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© Bruce Jackson, voyage avec Jean Malaurie à Nome et sa région, 1997
/ field trip with Jean Malaurie to Nome and its region, 1997

ÉDITORIAL

JAN BORM

Jan Borm est professeur des universités en littérature britannique à l'UVSQ / Université Paris-Saclay, France, Directeur de l'Institut de recherches arctiques Jean Malaurie Monaco-UVSQ, Chaire UArctic en Humanités arctiques

Le numéro 24 de la revue *Inter-Nord* est en grande partie consacré à l'Alaska. La couverture et la quatrième de couverture présentent trois masques Yup'ik rapportés en Pennsylvanie par des missionnaires moraves au début du XXe siècle. Ils font désormais partie des collections de la « Moravian Historical Society » à Nazareth, en Pennsylvanie, aux États-Unis. Nous remercions la société de nous avoir autorisés à publier ces images. La couverture comporte également une photographie issue d'une série prise par Bruce Jackson lors de son terrain d'enquête avec Jean Malaurie à Nome et dans sa région en 1997. Un grand merci à Bruce également de nous avoir autorisés à reproduire plusieurs de ses images.

Les contributions consacrées à l'Alaska dans ce numéro comprennent trois articles scientifiques évalués par des pairs, deux travaux de recherche d'étudiants de l'université de Vienne qui s'appuient sur des travaux de terrain, présentés par Peter Schweitzer et Olga Povoroznyuk, ainsi que deux entretiens : l'un avec l'artiste contemporaine Iñupiaq Aisa Warden, réalisé par Daniel Chartier, et l'autre avec Mme Lyn Trodahl Chynoweth, fille d'un missionnaire morave qui a grandi à Nunapitsinghak, site du foyer morave pour enfants sur le Kwethluk, affluent du fleuve Kuskokwim, réalisé par Benjamin Ferguson et des lectures proposées par Muriel Brot.

Inter-Nord 24 rend en outre hommage au poète et anthropologue britannique Tom Lowenstein, décédé en mars 2025 à l'âge de 84 ans. Tom était notamment l'auteur du remarquable ouvrage *Ancient Land: Sacred Whale* (1993, réédité en 1999). Nous remercions ses ayants-droits de nous avoir autorisés à republier deux longs extraits, accompagnés de traductions en français pour lesquelles nous tenons à remercier sincèrement le professeur Hélène Aji de l'École normale supérieure de Paris. Hélène avait traduit ces poèmes à l'occasion de la conférence internationale « Problèmes arctiques : environnement, sociétés et patrimoine/Arctic problems: environment, societies and heritage » organisée par Jean Malaurie et moi-même au Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle de Paris en mars 2007, lors de la quatrième Année polaire internationale. Tom était l'un des conférenciers invités et a présenté un article sur son ouvrage alors à paraître, *Ultimate Americans* (University of Alaska Press, 2008), consacré à l'histoire de Point Hope, en Alaska, contribution publiée dans *Inter-Nord* 21 (2011, pp. 149-152). Tom a publié un volume fascinant consacré à son travail de terrain, *The Structure of Days Out*, paru en 2021, livre qui n'a pas reçu l'attention qu'il mérite jusqu'à présent. Adieu au poète !

Inter-Nord 24 propose également trois autres articles scientifiques ayant fait l'objet d'évaluations par des pairs dans la section intitulée « Varia », illustrant ainsi notre ouverture à toute publication scientifique traitant d'un sujet lié à l'Arctique. Il contient également un point de vue. Un grand merci à tous les contributeurs !

Jan Borm,
Versailles, le 24 novembre 2025.

EDITORIAL

JAN BORM

Jan Borm is Full Professor in British Literature at UVSQ / University Paris-Saclay, France, and Director of the Malaurie Institute of Arctic Humanities Jean Malaurie Monaco-UVSQ. He is also UArctic Chair in Arctic Humanities

Inter-Nord 24 is largely dedicated to Alaska. On the front and back covers feature three Yup'ik masks brought back to Pennsylvania by Moravian missionaries in the early 20th century. They are now held in the collections of the Moravian Historical Society in Nazareth, PA, USA, to which we are grateful for granting permission to publish these images. The front cover also includes a photograph from a series taken by Bruce Jackson during his field trip with Jean Malaurie to Nome and its region in 1997. Many thanks to Bruce for letting us reprint several of his images.

The issue's contributions dedicated to Alaska include three peer-reviewed scientific articles, two student research papers from the University of Vienna based on field work, introduced by Peter Schweitzer and Olga Povoroznyuk, and two interviews: one with Iñupiaq contemporary artist Aisa Warden conducted by Daniel Chartier and the other with Mrs Lyn Trodahl Chynoweth, daughter of a Moravian missionary who grew up at Nunapitsinghak, site of the Moravian Children's Home on the Kwethluk, a tributary to the Kuskokwim river, conducted by Benjamin Ferguson, as well as polar readings offered by Muriel Brot.

Inter-Nord 24 also pays homage to British poet and anthropologist Tom Lowenstein who passed away in March 2025 in his 84th year. Tom was notably the author of the acclaimed volume *Ancient Land: Sacred Whale* (1993, republished 1999). We are grateful to his literary executors to have authorised us to republish two longer excerpts, accompanied by translations into French for which we would like to sincerely thank Professor Hélène Aji of the École normale supérieure in Paris. Hélène had translated these poems on the occasion of the international conference "Problèmes arctiques : environnement, sociétés et patrimoine/ Arctic problems: environment, societies and heritage" organised by Jean Malaurie and myself at the National Museum of Natural History in Paris in March 2007 during the Fourth International Polar Year. Tom was one of the invited speakers, contributing a paper about his then forthcoming history of Point Hope, Alaska, *Ultimate Americans* (University of Alaska Press, 2008) published in *Inter-Nord* 21 (2011, pp. 149-152). Tom has published a fascinating volume about his field work, *The Structure of Days Out* (2021) which has not received the attention it deserves so far. Farewell to the poet!

