International LGBTQ+ Literature for Children and Young Adults

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Edited by

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In memory of my mum, with love. ELC

To my loves – Fi, Esther and Tovah. BJE

We would also like to dedicate this book to the memory of Bernat Cormand, who sadly died before it was published.

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Bernat Cormand is a philologist and illustrator. He has a bachelor's degree in Catalan Studies from Universitat de Barcelona and a master's degree in Comparative Literature from Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona Postgraduate School, where he wrote a thesis on 'The Lyrical Conception of Homosexual Feeling in the Poetry of C. P. Kavafis, Luis Cernuda and Jaime Gil de Biedma'. His artistic training includes sculpture, drawing and illustration, and he has worked in publishing as a desk editor, proofreader and editor. He is currently the chief editor of *Faristol*, a magazine specialized in literature for children and young people, and he is a part-time professor in the Faculty of Translation and Interpreting at Universitat Pompeu Fabra. His books include *El dibujante de osos* (The Bear Sketcher), *El niño perfecto* (The Perfect Boy) and and *Los días felices* (Happy Days).

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Chapter Four

HOMO SAPIENNE: A MIRROR OF MODERN GREENLANDIC LIFE

Mette Laustsen

Introduction

Homo Sapienne was the debut novel by Niviaq Korneliussen, a young Greenlandic woman, and was published in 2014. *Homo Sapienne* is an anomaly in Greenlandic literature, which hardly ever gets translated into other languages, because it has in fact been translated quite widely.[1] So far it has been published in German,[2] French (Canada and France), Swedish, and English[3] in the United Kingdom. As I write this, it is due to be published in English in the USA, Norwegian, Finnish, Icelandic and Czech, and publishing houses in Spain, Italy and South Korea are interested. That amount of interest, translation and publication never happens for a Greenlandic book; nor are Greenlandic books generally covered in foreign media. So what makes *Homo Sapienne* special? To answer that question, it is necessary to first look at the history of Greenlandic literature and LGBTQ+ issues in Greenland. In this chapter, I will discuss what makes this book unique: not only the LGBTQ+ subject matter, but also the style in which it is written and the gap it filled in Greenland.

Some Background on Greenland and the Greenlandic Literary Tradition

Greenland is a former colony of Denmark. In 1979, Greenland received home rule and in 2009 self-government, but Greenland is not totally independent of Denmark. Denmark still rules over foreign affairs and the military, and Greenlandic and Danish are both recognized as official languages.

There are about 56,000 people in Greenland. In the capital and the biggest city, Nuuk, there are about 17,000 people. With so few Greenlanders, there is a need for a foreign workforce, since there are not enough Greenlanders with the right education to

1 Fairly often, a Greenlandic book will be simultaneously be published in Greenlandic and Danish, but that has to do with Greenland being bilingual and because Greenland is not fully independent of Denmark.

2 The German title is *Nuuk #ohneFilter* (Nuuk #nofilter).

3 The English title is *Crimson*.

fill all the different jobs. As a result, there are a lot of Danes working in Greenland, especially in Nuuk.

For the purposes of this chapter, I differentiate between 'books in Greenlandic' and 'Greenlandic books'. Books in Greenlandic are defined here as translations into Greenlandic, not originally written in Greenlandic, while Greenlandic books I see as books originally written in Greenlandic.

Reading and writing traditions in Greenland were established relatively recently compared to other countries. As with most other indigenous populations, the Greenlandic people had an oral culture, until the Europeans introduced writing as a medium for a new and different culture and outlook.

In 1721, the Norwegian missionary Hans Egede arrived in Greenland and started converting the Greenlanders to Christianity. One of the ways to introduce Christianity to the Greenlanders was by translating parts of the Bible and other Christian texts into Greenlandic, so they could hear the Christian texts in their own language. Greenlandic was not a written language until the missionaries came and made it so. In 1739, the first four chapters of the New Testament were published in Greenlandic. By 1799, a total of 20 books in Greenlandic had been published, and all were about religion. In the 1800s, 115 religious or non-fiction books in Greenlandic were published.

The first Greenlandic novel *Sinnattugaq* (The Dream)[4] by Mathias Storch was published in 1914 and was about social conditions and the future; these were the topics for most poetry of that time period as well. From the 1920s, authors such as Frederik Nielsen, Pavia Petersen and Hans Lynge looked to the past for inspiration to produce poetry and prose. At the time, Greenland was still a traditional hunter society, in which most Greenlanders lived much as they had for centuries. Until 1940, Greenland was a protected and fairly isolated country, and the outside world had minimal influence on everyday Greenlandic life.

In 1950, the Danish government started a project that they called the 'reorganization'. The idea was that Greenland should be transformed into a modern European country. Education and modernization were the keys, so the Danish language was to be introduced to children from the first grade. Danish teachers were brought in and as the demands on the schools increased, the shortage of Greenlandic teachers became more noticeable and so even more Danish teachers came to the Greenlandic schools. That had an impact on the schools and on education, which became very Danish and marked by the Danish language. There was also some oppression of traditional spiritual and cultural activities. The process could be called a 'Danification' of Greenland. In that process, some Greenlanders growing up in the '50s and '60s lost their language and in some cases their Greenlandic identity.

