

THE LITERARY REVIEW



AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CONTEMPORARY WRITING

SUMMER 2006 VOL. 49 NO. 4

ISSN 0022-2524

Lotte Inuk

From Ice Age

(Three times a week, a helicopter flies in with passengers and post from Kangerlussuaq to Nuuk Heliport and three times a week, depending on the weather, flies back toward Maniitsoq and Kangerlussuaq.

From the window in my room in Block 16, I see the little bird-like machine slip in between the curving, towering mountains and disappear.

When the weather is bad, there is no way to get out of here, no matter how much you might want to and plead and ask and wish.)

Susanna, the daughter of my music teacher, Nukâraq Enoksen, is by far the best-looking girl in town.

He plays bass and writes lyrics for a band whose songs we all know and can sing along with, even if we belong to that part of the population that doesn't understand the words, and his band, unlike for example Sumé, doesn't print a translation of the songs alongside the original lyrics on the back of the album cover.

Susanna's hair is thick and sleek and black as coal, almost violet in a certain light, she has long, strong legs and carries herself like a queen, and in the dusk she likes to promenade around on the narrow colorful footbridges of painted wood between the city's split grey concrete housing blocks with a green-eyed cat on her one shoulder; I don't know why or where to. Sometimes she has a walkman on, the cat doesn't seem to notice it or anything, it just sits there, matching her wild look. She doesn't seem to notice you when you walk by, which is too bad, and even without the obstacle of the music, she isn't the type you would think of just going up and talking to. Every boy without exception must be completely wild about Susanna, but she doesn't seem interested in contacting them either

or impressing them, and strangely enough they neither rush nor follow her around the way they usually would in Nuuk when such striking beauty is combined with such a lofty attitude.

Maybe she's just too beautiful, too mysterious, maybe you get an impression she could be a little crazy. Maybe it has to do with the cat, it creates an atmosphere of the witch and danger and magic. It just sits there on her shoulder like a guardian angel in the form of a tiger and never runs off and is content with its place, that's maybe what I most envy about Susanna Enoksen.

The Danish boys in town you don't even notice, they could practically just as well not exist among us.

Here there are Greenland girls, and Danish girls, and Greenland boys. Some Greenland boys only like Greenland girls, others also like the Danish girls. To win their hearts and their coveted glances you have to try to act as Greenlandic, as tough and cool and streetwise as possible; you have to eat Greenlandic food and play without fear anywhere in the mountains and all the way down on the ice and not be afraid of anything; not even the Greenland girls that hate you and gang up outside your street door to mock you and catch you and give you a smacking if you get too popular, even for one single boy in their class, no matter how uncool he might seem to you or to them.

Malou and I dream about having black, thick, sleek hair and speaking fluent Greenlandic just like that, so no one will have the slightest doubt about where we really come from anymore.

Malou's father divorced her mother in Denmark because of a Greenland woman not very much older than we are and moved here to the city for her sake with Malou, while Malou's little brother stayed with their real mother in Jutland. So in a sense Malou is half Greenlandic and can anyway pass for a Greenlandic if she's careful with her accent and nobody otherwise knows too much about her; there are many half Greenlandic children and even completely Greenlandic ones who don't

know a word of the language anyway, and also many whose hair has the same light brown color as Malou's and whose eyes don't look very different. I envy her that; with my own yellowish hair and unmistakably grey-blue eyes, it's harder to fake it convincingly, even if my mother, thank god, is seeing more and more of this handsome, completely cool Greenlander boyfriend who is younger than she is.

Anyway, in winter my hair gets darker and Malou and I eagerly compare color, count the black strands among the lighter ones and feel that it's going in the right direction, go without washing our hair as long as possible because it seems darker then and practise hard at the slang the girls in our parallel class use along with unusual pronunciations of certain important Danish words.

The Greenlander boys are so beautiful. How could the pale, bloodless, clumsy, faint-hearted boys in our own class, sons of out-stationed librarians and ornithologists and math teachers and scout leaders and pencil pushers, ever measure up to them? They don't even try, they already know they'll only be here for a limited time anyway, and it just can't pay to take up the challenge; they'll soon be home in their own territory again, where they can use language or intellect or their family names to elbow their ways forward.

