

ANNE HEITH

Millenarianism and the Narration of the Nation

Narratives about the Korpela Movement

ABSTRACT The Korpela movement was a millenarian movement which emerged in Northern Sweden in the nineteen-thirties. The article explores the use of historical subject matter about the movement in newspaper journalism, literary writing, and in the branding of Toivo Korpela and the Korpela movement on the World Wide Web in the context of present-day marketing of attractions for visitors.

The argument of this article is that the literary writings of Henning and Ernst Sjöström and Bengt Pohjanen respectively represent two conflicting ways of narrating the Swedish nation. The Sjöström brothers' novel *Silverarken* ['The silver ark'] represents a nationalist pedagogy in which the narrative of the nation exemplifies a teleology of progress. This mode of narrating is problemized by a double narrative movement which includes a "'timeless' discourse of irrationality" (Bhabha), exemplified in a number of Bengt Pohjanen's novels, which destabilizes and deconstructs the narration of the nation as a story about homogeneity and linear progress. This latter mode of narrating makes visible the split in the narration of the nation between the progressive, accumulative temporality of the modern Swedish welfare state and the performative subversion of an alternative logic which is also claimed to be representative.

KEYWORDS Korpela movement, Torne Valley, millenarianism, narrating the nation, Homi K. Bhabha, Meänmaa, Meänkieli, Bengt Pohjanen, the prophetic belt

Millenarianism and the Narration of the Nation

The Torne Valley on both sides of the Torne River, which has marked the border between Sweden and Finland since 1809, has become an increasingly contested area in the Swedish national imagery. Before the border was established, Finland had been a part of Sweden for more

than six hundred years. As a result of the peace negotiations with Russia in 1809, the Tornedalian Finnish population found itself divided by the new national border. Years of enhanced Swedish nationalism followed and the northern border area became increasingly important strategically (Åselius 1994). With the implementation of a nationalist pedagogy, the status of the Tornedalian Finnish population in Sweden became increasingly ambiguous.

Lars Elenius claims that the Tornedalian Finns in Sweden were not politically discriminated against, but that they were subjected to an assimilatory language policy from the latter part of the nineteenth century (Elenius 2006: 255). This account of the status of the Tornedalian Finnish minority in Sweden, which reduces the importance of the theme of marginalization and disempowerment, is in stark contrast to accounts provided in texts by prominent Swedish Tornedalian Finnish authors. In the poem "I was born without language," which has been reprinted several times, Bengt Pohjanen presents a sombre picture of identity loss, related to the loss of language (Heith 2007: 235).¹ Another example is found in Mikael Niemi's *Populärmusik från Vittula* ['Popular music from Vittula'], in which the narrator ironically enumerates what the Tornedalian Finnish children were taught at school. The enumeration ends as follows: "We spoke broken Finnish without being Finns, we spoke broken Swedish without being Swedes. We were nothing" (Niemi 2000: 50, my translation).

The apparent discrepancy between Elenius' account and those of Pohjanen and Niemi, is related to the different functions of historiography and fiction. While the first presents changes in assimilation and minority politics in various contexts over time, the latter presents subjective individual experiences at a given moment. This, I propose, indicates that literary writing may provide a space where the emotional content of experiences related to ethnic and linguistic minority status is explored. This involves that the history of the Tornedalian Finnish population in Sweden emerges as more problematic and ambiguous in the genre of fiction, than in, for example, the historiography of Elenius.

The main focus of this article will be a comparison of fictional representations of the Korpela movement, by the brothers Ernst and Henning Sjöström and Bengt Pohjanen. These specimens of literary writing are interpreted as instances where two conflicting ways of narrating the modern Swedish nation are deployed. The theoretical framework of this reading is provided by Homi K. Bhabha's discussion of nationalism and narratives of the nation in the essay "DissemiNation," published in *The Location of Culture* (Bhabha 2008).

One claim of this article is that the ambiguity of the status of the

Tornedalian Finnish population in Sweden is related to tensions between majority culture and national identity, on the one hand, and regional particularity and popular minority culture, on the other. This tension is apparent in representations of the millenarian, popular, revivalist movement, the Korpela movement. It is clear that the Korpela movement represents “otherness” from the perspective of dominant culture. However the “strangeness” of the movement was related not only to religious practices by the journalists who wrote about it in the nineteen-thirties. Frequently Finnish and Sami ethnicity, the use of the Finnish language, poverty, backwardness, a propensity for mysticism and isolation, were foregrounded as components that distinguish the local popular northern culture from that of the modern Swedish welfare-state. Thus various symbolic thresholds were established, which have contributed to excluding the northern ethnic and linguistic minorities from the imagined community of the nation.

