of the dark winter months.

Each artist has revisited Paulaharju's narratives, and their own themes and experiences are thus reflected in their contributions, some of which portray traditional costumes and ritual artefacts intricately tied to customs, traditions, language, and culture. Some accounts are short; others are longer and more detailed. The short stories, for example, are presented so that they merely seek very briefly to introduce themes to the reader. The story then concludes, leaving a restless appetite for further enquiry. The stories therefore demonstrate the power the dark side has to draw in the unsuspecting reader.

Perhaps the book's most outstanding features are seen in how

each of the contributors brings to life the characters in Paulaharju's narratives. These are expressed through a multitude of different contexts typical of Lappish tales, among them strange relationships that have taken place between human beings and beings from other realms of existence. Such forms of communication exemplify the deep longing human beings sometimes have for sensory connections with the realms of magic and enchantment, something outside themselves, which may help to alleviate their suffering or hardships, and recover spiritual powers or feelings from the past that may have been lost because of misfortune or theft.

Pitkänen's artwork captures the book's strongest themes related to Sámi stories that are animated through what is sometimes the fate of the shaman or noaidi in Sámi society, who is versed in witchcraft. The noaidi's power was typically used to attain food sources through hunting practices such as fishing, fowling, and trapping. The power and use of the spoken word through songs, incantations, and spells were also used for cursing and sorcery according to Christian priests, who also feature in the book, highlighting many of the central themes associated with the Sámi people, their spiritual traditions, culture, and historical background.

The plight of the Sámi shaman in the hostile Arctic environment reflects what is depicted within scripture regarding the eternal

struggle between the forces of good and evil in which Christian priests saw the Sámi embroiled. Temptation and orientation towards the darker side of life are the product of the illusory or temporary sense of power it brings. In addition, the consequences of breaking taboos and customs, or venturing into uncharted territory through the lure of malevolent powers are well captured in Pitkänen's contribution, as is the quest for romance, fulfilment and love, which seems largely out of reach for some of the characters. The struggle for survival for the pious and righteous in finding love, food sources, and navigation within the harsh Arctic landscapes to maintain an occupation or lifestyle are communicated well within the stories' contexts.

The texts are compelling and interesting, but in some cases, they lack a link word to bring a little more consistency to the story line. This may be a reflection of some of the challenges involved in translating Finnish into English. However, these are few and far between. At the back of the book Pitkänen has written a helpful series of summaries about the content of each of his stories. However, mention of these at the beginning of the volume would have been advantageous and more helpful in better communicating some of the meanings underlying the stories. The publication's design, layout, and explanations clearly show his depth of interest in the subject matters presented throughout. In addition, each

of the contributors has added a short explanation of the background and inspiration for their work, which is a credit to the publication.

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