Some literary progress happened in the '50s. In 1959, the first Greenlandic children's novel was published: *Kâle: atuagaK mêrarsiut* (Karl, the Book for Children) by Jørgen Fleischer. From the end of the 1960s onwards, social conditions were again taken up as subject matter, in some cases in a very satirical and/or polemical style. Among the

4 All translations are my own, unless otherwise noted.

authors were names like Moses Olsen, Aqqaluk Lynge and Ole Korneliussen. Political and cultural works started to make Greenland Greenlandic again. People began to want to reclaim their identity. After home rule in 1979, the focus was put back on the Greenlandic language. For the schools, that meant that Greenlandic officially became the language that the schools should teach in and Danish became the pupils' first foreign language. A Greenlandification was started, which is still in progress today.

Compared to some other indigenous cultures, the Greenlandic language and culture is not in such a dire situation. Greenlanders have comparatively many books in their own language and their cultural heritage is still largely intact. They have not fully lost their identity in spite of the issues of the '50s and '60s, and they have their own country, though not full independence.

The Greenlandic language is not just one language. Due to the huge distances between different areas of the country and the isolation of some parts of Greenland, there are four different versions or dialects of Greenlandic: North Greenlandic, East Greenlandic, South Greenlandic and West Greenlandic. People from the different parts of Greenland can have trouble understanding each other. West Greenlandic is the standard language and the language used in school books, among other texts.

In 1974, a new Greenlandic orthography was introduced, which is significantly different from the old one. Greenlanders who grew up reading the old way find reading books with the new orthography challenging and some do not read new books, so they have even fewer books to read in their own language. The converse applies to the younger Greenlanders: the older books may not be accessible to them, because it is a written Greenlandic that they do not easily understand.

Greenlandic Young Adult Books

Some years ago, I came across an article by Rudine Sims Bishop called 'Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors' (1990). It is an article I often use when talking and writing about Greenlandic literature, because it clearly and understandably states the issues Greenlandic literature faces. In the article, the author talks about children's literature and compares it to windows, sliding doors and mirrors. She explains that windows offer views of worlds real or imagined, familiar or strange. These windows can become sliding doors, if the readers via their imagination walk through to become part of the author's world. If the book transforms human experience and reflects it back to the reader, and the reader can see their own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience in that reflection, then the window becomes a mirror. Readers often search for the mirrors in their books. Though the author talks about children's literature specifically, the same principles can certainly be applied to materials for young adults.

In the Danish books available in Greenland, there are plenty of windows and sliding doors for Greenlandic youth. It is not hard for them to get a view of a different world or culture. But what is lacking are the mirrors. It is not often that Danish books, or foreign books translated into Greenlandic, mirror Greenlandic life. There are some books written by Danish authors that take place in Greenland, but a lot of them describe Greenlandic life through Danish eyes and they often focus on history or the parts of

Greenlandic life that are foreign to non-Greenlandic readers. They do not really give a real picture of modern Greenlandic life. For example, *Et halvt hjerte* (Half a Heart)[5] by Lene Fauerby and *Slædehundene hyler* (The Sleighdogs' Howls)[6] by Charlotte Blay are both by Danes about Greenland, and it is not fair to expect Danish books about Greenland to be more than a Dane's version of windows and sliding doors regarding Greenlandic life. But it is acceptable to expect Greenlandic books to be mirrors, at least to a certain extent. Unfortunately, the low number of Greenlandic books makes those expectations hard to fulfil. There simply are not enough books to provide mirrors for all the different aspects of the Greenlandic culture and ways of life.

Young adults as a separate reader group are not a major target audience for publishers in Greenland. Books are mostly either children's books or adult books, with very few written especially for young adults currently. But there are of course books that are suitable and might be interesting for the young Greenlander. Looking at just the books classified in libraries as young adult books, there are in total only about 100[7] fiction and non-fiction titles suitable and potentially interesting for young adults originally written in Greenlandic or translated into Greenlandic. Of the 100, about 50 are fiction. Of the 50 fiction books, about 30 were written by Greenlanders (referred to in this chapter as 'Greenlandic books'). The rest have been translated into Greenlandic. Of the 50 titles, half are more than 20 years old. Twelve of the titles are less than 10 years old, of which 11 were written by Greenlanders. Five of the 12 titles are less than five years old and all five were written by Greenlanders. This means that only 5 per cent of the books available for young adults are recent fiction titles written by Greenlanders.

With the continuing focus being on supporting Greenlandic culture and language, hardly any books published in Greenlandic are translations now. The money being spent on publishing books is spent on books written by Greenlanders. The small quantity does not say anything about the quality of the books; of course there are some good books in the collection. But the data I presented show clearly that many of them are unfortunately quite old and therefore may have cover art or subject matter that does not appeal to the modern Greenlandic child or young adult. In general, it could be argued that the content in most of the Greenlandic literature available is not written with young adults in mind.

Many of the 100 books mentioned above are what we could call 'kayak literature', meaning books that take place in the good old days, where the men went out hunting in their kayaks, or else they are works that describe the political development in Greenland. These are two different and interesting subjects but they are not always appealing to most modern young Greenlanders. In school, children and young adults have to read about those subjects, which can make them feel boring and too much like school assignments

5 This is a story about a girl grieving the death of her mother and sister. In the mountains, she finds a mystical comfort and she is transported into the imagined life of the Qilakitsoq mummies. Past and present are bound together.

6 A story about 14-year-old Nannavina set in the small Greenlandic village where she grew up. Her brother has disappeared and she does not know who she can trust. She goes on a dogsled ride, but things go wrong.

7 The numbers are as of June 2018 and are my own calculations, as checked by colleagues.

and not leisure reading. Speaking with the Greenlandic youth in my role as a librarian, a lot of them told me that for them, Greenlandic literature has the reputation of being boring and uninteresting. It does not mirror modern Greenlandic young adult life. The young Greenlander cannot recognize their voice or their life in them. Thus, there is clearly a gap in the market for modern Greenlandic young adult books, and efforts have been made to address this recently.