The Korpela movement

For a couple of years in the nineteen-thirties there was a group of people mainly in the Swedish Torne Valley, in the northernmost border area between Sweden, Finland and Norway, who waited for a flying ark which was to come to take them to Palestine. They had been told that this would happen by local prophets who predicted that the world would come to an end on 24 July 1937 (Lundmark 1985: 30–32). One event that had sparked off the prophecy was the publication of a new Finnish translation of the Bible in 1934. This was seen as an abomination by two preachers who were inspired from their reading of the old translation of the Bible, particularly the doomsday prophecy and the mentioning of an abomination in the *The Book of Daniel* (Lundmark 1985: 30).² Inspired by the *The Revelation of St. John the Divine* the two prophets predicted that they themselves would be admitted to heaven and that approximately a year later an ark would arrive to pick up the rest of the true believers (Lundmark 1985: 30–31).³ In the apocalypse to come the true believers would be saved while all the rest would be destroyed, as would the entirety of Scandinavia (Lundmark 1985: 32).

The doomsday prophets, who began preaching in the Torne Valley in the nineteen-thirties, and their followers have become known as “the Korpela movement.” Toivo Korpela was a Finnish preacher who began preaching among the Laestadians⁴ in the Swedish Torne Valley in the winter of 1928–29. At the time he was a fairly young man—he was born in 1900 in Ähtäri in the Finnish province of Ostrobothnia. Although there was a conflict between Korpela and the leaders of the Laestadian movement, he attracted followers. There were also rumours accusing him of being a communist and of having swindled money from people. The truth of these rumours has not

been confirmed and it is doubtful if there is any substance in them (Lundmark 1985: 29). However, it is clear that Toivo Korpela was a controversial person who attracted followers but also provoked adversaries. In January 1934 he left Sweden for Ähtäri. After that two self-proclaimed prophets, Sigurd Siikavaara and Arthur Niemi, introduced the belief in an imminent apocalypse and the arrival of an ark. During the spring and summer of 1934 they preached the new message in villages in the Torne Valley and during a trip to Kiruna (Lundmark 1985: 32). The news reached Toivo Korpela, who wrote to Siikavaara and asked him to join him at a place near the border between Sweden and Finland. They met and together they went north to preach in various villages. Niemi joined them and they continued to journey and preach all three of them together.

In January 1935 Korpela left the other two in the Finnish village of Sieppijärvi. He went home to Ähtäri and never returned to Sweden after that (Lundmark 1985: 34). When they were in Sieppijärvi, Siikavaara and Niemi preached about the ark for the first and only time in Finland (Lundmark 1985: 34). According to Lennart Lundmark Korpela himself was not pleased with the development, but still he remained something of a cult figure for many of the members of the movement (Lundmark 1985: 34). However, when Korpela dissociated himself from the doctrine of the ark in interviews published in various newspapers, one of the prophets demanded at a meeting in April 1935 that he should be condemned to the deepest recesses of Hell. This was also performed and consequently it was considered within the movement that Korpela no longer had any part to play in it (Lundmark 1985: 35). This of course implies that after this it is not fair to attribute the ideas and practices of the movement to direct influences from Toivo Korpela. In spite of this I will follow the practice of Lennart Lundmark and use the denomination “the Korpela movement” since it has, by popular consent, become established under that name (Lundmark 1985: 35).

Millenarianism—Religion of the Oppressed

The phenomenon of millenarianism may, following Lundmark, be defined as a collective reaction to a crisis involving cultic and miraculous elements (Lundmark 1985: 10). The salvation of the members, that is the group which shares a belief in millenarianism, is seen as collective, realised on earth, imminent, total in the sense that there is a belief that life on earth will be completely transformed and that a new rule will lead to perfection, and last but not least, that the transformation is accomplished through miracles (Lundmark 1985: 10–11).⁵ One important Biblical source for these beliefs is found in *The Revelation of St. John the Divine* where a thousand-year earthly Kingdom is predicted.