Inter-Nord 24 also features three other peer-reviewed scientific articles in the section entitled "Varia", illustrating the fact that we are open to scientific papers on any topic in relation to the Arctic. It also contains a viewpoint. Many thanks to all contributors!

Jan Borm,
Versailles, 24 November 2025.

DOSSIER SPÉCIAL « ALASKA » / *SPECIAL THEME « ALASKA »*

Articles soumis à comité de lecture / *Peer-reviewed articles*

© Bruce Jackson, voyage avec Jean Malaurie à Nome et sa région, 1997
/ field trip with Jean Malaurie to Nome and its region, 1997

CREATION OF URBAN ALASKA NATIVE RELIGIOUS SPACES IN AN ALASKAN CITY

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Introduction

Urbanization and migration of rural, Indigenous populations to cities counts among the most important processes leading to the rapid changes of the Arctic socio-economic environment (Csonka & Schweitzer 2004). For instance, an increasing number of Indigenous peoples in Alaska are moving to urban areas in pursuit of better job prospects, educational opportunities, and access to healthcare (Kim 2020). Transitioning to the city represents both opportunities and challenges. In villages, Alaska Natives constitute, in many cases, the ethnic majority, whereas, in the city, they become a minority (Hanson 2015). Anchorage is the largest city in Alaska that can be characterized as ethnically diverse and complex (U.S. Census Bureau website 2022).

Despite the challenges involved, many scholars view rural-urban migration in Alaska not as a loss of culture, but as a continuation and adaptation of rural cultural identity. (Clifford 2020, Fienup-Riordan 2000, Voorhees 2010). Peters & Andersen (2013) argued accordingly that urban Indigenous communities are unique in preserving the continuity between urban and rural environments by maintaining ties to non-urban spaces, as well as to kin and communities outside the city.

Christianity remains "the predominant religion in Anchorage and throughout Alaska'' (Boisclair 2008). Christian denominations may migrate to the urban environment in parallel with its Indigenous parishioners (Jekel 2018; Nicholson 2018). Urban Indigenous communities establish religious spaces within the city to recreate the atmosphere of their home villages. These spaces help preserve the connection between urban and rural networks by providing opportunities to practice the cultural and religious traditions they brought with them, rather than fully adopting the dominant urban culture (Abu-Lughod 1961; Huang 2014; Sahlins 1999). For example, the Orthodox, Moravian and Catholic Yup'ik Indigenous peoples continue to attend and take an active part in their corresponding, urban religious denomination activities. This paper focuses on two examples of main Christian, annual, religious events occurring in the city of Anchorage (Orthodox Starring/Selaviq and Protestant Native Musicale). The author assisted in these celebrations during her fieldwork conducted in the Alaskan city between 2018 and 2022 by using such ethnographic methods as participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and archival research. These two Christian celebrations illustrate how the Yup'ik Orthodox and Yup'ik Moravians renegotiate their traditional and Christian beliefs in the city by creating public and private Indigenous spaces that allow for maintaining the continuity with the rural and urban extended family networks. The celebrations help the Yupiit in their efforts to shape the city to fit their own needs. In parallel, their identity and their traditions are being renegotiated in accordance with the ethnic and religious diversity that the city imposes. Before analyzing the celebrations occurring in the urban environment, the author provides the historical perspective on how one of them was brought by the

FIGURE 1: A star at the Saint Innocent Cathedral, Anchorage, Alaska © Author

Russian Orthodox missionaries to be adopted and adapted to in different Alaska Native regions, while the other one was organized in the city to embrace the Protestant Indigenous diversity in Alaska.

Starring / Selaviq

One of the key gatherings for both rural and urban Yupiit in Anchorage is the celebration of Christ's birth, which begins on Orthodox Christmas, January 7th, and is known as Starring, Selaviq, or Slavie. "Selaviq" is the Yup'ik term for Starring. As noted by Fienup-Riordan (1991), anyone familiar with the Yup'ik region knows about the Russian Orthodox custom of celebrating Christmas through this tradition. To explain how Starring has evolved in Anchorage while still retaining its core elements — and how it helps connect urban Yup'ik with people back in their village—the author begins with an overview of its historical and current role in rural Yup'ik areas. The word "Selaviq" comes from the Russian verb "славить," meaning "to glorify." The celebration coincides with Russian Orthodox Christmas on January 7th, based on the Julian calendar (Inouye 1987). The centerpiece of the tradition is a star — often decorated with a Nativity icon — that represents the star of Bethlehem. After being blessed in church at the end of the Christmas service, large, rotating stars are carried from house to house, accompanied by the singing of church hymns and kolyadi, which are traditional Carpatho-Russian carols (Fienup-Riordan 1991).

The Starring tradition originated in Ukraine and was practiced even before Ukrainians adopted Christianity. Although the introduction of Christianity altered the tradition, the aspect of honoring ancestors persisted (Chuyko 2014). While this practice has nearly vanished in Russia, the ritual of offering food to the deceased is still observed there during memorial days and at gravesites. In certain regions of Ukraine, Starring continues to be celebrated, where meals are shared not only with the living but also symbolically with the deceased, who are invited to join the supper (Fienup-Riordan 1991).