In 2012 NAPA (Nunani Avannarlerni Piorsarsimassutsikkut Attaveqaat, or the Nordic Institute in Greenland), Nunatta Atuagaateqarfia (Central Library of Greenland), NUIF (Nuuk Ungdom I Fremdrift, the youth club in Nuuk) and milik publishing launched a short story competition. The name Allatta was chosen. Translated to English, 'allatta' means 'let's write'. The name was chosen for the simple reason that it was what needed to be done: let's write the stories that are missing. So far the Allatta project has resulted in three anthologies: *Inuusuttut – nunatsinni nunarsuarmilu / Ung i Grønland – Ung i verden* (Young in Greenland – And in the World) (Vahl and Therkildsen 2013), *2040* (Kleist et al. 2015) and *Paasininneq / Rum* (Room)[8] (Didriksen et al. 2018). Several of the winners from the two first anthologies have been, or are currently, working on new literary projects and three of the winners from the first anthology have since had their own books published. One of these was *Homo Sapienne*, which became a milestone in Greenlandic young adult literature and Greenlandic LGBTQ+ literature.

LGBTQ+ History in Greenland

Homosexuality is not an unknown subject in Greenlandic culture. In the traditional myths, which stem from before Christianity was introduced into Greenland, there are some featuring LGBTQ+ persons and subjects. The traditional myths are not generally judgemental. The LGBTQ+ persons are not necessarily the bad characters or depicted as wrong in the myths. The myths are the historic sources we have to tell us about the older history of Greenlandic LGBTQ+, which means we do not have much to go by. I will discuss them further below.

Written sources only became available after the Christian missionaries arrived, and Christianity certainly did not bring acceptance of LGBTQ+ people or issues. After Christianity, the stance was to ignore the subject. Leise Johnsen, director of Kalaallit Illuutaat – Det Grønlandske Hus, the Greenland Institute in Copenhagen, sums it up precisely, when she writes, 'Det, man ikke taler om, findes ikke', or 'That which you don't speak about, does not exist' (Johnsen 2012, 280). Homosexuality became taboo for a very long time. It was not really spoken about and mostly just ignored. Many homosexuals moved to Denmark if they wanted to live their life out in the open.

Luckily, attitudes started to change, and there have been a lot of new developments, especially in the last 20 years. Registered partnership became a possibility for Greenlanders in 1996 by law. In 2002, Qaamaneq, which means light, was founded as

8 The title has a double meaning, and also means broadminded.

an interest group for Greenlandic LGBTQ+ people. It ran until 2007 and was restarted again around 2014.

In 2005, *Qattuneq issiavilik* (Bench with a View), the first Greenlandic LGBTQ+ novel, was published. On 5 May 2010, the first Gay Pride was held in Greenland, in Nuuk. In 2011, there were Gay Pride events in both Nuuk and Sisimiut (the second largest town in Greenland). Since then, there have been several more Prides.

At the Nuuk Gay Prides in 2011 and 2012, 'non-heterosexuals' were invited to have their portrait taken and to offer a quote about their sexuality. The portraits and quotes were turned into the exhibition Gay Greenland, which was shown in Nuuk and Sisimiut, and parts of it have been shown in most of the municipality offices in Greenland. It was the first time faces and words had been put to a Greenlandic minority that traditionally had been silent and largely hidden. By touring Greenland, the exhibition introduced people in the small towns to a minority that they might not know much about and therefore might have prejudices against. By making them visible, the exhibition showed that LGBTQ+ people looked just like everyone else and were not so different after all. The exhibition has also been shown in Reykjavik, Thorshavn and Copenhagen. In 2015, it won the culture prize at Axgil, which is the Danish LGBTQ+ community's prize ceremony (Kruse 2015).

Most recently, from 1 April 2016, by law, same-sex couples could be married in church. So a lot of positive change has happened in the last 23 years concerning LGBTQ+ visibility and rights.

LGBTQ+ Literature in Greenland

When *Homo Sapienne* was published it became one out of only seven Greenlandic LGBTQ+ books. The seven are:

Aamma illit inuuneraat… HIV AIDS-ilu pillugit oqaluttuat / Livet er også dit… Historier om HIV og AIDS (Life is Also Yours… Stories about HIV and AIDS) from 2004, edited by Káte Hansen. A non-fiction book about Greenlanders who have HIV or AIDS. The book is bilingual in Greenlandic and Danish.

Qattuneq issiavilik (Bench with a View) by Jørgen Petersen from 2005, which was the first Greenlandic fiction LGBTQ+ book. It is about a young man's realization and acceptance of his sexuality. The book is only available in Greenlandic.

Kakiorneqaqatigiit[9] from 2010 and *Alumiguulik*[10] from 2013 by Kristian Olsen Aaju. Two crime fiction stories, where a lesbian couple are the main characters. The books have been published both in Greenlandic and Danish. They do not take place in Greenland and they do not provide much insight into Greenlandic life or being Greenlandic and LGBTQ+.

9 The Danish title is *Det tatoverede budskab.* Translated to English it would be The Tattooed Message. I read the Danish version.

10 The Danish title is *Den tatoverede strandvasker.* Translated to English it would be The Tattooed Body Washed Ashore. I read the Danish version.

Gay Greenland is the catalogue for the photographic exhibition with portraits of Greenlandic LGBTQ+ people from 2012.