The guys who sit half-naked in the dormitory's open windows in the evening when you're walking home along the walkways below have strong, light-brown chests, polar bear amulets carved from whale teeth on black leather cords tight around their necks and Indian hair shining blue and hanging halfway down their broad backs. They look like captured warriors, sorrowful dreamers in the orange-gold evening sun. They whistle at you with child-like enthusiasm so your diaphragm twitches with longing. Their voices are disturbingly dark and soft and issue from beautifully bowed mouths you know would taste good and salt as the sea, like the aroma of those small dried fish from their thick sweaters when you lean your head against their shoulders at the movies or happen to bump against them on a rocking crowded city bus. When they're out walking

the streets, they have their hands dug into the pockets of their leather jackets and skate elegantly, invincibly over the icy ground on slick cold rubber soles, hunching their shoulders and looking down at the ground and their breath steams and they send a slanted sharp glance full of unconcealed desire and sweet recognition when you walk past, all the while watching yourself that you don't stumble like some cow on the treacherous rock.

You have the idea these boys would fight and die for you, like in a fairytale or a romance magazine. You lose yourself in your childhood dreams of noble wild men or brave martyrs, dramatically dead much too young from courageous fights in mysterious jungles on distant, suffering continents.

I never imagined boys could be so beautiful! So shameless and plain fascinating, so uninhibitedly attractive, simultaneously so heartbreakingly gentle and dangerously raw and violent. If only I had the same blood running in my veins, if I knew what these boys knew, thought and felt! If I could wake up one morning and speak their language, know their history, decipher their codes. If the hairs which against my will and all too fast are growing on my sex could be just as coal black and sleek and fine as the Greenlander girls' in the showers during gym class.

What raw beauty and perfection!

Exactly what a human being should look like.

Miki says that when the revolution comes I'll be thrown out, sent directly home where I came from, I'll have no chance to stay in this land or ever return for a visit. I know that he wants me to stay, he talks as though he doesn't believe himself that any revolution will occur. But I think it will, and hope so with all my heart.

"What if we get married?" I ask. "If we get married and have a baby," Miki tells me, "the child would be allowed to stay. Our child would be a pure native."

Not even my schoolmates and best friends, Martin and Nico, both born and raised here with no connection left to their family's original Scandinavian homelands, would ever be considered as pure natives or

equal citizens of the proud pure kingdom that will arise on this mighty island after the revolution. It seems that being considered native born or a citizen is not based on anything concrete or on any demonstrable fact or anyway not on that alone—it seems more to be something abstract.

The Danes or Faroese and other illegitimate changelings who have not voluntarily left by the time of the revolution will be promptly deported via a bullet in the head, Miki claims.

“Will you fight for my life?” I ask, my heart beating wildly at the thought of such a serious and decisive revolt. “Do you think we could dye my hair?” He laughs. “It would never look like a Greenlander’s no matter what you do with it! And our child would be a poor bastard, think about that.”

“Like the two of us,” I say.

“Speak for yourself,” he says.

The bastards are the most beautiful, here and everywhere else: That black hair, those light eyes, or the opposite. Those long, powerful limbs. That warm complexion. All the best salvaged from both fallen worlds, a new beginning, a phoenix arisen from the ashes, a whole new kind of human being.

Miki says these are racist thoughts; he plucks the word out of the blue, suddenly, neither of us has really thought about it before, even considered its existence at all: Racist. It is racist to think that bastards are more beautiful than pure-bloods, to have such a preference.

But I still love the bastards of this world, maybe it is an inborn preference, present from conception: My father was married, but not to my mother; my mother claims when she is in that kind of angry mood that precisely that is my grandmother’s tragedy, the cross she must bear. But even if I don’t doubt it must have been a terrible shameful history for her and she doesn’t hesitate to let me know that constantly either, though not so directly, I still know for sure that it can’t be so, that despite everything it can’t be the only reason.

*Translated from the Danish
by Thomas E. Kennedy*

Modern Literature and Culture at Ryerson University, Toronto, Canada, where she is also the director of the Modern Culture Multi-Media Center dedicated to the preservation and study of early twentieth-century modern texts and artifacts. She is the author and editor of numerous books including *Baroness Elsa—A Cultural Biography* (MIT Press, 2002) and *I Got Lusting Palate / Mein Mund ist lüstern: Dada Verse von Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven* (Berlin, 2005).

