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GREENLANDIC LITERATURE: ITS TRADITIONS, CHANGES, AND TRENDS

CHRISTIAN BERTHELSEN

Abstract. This article deals with the origin of Greenlandic written literature and its development into modern Native poetry and prose. Greenlanders inherited abundant oral traditions from their ancestors, but between 1721, when recent colonization began, and 1861, when the first Native newspaper was issued, there was no independent writing. In this newspaper, small articles written by Greenlanders were presented to a Greenland-wide public. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the first novels were published. This article demonstrates how modern Greenlandic literature has been affected over the past 100 years by European influences. The author, a Greenlander by birth and former school director for Greenland, illustrates how the development of society is mirrored in both prose and poetry, and concludes that the urge to write about Greenland is currently bearing fruit, especially in the field of ethnic literature.

INTRODUCTION

This article is primarily concerned with Greenlandic literature, which has evolved since European influence first had an important impact about a century ago (Berthelsen 1983: 62ff). However, mention should first be made of pre-European poetry and prose known to us through old legends which were passed from generation to generation as oral tradition.

The old legends are of fundamental importance in understanding Eskimo culture and psyche. In those old legends which have been collected, we learn about everyday events and beliefs that were common to Eskimo society. These tales of daily life are dramas in themselves, and fantasy was allowed free expression. The themes of these tales reflect the eternal struggle for survival and, at the same time, the fear of invisible forces which have power over life. Animal fables give a clear impression of the Eskimos' close relationship with animals. Witchcraft played an important part in both a benevolent and a malevolent sense. Killing was part of the Eskimos' daily life. This created insecurity and fear for certain individuals and families. Tales of heroes were often exaggerated; they accomplished incredible feats against nature with their bare fists. Poetry or lyrics were used to settle disputes at large gatherings. Two opponents would sing

satirical songs in front of a large audience who passed judgment, expressing their sympathy with delighted cheers or laughter and their disapproval with hoots (Thalbitzer 1950:228). Magical spells were recited to lure prey nearer or to appeal for help when in danger. Magical spells were personal possessions which were passed on from generation to generation. For Eskimos, the power of the word was tremendous. An East Greenlander once expressed it thus: "The word is man's greatest strength. One can wound or please a person with a word —for life. If one is wounded by a weapon, the wound can still be seen but it does not hurt as long as a word which is not even spoken. Therefore, the word is man's greatest strength."

Oral tradition has continued until modern times. What some older Greenlanders can remember from the storytellers of our childhood belonged to the more primitive Greenland of 40-50 years ago. The very good storytellers were busy during the dark winter. In some cases, these storytellers were invited into homes and rewarded for their entertainment with food. In other cases, they simply called because they knew they would be welcome. Many old Greenlanders can still recall the atmosphere in those small houses when they listened to the monotonous voice of the storyteller. It was windy and dark outside, and the silence in the room and the dim light

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helped to create a special atmosphere around the storyteller. The men of the house sat and worked on their equipment. The women sat on the bed and sewed. The children were perhaps already in bed. When the tension and suspense reached a climax, the children crawled right under the bedclothes and those sitting on the bed lifted up their legs and sat cross-legged. One could not distinguish exactly what was under the bed among all the skins, provisions, and washing bowls, but something dangerous may be lurking there! The monotonous delivery, which in the winter was often accompanied by the howling of the wind, was conducive to sleep. Loud yawns could be heard now and then and finally the sound of snoring. But the storyteller continued undaunted; it was part of his task to make his audience drowsy.

CHRISTIANITY

External influences arrived with the colonization of Greenland in 1721. The priest Hans Egede began to preach the Gospel. Even though the new influences began as external ones, they proceeded on Greenlandic terms, insofar as Hans Egede and his followers had to acquire a working knowledge of Greenlandic language in order to even begin preaching the Gospel. On the other hand, Greenlanders had to learn the art of reading so that they might read the Bible and be taught the Christian faith. A new kind of prose and poetry began to emerge, that of the Bible and hymnals (Berthelsen 1983:24-25).

The teaching of reading progressed quite satisfactorily, but there was very little ordinary reading material apart from the Bible and the hymnal. We know that at the beginning of the nineteenth century, handwritten Danish tales translated into Greenlandic were circulated from house to house until they became so tattered that they were no longer readable (Berthelsen 1983:25-27). Not until 1830 were a few books printed, and in the 1850s a printing house was finally established in Godthåb (Oldendorf 1957: 39). Within four or five years, 10-12 books were printed, among them a collection of legends in Greenlandic and Danish with copious illustrations by Aron from Kangeq, Jens Kreutzmann, and Rasmus Berthelsen, who were "discovered" at that time (Berthelsen 1983:38).