…Inuugatta: Nunatsinni angutit anguteqatiminnik arnallu arnaqatiminnik aappaqartartut pillugit (…Because We Are Alive: About Gays and Lesbians in Greenland) from 2014, written by Hjalmer Dahl. A non-fiction book about being gay in Greenland.

Homo Sapienne from 2014 written by Niviaq Korneliussen. A young adult/adult fiction book initially published in both Greenlandic and Danish. More on this below.

Besides those seven, there are a few more Greenlandic LGBTQ+ stories:

'Svigermoderen, som giftede sig med sin svigerdatter (The Mother-in-Law Who Married Her Daughter-in-Law)',[11] and 'Arnaussâq'[12]. Two examples of traditional Greenlandic myths with LGBTQ+ elements.

'San Francisco' written by Niviaq Korneliussen. One of the winning short stories in *Inuusuttut – nunatsinni nunarsuarmilu / Ung i Grønland – Ung i verden* from 2013. Again, I will return to this below.

All of the above-mentioned titles are written and published for adults except 'San Francisco', which is part of a young adult short story anthology, and *Homo Sapienne*. As is clear from the dates mentioned above, *Homo Sapienne* was published nine years after the first Greenlandic LGBTQ+ novel. But one could say that the Greenlandic LGBTQ+ story tradition is a lot older than the 13 years the books have been around, because of the traditional myths.

'The Mother-in-Law Who Married Her Daughter-in-Law'

In this section, I will analyse a version of the traditional myth that was collected near the beginning of the 1900s by Knud Rasmussen and was first published at the beginning of the 1920s (Taateraaq 2000).[13] Written down in Danish, 'Svigermoderen, som giftede sig med sin svigerdatter (The Mother-in-Law Who Married her Daughter-in-Law)' is over 100 years old, but in the oral storytelling tradition it is many years older, although exactly how old is not known.

The myth is very short, only about 19 lines, but much happens in those lines. Ukuamaaq,[14] a man, mistreats his wife, so she runs away from him. Her mother-in-law finds her, and they make a life together. The mother-in-law is described as behaving like a man and as using a reindeer penis. She goes hunting and brings home many reindeer. However, Ukuamaaq finds them and he shames his mother by laughing at her when she drops the reindeer penis. He chases her, but she commits suicide from shame by jumping into a big waterfall. Ukuamaaq takes his wife back home with him and the

11 There are several different versions of this myth. More about this below.

12 It is a name, so no translation is needed.

13 This version can be read in *Myter og sagn fra Grønland*. Collected by Knud Rasmussen. Forlaget Sesam.

14 In the version that was my main focus, Ukuamaaq is the name of the son. In other versions, it is the name of the daughter-in-law. Language-wise it is probably more correct that it is the name of the daughter-in-law.

story ends. It is, obviously, not a happy story. The bad man gets what he wants and the lesbian relationship (or, perhaps to be more precise, the females living as a man and woman) ends with a suicide and the woman back in a difficult heterosexual relationship. However, it is important to note that the relationship between the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law is not described as a bad thing or deemed to be reprehensible. The mother-in-law commits suicide because Ukuamaaq laughs at her reindeer penis and through his laughter he shames her. Being a laughing-stock and having to cope with the loss of honour was (and perhaps still is) a very serious matter. When such a loss of honour happened, Greenlanders could be so ashamed that they would go out into the mountains and become *qivittoq*, or a hermit who in time would take on animal-like abilities, such as heightened senses and supernatural abilities (Kreutzmann 2018). When a *qivittoq* died, he/she was believed to become a ghost. I would argue that it is not the act of their relationship in itself that results in the suicide, but the shaming done by a bad man. Ukuamaaq is not the hero of the story. He might be the winner, but it is the mother-in-law (his mother) who is the hero. She took good care of her daughter-in-law and treated her well. In the story, a female living as a man is shown to be capable of providing for a wife; the problems stem from a third party. This might be a lot to read into 19 lines, but short myths and tales are meant to be read into.

There are different versions of the myth from around Greenland. In some, the mother-in-law is said to force her daughter-in-law to go with her, and in others, the man kills his mother and his wife. A version written down and first published in 1875 is somewhat different. In this version, the mother-in-law is killed and called despicable (Rink 1974). I cannot help but wonder if the description of the mother-in-law as despicable is the original storyteller's description or if the word and the judgement come from the man who wrote the myth down and published it in 1875. It is also in this version that the mother-in-law is most clearly described to be forcing her daughter-in-law, and nothing is said about her hunting abilities. The already short myth is more than halved in the judgemental 1875 version, which I read as a religious damnation of an unnatural woman. In all the other versions of the myth I have read, the mother-in-law is not despised as such, and is shown to be very capable of providing for her daughter-in-law.

'Arnaussâq'

'Arnaussâq' is a myth about a man, Arnaussâq, who acted like a woman. The translation of the name would be 'Looks like a woman'. If the women in the village needed help with sewing they asked Arnaussâq and he could always help. When sleeping next to the young women he never touched them, but when sleeping next to the young men he touched them. After Arnaussâq's death, it became a tradition for the young hunters when going out to hunt to make sexual movements towards Arnaussâq's grave and yell: Arnaussâq, we are coming to have sex with you. That brought good luck for their hunting trips.

The myth/story is believed to be based on an historical event from the 1800s. It was a common belief that women and dead people could attract animals and ensure a good hunt, whereas in this story it is a dead homosexual man bringing good luck to the hunters. Arnaussâq is accepted and treated as they would treat a woman or dead

member of their village. There is no judgement. Arnaussâq is liked and his abilities in regard to the traditionally female tasks are respected and sought out.