Millenarian movements may be interpreted from various points of departure (Lundmark 1985: 17–22). One is reflected already in the denominations “the Korpela movement” or “the Siikavaara sect,” which both foreground the presence of charismatic leaders. In the nineteen-thirties when the Korpela movement became known all over Sweden through articles written by reporters who were sent to the Torne Valley, the role of the leaders became a *leitmotif*.⁶ However it is a simplification to foreground charisma as the only explanation of a millenarian movement’s success (Lundmark 1985: 18–22). Other factors of importance are the social context of the charismatic person and the character of the beliefs propagated. In order to attract followers and initiate action, the message of the charismatic person must be relevant to the group that is being addressed. The role of social context and interaction is further emphasised by interpretations which foreground the dialectic character of the exchange between a leader and followers. One strand in these interpretations is the notion that leaders are chosen and empowered by followers experiencing unfulfilled expectations (Lundmark 1985: 18–19).

Other explanations of the rise of millenarianism highlight economic and political factors. Theories which foreground the element of protest against cultural, political and economic oppression are of particular interest with regard to the ethnic and linguistic backdrop of the Korpela movement. One element in the construction of symbolic thresholds between Swedish majority culture and Tornedalian Finnish culture, I propose, is related to asymmetries when it comes to the modernisation of Swedish society. Elenius points out that there were differences in the process of industrialisation between Sweden and Finland, and that the Finnish-speaking population of the Swedish Torne Valley was cut off from the enhanced process of modernisation, which transformed areas with a Swedish-speaking population (Elenius 2006: 255).

In a study of millenarianism deriving from a colonial status Vittorio Lanternari describes it as “the religion of the oppressed” (Lanternari 1963).⁷ The study does not foreground other relationships than that between millenarianism and colonial pressure. In spite of this it is interesting as a backdrop to Bengt Pohjanen’s present-day use of historical material about the Korpela movement in literary texts. These texts frequently express a critique of Swedish assimilation politics and the development of the modern welfare state from a perspective that implies a focus on the impact of ethnic and linguistic minority status. It is a fact that modernity came to the Torne Valley later than to other parts of Sweden and that there was a conflict between old and new in the nineteen-thirties when the traditional way of life was transformed quite dramatically by social, religious and political changes.

The Korpela Movement in the Discourse of Historiography

Lundmark's point of departure in *Protest och profetia. Korpela-rörelsen och drömmen om tidens ände* ['Protest and prophecy. The Korpela movement and the dream of the end of time'] is that of a researcher in the academic discipline of history (Lundmark 1985). The study examines the Korpela movement retrospectively after it had ceased to exist. It is based primarily on material collected by authorities who were dealing with the movement. An important section of the written sources consists of material from the police investigation in connection with the trial of sect members in 1939. Other sources include reports from medical authorities involved in the investigation of the mental status of sect members, clergymen who reported on the religious beliefs of the movement, and educational authorities and child welfare committees which intervened when children were taken from sectarian parents considered to exercise an unsound influence over their children. Lundmark is careful not to foreground any single explanation, such as the existence of a charismatic leader, to account for the success of the movement. Rather he points to the impact of multiple factors in a time of social change and the dialectic interaction between members of the movement, and the movement as well as non-believers, as ingredients which triggered the events which came to an end when the police intervened in 1939. Lundmark is cautious not to revert to sensationalism either.

The Korpela Movement in Contemporary Journalism

The activities of the Korpela movement were recorded both by regional and national newspapers during the years when the Korpelians fired the imaginations of journalists who were covering the story about the movement. The truth of Lundmark's observation that the journalists frequently were carried away in the spread of rumours and the production of cock-and-bull stories is confirmed by a look at contemporary material from newspaper archives (Lundmark 1985: 23).⁸ Frequently headlines foreground the beliefs and practices of the members as bizarre, often in a condescending, mocking tone as in "Woman teacher resigns in order to fly with crystal ark" (my translation).⁹ There are numerous examples of insinuations of Toivo Korpela's presumed dishonesty, communist sympathies and lack of education and charisma, which contribute to making the success of the movement utterly incomprehensible—at least for the journalists who view the movement and the rumours about it from the outside, from the position of rational, educated and modern spectators. One typical headline proclaims that "The prophet of the flying ark still an illiterate at the age of 25!" The subtitles go on stating that "Preached over

Bible texts that others had to read. — Clear proofs of the profitability of the tours to Sweden” (my translation).¹⁰ There are also attempts at explaining the movement’s success which explicitly emphasise the isolation of the people in the villages, poverty, harsh living conditions and lack of the benefits of a modern life style. The result is a construction of the members as the marginal, incomprehensible Others of modern, enlightened Swedes.