On Christmas Eve, before the traditional three days of caroling begin, some Ukrainian families serve Holy Supper and set an extra place at the table for the souls of ancestors, symbolically inviting them to join the meal (Fienup-Riordan 1991: 97). The author contends that this practice of honoring and feeding the deceased is closely aligned with the Yup'ik winter ceremonies, making the Starring tradition more easily integrated into Yup'ik culture. Beyond the Yup'ik region, Starring also spread to other areas

of Alaska, leading to regional variations in how it is celebrated. Although it is unclear who exactly introduced Starring to Alaska, records suggest the tradition was already present by the late 1800s. Beaman (1989) documented a Starring celebration among the Unangan people on Saint Paul Island during the 1880s. For the Yupiit, Fienup-Riordan (1991) noted that, according to Kasigluk Elders, Father Nicolai Epchook and Father Zakhary Guest brought the tradition from the Russian Mission, where it was also practiced in the 1880s. Father Nicolai Epchook, of Russian-Yup'ik descent, studied at the Russian Unangax seminary in Unalaska on the Aleutian Islands before becoming a priest (Fienup-Riordan 1991), suggesting he may have introduced the practice from the Unangax̂ Orthodox community to the Yup'ik region. Thus, Starring gradually spread throughout Alaska from the late 19th century, with each region — and even individual villages — developing their own ways of celebrating it.

Although Russian Orthodox missionaries generally tolerated certain Yup'ik traditions and beliefs, particularly those that did not conflict with Christian ideas, they disapproved of traditional ceremonial celebrations (Black & Netsvetov 1984). Fienup-Riordan (1991), in her account of the Selaviq celebration in Kasigluk in 1989, noted that the villagers recalled Russian Orthodox priests who, starting in the 1930s, promoted the Starring celebration while discouraging the traditional winter ceremonies. They hoped the Yupiit would adapt Selaviq by incorporating some Yup'ik elements into the celebration.

In Yup'ik villages, the number and order of hymns and kolyadi may vary, but typically, the troparion, kontakion, sections from the canon, a kolyada, and "Many Years" are included in the singing (Oleksa 1992). A key distinction between the celebrations in the Yup'ik areas, such as the Yukon-Kuskokwim and Nushagak ones is that the latter places greater focus on inter-village visits rather than on food and gift distribution (Oleksa 2017). While the song repertoire may differ in terms of the number and arrangement of church hymns and kolyadi in the Yup'ik region (Oleksa 1992), the fundamental structure remains consistent across the region, with Starring continuing to be the central annual event in many Yup'ik villages. As Diane Chris, the wife of the first Yup'ik priest to settle in Anchorage (2020) put it:

> *I would say [the Selaviq tradition in Yupiit villages] is pretty much the same, they may skip a part, they may not have gifts but the singing always comes first, because you are following the star at home. The style of singing is different because the songs are the same; it's just slower, a little bit of different pronunciation, like in Yukon, some people coming to Bethel from Yukon and trying to correct us for singing wrong. But it's the same song. And just the speed of the song, the tempo might be different, but it's still the same.*

The blessing of the stars takes place on Christmas, January 7th, according to the Russian Orthodox (Julian) Calendar. Typically, the priest's home is the first stop for the star after the Christmas service (Chris 2022). The festivities may last up to ten days, concluding on Epiphany, January 19th. During the caroling, a man holding the star stands with his back to the altar or the house's red (icon) corner, facing the congregation and rotating the stars counterclockwise. Church hymns and carols, known as kolyadi, are sung in English, Yup'ik, Slavonic, and Ukrainian. The Ukrainian and Slavonic songs are memorized and passed down through generations as part of the Yup'ik oral tradition (Fienup-Riordan 1991). Since being introduced to the Yup'ik region, Selaviq has evolved into the most significant celebration of the year, with the entire village community, including people from other denominations, taking part.

In the Yukon-Kuskokwim region, once the singing and caroling have concluded, the hosts begin distributing food and gifts, prioritizing the Elders. This "wealth distribution" is the outcome of months of preparation, involving both subsistence efforts and financial investment (Fienup-Riordan 1991: 106). The process at each house can last several hours, depending on the extent of the gift and food distribution. "It kind of evolved into a competition, twenty years ago. I thought how those people could afford it, I was amazed how much they gave out" (Chris 2022). It is interesting to note here that the distribution of the enormous amounts of gifts and food was the base of Kevgiq, or the Messenger Feast, a Yup'ik winter ceremonial celebration:

> *And the items they gave away during the dance festival got larger and larger…foods that they harvested during spring, they'd bring seal pokes, seal pokes filled with walrus meat, different things, seal pokes filled with beluga. They added those [to their gifts] when I watched them.* (Philipp 2018: 392; 404)

In other words, instead of being completely eradicated by the missionaries, the winter ceremonial feasts were creatively transformed into the Orthodox Starring celebration. By introducing Selaviq to the Yupiit, Orthodox priests gradually replaced traditional winter ceremonies such as Nakaciuq (Bladder Festival) and Elriq (Feast of the Dead) with this new Orthodox feast. The similarities between Starring and these traditional celebrations likely made it easier for the Yupiit to adopt the new tradition. For example, the practice of inviting ancestors to households and of honoring them with food, which was a pre-Christian custom, survived in the Orthodox Selaviq celebration in Ukraine and was also observed during the Feast of the Dead among the Yupiit.