The most significant product that emerged from the printing house was the newspaper *Atuagagdliutit* ("reading material which is offered") which began in 1861 (Berthelsen 1983: 47-48; Petersen 1970:328; Oldendorf 1957:107-126). Today it is called *Atuagagdliutit/Grønlandsposten*, since the Danish language newspaper, *Grønlandsposten*, which started in 1942, was taken over by *Atuagagdliutit* in

1952. *Atuagagdliutit* was of the utmost significance for intellectual development in Greenland. It was in this paper's columns that the ordinary Greenlander started to express himself in writing. The newspaper produced 12 issues per annum but they were only distributed once a year. The communication network at that time did not allow for more frequent distribution. It was illustrated with colored lithographs and wood-cuts in black and white made by Greenlandic artists, who had copied some of the illustrations from Danish journals. These illustrations were produced by the newspaper's editor, Lars Møller. With the newspapers, Greenlanders got local and foreign news a year late, but that did not matter. They were not used to anything better. *Atuagagdliutit*'s primary objective was to entertain and inform, as explained in the announcement of the newspaper's inception written by its founder, Dr. H. J. Rink, who was then Inspector for South Greenland. The newspaper's material was multifarious. Some Greenlandic seal hunters described their settlements, the weather, any unusual occurrences noted while hunting, and accidents. In the oldest issues of the newspaper, one can find a number of translated Danish legends and some classics of world literature such as *Robin Hood*, *Robinson Crusoe*, and *1001 Nights*. There were also accounts of arctic expeditions and wars in various parts of Europe.

The Danish missionaries created the Greenlandic hymnal, *Ivngerutit okko 119, arsillyput, kalalin opertut attuægekseit nalektarangamik* (These 119 Songs Are Written for Use by Faithful Greenlanders During the Service; Thalbitzer 1950:282). Even today, one finds a large number of hymns written by Danish missionaries in the Greenlandic hymnal. Most are Danish hymns translated and adapted into Greenlandic. The first Greenlandic hymn writer of any repute was Rasmus Berthelsen (1827-1901). He was educated at the Seminarium or Teachers' Training College, in Godthåb, which was founded in 1845; he later became a teacher at the same college. We can find his hymns, among other places, in a small hymnal which he published in 1877 entitled *Tussiatit* (Hymns). His name has become closely associated with a particular Christian hymn, "Guuterput qutsinnermiu" ("Our Lord in Heaven"), which is based on the angels' song to the shepherds on Christmas Eve. This is a kind of Christmas carol or national anthem which has become a part of the Greenlandic Christmas tradition. At Christmas and on special occasions, everyone rises spontaneously to sing the hymn in part-song. Since Rasmus Berthelsen's day, the writing of Greenlandic hymns has gradually been assumed by Greenlanders (Berthelsen 1983:56).

THE BEGINNING OF NATIVE LITERATURE

The beginning of the twentieth century was, in many ways, a time of upheaval in Greenland (Berthelsen 1976). Improvements were made in the field of education, Greenlanders' participation in the country's affairs was extended by the creation of district and regional councils, and the arctic climate became significantly milder for a period. For Greenlanders, this meant the creation of new occupations—namely fishing and sheep breeding—alongside traditional seal hunting. A religious revival spread from Godthåb and took root along the west coast. From 1911 to 1920, there was a running debate about Greenland's identity, which was something quite new (Berthelsen 1983:60).

It was during this exciting period, with its numerous movements, that two of Greenland's first poets were recognized. They are still considered to be among the most significant of Greenland's writers. These poets were the priest Henrik Lund (1875-1948) and the organist and college teacher Jonathan Petersen (1881-1961). Henrik Lund and Jonathan Petersen continued in the tradition of Rasmus Berthelsen's hymn writing. The common theme of their popular verses is the homeland of Greenland. They described the beauty of their country, and wrote songs about the people living there. Some of the verses criticized society, but it is not the system—in this case Greenland's status as a colony—which is criticized, but rather the people themselves. Other verses contain rousing and admonitory passages directed at the whole of society—a kind of pedagogical manifesto in the spirit of the times.