In the construction of otherness there are frequent references to ethnic and linguistic deviances from the national majority culture—often with a racist bias. In an article about a visit to a Korpela meeting in Kiruna, the journalist from the national newspaper *Aftonbladet* describes the gathered people as “strange:” “Tough sinewy men, hardened by laborious work and hardship in the wilds, swarthy Finn types with sly, deceitful looks, small, dry old men, twisted as mountain birches. Many of the women wear black kerchiefs in an old-fashioned way” (my translation). The article’s subtitle particularly foregrounds the ethnic and linguistic otherness of the gathering: “Monotonous babbling in Finnish from noon till night” (my translation).¹¹ In another article, “Witchcraft is still sometimes used against illness in Lapland” (my translation),¹² the journalist who was sent by the national newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* gives another example of how a dichotomy between the modern, civilised south and the backward, peripheral north may be constructed. In the article’s introduction a connection is established between the success of the Korpela movement, Sami and Finnish ethnicity and a pre-modern life style. The district medical officer, who is being interviewed together with the visiting journalist, represents rationalism and modernity. There is no mistake about the condescending tone when it is stated that it must be kept in mind that the northern parts of the province of Norrland still are a wasteland and that the Sami and Finnish speaking population north of the Arctic circle still occasionally use witchcraft in spite of electricity and the radio. One major component of the otherness of the Sami and Finnish ethnic and linguistic minorities is that they are made to represent an earlier evolutionary and historical phase compared to that of modern Swedes. The notion of superiority connected with education, rationalism, modernity and living in the centre is central to the constructed dichotomy. The members of the Korpela movement are connected with ethnic and linguistic minorities, poverty, lack of education, anti-rationalism and a marginal position, both with regard to national majority culture, and ideas of a geographical centre. However, the situation has changed today as these notions circulated in the medias’ construction of reality in the nineteen-thirties, and may be critically examined from the context of ethnic and linguistic mobilisation inspired by critical theory, deconstruction and postcolonial theory.¹³

The Korpela Movement According to the Sjöström Brothers

One example where the historical material about the Korpela movement plays a prominent role is the novel *Silverarken* ['The silver ark'] from 1969, written by the successful lawyer Henning Sjöström and his brother Ernst Sjöström. The novel contrasts followers and antagonists of the movement throughout. While the narrator and focalizer shifts in the novel, the image of the movement is consistently negative. This negative interpretation is summarized in the text on the back-cover of the novel, which ostentatiously directs the readers' attention to atrocities and scandal:

The Silver Ark is the fifth book by the Sjöström brothers. It is about religious ecstasy followed by nude dancing and group-sex in isolated villages in Norrland during the time of the Korpela movement. The ecstatic movement spread like a plague. There were many tragedies. People gave away their homesteads and assigned away bankbooks when waiting for the ark that was to take them to heavenly bliss. Some eighty persons—most of them women—were prosecuted for immoral behaviour. (My translation.)

Lundmark describes *Silverarken* as a novel which “uncritically passes on the grossest cock-and-bull stories” about the Korpela movement (Lundmark 1985: 24, my translation). It is obvious from the marketing of the novel that aspects of the movement that may seem scandalous to a general reading public are particularly foregrounded, that rumours are passed on and that exaggerations, which enhance the spectacular qualities of the subject matter, are deployed. For example there is no support for the information that “some eighty persons [...] were prosecuted” in Lundmark’s study. According to him 118 followers were interrogated. Of these 45 persons were sentenced to pay fines (Lundmark 1985: 64).

One of the narrators and focalizers in *Silverarken* is a man whose wife joins the movement against his will. At the end of the novel he has lost his family and traditional way of living. According to Henning and Ernst Sjöström the narrative of the Korpela movement is a story about insanity, foolishness, lusts unleashed, excessive drinking, promiscuity and illicit sex. Normality and reason are represented by the police and various authorities, as well as the righteous farmer-narrator and focalizer, whose life is shattered. The most zealous followers are represented as an irrational, unhealthy threat to normal society. Toivo Korpela is mentioned a couple of times but he is not one of the major characters and he does not play any role in the action, other than that of a man who prior to the beginning of the plot had contributed to starting something which he later had no influence or control over.