> *The Aunties always said that during Selaviq the curtains should always be open. And the mirrors [should be] covered. If the curtains are closed, the deceased will cry and go to other places, then to God… People eat [during Selaviq] and think they are full; but they are never full, as the dead are always hungry and they come to the spirit of the living to eat. But even if people have nothing to share, they should open their door, as they can share good words.* (Anonymous 1 2020)

The author contends that one of the key aspects in the Yupiit's adoption of Selaviq was the practice of inviting ancestors to partake in food and gifts. Rather than rejecting the tradition, the Yupiit embraced Selaviq by blending it with traditional elements and rituals from the Feast of the Dead and the Bladder Festival. Fienup-Riordan (1991) pointed out some other similarities between Selaviq and traditional winter celebrations. For instance, in villages, spaces were divided into a ceremonial men's house and women's dwellings. Similarly, in the Russian Orthodox church and in households where Selaviq was celebrated, there was a clear separation of spaces for men and women. Ritual circuits played an important role in both Selaviq and traditional celebrations. During the final ritual of the Bladder Festival, seal bladders, believed to contain the seals' souls, were placed into the ice hole. The end of the Christmas season was marked by the Epiphany celebration, where people gathered around the ice hole. Additionally, inviting the spirits of the deceased to join the community and feed them through namesakes during the Feast of the Dead, as well as the Ukrainian Starring tradition of inviting the deceased to share in the supper, mirrored these practices.

In his analysis of Selaviq, Oleksa (1992) observed that the celebration involves not only Orthodox parishioners but non-Orthodox villagers. Although Yup'ik villagers from various Christian denominations take part in each other's celebrations, Selaviq stands out as the primary annual event that brings all the villagers together. Some Yup'ik Moravians host a star and a priest at their homes for the celebration. While they may not always sing hymns and kolyadi, it was noted that they do engage in the sharing of food and gifts.

> *In the village, we have the Russian Orthodox and Moravian [denominations]. We celebrate our Christmas, we celebrate their Christmas, which is Selaviq. I do not know how to sing their stuff, I do not know how it is here, but they have their own singing group. As a Moravian I just stand, I do not know how to sing [the hymns and the kolyadi]. We have one God, I can kind of celebrate both.* (Anonymous 2 2019)

Arguably, Yup'ik Moravians do not practice an official feast accompanied by such an intricate gift-giving ritual. Notwithstanding, in Anchorage, the Moravian gatherings are often organized around food, while memorial services sometimes involve gift sharing. In addition, the Yup'ik Moravians follow the urban Orthodox star and join the Selaviq celebrations in Yup'ik and other Alaska Native Orthodox households.

> *During the Christmas time, when we have Selavie, the Moravians join, because they grew up with that, it became the activity for the whole village. It has become their tradition, like in Father [Peter Chris'] village. On December 25th there is a Christmas play in the Moravian church; everybody goes to that. So, the village celebrates [Protestant] Christmas. The Orthodox may not participate in the services, maybe in the play or in the exchange of gifts, and on January 7th everyone does the Orthodox [Christmas].* (Chris 2022)

In certain Yup'ik communities, Starring continues to strengthen connections between villages, similarly to the Bladder Festival, when seal spirits were invited, and other villages took part in the sharing of gifts and food. Some scholars argue that Selaviq represents a fusion of traditional Yup'ik and Orthodox traditions, forming a new religious and cultural practice (Fienup-Riordan 1991; Jerabek 2014; Mousalimas 1992; Oleksa 1992). Indeed, upon their introduction to Christianity, the Yup'ik people gradually moved away from their traditional winter ceremonial feasts and embraced Starring as a Christian celebration. Some traditional elements were lost in the process. Nevertheless, the author

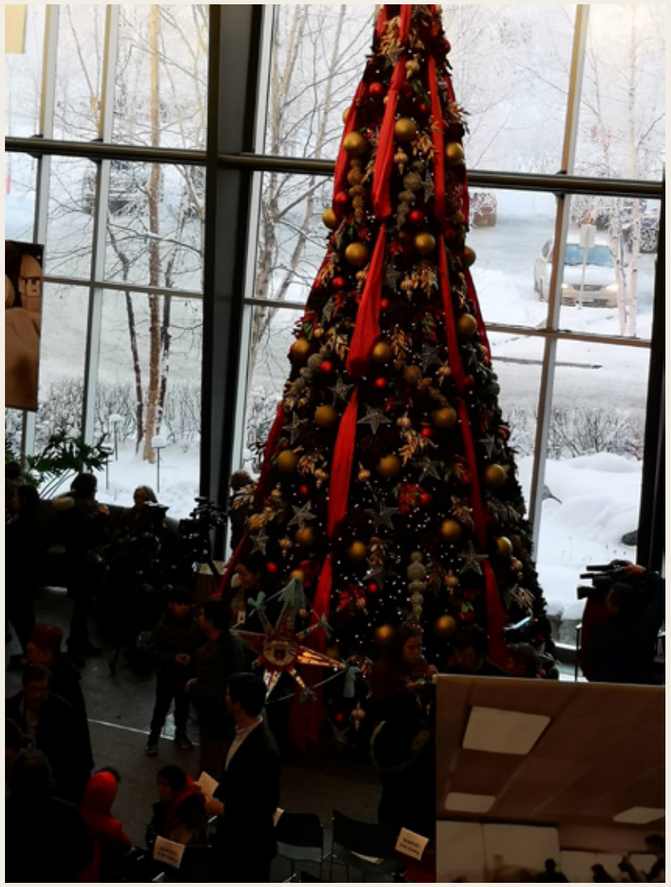

FIGURE 2: Starring at the Southcentral Foundation, Anchorage, Alaska, 2020 © Author

contends that the Yupiit chose to selectively incorporate Christian elements — such as singing and caroling — into their pre-existing cultural rituals, rather than blending them together. The practice of honoring the dead, a pre-Christian custom maintained by Ukrainians, remains a central feature of Starring for the Yup'ik people.

