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Queer Perspectives on Erotic Human-Supernatural Encounters in Finland-Swedish Folk Legends

ABSTRACT

Despite numerous studies with various perspectives on the folk legend, the Nordic context is still lacking in studies that combine concepts of queerness and posthumanism with folk legends. This article focuses on Swedish folk legends in Finland that depict erotic encounters between humans and nature spirits. The three example legends used were collected in rural Swedish-speaking parts of Finland in 1890, 1898, and 1917. They all tell of encounters between humans (men) and spirits (females) that take place in nature, a place traditionally perceived as the home of these spirits. The erotic character of the encounters is determined not only by direct sexual interactions, but also within a frame of ambience, language, and acts. By using a combination of queer theory and posthumanist concepts, I challenge the ideas of normative sexual behaviour expressed in the material. A queer reading reveals transgressions within gender-normative behaviour and also interesting contradictions in which gender norms are abided by. The inter-species relationship between human and spirit can be seen as queer, but at the same time, it is normative or pursues normativity. The posthumanist approach results in the dissolution of the theoretical nature/culture dichotomy. The relationship between human and spirit can be viewed as that of companion species; a relationship based on the desire to connect, as well as a mutual past, present, and future.

Keywords: Folk legends, folklore, Swedish Finland, queer theory, posthumanism, sexuality

FOLKLORE ABOUT NATURE spirits has been the subject of countless previous studies. On the Nordic scene, I would like to mention Gunnar Granberg (1935), Jochum Stattin (2008), Camilla Asplund Ingemark (2004), and Mikael Häll (2013) in particular. Studies of erotic folklore have been conducted by, among other, Inger Lövkrona (1991; 1996), Lotte Tarkka (1998), and Laura Stark-Arola (1998). Significant and thorough as these studies might be, they are children of their time and therefore lack perspectives on queer sexuality and the divergent. My use of queer and posthuman theory serves to fill a blank in the research of older traditional materials.

The aim of this article is to focus on three legends about erotic encounters between humans and nature spirits and how a posthumanist questioning of the nature/culture dichotomy, combined with a queer approach, can uncover both queer relationships and non-normative gender-based behaviour. The legend is the most common folklore genre that gives insight into how people viewed the world around them (af Klintberg 1977, 6), which is why I have chosen to study legends. I believe that applying a new theoretical perspective on old material will open up new ways of interpreting these narratives and what they stand for.

In this article, I explore new interpretations of sexuality and gender in folk legends, which hail from a time we often perceive as homogenously heterosexual or at least ignorant of sexual diversity. My reading of these encounters will be queer, with the understanding that heterosexuality and heteronormativity are cultural, social, and historical constructs that have promoted a way of life that is restricted by general discourse (Ambjörnsson 2006, 52). Including a posthumanist approach to the relationship between humans and nature spirits, I challenge the idea of humankind existing above all other species. The forest, where these encounters take place, I will argue, is a “natureculture” structured by humans (Haraway 2003; 2008). In my material, the nature spirits first appear as the queer “them,” an analogue to homosexuals in a heteronormative context (compare Franck 2012). The human male counterparts of the encounters are, however, also “queer by association.” By this, I mean that by cavorting with queer spirits, humans run the risk of being

seen as queer themselves. The expression “queer by association” was first used by Cindy Patton in a 1988 article (quoted in Pearl 2013) to express how non-queer people with AIDS in the 1980s were labelled as homosexual because of the disease’s label as a queer illness. In addition, I will analyse the legends using a posthumanist approach. In a posthumanist context, connecting with other living things is desire at its most basic level; “not to have or know but collapse the self with other(s),” is thus a queer desire, according to Patricia McCormack (2009, 113). The relationship between human and spirit is thus a queer relationship.