In the reception of *Silverarken*, opinions varied with regard to the truth-value of the novel. Some reviewers, as the one in the evening paper *Expressen*, naively professed a belief in the novel's truthfulness. According to *Expressen's* reviewer this is proved by the correspondence between the novel's representation and reports in contemporary newspaper articles—a most surprising conclusion considering the sensationalism and bias of contemporary newspaper material. The reviewer particularly mentions that the Sjöström brothers had had access to police reports, interviews with witnesses and trial protocols, that is to a large extent the same material which Lennart Lundmark used in his study.¹⁴ However, Lundmark particularly mentions that it had not been possible to interview people who had memories of their own of the movement, as “their time as Korpelians [‘korpelaner’] was too much imbued with shame and defeat for them to speak about it” (Lundmark 1985: 8, my translation). With this as a backdrop it seems unlikely that the Sjöström brothers would have succeeded in interviewing people who were directly involved. Thus it is directly misleading when it is stated in one article that Ernst Sjöström spent three years collecting material through interviews and other sources.¹⁵ This kind of information creates the illusion that the Sjöström brothers' novel is factual and truthful by documenting what really happened, while on the contrary it is extremely speculative. This is reflected already in the title of one review which reads: “They got drunk, danced and made love in our most astonishing religious revival” (my translation).¹⁶

Other reviewers are less impressed by the documentary aspirations of the novel. One concludes, “[o]f course the Sjöström brothers' novel is a speculation in pornography.”¹⁷ Several reviewers make comparisons between the sexual practices of the Korpela movement and those of the sex liberal nineteen-sixties. One concludes, “[t]here is nothing new about group-sex.”¹⁸ In remarks like this there is a conflation of the cultural context at the time of publication and that of the time when the Korpela movement attracted followers in the nineteen-thirties.

Toivo Korpela and the Korpela Movement in the Fictions of Bengt Pohjanen

During the last few decades Bengt Pohjanen has played a major role in the ethnic, cultural and linguistic revival of the Tornedalian Finnish population. This includes the construction of an imaginary community with a history of its own (Heith 2007; Heith 2008a; Heith 2008b). One element of this history is the vision of a prophetic belt stretching from Bodø in Norway in the west to Narjan Mar in Russia in the east (Pohjanen 2000: 55). This belt covers the imaginary—and in some respects real—homeland, called *Meän-*

maa (literally 'our land'), of the Tornedalian Finns. The Finnish preacher Toivo Korpela is one of the prophets of this area who Bengt Pohjanen has repeatedly reflected upon in various discourses.

In Bengt Pohjanen's use of the historical subject matter concerning the Korpela movement Toivi Korpela plays a much more prominent and complex role than in the Sjöström brothers' novel. In the experimental novels *Korpelan enkelit* ['Korpela's angels'] (1989) in Finnish and *Dagning; röd!* ['Daybreak; red!'] (1992) in Swedish, one plot line consists of a quest made by authors who in the nineteen-eighties seek some kind of truth about Toivo Korpela. They travel to his place of birth Ähtäri in Finland where he also ended his days. They interview people and listen to various contradictory stories about what Toivo Korpela was like. Like the enigmatic Kurtz in Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness*, Korpela is surrounded by stories and gossip. As works of art the novels are extremely meta-fictional with ample comments about representation, reality and the novel. The compositions are deliberately complex, rigorously avoiding that of a single thread narrative. Major themes include an examination of the nature of man and the transgression and deconstruction of limits imposed by a rational mode of experiencing. These themes are explored against the backdrop of the Swedish welfare state in which religious fervour and ecstasy represent otherness compared to the "normality" envisioned in the master narrative of modern society. The critique that imbues Pohjanen's novels implies an alternative vision of man as a conglomerate of rational and non-rational drives. On the one hand there is the welfare state's modernist vision of man and, on the other, an alternative account, which does not encompass the notion of man as exclusively rational. This latter view has been propagated by an author whom Pohjanen frequently refers to, namely Dostoyevsky. Particularly Dostoyevsky's *Notes from Underground* (1864) with its critique of modernity and the view of man as a rational being is interesting as a subtext to Pohjanen's own critique. Like Dostoyevsky, Pohjanen is critical of utopian visions of a future Crystal Palace where mathematical precision reigns. With this as a backdrop the vision of a prophetic belt offers an alternative space. It is significant that the seekers and investigators of the novels do not find a final answer when it comes to the nature of Toivo Korpela, who emerges more like the battle field for multiple and contradictory forces than a predictable, rationally comprehensible formula.