Starring in Anchorage, Alaska

When Father Nicholas and his wife, Matushka Anastasia Molodyko-Harris arrived in Anchorage in 1967 to establish an Orthodox parish, a Yup'ik parishioner gave them a star he had made in a Yup'ik village. The star was intended to be brought to the Alaska Native Medical Center or the Hospital, as well as to city nursing homes (Jekel 2018: 38). Although various traditions of Starring had developed in Native villages and regions across Alaska, the Yup'ik star was the first one to be used in the urban Starring celebration by this Orthodox priest. Starring helped in recreating village life for the Hospital's patients who had to stay in Anchorage for healthcare, as well as for their urban extended family members and friends, originally stemming from the same villages.

> *We would have maybe a hundred people there visiting patients. I would lead them into different rooms, say a prayer over each person, and [we would] sing several carols in the room. So many people were touched by this; there would be tears running down their cheeks of thankfulness that we had remembered them during the Christmas season.* (Jekel 2018: 38)

Therefore, although Starring remains the primary annual celebration and a marker of the village lifestyle, it has come to serve as a means of preserving the connection between rural and urban areas. Former villagers who have migrated to the city work to uphold the tradition there, while practicing their pre-contact and Christian rituals and inviting their ancestors to the feast organized around their namesakes, relatives and friends temporarily located in the city. Thus, this urban Starring celebration represents both an effort to connect to the ancestors and to the rural, extended family network.

Since Father Nicholas Molodyko-Harris was appointed, there has been a notable rise in Yup'ik influence within the Anchorage Deanery of the Russian Orthodox Church in Alaska, particularly in the development of Starring in the city. Father Peter Chris, the first Yup'ik priest to settle in Anchorage, became the hospital chaplain and introduced the Starring tradition from his hometown of Nunapitchuk. His wife, Matushka Diane Chris (2022), explained the reason for their move from the rural Yup'ik area to Anchorage as follows:

> *Father Nicholas [Molodyko-Harris] did everything [by himself], they wanted a Native priest in the hospital, they wanted Yup'ik because the Yup'ik language is mostly still alive. Elders were scared of the English language in the hospital, so a Yup'ik priest could be more comforting. More and more Yup'iks are coming to the city.*

For many years, Father Peter Chris has continued to be the one in charge of the annual Starring celebration, bringing the Selaviq tradition of his Yup'ik village of Nunapitchuk to become prevailing over the other ones at least for the parishioners of Saint Innocent Cathedral:

> *But when [Father Peter] leads it, the tradition of Nunapitchuk is the base, because when you come, you sing first, and then the preacher or the priest, whoever preaches, gives the sermon, and then you feast when they are feasting, you pass the gifts, and it's that structure every time.* (Chris 2022)

Embracing the city diversity in terms of Alaska Naive Orthodox migration, multiple stars travel

FIGURE 3: Starring gifts received by the author in an urban Yup'ik household © Author

across the Anchorage and Matanuska-Susitna areas after January 7; they mirror the village representations from different rural areas (Andrew 2022). On the one hand, they point out the fact that the village traditions migrate and transition to the city. On the other hand, the new urban dynamics of the Orthodox lifestyle require their renegotiation, for instance, the necessity to embrace the diversity and ethnic complexity of the city.

The main priest in charge of the star visits to the Orthodox households in Anchorage originates from the village of Nunapitchuk. He is attached to Saint Innocent Cathedral, the largest Orthodox church in Anchorage (Orthodox Church in America website 2025). Therefore, the Nunapitchuk Starring tradition remains prevalent for the existing parishioners and village newcomers, notwithstanding the regional differences.

On January 7th, the Cathedral main star begins its journey across Anchorage, visiting Alaska Native patients from both rural and urban areas at the Southcentral Foundation and the Alaska Native Medical Center.

> *Here in Anchorage the hospital would be the first place, and then it became such an event in the hospital that they scheduled a big celebration at the Native hospital, they had their dancers and food. They used to have some Native dancers, usually Yup'ik dancers, depending on who was in charge.* (Chris 2022)

The Starring choir differs from the Cathedral choir as it includes a different number of Yup'ik and other Alaska Native parishioners. While the Starring choir members respect and adhere to the priest's village celebration tradition, they also renegotiate it on their own terms. The Alaska Native parishioners play a role in shaping the adaptation of the tradition to the urban church, incorporating their own village singing practices into the urban Starring celebration.

> *In Anchorage they were accepting his [Father Chris Peter's] tradition at first, because they were respectful, and this is how you do it, but I think, then he was more open to it and he just said, do whatever you want to do, and I think it was helpful. Now Selaviq is a mixture of all the [Alaska Native] cultures. They all bring a part of their village here, yes.* (Chris 2022)

In the Yup'ik villages, high rates of unemployment are one of the reasons households are relatively flexible in how long a household celebration takes (Fienup-Riordan 1991; Goldsmith 2008). In contrast, in the city the fast-paced lifestyle dictates its rules to the urban celebration of Starring. "Now, because people work, we actually schedule it [in the city]," explains Chris (2022).

In Anchorage, each household is allotted about two hours to host the star, the priest, the choir, and the public. The Cathedral star moves throughout the city, with the final days reserved for some Alaska Native households in the nearby Matanuska-Susitna Borough. There is no longer a spatial separation of men and women during church services or Starring in Anchorage households. However, the Orthodox Church still maintains a structure similar to the Yup'ik men's communal house, as the sacramental rituals in the church continue to be conducted exclusively by men.