I will also challenge the idea of power relations between sexuality and nature through the employment of queer ecocriticism (Lönngren 2012). Key issues in queer ecocriticism include how the ideas of nature and sexuality are related and how the binary gender system is linked to the nature/culture discourse (Lönngren 2012, 211). Covering not only human (same-sex) sexuality, but also that of animals, queer ecocriticism incorporates LGBT politics, environmental politics, and cultural concepts of nature:

There is an ongoing relationship between sex and nature that exists institutionally, discursively, scientifically, spatially, politically, and ethically, and it is our task to interrogate that relationship in order to arrive at a more nuanced and effective sexual and environmental understanding. (Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson 2010, 5)

Queer studies, in relation to cross-species or non-heteronormative sexual encounters, have been conducted in many fields in the Nordic countries since the 1990s (those relevant to my own study include Franck 2012; Göransson 2012; and Lönngren 2012; 2015). Queer research in the field of older folkloristic texts has mostly been concentrated on fairy tales, such as the anthology *Transgressive Tales: Queering the Grimms*, edited by Kay Turner and Pauline Greenhill (2012), and most of it has been conducted in the United States. As a researcher of Nordic folklore using Nordic (Finnish-Swedish) material, I have noted a lack of queer studies of folk legends from the geographical area that forms my frame of reference.

Material

In this article, I closely examine three folk legends from the Swedish-speaking parts of rural Finland. These legends were recorded in 1890, 1898, and 1917, and can be found in the folklore archives of Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland (Society for Swedish Literature in Finland, abbreviated in this text as the SLS).

The recording of folklore material in Finnish in Finland began in the early 19th century, and with the publishing of *Kalevala* in 1835, the academic world took increasing interest in folk traditions (Andersson 1967, 75, 117, 168; Ekrem 2014, 24). Having been part of Sweden for centuries, the upper class of Finland was Swedish-speaking and remained so when Finland became part of Russia in 1809. The *Kalevala* was considered an important part of building a Finnish national identity (Virtanen 1999, 42), but not many reflected on the fact that there was a minority of Swedish-speaking peasantry with equally rich traditions. That did not happen until the 1850s, when a Svecoman (a pro-Swedish nationalist movement) campaign to keep Finland bilingual (that is, both Swedish-speaking and Finnish-speaking) also turned scholarly attention towards the popular traditions of the Swedish-speaking rural minority in Finland. In 1885, the SLS was founded, with the purpose of gathering Swedish folk dialects, folk songs and tales (Andersson 1967, 175; Honko 1980, 43). In short, the Swedish traditions of Finland had been noted as part of the national identity. The SLS had strict rules about how the material was to be collected. The collectors should visit the most remote villages, speak to the oldest inhabitants, note the names of the villages and informants and write down the information received in the vernacular, which could be tricky because no set grammar rules existed for writing dialects (Ekrem 2014, 34–6). Because of these criteria, the records are fairly similar in form, and they reflect a tradition (af Klintberg 1977, 6). What we cannot know from the legend records is why the legends were told – the focus at the time of collection was not on function, but on form and geographical circulation. The material was then organised systematically by archivists, which means that they decided what genres to assign the narratives to. These

categorisations were later questioned, revised, and improved (see Dégh and Vazsonyi 1973).

I have chosen to study legends because they are short, locally anchored narratives that mention people by name and thus provide a very clear mirror for the society they originate from. Life in the Finnish countryside at the end of the 19th century and the start of the 20th century was characterised by proximity and communality (Pohjola-Vilkuna 1995, 8). The daily bread was gained from the earth, the forest, and the sea – we will see examples of this in the next section, in which I present the material. This material describes the everyday tasks of outdoor work. Labour was divided according to gender; women's work was within the house or the farm, while men's work took them outside the homestead (Tarkka 1998, 93). Sexuality was controlled by the church (Pohjola-Vilkuna 1995, 12), but folklore with erotic content was very common as a form of entertainment, as well as a manifestation of stifled sexual desires (Lövkrona 1996, 88). The legends could be a means of expressing boundaries and desire, but also warnings.

The Legends

I have collected, for my forthcoming dissertation, material consisting of 86 legends that describe erotic encounters between humans and nature spirits. For this article, I have selected three that represent the themes of my material: seduction by a spirit, marriage to a spirit and having children with a spirit. The 86 legends, however, constitute the frame of reference for my understanding of these encounters.