Samantha Gillison is the author of *The Undiscovered Country* and *The King of America*. She lives in Brooklyn.

Georgi Gospodinov, born in 1968, is a researcher at the Institute of Literature in the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and an editor at *Literaturen vestnik*, a literary weekly. He has published three collections of poetry, *Lapidarium*, *The Cherry-Tree of a People*, and *Letters to Gaustine*. His first novel, *A Natural Novel*, has appeared in Yugoslavia, Macedonia, France, and from Dalkey Archive Press in Chicago. *And Other Stories* (2001), from which these stories are drawn, has already been published in France and the Czech Republic.

Chris Green's poetry has been published in such magazines as *Poetry*, *Verse*, *The American Scholar*, and *North American Review*. He's an editor for *RHINO* and also founder of Green Horse, an organization linking poets to political activism and literary service work.

Jay Griswold's new book, *Conquistador*, has just been released on Main Street Raq Publishing Company.

Mariya Gusev teaches at Fairleigh Dickinson University and writes in Brooklyn.

James Hannaham received his MFA from the University of Texas in May. He lives in Brooklyn.

Richard Hoffman is author of *Half the House: A Memoir*, and the poetry collection *Without Paradise*. He is Writer-in-Residence at Emerson College in Boston and also teaches in the Stonecoast MFA program at the University of Southern Maine.

Lotte Inuk published her first two novels at the age of 17 (*Moonlight's Daughter* and *Maria Mia*, 1982). Since then she has published more than a dozen books and many stories. In 1993 she was awarded the Children's and Young Adult Fiction Prize of the Danish Ministry of Culture for her trilogy of novels, *Regina* (1992-96). The excerpt here, "Ice Age," is from her most recent novel, published in Denmark in 2004, about the life of a young woman in Greenland.

Karen Kevorkian's book of poems is *White Stucco Black Wing* (Red Hen Press, 2004). She is in the creative writing department at the University of Virginia.

Delisa Mulkey is a PhD candidate at Georgia State. Her work has appeared in *Poetry*, *The Gettysburg Review*, *Nimrod*, *Cairn*, and others. She has received a Ruth Lilly Fellowship and published a chapbook, *Peacock by Moolight*. In 2005 she won The Writer's Exchange Contest sponsored by *Poets and Writers*.

David R. Poe lives in France, splitting his time between Paris and Normandy. His stories have appeared in *Story Quarterly*, *Prairie Schooner* and *Cimarron Review*.

Aimee Pokwatka is in the MFA program at Syracuse University. Her work has been published in *Small Spiral Notebook*.

Fiona Sampson's most recent books are *The Distance Between Us* (Fern, 2005) and *Writing: Self and Reflecting* (Nacriker, 2005). She is the Editor of *Poetry Review*.

Miltos Sachtouris (1919-2005) is one of Greece's foremost poets of the twentieth century. He was the author of 13 books of poetry and the recipient of several national prizes for his work.

Dana Schwartz is currently working toward her MFA at Fairleigh Dickinson University. She lives in Brooklyn.

James Michael Slama holds an MFA in fiction from Fairleigh Dickinson University and his stories have appeared in *The Barcelona Review*, *The Cafe Irreal*, and *Locus Novus*.

Terese Svoboda's most recent book of poetry is *Treason*, published by Zoo Press. *Tin God*, her fourth novel, was published this March.

Rawdon Tomlinson's recent books are *Deep Red* (U.P. of Florida, '94) and *The Line* (pudding House, 2004); *If You Could Lick My Heart* is forthcoming in Spring 2007 from L.S.U.. He teaches at University of Colorado at Denver.

Jim Weatherall is the Assistant Director of the Center for Science Writings at the Stevens Institute of Technology. He lives in Brooklyn.

Song Yong was born in Youngkwang, Korea in 1940. He started his writing career with a short story, "Cock-Fighting," published in *Changbi* magazine in 1967. Since then, he's published several books of fiction and non-fiction including *Teacher and the Crown Prince* (1974). His most recent collection of short stories, *For Balzoza*, was published in April, 2003 by Changbi.