Although access to Native food in the urban environment is limited, as compared to the village, urban Yup'ik households still distribute it during Starring. "In Anchorage, it's hard for them to get Native food, they do what they have, they try to make it at home, because it's the tradition" (Chris 2022). During the celebration, roasted fish and akutaq, also known as "Eskimo ice cream," are traditionally served. Notably, the author's collaborator referred above to the village as being "home" for the Yup'ik and other Alaska Native peoples living in Anchorage. This reflects the strong connection between rural and urban life, with a deep sense of belonging to ancestral lands, while being physically disconnected from the ancestral lands. For the Yupiit, feasting and gifting in line with "home" traditions help maintain this bond. Berries and fish are gathered from nearby areas, traded, or brought in from the village. The food is shared after a sermon and singing, followed by the distribution of gifts. Fienup-Riordan (1991) stated that in the village, gifts may vary from affordable and practical to expensive and elaborate. In Anchorage, the households visited by the author distributed candies as well as gloves, soap, towels, pens and other useful items.

The Covid-19 pandemic contributed to shaping the tradition along with its readjustment to the urban lifestyle, leading to shaping it further in the city context. During the pandemic, the star visits of the hospital and households were temporarily haltered. Still, temporary solutions were implemented: Saint Innocent cathedral hosted an outdoor singing, as well as a drive-through distribution of food and gifts. Strong community involvement was demonstrated by significant food and gift donations to the organizing Cathedral. Additionally, members from

various rural and Alaska Native communities led spontaneous Starring and food-sharing events outside churches and households, some of which were streamed on social media, ensuring that "the spirit of celebration did not change" (Lekanof 2022). The various outdoor Starring celebrations permitted the author to observe new variations and styles of the Starring celebration.

The author's observations align with the arguments provided by Fienup-Riordan (1991), Jerabek (2014), Mousalimas (1992), and Oleksa (1992) that Starring, or Selaviq was reshaped into a new Yup'ik tradition. The Yupiit adapted Orthodox practices like starring, hymn singing, and caroling, integrating them with longstanding traditions such as sharing food, exchanging gifts, and inter-village feasting. The pre-Christian Ukrainian custom of honoring ancestors with food likely helped make this cultural integration possible. The rural-urban migration resulted in the reshaping of the Starring celebration tradition. The Starring celebration organized by Saint Innocent Cathedral serves as a bridge connecting both rural and urban Alaska Native communities, bringing them together for a shared feast at the Alaska Native Medical Center. By hosting this annual event, the Orthodox Church serves its parishioners and their Orthodox and Christian extended families as a vehicle that helps recreate aspects of village life by honoring traditions of the Starring celebration, rooted in the villages and migrating to the city. While the celebration has adapted to accommodate the pace of city life and the regional customs of other church members, it remains central to the observances held by cathedral parishioners, hospital patients, and their guests in the church, hospital, and homes.

Native Musicale

Unlike their Orthodox counterparts, Yup'ik Moravians do not appear to hold an elaborate, regular, annual gift-giving tradition. However, many Yup'ik Moravians living in the urban area continue to stay connected to their village roots by taking part in the Native Musicale, a Protestant festival held every year during Anchorage's Fur Rendezvous winter celebration. This event serves as a meaningful bridge between village and city life. The author joined a Yup'ik singing group to participate in the Native Musicale in 2019 and 2020 which involved extended family gatherings and sharing of traditional Native food in the preparation phase. Organized each February or March by the Anchorage Native New Life Fellowship, the Native Musicale coincides with Fur Rendezvous events like the Open World Championship Sled Dog Races, the Inupiaq Blanket Toss, and the Charlotte Jensen Native Arts Market (Anchorage Native New Life Fellowship website 2024). This time of the year also attracts many rural Alaska Native artists who come to Anchorage to sell their crafts and to take part in the evening musical festival. Although the first Native Musicale was held in 1967, it evolved into a more significant and popular event with support from the InterAct Ministry. The ministry had earlier founded Victory High School in 1959 for Unangax̂, Yup'ik, and Inupiaq children to provide an alternative to distant boarding schools in Sitka or the Lower 48, and it encouraged these students to participate in the Musicale "to share the Christian message" through testimonies, singing and music (InterAct Ministries website 2025). Since 1974, the Anchorage Native New Life Fellowship (ANNLF) has been in charge of the Musicale organization (Anchorage Native New Life Fellowship website 2024). Located in Anchorage, ANNLF broadcasts its services on Facebook; it is also an active radio and television ministry with outreach to various rural Alaska Native communities, including some in the Yukon-Kuskokwim and Bristol Bay areas. Thus, the ministry serves as a means for the rural and urban Yup'ik communities to stay connected at a distance, while reuniting on the occasion of the Native Musicale annually in the city of Anchorage.

Today, the Musicale remains a meeting platform that is both "a celebration of Christian faith" and "a social event" for "Indigenous believers [who] come from different regions across Alaska and [who] love music" (Bishop William Nicholson, personal communication, 2022). For those who are unable to be there in person, the event may be available to watch on social media or a recording of it on DVD can be purchased later. The Musicale gives Alaska Natives the opportunity to... "see lots of people you do not see otherwise... it's like a family and friends reunion, high school and college friends" (Anonymous 3 2020). It also allows Alaska Native participants to expand their network by connecting with previously unknown members of the Christian Alaska Native network during the event.