The verbatim translations below were performed by me, and I have aimed to retain the colloquial tone and structure of the texts. These three legends were chosen mainly because of their explicit erotic content, but also because they all display ideas and norms regarding sexual behaviours, gender roles, and space. I define the term “erotic” within a frame of ambience, language, and acts.

It is sometimes not specified by the legends that the spirits encountered are, in fact, spirits, or what kind of spirits they are. It must be noted that the performers of folklore did not themselves categorise these

spirits; the recording researchers and the archivists did. The spirits were rarely homogeneously constructed in the legends. The circumstances of the encounter, however, tell us that such a being is indeed a spirit; for example, a woman walking alone in the forest is rarely human. Ultimately, categorising the spirit does not necessary contribute to the analysis of this study, but it helps make the text clearer.

- 1) A farmhand in Teerijärvi, who in the winter was engaged in chopping wood in the forest, was visited by a forest lady. She tried in every way to tempt him into criminal relations with her, but when she became too insistent, he struck her with the axe in a certain place. She immediately disappeared, but the axe became dull, as if he had struck stone. (SLS 10, 537)
- 2) Women among the trolls have, at times, also wanted to tempt men to lay with them to get children of human seed. Once, Mårtis Joss on Svarfvar hill, in Pörtom, in the forest, happened upon a female troll, who tried in every way to get him to lie with her and promised to give him as much money as he wanted if he only obliged her. But he had heard that the male member would be consumed as if by heat at such an intercourse, and therefore, he dared not appease her wish. (SLS 65, 44)
- 3) A boy was looking for horses in the forest and met there a fine human, and he said: "Good day, good day, my betrothed wife." "Good day, good day, my fiancé," she said. After a few days, she came down where he lived, and he had to take her [as his wife]. She said that she would be just as good as anyone else if only she would be christened. Then, one day, he was shoeing the horse, and the shoe was too narrow. She took it between her hands and straightened it out. They had children so strong that when their boy went to the mill, he took one full sack under each arm. When he got there, he asked the miller if he could mill some bags of flour. The miller thought that it was some small bag and asked him to bring it in, and then, the boy slammed the "bag" on the bench with a bang. (SLS 280, 391–2)

The spirit in the first legend is termed a “forest lady,” which is not too uncommon a name for the *skogsrå*, a Nordic version of a nymph. She was described as a solitary and usually female spirit who was often regarded as a caretaker of the forest, with its beasts as her pets and livestock. She went under many names, which changed locally, but several of them contained words that revealed her to be female. In this article, I will refer to her by her most commonly used Swedish name, *skogsrå*, which also implies that she is the *rådare*, the ruler and/or caretaker of the forest. Legends featuring the *skogsrå* generally describe her as beautiful (though when she turns her back, she looks like a rotting tree trunk), whimsical, and very sexual (Granberg 1935). As such, she represents female subversion in a discourse in which women are expected to be less sexual than men are.

In the second legend, we are told that the spirit is a troll. In the third, the spirit is said to be “a fine human.” For the sake of clarity, my assessment is that this is a troll. Trolls could be encountered in the forest, although they preferred to live in mountains or hills. They were usually imagined to be quite human-like and lived in heterosexual family constellations in societies that resembled those of humankind (Schön 2008, 20). Finland-Swedish records rarely provide any insight into the size and physical appearance of trolls, but they symbolise evil, as well as the forces of nature (Asplund Ingemark 2004, 9). Trolls were often well dressed, which betrayed their nature because people would not wear their Sunday best when entering the forest (Schön 2008, 36–7). Bold though they may be, female trolls were usually not considered to be as sexually aggressive as the *skogsrå*. However, they were known for kidnapping people, mostly children (Schön 2008, 104–25). The *skogsrå* was not a complete stranger to kidnapping herself, which shows the fleeting identity categories of these spirits.