Qattuneq Issiavilik

Many years went by before *Qattuneq issiavilik* (Bench with a View) by Jørgen Petersen was published in 2005. *Qattuneq issiavilik* is a traditional LGBTQ+ novel in the sense that it tells the story of a young man, Kari, on his journey of discovery and his acceptance of his sexuality. While on holiday, Kari wakes up after a night on the town, and realizes that he has been with a man. That leads to some soul-searching and the realization that even though he has been with women, he has always done so without feelings. These relationships were a means of suppressing his homosexuality. He accepts his true feelings and attractions. Kari is very afraid of his family's reaction, especially since he knows someone who lost their family after coming out. After some time, Kari finally comes out to his mother and twin brother. Luckily, their reaction is very positive and they accept him as he is. His mother promises to help him tell his father and persuade him to accept the situation as well. The book is written for adults, but can certainly be read by young adults also.

Qattuneq issiavilik has only been published in Greenlandic, which is a shame, because that means that the book and the story are only available for the relatively few that can read Greenlandic well enough, so it really is just for Greenlandic-speaking Greenlanders. It would be beneficial if it were available for more interested readers. If the first Greenlandic LGBTQ+ book could be read by more LGBTQ+ people and indeed more people generally outside Greenland, readers would have a window that opens onto Greenlandic LGBTQ+ life.

'San Francisco'

Of the ten winning short stories in the first Allatta competition, one was an LGBTQ+ story: 'San Francisco' by Niviaq Korneliussen, a young Greenlandic lesbian born in 1990. When the anthology was published in 2013, it was the first time that a young Greenlandic LGBTQ+ woman had written for her peers and had her writing published. When I interviewed Niviaq some years ago about her participation in the Allatta project, she told me that she mostly only reads Danish books, and that as a writer she can only get inspiration from other countries. There are too few books in her own language that she can be inspired by. She writes about what she feels is missing in Greenlandic literature; in other words, she writes her own mirrors.

'San Francisco' is a road story. Fia is travelling across the USA, having run away to the States from Nuuk. She is grieving and losing herself completely in her grief, and has flashbacks to her life with Sara in Nuuk. Back in Nuuk, Fia had felt watched and judged and that had caused problems in her relationship with Sara. After a big fight about Fia's discomfort with people seeing them as a couple, Sara left their home and was hit by a car and died. But 'San Francisco' is not a short story where being homosexual is the main issue; rather, it is mainly a story about grief and finding light again after a great loss. The

fact that Fia's love is a woman is not the main issue. It does, however, feature death, as is common in many LGBTQ+ works from around the world.

Homo Sapienne

One year after 'San Francisco', Niviaq Korneliussen had her first novel published by the same publisher who published the first Allatta anthology. *Homo Sapienne* was and still is something new and different in both Greenlandic young adult and Greenlandic LGBTQ+ literature. In *Homo Sapienne*, the author writes with a clear young Greenlandic voice, using text messages, Facebook, loan words, music and other intertextual references to give the reader a direct insight into the lives and culture of young Greenlanders. This is how the author and her peers speak and act. Niviaq Korneliussen also plays with Greenlandic words and names and lets them play a part in the stories. The names of three of the five main characters all have an additional meaning; they become metaphors of a sort, as will be discussed below.

In a lot of literature set in Greenland, there are long passages devoted to the beautiful natural wilderness. But life in Greenland is about so much more, especially for young Greenlanders. *Homo Sapienne* is about modern Greenlandic city life as seen through the eyes of five different but intertwined Greenlanders, each of whom has their own chapter. Each chapter has a song title as the heading.

Fia (song: Crimson & Clover by Joan Jett and the Blackhearts)

The first chapter is Fia's story. She is unhappy with her boyfriend of three years, Peter. They live together. The chapter begins with several of Fia's long trains of thought:

> Peter. One man. Three years. Thousands of plans. Millions of dinner invitations. Vacuuming, dishwashing and cleaning. Rushing on forever towards infinity. False smiles turning uglier. Dry kisses stiffening like desiccated fish. Bad sex should be avoided at all costs. My fake orgasms get harder to believe as time goes by. But we're still making plans. (Korneliussen 2018, 5)[15]

The reader can feel her unhappiness and her inner turmoil. She only expresses her true feelings about her life with Peter in her head. Outwardly, she plays the role of the girlfriend planning on a lifetime together. But on the inside she is dying:

> Death has begun to appear in my dreams and I am petrified. Murder. Death of the soul. A shrivelled corpse. Suicide. Death has begun to visit me, and I am petrified. Mass murder. A failed suicide attempt. Envious of the dead. I've begun to walk hand in hand with it, and I'm petrified. I make up my mind because death won't leave my mind. There has always been something missing here. (Korneliussen 2018, 10)

15 All of the quotations from *Homo Sapienne* are taken from the UK translation by Anna Halager, published in 2018.

The dark thoughts scare her enough to change her situation. After Fia breaks up with Peter, her friend and new roommate, Arnaq, takes her to a party to try to find her a new man. At the party, Fia meets Sara and falls for her instantly, but Sara has a girlfriend. Fia tries to forget Sara and forget that she felt attracted to another woman. She takes another man home with her, but she does not really feel like sleeping with him.