In a later short novel in Swedish, *Kristallarken* ['The crystal ark'] (1998), an alternative rationale for the interpretation of the Korpela movement is presented. When it comes to the way it is narrated and composed, this novel is less complex and experimental than the previous *Korpelan enkelit* and *Dagning; röd!* It is narrated in the first person by a narrator who looks

back upon a time when the laws and habits of the everyday ordinary world lost their function as checks for desires and excesses. The narrator explicitly states that he did not believe in the preachings of the prophet of the doomsday sect which emerged in the wake of Toivo Korpela's preachings, but still he participated in the overthrowing of rules and restrictions which regulated sexual practices and what was considered as responsible, decent behaviour in the village community. The theme of this short novel is that of the joyful, burlesque popular carnival which for a period allowed the poor villagers to feel free from limitations that made their life restricted. Indirectly it also tells a story of the harsh conditions and longings of the people. The terms "being free" and "freedom" are frequently mentioned in the religious idiom used by the movement when referring to the imminent prospect of becoming free from worldly matters when the world perishes. The theme of freedom is of course central both to the religious discourse and to the political discourses that competed with the Laestadian revivalism and the Korpela movement for followers.

Trevliga djävlar ['Nice devils'], published in 2003 in Swedish, is still another novel where Pohjanen uses material about Toivo Korpela and the Korpela movement. The narrative levels shift as does the time of the story, from the present day with satellites in the sky till the early twentieth century and the nineteen-thirties. The present-day narrator looks back upon his youth when friends and a relative of his miraculously survived when the Titanic sank and on the nineteen-thirties when another ark was expected by the Korpelians. At the time of narration the narrator is an aged man with grandchildren who live in the south. The early twentieth century is described as a time of change caused by modernity and political and social turbulence. In the Torne Valley of the nineteen-thirties the fascist Lappo movement and communists were competing for followers. The new time is described as an upheaval with dreams of utopian worlds

where there were no borders between spirit and flesh, reality and fantasy, man and God. There were strange ideas about mercy without limits and heretical teachings that the soul of man could not be stained by any fleshly sin (Pohjanen 2003: 59, my translation).

Toivo Korpela is mentioned as one of the prophets of the new time who contributed to heretical teachings that led people astray. The major theme of the novel is the change of the traditional Tornedalian society caused by modernity, and the religious and political turbulence of the nineteen-thirties. In the narrator's story about this particular historical context there are several false prophets whose followers are ruined, such as modernity, represented by the Titanic, fascism, Stalin, and Korpela.

Branding the Korpela Movement in Cyberspace

Pohjanen's novels *Korpelan enkelit*, *Dagning; röd!*, *Kristallarken* and *Trevliga djävlar* contribute to shaping a particular Tornedalian literary landscape. This landscape was foregrounded in an article published in one of the major Swedish newspapers in 2003. The article is quoted on Pohjanen's website on the Internet, where he has created a new space for the construction of an imaginary community for the Tornedalian Finns.¹⁹ The article mentions Bengt Pohjanen's Torne Valley as one of the cultural treasures that may be found in Swedish literature. When appropriated by Pohjanen this statement becomes part of a new strand in the construction of an imagined community, namely the use of literature in a combination of region-building and the marketing of attractions for visitors. Bengt Pohjanen's Torne Valley is branded as one of the exciting destinations in 2009 which is said to "blow up borders" (my translation).²⁰ One of the attractions is described under the title "Korpelarörelsen." The text tells the reader that "[t]he master narrator Bengt Pohjanen is happy to tell the breath-taking and enigmatic story about the Korpela movement" (my translation). It is accompanied by a photograph showing Pohjanen standing in a dark wood in the process of telling the story to an attentive audience. From a rhetorical perspective the choice of the words "breath-taking" ['hisnande'] and "enigmatic" ['gåtfull'] to characterize the movement is congenial with the vision of the prophetic belt which constitutes a space where prophets of various brands may partake in a drama of revolt against the anthropology of Western modernity rooted in Enlightenment rationalism. This theme is not elaborated in the branding and marketing of the oral performance, but it is part of the intertext that provides Bengt Pohjanen's use of the material with a specific significance.