These encounters all occur in the forest, often described as a borderland between the safe, human world and the unknown world of the supernatural (Asplund Ingemark 2004, 86, 87). This arena, then, plays an important part in the queering of the encounters. My analysis is divided into sections that address the forest as arena, as femininity, and as masculinity.

The Forest As an Arena for Encounters

The scene of the encounters is the forest, which is often regarded as a space outside of humankind's jurisdiction. Theoretically, a space is a place that has been given meaning through human experiences and interpretations (Olsson and Ruotsala 2009, 11). The forest is part of nature, a sphere that the 19th century bourgeoisie thought of as exotic and non-productive (Frykman and Löfgren 1979, 53). For the peasantry, however, the forest was a part of daily life for both men and women, though in different ways, that yielded material, firewood, and food and also provided livestock with grazing grounds (Frykman and Löfgren 1979, 46–8). However, as a symbolic space and a place of work, it was not an uncomplicated space to enter, especially for women (Stattin 1990, 24). It has been described as a frontier, a boundary between the systematically categorised domains, namely the human world and the spirit realm. In this borderland, supernatural beings lived (Stattin 2008, 49). Folklorist Tarkka writes in her article "Sense of the Forest: Nature and Gender in Karelian Oral Poetry" (1998):

Being in the forest represented a state of anomaly in which the familiar temporal reality, expectations, and world of sensations belonging to the cultural landscape and domestic sphere were no longer valid. (Tarkka 1998, 95)

However, the forest was also a "self-portrait of the human community" (Tarkka 1998, 96) in that the idea of the forest was constructed according to the norms and rules of society in an attempt to make the abnormal normal. The spirits inhabiting the forest were assigned human, normative values of having families, homes and livestock, but they still were regarded as separate from humans. The animal nature of the spirits, in combination with their demonisation by the church, made sexual relations with spirits akin to bestiality, a capital offense (Liliequist 1992, 141–50). This is the foundation for our definition of the spirits as queer and of the humans having sexual relations with them as displaying a queer sexuality in that they have a relationship with that which is not human. This matter, however, is very complex.

The forest is a female-coded place in that it is dangerous; it contains female spirits, and is connected to the idea of female sexuality as wild and untamed. It also serves as an area for performing masculinity through hunting, which is a sign of virility and manliness. In Karelian oral poetry, the forest is described as a woman, and the man entering it becomes a physical part of it (Tarkka 1998, 99, 107, 108). This concept fits well with the idea of the female nature as something that must be conquered by male culture (see Hirdman 2001).

Facing the Dance

The division of the world into the duality of nature and culture is an idea that emerged with the birth of the modern western society and also constitutes a foundation for our understanding of sexuality. The natural is right and good, but being close to nature is wrong and foul. Queer sexualities have been described in terms of being “close to nature,” as in being unbridled, and also “against nature,” a contradiction that springs from the connection between sexuality and procreation. Sexuality without procreation is unwanted, unnatural, and non-normative, whereas procreative sexuality is desired, natural, and normative (Gaard 1997, 117–8). The fact that we view female nature spirits as inherently sexual and as the embodiment of nature is a consequence of these discourses. Ecofeminist Greta Gaard (1997, 115–6) uses Val Plumwood’s list of dichotomies to illustrate how one set of values is seen as negative (female, nature, animal, primitive, etcetera), as well as the fact that the linking together of these groups exacerbates their oppression. By relating the above negative values to one another, the positive values are also related to one another and defined by what they are *not*, that is, the negative values. Gaard has been criticised for having a too static approach to sexuality and nature (Lönngren 2012, 209), but her work constitutes a basis for queer ecocriticism, which challenges the dualisation of nature and culture, with its extension of binary sexual identities and practices.

In 19th century agrarian society, however, the division between nature and culture was not absolute. The farmer lived in a productive landscape

consisting of various places of work (Frykman and Löfgren 1979, 46). Some places, like the village or the homestead, were considered safer than others, like the forest, but in order to make a living, people did consider the entire landscape around them as consisting of various productive areas. I will consider this worldview from a posthumanist perspective.