The next time Arnaq and Fia go to a bar, they meet Sara and her girlfriend. Fia can no longer ignore that she is attracted to women. She tries out her attractions with Arnaq by having sex with her. Arnaq is a Greenlandic name, but it is also the Greenlandic word for woman. So Fia replaces Sara with Arnaq, another *arnaq* (woman). The experience with Arnaq gives Fia her answer: she is a lesbian. After sex, Fia goes into her own room to think. She calls her brother to talk and he invites her to an afterparty. At the party Fia meets Sara again, and Sara kisses her. The readers can see how Fia begins to accept her feelings and who she is. She is no longer indifferent or depressed. She is free and in love:

> She walks over to me, and my world is totally silent. I only look at her, and the sensation within me is infinite. She takes hold of me and escorts me out of the door, and I don't resist. The spring night is invigorating. Nature has quietly come to life again, and that's all I hear. There's something beautiful in front of me. From Greenland to infinity, and back again … What a day to be alive. She reads the note I have been carrying around for two weeks. The spring night gives me life, and Sara kisses me. What a day to realise I'm not dead. Love has rescued me. (Korneliussen 2018, 33)

Inuk (Song: Home by Foo Fighters)

Over the course of three months, we follow Inuk's life as he runs away from Greenland due to a possible scandal. He experiences blame, self-hatred, the 'killing' of the old, rebirth and finally acceptance. He had told his best friend Arnaq, in confidence, that a male politician had made a pass at him, and Arnaq told the story at a party to get attention from the rest of the partygoers. The chapter consists of diary entries and letters to and from his sister Fia and former friend Arnaq. Most of the entries and letters are signed differently, depending on how he feels about himself at that moment. He calls himself, for example, a runaway, a survivor, a refugee, a liar, a claustrophobic homophobe, a man who wishes he was not a Greenlander, a Greenlander by force, silent, lost, unemployed, not angry, dead, loved, devoted, brother, home, and homo sapiens. Inuk writes:

> I wouldn't have survived if I hadn't escaped. But here they can't touch me. Never again will I return to Greenland. Never again will I be holed up in prison again. Never again will I be walled up behind tall mountains. Never again will I call a Greenlander my fellow countryman. Never will I go back to live among the prison inmates. Because I'm ashamed to call myself a Greenlander. Refugee. (Korneliussen 2018, 43–44)

He runs away from Greenland, which he sees as a prison of eyes that stare, judge and condemn. He writes:

> Dear Fia
>
> Do you remember when I first discovered that you had started drinking and smoking? Do you remember how sad I was when I found out? I often wonder whether your bad friends influenced you or whether this was something you decided on your own. […] You are not into women. I know that. You're ok. You're not evil. Arnaq has just dragged you down with her. You're so much better than that. I'm asking you to drop Arnaq and never go back. I don't want to lose you.
>
> Inuk (Korneliussen 2018, 47–49)

He cannot accept homosexual feelings in himself and therefore he cannot accept those feelings in his sister. He blames Arnaq for everything: she is the evil that ruined his life and now he feels she is doing the same to Fia. He sends her a letter with a questionnaire for her to fill out, in which all the questions are essentially a way for him to tell her how much he hates her. In return, he receives this letter:

> My dearest Inuk
> I've filled these out:
> Do you think I'll forgive you? x No
> Are you a heartless bitch? x Yes
> Forgive me.
> Arnaq. (Korneliussen 2018, 57)

Slowly, over the course of more letters and diary entries, Inuk changes. He forgives and accepts:

> Dear Fia
> I'm into men.
> Inuk. (Korneliussen 2018, 73)

A subsequent letter reads:

> Dear Inuk
> I know. You're not alone. You'll never be alone
> Fia (Korneliussen 2018, 74)

And at last:

> The last day
> Finally, I am home.
> Homo. Sapiens. Inuk (Korneliussen 2018, 75)

Inuk's chapter is comprised of 32 letters and diary entries made at different points in Inuk's internal journey during the course of three months. We do not get the whole story, all the whys and hows. But through the 32 letters and diary entries, we follow his journey towards self-acceptance. Inuk is the Greenlandic word for human, and his chapter is

about finding home in the acceptance of oneself. He is human, he is a man and he is a man who loves men.

Arnaq (Song: Walk of Shame by P!nk)

The title of the song the author chose for this chapter is significant. Arnaq's chapter is full of shame hidden under a brave, always-partying, always-happy face. It is a shame that she numbs with alcohol. Arnaq lives for Fridays when it is time to party. Every Friday, she is on the lookout for parties to go to and people to end the night with; it does not really matter where or who. She wants to lose herself in partying and sex. She drinks to forget. The morning after is always the worst, trying to remember what she did the night before. How much money has she spent? Did she do something bad? This time she has. She has spent all her money, so she cannot afford to buy food and, even worse, Arnaq betrayed her best friend's trust to try to score the one person she is in love with. She wants to forget what she did and the relationships she ruined. The only way she knows to forget is to party, but she has no money. In desperation, she calls her father, who sexually abused her when she was a child:

> 'Sweetheart? My sweet daughter, my darling, my love!'
> That motherfucker. His voice makes me want to throw up.
> 'I'm out of money. Can you send me some?'
> 'My sweet daughter, my darling. I miss you. Do you miss me?'
> His voice changes. I recognise this voice. It's terrifying.
> It's a trick, you know. I give. He gives. I give, he gives. I give, he gives. A trick.
> Always have been, always will be. I give, he gives. I give, he gives.
> 'Yeah,' I say, almost inaudibly.
> 'Yeah what? Answer me properly.'
> Just you wait. When I get my hooks into you one day…
> 'Yeah. I miss you.'
> Just you wait. I'll stab you both.
> 'Do you miss me a lot?'
> 'Yeah, I miss you.'
> Just you wait, I'll murder you.
> 'A lot?'
> 'Yeah.'
> Just you wait.
> 'I'll put some money in your account.' That's the trick. I give, he gives. The trick.
> (Korneliussen 2018, 104–5)

She is trapped in a spiral of shame. She parties to forget her shame about what her father did to her. But in partying she spends all her money and in desperation she turns to her father to be able to continue to party. She gives, he gives. Her feelings and her free will are still being abused, so the shame continues. After that, she finds someone to party

with, a man who will provide alcohol so she can party again and bury her shame again in alcohol. Her weekend shame circle continues.