Henrik Lund's verses advocated, to some degree, the retention of old traditions such as collecting supplies for the winter. But at the same time, he chastised people for simply clinging to old ways from force of habit. He urged them to welcome new ideas. One of Henrik Lund's poems, "Nunarput utoqqarsuanngoravit" ("Our Ancient Land"), which is sung as Greenland's national anthem, recognizes the identity of Greenlanders and appeals to the country's children to be aware of modern influences. Henrik Lund wrote very subtle descriptions of the Greenlandic landscape, especially of beautiful places in the most southern part of Greenland where he was raised. He was a humble admirer of the Creator's works, which he praised in graphic and evocative poems. But for him, this earthly beauty was only an introduction to the beauty awaiting us after death. He often used visual images and metaphors when he wanted to describe what he saw and heard (Berthelsen 1983:62-75).

Jonathan Petersen was the interpreter of patriotic passion and defender of the traditional ways of life. The basic theme in his socially

oriented poems was quite clearly that life in Greenland should be based on what the country has to offer—on Greenlandic terms—as it is expressed today. Those who live by hunting should by all means follow their ancestors' way of life, whereas those employed by the state to teach their fellow countrymen should acquire all the knowledge that they could absorb. Jonathan Petersen also acknowledged Greenland's colonial status on the grounds that Greenland could not manage without firm affiliation to another country. In one of his poems, he called the country "Denmark's property" and expressed great devotion and gratitude to Denmark. He urged the coming generations to take part in building the country in collaboration with the Danes (Berthelsen 1983:75-86).

Another popular poet of this era deserves mention: Josva Kleist (1879-1938), principal catechist and longtime member of the Regional Council for South Greenland. He expressed in his poems his outright indignation at excessive use of European stimulants, coffee and tobacco, which people acquired by selling sealskins that should have been used locally to cover women's boats and kayaks. At the same time, he reprimanded his fellow countrymen for their conservatism and obstinacy. People may cite all sorts of excuses, but they often forget that it is they who are to blame when nothing changes (Berthelsen 1983:86-89).

THE FIRST NOVELS

The first two Greenlandic novels, which appeared in 1914 and 1931 respectively, are concerned with the future and are, in reality, political writings in the form of novels. The first is called *Sinnattugaq* (*The Dream*) and was written by the priest Mathias Storch (1883-1957). The second, *Ukiut 300-nngornerat* (*The 300th Anniversary of Hans Egede's arrival in Greenland*), was written by a college teacher and later Member of the Danish Parliament, Augo Lynge (1899-1959). *Sinnattugaq* is, above all, a criticism of the established order in Greenland at the turn of the century. The author directs his criticism to the ignorance which prevailed among Greenlanders at that time and which put them in an inferior position with regard to the Danes. The author allows the book's main character, Pavia, an intelligent young man, to experience a number of situations where ignorance and adherence to the old ways lead to misunderstandings and end in misfortune. Pavia is affected by the consequences of ignorance and prejudices. In despair after his sweetheart is given to another at the insistence of her parents, he falls asleep on the

bench in his college classroom and dreams of the town of Nuuk (Godthåb) in the year 2105, or 200 years in the future, where everything has changed for the better because people have become enlightened. The reader is led to suspect that the transition was extremely difficult (Berthelsen 1983:89-96).

In Augo Lynge's *Ukiut 300-nngornerat*, we also look forward to the year 2021, or about 100 years into the future. Augo Lynge's Greenland in 2021 is part of the Danish kingdom. Greenlanders and Danes now have equal rights. Commercial fishing is the principal industry. Agreements have been made with Newfoundland and Iceland concerning fishing rights. Augo Lynge's optimistic remarks with regard to the new occupations of fishing and sheep raising must be seen in the light of the prosperous period of the 1920s and 1930s. This boom period, which included the two occupations of fishing and sheep raising, was due, in part, to climatic amelioration. The book's plot is peped up by using the techniques of suspense as one might find in detective novels. Augo Lynge mentions in his book that flight routes to China and Japan have been opened over the North Pole. He talks about the United States of Europe, a modern hotel on a *nunatak* (a peak surrounded by glaciers) in the Inland Ice, and an invention which should make it possible to melt the Inland Ice. Greenland's capital is described as an important fishing port with high-rise buildings. At the book's writing, people no doubt smiled at these ideas. But, indeed, much of his subject matter has already become reality (Berthelsen 1983:96-103). This first period of European-influenced poetry and novel writing was, then, concerned with current social conditions and speculations about the future. Greenland had become more outward-looking.