Nature and culture are not opposites, says Donna Haraway (2003; 2008), who introduced the term “natureculture” to illustrate a new way of thinking about nature and culture as an inseparable synthesis. Nature is not free from human structures and concepts, but rather a dynamic part of human culture. Studies about naturalcultural relations between human beings and animals have been conducted by many (e.g., Fuentes 2010; Latimer and Miele 2013), but I refer to Animal Studies scholar Erica Fudge in particular. In her article “The Animal Face of Early Modern England” (2013), on 17th century English humanist ideas on human-animal relations, Fudge compares the official view of placing humans above animals (a tradition posthumanists are working to break) with contemporary archive material concerning the everyday lives of small-scale English farmers. She discovers that the philosophical concept of livestock holding was not shared by the farmers: “[T]hey [the livestock] are things of value; they are living symbols; and they are simply members of the household with whom human share bodies, healthcare regimes and blessings.” (Fudge 2013, 190)

Haraway (2003, 15), writing about dogs, prefers the term “companion species” to companion animal because of its larger and more diversified spectrum, “not just because one must include such organic beings as rice, bees, tulips, and intestinal flora, all of whom make life for humans what it is – and vice versa.” The idea of the naturalcultural encounter between companion species, or the “dance of relating,” as Haraway (2008, 25) calls it, informs how I view the interaction between humans and nature spirits in my material. There is a familiarity extended towards the spirits, yet they are distinctly not human and are not seen as such, except for the spirit in the third example, who is referred to as a “fine human,” which underscores the notion of the human-like appearance of trolls. The spirits hold a complex and norm-breaking identity as something that appears

to be human, but is in fact supernatural *as well as* animal, though not a beast. They can be seen as queer in the sense that they seem human, but are not. The *skogsrå* in the first example is called a “forest lady,” which indicates a human-like appearance and also suggests a certain gender, class, and marital status. The spirit in the second example is expressly a troll, trying to tempt a man into having sexual relations, to which he is not immediately opposed. Thus, we see that the spirits are treated as something familiar, though they are not always friendly; in this way, they are a textbook example of a companion species (Haraway 2003, 30).

In one sense, the forest is a different place than the village, but at the same time, it is an extension of the village, which itself is not free of complexity, such as gendered sections. When the men in these legends entered the forest, they entered large areas that were uninhabited by humans, but these were still known areas. The forest was present in everyday life and provided people with what they needed to survive. The spirits living in the forest can be seen as the “other,” a stranger, familiar in his or her role as the stranger, who is everything we are not (compare Ahmed 2000). They have faces, as Fudge (2013, 180) puts it, using Haraway’s expression that “[l]ack of reason means lack of face, means lack of individuality, lack of home, which in turn means that these beings are outside of full ethical consideration.” The spirits in my material do not lack reason. They have their own lives, interests, and volitions; they want to have relations with people (SLS 10, 537), they want children with people (SLS 65, 44), and they have their own dwellings where they can take humans, but that they also can choose to leave (SLS 280, 391–2). The idea of having a face is especially interesting in the encounters between humans and the *skogsrå*, for instance, in that she was often imagined to prefer face-to-face meetings because her back looked like a rotting tree trunk or because she found it difficult to hide her tail. She usually did not turn her back until she was dismissed, driven away, or frightened, when she had “lost face,” so to speak.

Haraway (2008, 5) points out that touch is necessary for a meaningful encounter. In regard to the material I have, I see touch as not only physical, but also metaphysical. The strong tradition of storytelling about

spirits shows that they have touched us and we have touched them or, at the very least, desire to. The vast collections of folklore containing encounters with spirits are a strong mark of our desire to connect with the familiar stranger, who is not quite us.

Subversive Women

For an encounter to occur between human and spirit, someone must take the initiative (Asplund Ingemark 2004, 86). This initiative is often taken by female nature spirits; they perform actively in order to achieve and maintain contact with humans, often breaking the rules of gender-normative behaviour. However, they simultaneously perform according to a traditionally feminine code. We will consider these discrepancies below.