Ivik (Song: Stay by Rihanna)

Ivinnguaq has always felt different. She preferred to play with the boys and was not interested in getting a boyfriend. All through her childhood, she was asked why she was the way she was. She never had an answer and therefore hated the question. When she moved to a bigger town at 18 to study, she got her confirmation. She liked girls.

Now she lives with her girlfriend Sara, whom she loves and wants very much. But she has an issue that is becoming a big problem in her relationship: she cannot stand for Sara to touch her sexually. Ivinnguaq is very afraid of losing Sara. She does not understand why she does not like to be touched during sex, so readers might wonder if she is a stone butch or if she is uncomfortable with her body or ashamed of her sexuality. Ivinnguaq and Sara fight because Sara feels pushed away. Ivinnguaq ends up having a one-night stand with Arnaq, during which Arnaq is so drunk that she does not try to touch Ivinnguaq. Sara finds out about the infidelity and dumps Ivinnguaq, who tries without success to gain her forgiveness. Finally, after two weeks, Sara asks if they can talk. The following conversation takes place, with Sara explaining Ivinnguaq to herself:

> 'Ivik, I'm gay.'
> 'I know…'
> 'Please listen to me,' she says. 'I'm into women. I'm not into men.'
> I can't admit what she's trying to tell me.
> 'Because I like women, I can't be with a man,' she repeats.
> 'What do you mean by that?' I ask.
> 'I can't be with you.'
> I stare at her.
> 'I can't be with you because you are a man.' (Korneliussen 2018, 143)

Sara has figured out the answer to Ivinnguaq's and everybody else's question: 'My soul finds solace in my body. Now that my body has finally found the answer, my soul is no longer in doubt. I was born again when I was twenty-three years old. I was born as Ivik' (Korneliussen 2018, 144).

Ivinnguaq, which means dear little Ivik, is a commonly used name for women, while Ivik is a name commonly used for men. So Ivik can now start a new life as a man, finally feeling right.

Sara (Song: What a Day by Greg Laswell)

Sara's chapter starts with the birth of her niece. Sara wants it to be a good experience, with nothing to ruin the happiness of her niece's birth. But she cannot help but think about Ivinnguaq. Did she do the right thing? Why did Ivinnguaq, or Ivik as she prefers to be called, cheat? Why does she not like to be touched? All becomes clear during a text

message conversation with her sister, who says that she is planning to call her daughter Ivinnguaq, but that the daughter can call herself Ivik, if she feels like a boy. Suddenly Sara understands what was wrong with her relationship with Ivinnguaq: Ivinnguaq is not Ivinnguaq, but rather Ivik. Sara meets with Ivik and has the conversation discussed above. After that conversation, Sara uses male pronouns for Ivik when she thinks and talks about him. It is an accepting goodbye, but despite this, Sara cannot seem to get out of her negative thought spiral. She feels as if everything she touches goes bad, a mindset with which many readers will surely be able to empathize (and thus another mirror). For Sara, it takes holding her niece to free her from her negativity: a kind of rebirth. She goes to a party, where she meets Fia again (the same party as at the end of Fia's chapter). They kiss. They begin.

The book is full of metaphors of life and death. Fia chooses to change her situation and start living. Inuk has to go through 'death' to accept and also start living his true life. Ivinnguaq is reborn as Ivik and also starts a new life in acceptance. And Sara welcomes a new life, accepts the 'new' Ivik and her own life, and starts something new. Fia, Inuk, Ivik and Sara all start over and are reborn into new and truer lives. Their chapters all end with them looking optimistically towards a new future. Arnaq's story is the opposite. She is heading straight to the bottom. Shame and the need to lose herself is stronger than anything else in her life. The other chapters may offer hope, though; perhaps Arnaq, too, will one day be reborn.

Blomsterdalen

Niviaq Korneliussen's second book, *Blomsterdalen*,[16] was published in August 2020 and has already been sold to France and Canada. Niviaq Korneliussen is not specifically a young adult writer, but rather a young writer writing about and for other people her age. Similarly, she is not marketed within a particular market segment (young adult or adult), but *Homo Sapienne* can be seen as fitting within both categories, whereas *Blomsterdalen* is more of a book for adults. For example, the sex scenes in *Blomsterdalen* are quite direct and graphic; nonetheless, it would also be suited to the mature young adult.

Blomsterdalen is a book about friendship and love, but mostly it is a book about suicide. In interviews, the author refers to a suicide culture in Greenland that is not being talked about (Ravn Nielsen 2020). Suicide is unfortunately a big problem in Greenland, with a suicide rate among the highest in the world. It is not an LGBTQ+ problem specifically, but across the population as a whole. Niviaq Korneliussen hopes that her book can help start conversations about a topic that needs to be talked about, so something can be done.

Blomsterdalen is about a young lesbian girl who is moving to Denmark to study. In the plane travelling to Denmark, she gets talking with the woman sitting next to her. She says,

16 In contrast to *Homo Sapienne*, this novel was originally written in Danish and then translated into Greenlandic by the author as *Naasuliardarpi*. Both the Greenlandic and the Danish titles translate as Valley of Flowers, a location in East Greenland. Due to the publication schedule of the present volume, I am only able to provide a brief discussion here.