Because there are only a few educational institutions available in Alaska, many Alaska Native students have pursued their studies at boarding schools and colleges, where they have formed friendships with Alaska Natives from other areas. The festival expanded, as these students reunited and gathered to sing and conduct music together. Currently, the

FIGURE 4: Native Musicale 2020, Anchorage, Alaska © Author

festival is a "time of touching base with each other" (Paton 2021). The Musicale organizers and participants continue to recreate this pan-Protestant, Alaska Native space in the city that enables them to reconnect and expand their network on the state level. Alaska Native corporations support the event with funding, contributing to the development of the Alaska Native Christian identity.

Regarding the festival's "social gathering" element, it features a 'Parka Parade' and an Alaska Native pop-up arts market. The Parka Parade kicks off each evening of the three-hour event and showcases traditional Yup'ik and Inupiaq parkas and qasperet (hooded overshirts). Alaska Native models wear their garments while sharing their creation stories and the cultural significance behind them. For the Yup'ik people, parkas symbolize a deep connection to both their community and their ancestral homeland that "tell a story" of a particular Yup'ik region; it is also "a declaration and expression of [the Yup'ik] will and desire to continue [their] culture" (Meade 1991: 230). Although the Musicale draws both Alaska Native and some non-Native Christian attendees from across the state, the 'Parka parade' primarily showcases the cultural heritage and sewing traditions of the Yup'ik and Inupiaq peoples. A popular clothing choice for both men and women during the festival is the qaspeq—traditional Yup'ik overshirt —, which has come to symbolize the identity not only of the Yup'ik, Inupiaq, and other Native groups, but also of non-Indigenous Alaskans. The festival's atmosphere, which includes honoring Elders and supporting youth involvement, reflects shared values among Alaska Native communities.

The author's Yup'ik language teacher invited them to join the Native Musicale in 2019, where they had been invited to perform with Yugtun Aturtet (Yup'ik Singers in English). Yugtun Aturtet is a singing group that has been performing at the Native Musicale for many years (Paton 2022). Carrie Paton, the choir director, has dedicated her life to singing and playing Christian music, a passion that developed after moving to the city. She was named in honor of Yuracista, a Yup'ik man from Togiak, with the name carrying significant meaning of "the one who makes songs" (Paton 2022). The Yupiit people believe they inherit certain traits from the deceased they are named after, and for Paton, the Christian gospel has been a significant influence since childhood. Her mother, a Moravian, was an active church member and a renowned gospel singer. In 1976, Paton began attending college in Anchorage, where she became

involved in a weekly fellowship that sang at the Alaska Native Service Hospital. The group gained popularity, eventually leading to the formation of a Musicale singing group that began participating in the festival (Paton 2022). A number of the singing group's members were involved with the Anchorage Native Outreach Ministry (formerly known as the Anchorage Moravian Fellowship) and were also part of the choir director's extended Yup'ik family, including sisters, cousins, aunts and uncles. Alongside her roles as the choir director and leader of the Anchorage Moravian Fellowship, Paton has been collaborating with a song editor since 2016 to create songbooks with songs translated into Yup'ik and set to musical notation (Paton 2022). Under Paton's leadership, Yugtun Aturtet sang Christian hymns in both English and Yup'ik, accompanied by piano, at the 2020 Musicale, where the author was invited to join the group.

The group rehearsed weekly for about a month leading up to the festival. Most of the practices took place at the choir director's house, although some were held at the homes of other choir members and in a church building. Except for the singing at the church, all the other singing practices were followed by sharing a meal together featuring Native food, shared by the hosts and/or brought by the participants. For the performance, everyone wore the Yup'ik qasperet (hooded overshirts). Some choir members also performed with other groups, often including close or extended family members from both the village and the city, on the same or different nights of the festival. The festival brochure always lists the names of the participating groups along with their current location.

A singing group often includes participants from both rural villages and urban areas, united by family and friendship ties. The Musicale represents the fluidity and dynamics of Indigenous rural-urban migration, contributing to the creation of both private and public Indigenous spaces within the city. It serves as a venue for Indigenous networks, with flexible boundaries formed not only through extended family connections but also through the legacy of boarding schools, where Indigenous students from various tribes forged lifelong friendships. The Musicale is an annual event that reinforces statewide connections, bringing together Indigenous people from both urban and rural areas. Additionally, the festival is closely linked to the development of Inuit music and the pursuit of self-determination, the Yupiit being a part of the Inuit, as defined by the Inuit Circumpolar Council-Alaska (ICC Alaska website 2020). According to the authors' collaborators, Indigenous peoples in Alaska, particularly the Yupiit, are "very musically inclined" (Nicholson 2022; Paton, 2022). Inuit musical traditions changed with the arrival of evangelism. The Moravian pastors discouraged traditional ceremonies, including Yup'ik dancing. As a result, the Yupiit, along with other Indigenous groups in Alaska, began actively adapting the Christian gospel to their own cultural context, a process referred to as "Yup'ifying". Perea (2018: 133) lists examples of "Cup'ifying and Yup'ifying gospel" arguing that "the Cup'ik culture made Christianity something of its own" in the process of negotiating Yup'ik and Cup'ik "agency and self-determination". The Indigenous Christian festival parallels Fur Rondy, a predominantly Euro-American, "secular festival of welcoming spring" (Nicholson 2022). The preparation for and participation in the festival highlights Indigenous agency, showcasing the strong connections between urban Yupiit and other Indigenous Christians and their ancestral lands. These are places where they once gathered to sing at churches and conferences. In Yup'ik villages with several religious denominations, Orthodox and Moravian community members often join each other's celebrations (Chris 2022). Similarly, in the city, while urban Moravians take part in the local Starring celebrations, urban Orthodox individuals attend the Musicale. Unlike Starring, the Musicale does not include such traditional elements as feeding the deceased. However, the planning and execution of the major Protestant Indigenous event resemble traditional winter rituals, featuring large inter-village gatherings, singing, and food sharing. With evangelization, the Church became "a central part for gatherings" in the village (Paton 2021).