The spirits desire connection with humans and are sometimes very insistent on it. In Example 3, a troll girl is encountered by a boy in the forest and greeted with: “Good day, good day, my betrothed wife.” She replies: “Good day, good day, my fiancé,” and shows up at his home a few days later. Soon, “he had to take her [as his wife].” She tells him that she “would be just as good as anyone else, if only she was christened” (SLS 280, 391–2). Here she demonstrates an awareness of her own subordination because she is un-christened. She also knows that she will be considered more of an equal if she is christened, but at the same time, she will be subordinate to the man in the patriarchal structure of the society that she wishes to take her place in. That subordination is a given in a society built upon the principle of male authority.

The process of “de-trolling” the troll girl, of turning her away from the non-normative, started with the words she and the boy exchanged upon meeting, when he called her his wife. The construction of identity through language and repetitive acts is the core of performativity (Butler 1993, 179). The ceremony of wedlock is a ceremony of words and actions; when the presiding official announces: “I now pronounce you husband and wife,” the couple changes identity. The boy performs that same rite by greeting the troll girl in the way that he does, and she acknowledges him with her reply. Performing a heterosexual marriage, the troll girl

also performs womanhood by having a child. According to Michelle Göransson (2012), a straight life-line contains certain attributes, and for women, one of them is having children. By straying from that path, a life becomes queer and difficult to grasp for heteronormative society. A woman without a child simply is not a woman (Göransson 2012, 123). Children were a natural part of life in peasant society, so much so that magic was used as a preventive method, although not to increase fertility, according to folklorist Stark-Arola (1998, 196) in her dissertation *Magic, Body and Social Order: The Construction of Gender through Women's Private Rituals in Traditional Finland*, on Finnish-Karelian women's secret magic rituals. Children were simply assumed to arrive without magical help.

According to Judith Butler's (2007) heterosexual matrix, a body is only comprehensible when it meets the demands of the determined gender and sex identities advocated by discourse; the male sex has a male gender and desires the female sex, which has a female gender. The female nature spirits are described with words that accentuate their female gender, but they act in a way that is not traditionally feminine. The acts are not necessarily provocative in themselves, but when performed by a female, they are charged with gender-bound values. A woman is supposed to look and act like a woman and desire a man who looks and acts like a man. The female spirits break this rule by not acting according to their gender. They are strong and can shape horseshoes with their bare hands, and their children are strong as well (SLS 280, 391–2). Physical strength is traditionally a typical male trait, but when a woman displays it, she poses a threat to masculinity (Lövkrona 1996, 142). Here, it must be noted that strength was appreciated in the women of the peasantry because farming was hard labour and women were expected to put in as much work as the men (Östman 2000, 174–5). The kind of superhuman strength demonstrated by the spirit in the legend, however, is a far cry from the stamina that gave women the durability to manage their daily chores on a farm. The strength to shape a horseshoe with one's bare hands is not only supernatural, but can also be interpreted as a threatening act: the spirit is showing that she is more than capable of hurting her

husband. A Christian wife should obey and acknowledge her husband as her head, not threaten or emasculate him.

The nature spirits can be said to represent nature in the sense that they are non-human (my extended material includes records that describe the spirits' human-like clothes, but also the existence of tails and the aforementioned rotting tree trunk instead of a back), and as such, they are posed against humankind as the antithesis of humanity. However, as ecocultural theorist and professor of American literature Stacy Alaimo writes in her paper "Eluding Capture: The Science, Culture, and Pleasure of 'Queer' Animals" (2010), the human-animal dualism is faulty in that it reduces animal sex to mechanical acts of instinct. Trolls, it is said in my material, "tempt men to lay with them to get children of human seed" (SLS 65, 44). They have a clear sexual agenda, and this does not only consist of instinct. The lines between human and non-human are blurred even more with the words used to describe the nature spirits: "a *female* troll" (SLS 65, 44), "a fine *human*" (SLS 280, 391-2), and "a forest *lady*" (SLS 10, 537). In two instances, it is even specifically pointed out that the spirit encountering the human male is female (SLS 65, 44 and SLS 10, 537); this is a reminder that even if a queer desire is displayed between a spirit and a human, it is still heterosexual. Socially conditioned heterosexuality is an issue that Pia Laskar addresses in her dissertation *Ett bidrag till heterosexualitetens historia: Kön, sexualitet och njutningsnormer i sexhandböcker 1800–1920* (2005), on gender, sexuality and norms of pleasure in sex manuals from 1800 to 1920. She states that in these handbooks, heterosexuality is, in fact, a learned behaviour. How the sex act should be performed, when, where, why, and with whom are all described, thus creating a handbook for performing heterosexuality. By pointing out that the nature spirits that the men encountered were female and highlighting their human appearance, heteronormativity is confirmed, and the spirits are humanised. While it is impossible for the spirits to actually become human, they are, as we have already seen, intricately linked with humans as a companion species in a nature-culture. Patricia MacCormack (2009) writes:

Seduction is not a desire to know or assimilate the other, it wants the other to change us and us to change the quality of the other to create a unique hybrid beyond any sexual narrative. (MacCormack 2009, 115)

It is indeed this that I see in the legends about erotic encounters between humans and nature spirits. Sexual desire is there, and it is queer because it is inter-species, but all the greater is the desire to connect.

Masculinity Revisited

If the female spirits act in a subversive manner, breaking the unspoken rules of gender-specified conduct, the male humans are the very picture of heteronormative masculinity. They seem uncompromising, strong, and capable. In two of the three example legends, we meet our men at work. They are in the forest, actively performing masculinity (compare Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson 2010, 13) by chopping wood (SLS 10, 537) and looking for horses (SLS 280, 391–2). The place of work is essential to the nature of the work; the work men performed in the forest was part of the male identity (Olsson and Ruotsala 2009, 15). Hunting, for example, was a sign of virility and masculinity (Tarkka 1998, 99) and was exclusively performed by men. By performing these manly coded tasks, the men of the legends are securing their place in society and confirming heteronormativity. In the encounter with the nature spirits, however, their heteronormative sexuality is in danger of faltering because the nature spirits represent the queer and being associated with them and risking a fall into temptation will compromise the men's masculinity. The masculinity has to be performed anew. The farmhand reacts by striking the *skogsrå* between the legs, thus using violence to put an end to her advances. Violence was considered unbecoming of a man (Liliequist 2001, 95), but in certain situations, it could be justified. For example, men were allowed to, and actually did, react violently towards women who had exposed them to love magic (Stark-Arola 1998, 222). The *skogsrå* in my material subjects the farmhand to her invitations and brings him dangerously close to the role of the victim, upon which he reacts with violence, as is his prerogative, and brings down his axe be-

tween her legs. Order is restored, although his axe becomes blunt, “as if he had struck stone” (SLS 10, 537). The axe, as an object made of steel, was believed to have protective powers. Steel, considered the most effective ward against the supernatural, was used throughout life in the form of small pieces, scissors, knives, and axes (Tillhagen 1962, 40). As a tool of manly coded work (logging), the axe is also attributed male values and can be seen as the extension of a man. The farmhand in the legend uses protective steel in the shape of a tool with male attributes, so he is symbolically fighting the obstinate female with masculinity. A power structure emerges in which the man’s strength and phallus, the axe, are used directly to harm the female sex of the *skogsrå*, a form of power-based sexual violence. That the axe was rendered useless by the strike, can be read as a form of emasculation.

In Example 2, a man named Mårtis Joss is offered money for his sexual services by a troll who wants a half-human child. He is tempted, but decides to decline for fear of losing his male member, which he has heard can “be consumed as if by heat” via such an intercourse (SLS 65, 44). A man without his phallus would no longer be a man. It is the fear of being emasculated that hinders him, rather than social and moral norms about giving in to the female and non-human, which in itself is a form of unmanliness. According to historian Mikael Häll (2013, 401) in his dissertation *Skogsrået, näcken och Djävulen: Erotiska naturväsen och demonisk sexualitet i 1600- och 1700-talens Sverige*, men who gave themselves up to female nature spirits were regarded as feminine and weak. To accept payment for sexual intercourse is basically prostitution; another reason for the man not to accept the troll’s offer is that prostitution was traditionally seen as a female occupation. Here, performative masculinity is able to stand against the lures of nature spirits. Mårtis Joss, who was offered money for intercourse in Example 2, managed to retain his masculine identity. The farmhand in Example 1 was close to getting away with his masculinity intact, but the strike that protected him left his axe blunt.

