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Barbara Sjöholm. *Black Fox: A Life of Emilie Demant Hatt, Artist and Ethnographer*. Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2017. v, 391 pp.

Reviewed by Sandra Laursen

Two young women on vacation, an art student and a teacher, meet a mysterious local man dressed in animal skins who persuades them to climb into his boat. He rows them across a beautiful mountain lake where they begin a wilderness adventure in the land of the midnight sun. It sounds like the start of a fairy tale, but it is a true story from the opening chapters of *Black Fox: A Life of Emilie Demant Hatt, Artist and Ethnographer*.

Black Fox is an engaging biography of Danish ethnographer and artist Emilie Demant Hatt (1873-1958). The book is organized into three main sections. *Nomad*, the first section, documents Emilie Demant's early life in a middle-class family in Jylland, her move to Copenhagen to study art, and the quest for adventure that led her, in 1904, to take a summer vacation to northern Scandinavia with her sister Marie, a schoolteacher. By chance they met the man who would become Emilie's lifelong professional collaborator, the Sami (Lapp) poet, mystic, and hunter Johan Turi. In a bold move for bourgeois single women at the time, Emilie and Marie spent several days visiting his extended family of nomadic reindeer herders in their summer encampment on the shores of glacial Lake Torneträsk in northern Sweden. Though they shared no common language, Turi and Demant rapidly established an intuitive connection and confided in each other their dreams: Turi's to write a book about the Sami herders' way of life, and Emilie's to travel with the Sami as a nomad.

Three years later, after studying the Sami language in Copenhagen, Emilie realized her dream. She returned to northern Sweden to join the clan, or *siida*, led by Turi's brother Aslak and his wife Siri, on the shores of Torneträsk and then traveled with them through the full seasonal migration cycle of the reindeer herds that sustained the *siida*. In the summer, the herders camped high while their herds grazed in the mountains, ending with a roundup to sort the new calves and slaughter mature animals for meat and hides. As September snows fell and the ground froze, the *siida* loaded their sleds and migrated to lower elevations, spending the winter in coastal villages where the

reindeer foraged for forest lichens, until it was time to migrate back to the summer range.

From the married women of the *siida*, Emilie learned Sami domestic skills, but she also took on the traditional chores of unmarried women, helping to manage the reindeer herd, pack and load the sleds, determined to bear her fair share of the work. She sewed and wore a reindeer hide dress, played with the children, slept in the family tent through bitter cold spells with a puppy breathing in her face to keep both their noses warm, and recorded her observations in notebooks and sketches. In later years, Demant connected with other Sami families to spend months traveling different migration routes and gathering further cultural observations. She came to understand the Sami herders' contentious relationships with Scandinavian governments. Their traditional lands of Sápmi (Lapland) span the northern parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia, but newly established national borders now posed obstacles to the herders' traditional migration routes, and expanding farm settlements challenged Sami traditions of collective land use.

As Turi helped Demant to realize her dream of living among the Sami, she also helped him to realize his history of Sami herders' lives. She prodded Turi to capture his stories in writing, sequenced them and standardized the spelling, translated his account into Danish text that would appear alongside Turi's Sami original, and used her social connections to find a publisher in Hjalmar Lundbohm, a Sami-sympathizing manager in the Swedish iron-mining town of Kiruna. Turi's work *Muitalus sámiiid birra* (*An Account of the Sami*) was published in 1910, and describes the life of his reindeer-herding people at the onset of the twentieth century. This was the first secular book published in the Sami language by a Sami author, and made both Turi and Demant somewhat famous across Europe, leading to translations into several other languages and other speaking and writing invitations. *Muitalus* is considered pioneering in the now-accepted method of collaborative ethnography, whereby ethnographers conduct and report their work with informants in ways that value the voices of both the cultural insider and the outside observer.