'My family is afraid I will get lost. I do that often'[17] (Korneliussen 2020a, 31). This sums up both the character and the book rather well. It is about a girl who was lost, then found, but continues to get lost again and again in her actions, her memories and her thoughts. She gets more and more lost until she loses herself completely and commits suicide in the end. She has a girlfriend and is accepted by her family, so it is not her sexuality that makes her lost and makes her feels like she is wrong, like she doesn't fit in. Instead, it is about how she looks, acts, is, and so on. She is a girl with very low self-esteem and a drive to self-sabotage. It is as if she is lost even before the book starts.

Conclusion

In Greenland, *Homo Sapienne* (and subsequently *Blomsterdalen*) filled a gap. Before *Homo Sapienne*, there were no novels depicting modern LGBTQ+ life for young Greenlanders or even many books depicting modern young adult lives in general. When finding one's identity, it is important to have books and stories that describe one's history and the traditions that form where one comes from. But the past is not enough. Now is equally important. Greenlandic young adults have plenty of the past, but the now was missing. Young Greenlanders could not find books and stories describing their now. They could not be inspired or feel themselves reflected in the books made available to them. But *Homo Sapienne* changed that. Every young Greenlander can recognize the struggles or at least part of the struggles that Fia, Inuk, Arnaq, Ivik and Sara have, even if they themselves are not LGBTQ+, because identity and finding yourself are common themes for all people at some points in their lives. It is that recognition, the mirror, that attracts the reader. Young Greenlanders (and young people from other countries) can recognize themselves in the platforms of communication, the forms of expression, the feelings, the struggles, the searching and the way of life. With *Homo Sapienne*, young Greenlanders could read about lives like their own, written in a voice like their own. Older people can also recognize some of the same feelings and experiences from when they were younger.

Homo Sapienne and *Blomsterdalen* have certainly also filled another gap in Greenlandic literature, that of LGBTQ+ literature. As mentioned previously in this chapter, when *Homo Sapienne* was published, it became one out of only seven Greenlandic books with LGBTQ+ themes, three of which were non-fiction. *Homo Sapienne*, and now *Blomsterdalen*, are the only ones both written by a young Greenlander and that depict young Greenlandic LGBTQ+ lives. LGBTQ+ Greenlanders are now, for the first time, properly represented in Greenlandic fiction literature. Furthermore, *Homo Sapienne* contains many different stories, since there are five characters on the LGBTQ+ spectrum. It could be argued that the author wants to cram too much into a relatively short book by covering many different sexualities and gender identities. However, although the main characters each have their struggles to deal with and overcome, in the majority of cases (with the exception of Inuk), the fact that they are LGBTQ+ is not the main topic or problem. Like the

17 My translation from the original Danish: 'Min familie er bange for, at jeg farer vild. Det gør jeg tit.'

mother-in-law and Arnaussâq in the myths, they are judged on their actions and their personalities and not on their sexuality or gender identity. *Homo Sapienne* is a novel about five young Greenlandic people with relationship problems, emotional problems, identity problems and so on, the same problems that people not on the LGBTQ+ spectrum struggle with. Being LGBTQ+ is not the main focus of *Homo Sapienne*. Being young and finding one's way in life is the main focus.

Moreover, it is understandable that people on the LGBTQ+ spectrum might choose to move away from the smaller towns to the capital, Nuuk. As in many other countries, the capital and bigger cities are often more accepting of LGBTQ+ people. In Greenland the towns and cities are comparatively small compared to other countries. Nuuk, the capital, is by far the largest Greenlandic city, but it is still a relatively small city of only about 17,000 people. So the pool of LGBTQ+ people is small and it is therefore natural that many of them know each other and that their lives are very intertwined. The structure and content of the book reflect this.

In this chapter, I have explored some of the reasons why *Homo Sapienne* became and continues to be such a success. You do not have to be on the LGBTQ+ spectrum or have a specific interest in LGBTQ+ subjects to read and enjoy *Homo Sapienne*; you just have to want to read and experience the life of five young Greenlanders, who happen to be LGBTQ+. As mentioned before, the book filled some gaps in Greenlandic literature: young adult literature, new adult literature and LGBTQ+ literature. However, I would argue that this is not the only reason for its popularity: another likely factor is the book's stylistic innovation. The play with formats, timelines and the disregard of traditions of how to write came as a breath of fresh air to modern young reading audiences. The author's voice comes over very strongly, and has a sense of authenticity: she writes just as young people think, act and talk about subjects that are important to them.

But why the unprecedented level of international success?[18] Lene Therkildsen, the publisher of the book, has said that she does not really do any special PR for the books she publishes, other than sending the book out widely to the media. But milik publishing and Niviaq Korneliussen did attend Bogforum, which is a big book fair in Denmark. There, Niviaq and the book caught the eye of Jes Stein Pedersen, a literary critic for the Danish newspaper Politiken. He wrote a glowing review, concluding with: 'Homo Sapienne er, bogen man kan bede sine forældre, venner og klassekammerater om at læse, hvis man synes, de trænger til at ankomme til the real world …' (Homo Sapienne is the book you can ask your parents, friends and classmates to read, if you think that they need to arrive in the real world) (Pedersen 2014, 16). *Homo Sapienne* can be a mirror of this real world for young Greenlanders, and part mirror and part window or sliding door for the rest of us.

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19 My translation of the Danish title: *Det tatoverede budskab.*

20 My translation of the Danish title: *Den tatoverede strandvasker.*

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