Writing the Nation

The examples of a novel by the Sjöström brothers and the texts by Bengt Pohjanen display a contrasting way of deploying historical material in fiction. The implications of this may be interpreted within the framework of theories that analyze the writing of the modern nation in the form of the novel. One such theory is proposed by Homi K. Bhabha in the postcolonial classic *The Location of Culture* (Bhabha 2008). Bhabha elaborates two ways of assessing time in literary narratives and their implications for the understanding of categories like "the people" and "history." He is critical of the kind of historicism which proposes a linear equivalence of events and ideas and which also implies that a people, a nation, or a national culture are seen as empirical social categories or holistic cultural entities (Bhabha 2008: 201). One of Bhabha's major points is that the nation is a highly ambivalent

category which may be seen as a narrative strategy and that the narrative and psychological force of nationness influences both cultural production and political projection. Quoting Said he criticizes beliefs in single explanations and single origins. Bhabha's critique furthermore foregrounds the complicity between modern nationalism and Enlightenment universalism, which requires an idea of the Other in order to sustain its universalistic claims (Bhabha 2008: 203). Two major points made are that the boundaries of modernity are problematic and that a historiographic fixation on them in narratives of the modern nation have tended to highlight homogeneity.

In the representation of the nation as a temporal process Bhabha also discerns a nationalist pedagogy which implies that the narrative of the nation embraces a teleology of progress. As a complement to this he discerns another model. This is called the model of a "timeless' discourse of irrationality" and it implies a questioning of the metaphors of progressive modern social cohesion (Bhabha 2008: 204). Of course the metaphors and narrative models of progress, continuity and cohesion that imbue the narration of modern Western nations have not emerged without contestation. On the contrary Bhabha emphasizes the element of narrative struggle that produces the origin of the nation. The main argument of this article is that the Sjöström brothers' and Bengt Pohjanen's deployment of material about the Korpela movement represent two distinct ways of negotiating the content of modernity and the identity of the nation. Bhabha goes on pointing out that:

In the production of the nation as narration there is a split between the continuist, accumulative temporality of the pedagogical, and the repetitious, recursive strategy of the performative. It is through this process of splitting that the conceptual ambivalence of modern society becomes the site of *writing the nation* (Bhabha 2008: 209).

In highlighting the performative aspects of narrating the nation in the present, Bhabha proposes the strategy of reading between the borderlines of nation-space in order to see how the concept of the "people" emerges within a range of discourses as a double narrative movement. The people are both the historical "objects" of a nationalist pedagogy and:

the 'subjects' of a process of signification that must erase any prior or originary presence of the nation-people to demonstrate the prodigious, living principles of the people as contemporaneity as that sign of the *present* through which national life is redeemed and iterated as a reproductive process (Bhabha 2008: 208).

Summing up

On the one hand the novels discussed above exemplify a presentation of a teleological, progressive narrative about the people and the nation, and on the other a double narrative movement which includes “a ‘timeless’ discourse of irrationality.” I propose that the novel by the Sjöström brothers is based on the notion of the state as a cohesive entity founded on the legacy of Enlightenment universalism and rationalism. Pohjanen’s texts, on the other hand, display a performative positioning as a subject in a process of signification, which destabilizes and deconstructs the narration of homogeneity and linear progress. The spatial metaphor for this alternative is the vision of a prophetic belt stretching from Bodø in Norway to Narjan Mar in Russia. Among the prophets of this belt are Toivo Korpela and the initiators of the Korpela movement. In this alternative narrative of the nation and the people, these are agents both in the story of the emerging modern welfare state and in the plot of the “‘timeless’ discourse of irrationality.” This makes visible the split in the production of the nation as narration between the continuist, accumulative temporality of the modern Swedish welfare state and the performative subversion of an alternative logic which is also claimed to be representative.