NEW INSPIRATIONS FROM THE 1920s

We now turn to a revival in poetry which began about 1930. The direct source of inspiration was, without a doubt, the external orientation taught at the Seminarium. Danish had been introduced into elementary schools, and consequently this subject became more important in the college's curriculum. Danish literature texts were used in Danish lessons as far as the students' level of language would permit. This new opportunity to view the outside world was seized upon by some of the brightest students at the college who, at the same time, displayed their own literary talents in various forms. They were inspired by reading Danish poetry and prose.

These new sources of inspiration brought new and broad subjects to Greenlandic poetry. The new poems were clearly more emotive and included many nuances of experiencing beauty;

some of the poems expressed spontaneity and youthful *joie de vivre*. Poems stressing social issues with a moralistic attitude were no longer predominant. The trend in prose was to look back in time to find new themes, in some cases right back to the Eskimo past. Current problems were only tangentially treated. There was no longer a preoccupation with the future. The main figures in these new trends in poetry and prose were Frederik Nielsen (born 1905), who trained as a teacher and later became head of Radio Greenland, Pavia Petersen (1904-1943), principal catechist, and Hans Lynge (born 1906), artist and sculptor. The three went to college together in Godthåb and, without a doubt, inspired one another (Petersen 1970:332-335; Berthelsen 1983:110).

Frederik Nielsen's poetry is full of praise for the beautiful Greenlandic landscape, good period portrayals, situational descriptions, and serious meditations on life. His prose works are concerned with the past. The plot of his first book, *Tuumarsi* (*Thomas*), is taken from an authentic incident: the famine which devastated a settlement on the west coast of Greenland in the mid-1800s. The descriptions in *Tuumarsi* present a sequence of portrayals of settlement life at that time, with scenes taken from daily life to illustrate particular kinds of friendly and unfriendly behavior, special kinds of humor, happiness and sorrow, and other situations.

Frederik Nielsen's main work is a trilogy that portrays the Eskimos' long migration from Canada to Greenland's coastal regions, their contact with Norsemen who inhabited southern Greenland for approximately 400 years, and their establishment of settlements, including various episodes in the development of Greenland up to about 1900. The portrayals of the oldest periods are based to a great extent on the old native legends, whereas he naturally uses historical sources for the basis of the latter section (Berthelsen 1983:110-131).

Pavia Petersen managed, in his short life, to make his mark by authoring two books. He also wrote poems which are among the most beautiful in the Greenlandic hymnal. In his evocative verses, he succeeded in expressing distinctive Greenlandic feelings about landscapes and traditions. One is especially aware of his pronounced feeling for colors in poems that describe the seasons, especially autumn. Pavia Petersen wrote a short play, the plot of which is taken from everyday life in a Greenlandic town at the start of the 1930s. In the play, changed social conditions are having an adverse effect on young people. An unstable, shallow youth who earns his living by casual labor and a little fishing and hunting is contrasted with the reliable, sensible seal hunter and his equally reliable mate. Pavia Petersen's sympathy for the hunting way

of life is obvious (Berthelsen 1983:131-145).

Hans Lynge wrote a number of short plays which have been performed over the years under his direction. Only a few of them have been published. The Eskimo world is the common theme of these and other works. He emphasizes features from the Eskimos' free and independent way of life and their conceptual world, which was full of fantasy. His book *Ersingitsup piumasaa* (*The Will of the Invisible*) portrays two brothers who take revenge on their stepfather, who killed their real father in order to marry their mother. It is a dramatic description. The portrayal is also of interest in that Hans Lynge tried to express the old mental set or world view of the Eskimos. Finally, Hans Lynge published a book of memoirs called *Greenland's Inner Life*, in which he explains the Eskimos' world view that prevailed at the beginning of the 1900s as well as living conditions at that time. He also produced a number of prologues, written in connection with special events (Berthelsen 1983:145-160).