The boy seeking horses in the forest in Example 3 married the spirit, thereby queering himself by association. He had her converted to

Christianity and fathered children with her. In other words, he had her perform humanness in an attempt to pass her off as human and thus uphold heteronormativity. It is said in the legend that he was attempting to shoe a horse, but the shoe was too narrow; upon which his wife took the shoe and straightened it with her bare hands. Steel and iron are materials that spirits were thought to be unable to touch, which means that the wife has taken one step closer to being a human, despite still having superhuman strength. This poses an interesting paradox, which could be the topic of a paper in itself. The legends about spirits were rarely unanimous in their descriptions, and as with any storyteller, details were changed to fit the story at hand. We see this also in the spirit's willingness to convert to Christianity, despite Christianity and its symbols being something that usually kept spirits at bay. The complexity of the queer relationship between the boy and his not-quite-human wife is demonstrated here.

According to Laskar (2005, 82), marriage has been used as a heteronormative gender-actualisation project, which means that one was not considered a man or a woman until being joined and completed in matrimony. The identity of boy or man can be a question of age. The boy in the third legend was apparently old enough to marry, but not old enough to be called a man. Because his marriage to the spirit was not heteronormative, he was also unable to gain the identity of a man.

Discussion

In this article, I have studied Finland-Swedish folk legends describing erotic encounters between humans and nature spirit, using a queer and posthumanist approach. The material demonstrates queer sexuality in the sense that it is cross-species. Posthumanism in itself is, according to MacCormack (2009, 113), a queer desire because of its ambition to create connections between living things. The parties in the encounters often act in a subversive manner, which can also be described as queer in the sense of being aberrant. The encounters happen in the forest, a space often regarded as one of the two poles of the nature/culture dichotomy. Instead of differentiating between nature and culture, which are in-

deed strongly influenced by one another, I suggest the use of Haraway's (2003) term natureculture. In a natureculture, man is not the epitome of creation, but rather lives in a relationship of curiosity with other living species, a relationship between companion species. Companion species share a significant past and present and will also share a future. They desire connections, and in the sexual relations that sometimes follow, identities become unstable and fluid.

Furthermore, these encounters express masculinity and femininity and how these (mal)function. Men are expected to have an active and enforcing sexuality that they are free to exercise, while women's sexuality is expected to be passive, submissive, and receptive. Female spirits, however, are described as sexually aggressive, which represents both an erotic fantasy and also a nightmare because men are in danger of becoming emasculated by active female sexuality. The legends can thus be read as both warnings and fantasies. Simultaneously, the female spirits show a certain level of submission, which shows that the patriarchal structures of society were strong enough to uphold male power, albeit imperfectly.

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SAMMANFATTNING

I artikeln undersöker jag queera, erotiska möten mellan människor och naturväsen i finlandssvenska folksägnen. Genom tillämpningen av queerteori och posthumanistisk teori problematiseras och utmanas idéer om normativ kvinnlig och manlig sexualitet i sägnerna. Samtidigt ifrågasätts också föreställningar om den binära uppdelningen natur/kultur samt dikotomins relation till sexualitet. Den queera närläsning jag gör avslöjar genusrelaterade normbrott, men även inkonsekvens gällande dessa normer. Den mellanartsliga relationen mellan människor och väsen kan tolkas som queer, men samtidigt är den normativ eller eftersträvar normativitet. Relationen kan också ses som ett förhållande sällskapsarter emellan; en relation baserad på begäret för förening, samt gemenskap i det förflutna, i nuet och i framtiden.