NOTES

- ¹ The poem “Jag är född utan språk” is reproduced in Swedish on the first page of Bengt Pohjanen’s and Eeva Muli’s *Meänkieli* grammar book (Pohjanen & Muli 2005). *Meänkieli* literally means ‘our language.’
- ² And from the time that the daily sacrifice shall be taken away, and the abomination that maketh desolate set up, there shall be a thousand two hundred and ninety days. Blessed is he that waiteth, and cometh to the thousand three hundred and five and thirty days” (*Book of Daniel* 12: 11–12).
- ³ “And they heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, Come up hither. And they ascended to heaven in a cloud; and their enemies beheld them” (*Revelation* 11: 12). “And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldst give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldst destroy them which destroy the earth. And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament: and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail” (*Revelation* 11: 18–19).
- ⁴ Laestadianism is a Nordic religious revivalist movement which bears the name of its founder Lars Levi Laestadius (1800–1861). A concise account of the movement and its founder is presented in Kulonen, Seurajärvi-Kari & Pulkkinen (2005: 167–170).
- ⁵ Among other works Lundmark refers to Vittorio Lanternari’s study *The Religions of the Oppressed. A Study of Modern Messianic Cults*. This study is interesting as a backdrop to an analysis of the Korpela movement although Lanternari’s study deals solely with “ethnological civilizations, with [...] economic and technological backwardness [...]”. These

ancient and prehistoric cultures are the roots of our present Western civilization, which, despite the growth and progress of centuries, in many cases has retained some of the early elements found in folklore, in popular superstitions and taboos" (Lanternari 1963: vi). My point is that there is no clear division between the modern Western civilization on the one hand and "ethnological," "prehistoric" cultures on the other, as elements from these are included in cultural practices involving hybridisation and syncretism in (post)modern postwestern cultures.

⁶ In August 2008 I had the opportunity to stay a week at the Sigtuna Foundation, Sweden. During this time I had access to their archives with newspaper articles about the Korpela movement.

⁷ In a forthcoming article I discuss the work of Bengt Pohjanen within the theoretical framework of contemporary postcolonial critique.

⁸ All subsequent references to contemporary newspaper articles refer to material from the Sigtuna Foundation's archives if no other reference is mentioned.

⁹ "Lärarynna säger upp sig för att flyga med kristallarken" ['Woman teacher resigns in order to fly with the crystal ark'], unsigned article in *Aftonbladet* 10 March 1935.

¹⁰ "Flygande arkens profet ännu vid 25 års ålder – analfabet! Predikade över bibeltexter, som andra måste uppläsa. — Klara bevis på Sverigeturnéernas lukrativitet" ['The prophet of the flying ark still an illiterate at the age of 25! Preached over Bible texts others had to read. — Clear proofs of the profitability of the tours to Sweden'], the Haparanda correspondent of *Nya Dagligt Allehanda* 22 March 1935.

¹¹ "Från AB:s utsände: På ett Korpela-möte i Kiruna. Entonigt rabblande på finska från middag till kväll" ['From the correspondent of AB: At a Korpela meeting in Kiruna. Monotonous babbling in Finnish from noon till night'], the signature Koski, *Aftonbladet* 20 March 1935.

¹² "Ännu trollas det ibland mot sjukdom i Lappland" ['Still witchcraft is sometimes used against illness in Lapland'], the signature Kråkberg, *Dagens Nyheter* 31 March 1935.

¹³ This is discussed in my forthcoming article.

¹⁴ "Bröderna Sjöström ger ut bok om religiöst vanvett" ['The Sjöström brothers publish book on religious madness'], Sussie Bjuvstedt, *Expressen* 20 October 1969.

¹⁵ "De söp, dansade och älskade i vår märkligaste religiösa väckelse" ['They got drunk, danced, and made love in our most astonishing religious revival'], Göran Palm, *Göteborgsposten* 12 October 1969.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ "Den religiösa extasen" ['The religious ecstasy'], Lars Hamberg, *Hufvudstadsbladet* 4 December 1969.

¹⁸ "Sexorgier var ritual vid Korpelas bönenemöten" ['Sex orgies were ritual at Korpela's prayer-meetings'], Bo Degerman, *Dalademokraten* 30 October 1969.

¹⁹ "The great provinces of Swedish literature are a too seldom mentioned cultural treasure. Gunnar D Hansson's Swedish west coast, Walter Ljungquist's province of Östergötland, Strindberg's Stockholm archipelago, Lars Gustafsson's province Västmanland, Bengt Pohjanen's Torne Valley, Birgitta Trotzig's Skåne plain..." (my translation; quoted from Bengt Pohjanen's webpage http://www.sirillus.se/index_bp.htm; access date 19 November 2008). The article was written by Ulf Eriksson and published in *Göteborgsposten* 31 July 2003.

²⁰ "Spännande resmål 2009" ['Exciting destinations in 2009']; http://www.sirillus.se/index_bp.htm; access date 19 November 2008.

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