INSPIRATIONS FROM THE OLD HUNTING CULTURE

The development and steady cultural influence from Europe came to an abrupt halt at the outbreak of World War II. Greenland had no contact with Denmark for approximately five years; Denmark was occupied by the Germans for most of the war years. During the war, the United States and Canada undertook to protect Greenland and to supply the population with food and other essential commodities. Air bases were established and foreign troops were stationed in the country. Greenland was thereby brought into global war and political upheaval in a sudden and very real fashion. After the war, Greenlanders voiced very clear demands for changes to the existing conditions. The social and economic development of Greenland began to be based on a modern fishing industry. I shall not go into details of that development here, but suffice it to say that the new arrangement began in 1950. The country ended its colonial status in 1953, when Greenland became incorporated into the Kingdom of Denmark. These substantial changes, which were generated by political decisions conforming to the wishes of Greenlanders, had unforeseen and far-reaching consequences. The cultural aspect of the country's development began to lag behind the technological. Changes in social development during the first years of the new arrangement constrained cultural activities. It was as if Greenland was overwhelmed by its new developments. It was not until 15 or 20 years after the new arrangement began—after the re-organization of the school and educational system had taken effect—that one could find signs of

literary revival. Literary works in the last 30 to 40 years can be divided into two thematic categories: (1) portrayals which are clearly inspired by the old Greenlandic hunting culture and (2) politically inspired poetry and writing.

Tales of the old days have always been loved by the Greenlandic people and the need for them became more topical and more strongly felt during the years following the implementation of social change. These portrayals, which involve some romanticization of the good old days, have at the very least been very popular reading and have provided good material for the radio. One must, of course, remember that for Greenland the concept of "the good old days" is not of a distant past but is close to the present. East Greenlanders have been in contact with Europeans for less than 100 years. Because Greenlandic identity is an important issue, it is only natural that the portrayals of the old days serve as a focus in the search for cultural roots, whether conscious or unconscious.

One of these writers about the past was the priest Otto Rosing (1896-1965). He is exceptional in his treatment of material taken from historical accounts. An example is his very popular historical novel, *Taseralik, The Place With an Inland Lake*, in which the plot centers on the mid-1800s. Hunting families from North and South Greenland met at the hunting ground, Taseralik, in the summer to collect special foods for winter supplies, to barter for various utensils, and finally to meet other people. It often happened that young people found themselves a wife or a husband at these summer meetings, thereby bringing new blood into the family (Berthelsen 1983:170-180).

The teacher Ole Brandt (1918-1981) emphasized in his writing the free and independent way of life followed by early Greenlanders. His trilogy, *Qooqa*, *Tulluartoq I*, and *Tulluartoq II* (named for persons) is a family saga from the 1700s. Strapping and determined hunters, magnificent examples of their type, are described in the books. There is a veritable orgy of exploits and displays of strength when out hunting. These magnificent people also had high moral standards. They wished to live in peace with their neighbors, that is, without the killing and blood feuds which were part of daily life at that time (Berthelsen 1983:191-203).

Literature of Greenland also includes non-fiction. The priest, Otto Sandgreen (born 1914), has written a number of books which describe conditions in East Greenland from early times to about the coming of Christianity after 1894. He was a priest in East Greenland for a long time, and he collected many tales about the pre-Christian period through conversations with Greenlanders who had

experienced it firsthand, or who had been told of old ways by their parents or grandparents. Otto Sandgreen made many interesting cultural-historical observations, some of which have been recorded in his books and smaller publications (Berthelsen 1983:203-210).

The principal catechist, Villads Villadsen (born 1916), is, among other things, author of a long three-part epic poem called *Nalusuunerup taarnerani* (*In Heathen Darkness*). He called the first part "Qasapi's Last Day." It is about the Greenlander Qasapi who killed the last Norseman, after which he announced that victory had been won and that Greenlanders would live in their country forever. In the second part, we hear about terrible, real events in East Greenland, stories of killing and revenge, from the introduction of Christianity until the end of the 1800s. The events center on two characters: Katiaja, who in jealous rage set fire to some gunpowder in a seal bladder container, and Aattaaritaa the exorcist, who killed his wife and Katiaja and ate their hearts. The same Aattaaritaa later traveled to West Greenland, where he was baptized and given the name Kristian Poulsen. The third part is about a family who became victims of an envious person. The head of the family was killed and the other members were driven to suicide (Berthelsen 1983:180-191).