The second section, *Author*, chronicles Demant's growing sense of herself as an independent scholar, not just as Turi's enabler. Her 1911 marriage to Gudmund Hatt, a university-trained geographer and ethnographer, brought her into academic and museum circles, and she encouraged Gudmund's interest in the Sami. Together they continued

to conduct field work in Sápmi, but this culture did not capture Gudmund's interests as it had Emilie's, and they did not return north after 1916. In 1913 Emilie published her own account of her time with the nomads, *Med lapperne i høfjeldet* (*With the Lapps in the High Mountains*). A visit to the United States brought her into contact with American anthropological circles led by the influential Franz Boas, whose thinking reinforced her firm sense that it was important to understand cultures on their own terms and not judge them by Western European standards—a view not prevalent at the time. Emilie continued to gather and publish Sami folk stories, to collect Sami objects that she later donated to museums, and to advocate for Sami rights to self-determination.

The final section, *Artist*, tells of Emilie's return to art as a career—her transition from representational art to a colorful and free-flowing expressionist style, her choice of scenes and themes from her time in Sápmi, and her participation in a lively community of Danish women painters. She faced worry and ostracism as a result of Gudmund's work for the accommodationist Danish government in the first years of the German occupation in World War II. He became viewed as a Nazi apologist and served prison time after the war.

Black Fox is the first book in English to document Demant Hatt's life and work. Sjöholm successfully navigates the many temptations to follow supporting actors that might lead this project to veer off course, such as the fascinating character of Johan Turi himself; the lifeways of the Sami people; or the Scandinavian intelligentsia and adventurers among whom Emilie and Gudmund moved. While the reader learns much about these people, the book stays close to Emilie's own story, patiently gleaned from archived letters and papers still available because of what Sjöholm calls Emilie's "packrat" inclinations. As the English translator of *With the Lapps in the High Mountains* and author of several articles about Demant Hatt, Sjöholm knows her subject well and treats her with sympathy but not simplification. This includes Emilie's complex personal relationship with Turi, who was two decades her senior but saw himself as Emilie's suitor and wrote longing, flirtatious letters from "Old Wolf" to his "Black Fox." Over time their friendship became entangled with other, shifting professional and social relationships: as subject and ethnographer, author and editor, writer and amanuensis, spendthrift and benefactor, member of a disdained social class and member of a privileged one.

Looking initially through the lens of Emilie's relationship with Turi, and then through her later studies and contact with Gudmund's

colleagues, *Black Fox* offers insights into the developing ethics of ethnography in the twentieth century. Demant Hatt entered the field at a time when the Sami were seen as an inferior and primitive culture and when anthropological studies were dominated by “racial biologists” who studied the world’s peoples by measuring their heads. Having developed her ethnographic insights through meeting the Sami on their own terms, she instinctively rejected these ethnocentric views, yet tended somewhat to romanticize the Sami and to see theirs as a dying culture, instead of one that was adapting—as cultures do—to changing times. Both racist and romantic prejudices will be recognizable to U.S. readers who have studied Native American history and culture; it is interesting to encounter them in a Nordic context and to acknowledge the consequences of their persistence into modern times.

Demant Hatt’s life story will also interest feminist readers with its glimpses into her situation as an independent, middle-class Danish woman in the early twentieth century, especially in comparison with the Sami women who were her mentors and the backbones of their clans. Some opportunities were enhanced, while other freedoms were limited once Emilie married at age thirty-eight. Her research contributions were distinctive in capturing details of Sami courtship, marriage, childbirth and childhood, topics not recorded by male scholars. She took her mother’s maiden name as her surname and maintained connections to Danish women’s organizations throughout her life. She was effective in deploying her social privilege on behalf of Turi and her Sami friends.

The book is written in a lively and readable manner. It is carefully footnoted and indexed and includes two clusters of informative photographs and sketches, which I revisited often as the narrative introduced those portrayed. I often wished for a map of Demant Hatt’s travels, as place names were unfamiliar and sometimes confusing, and I wanted a stronger sense of the distances covered in the migratory treks. An appendix explains Sjöholm’s linguistic choices, particularly the political significance of the older terms Lapp and Lapland versus the self-referring terms Sami and Sápmi.

I left this book with appreciation for a curious, determined and capable woman, and for the culture she studied and loved. Readers eager for more information about this intriguing woman, including some images of her artwork, may wish to visit the site Sjöholm maintains, <https://emiliedemanthatt.com/>