THE PRESENT IN POETRY AND PROSE

The first politically inspired poetry came from young Greenlanders who had pursued their studies in Denmark. This was no coincidence. In the 1960s, nearly all higher education, following high school graduation in Greenland, had to take place in Denmark, since Greenland has neither the facilities nor the teaching staff. As a result, there was a significant accumulation of young intellectual Greenlanders in Denmark. There arose a new national consciousness during the social upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s (for example, the activist peace movement in Europe) and interest in Greenlanders' own identity was aroused (Berthelsen 1983:219-220). These were the young people who had been through the new school system and who started the debate about a political change for Greenland.

In the politically inspired poems, social conditions are sometimes treated in a very rough, satirical, and polemic style, on a par with the so-called protest poems which flourished in many Western countries at that time. Among the contributors were Moses Olsen (born 1938), current Home Rule Minister for the Economy. He has written, among other things, a politically charged short story about the Danes' dominating role in Greenland. Aqigssiaq Møller (born 1939), current Director of Education, treats

recent problems in a couple of his poems in an ironic manner: the exaggerated expectations attached to the importance of learning Danish. He also touches on identity problems and comments: "Should it really not be possible for Greenlanders to find their way in today's Greenland, when before one could find one's goal without even the use of a compass?" Aqqaluk Lynge (born 1947), Program Secretary for Radio Greenland and now Home Rule Minister for Social Affairs, writes harsh poems directed at social conditions and foreign dominance in Greenland. He has published a collection of poems called *For Honor and Glory, Tupigusullutik angalapput* (1982), which is politically inspired. Kristian Olsen (born 1942), headmaster of a Greenlandic boarding school, wrote a collection of poems called *The Ballad About Identity* (1978). The title is self-explanatory (Berthelsen 1983:223-225, 246-263; Nørregaard 1980:93-137).

One book, entitled *Seqajuk* (*The Useless One*) and written by the teacher Hans Anthon Lynge, was the first real attempt at a socially critical novel. The situation of young people in today's Greenland is described, and the author treats problems such as lack of family roots, lack of responsibility, drinking, indifference about life's direction, and the generation gap. The book's main character, Juuna, has difficulty organizing his life. Frustration overtakes his girlfriend, Regina, with whom he has a child. She commits suicide. Juuna now worries about the small child who must grow up at his grandparents' house and who will later be sent to an orphanage when the grandparents go to an old people's home (Berthelsen 1983:264-269).

Since the publication of *Seqajuk*, many other books have treated current social conditions. In addition, problems of Greenlanders living in Denmark have been dealt with in a couple of novels. In the book *Silarsuaq ammarmat* (*When the World Opened Up*), written by Inooraq Olsen (born 1939), problems encountered by Greenlandic students in Denmark are treated. Even though students think they have good language skills and the required technical knowledge, the change of country and social milieu can still cause problems for them. It is even more difficult to cope with Danish daily life without sufficient familiarity with the language or knowledge of social conditions. Shattered illusions can lead to human tragedies. Unfortunately, examples of this do occur. One can read about this in a novel entitled *Bussimi naapinneq* (*The Meeting on the Bus*), written by Maaliaaraq Vebæk (born 1917). The Danish version of this book was published in 1983, two years after the Greenlandic original, under the title *Historien om Katrine*. The novel, which was published in

1981, was the first to be written by a Greenlandic woman (Berthelsen 1983:290-298).

It would be appropriate here to mention Greenlandic pop or beat music which in tone and text reflects the currents of the time. The lyrics are, naturally, written in Greenlandic and deal exclusively with conditions in Greenland. Current social problems are treated. Some of these lyrics are very well written. Without a doubt they have made young people more socially aware, and they have had a uniting effect—e.g., in connection with the so-called Aasivik gatherings, a summer camp tradition since 1976 in which Greenlanders from all over the country meet at different localities on the coast, based on the old idea of summer reunions at hunting grounds. Many of the lyrics voice protest against modern life-styles with their overemphasis on imported materialism. What is expressed in the lyrics can be summed up in the motto: "Life on Greenlandic terms." But when the old way of life is romanticized in a subjective and biased fashion, it may verge upon nostalgia (Berthelsen 1983:280-287).

Finally, it should be pointed out that recent Greenlandic literature, written under external cultural influence, is of quite modest scope to date. A population of 45,000 (in 1950 only 23,000) is not large enough to support an independent Greenlandic literature. But, that created so far is of special significance when measured with a cultural-historical yardstick. Other reading material consists of translations from technical and fictional works in Danish, written by Danish or foreign writers. There is now a great urge to write about Greenland. The field of ethnic literature, especially, is currently flourishing.

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