Since Moravians and other Protestants are mobile and able to hold private gatherings outside the church for prayer, singing, and music, Yup'ik Moravians began to create private and public Indigenous spaces, meeting in urban households, in the Alaska Native Medical Center, and during the major Indigenous Christian, annual event, the Musicale. As well-known in the village and in the city as Starring (Selaviq), the Musicale provides an opportunity for Alaska Native urban networks to come together, practice songs, and share Native food before the event. It also fosters connections with kin and friends from the villages.

Conclusion

The examples of two Christian celebrations, Orthodox Starring and Protestant Native Musicale, being organized annually by urban Indigenous peoples in Anchorage, illustrate how religious denominations in the city, along with other Indigenous spaces, play an important role in maintaining the continuity between the village and the city within the framework of the ongoing rural-urban migration. The dialogue with Christianity and its creative adoption by Alaska Natives does not stop when they migrate to the city. They practice their rural, religious traditions on a regular basis notwithstanding the necessity to adapt them to the fast-pace urban lifestyle, the religious and ethnic diversity, and the Covid-19 pandemic. The preparations for and implementation of the celebrations serve as opportunities to create temporary private and public Indigenous spaces that attract extended urban family networks, usually scattered across the city, as well as rural kin and friends.

As noted by Voorhees (2010), rural areas remain vital for sustaining urban Native cultural continuity, especially through Native food. Mirroring village customs, Indigenous Christians in Anchorage celebrate each other's religious holidays with food sharing and gift-giving rooted in ancestral winter ceremonial celebrations. The urban, Orthodox star connects the urban and rural kin by travelling on January 7th to the Alaska Native Medical Center, or the Hospital, that hosts both urban and rural patients. On the one hand, lack of healthcare services in the village constitutes a major challenge for rural, Indigenous community members. On the other hand, the necessity to travel to Anchorage for medical appointments and procedures helps facilitate Native food sharing and exchange of goods among the extended family networks living between the village and the city. Despite the threat that separation from ancestral lands poses to Indigenous identity (Voorhees 2010), Alaska Natives actively preserve these connections through both secular and religious practices in the city.

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WHOSE STORY IS IT, ANYWAY? THE TRAVEL WRITER'S DILEMMA BETWEEN INTEGRATING OUTSIDE VOICES AND KEEPING A STORY THEIR OWN, WITH A FOCUS ON JOHN MCPHEE'S COMING INTO THE COUNTRY

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Each generation has a lens through which to view the world, and to effect academic analysis. The current moment is no outlier in this regard, as its preoccupation so often lies in ecological and decolonial perspectives; two lenses that increasingly work in tandem. Decolonization, the intentional dismantling of colonial ideologies that have created systemic prejudice against indigenous peoples and rendered them alterities to be objectified and subjugated, has experienced increased academic empowerment in recent years. The goal has been to rectify prejudice, often by demonstrating how the traumas of the colonialist/settler mindset have trickled down through generations and affected all areas of life, from the psyche to the physical condition. Furthermore, decolonization requires a more diverse array of voices in decision-making processes in order to more evenly democratize representation. There has indeed been a shift toward inclusion of indigenous knowledge systems and philosophies in academia, leading to a broad shift in hermeneutics and historiographies, and in literature in particular there has been a shift toward opening up to stories from historically-disenfranchised demographics. However, travel writing occupies a unique space, in both literature and academic criticism.

Travel writing continues to be dominated by travellers of European descent, who continue to find importance in telling stories about cultures, groups, and experiences they have around the world. By definition, this is problematic, as decolonial ethics in literature demand that historically-disenfranchised groups be allowed to tell their own stories of themselves, and on their own terms. However, due to linguistic barriers, the differing manner in which stories are told by respective groups, and the fact that many stories would never be told to broader audiences without the traveller, there remains a literary space for travel writers in the 21st century. But the travel writer must now be aware that decolonial ethics also necessitate a shift in writing style. Narrowed down to its most basic rule, this means that the story is no longer primarily the story of the traveller moving through a foreign space, describing foreign peoples and foreign objects. Instead, the traveller must understand that the story of the people, the animals, and the places the traveller meets along the way must be subjectified and integrated into the story of the traveller, with both stories given at least equal weight. This is due to a shift in how ownership of community narrative is interpreted.

This paper is an analysis of travel-writing craft. In particular, I will be looking at how the Alaska travel writing canon has become much more inclusive of Alaska Native perspectives since the mid-20th century. As a framework for understanding this craft, I will employ Vivian Gornick's *The Situation and the Story*,[1] which is a guide to non-fiction creative writing that primarily focuses on memoir and personal essay. Gornick's suggested focus on situation, story, and voice will be analyzed and slightly tweaked in order to better represent the aims of an ethical form of travel writing that decenters away from the traveller's personal gaze. The result will be extrapolated onto John McPhee's book, *Coming into the Country.*[2] McPhee has intentionally worked throughout his career at finding ways to allow for the subjectivity of others to enter into his writing, employing multiple techniques, including what he calls a "gossip ladder."[3] With McPhee's techniques established, I will then demonstrate the evolution that has since occurred, with 21st century texts offering much more Alaska Native agency into the conversation of how to interpret historically-Native spaces. Writers effect this agency through such techniques as full interviews that allow for complete thoughts on a given subject by individuals whose perspectives, and even intersubjective realities, may exist outside the conveyable comprehension of the traveller.

The Situation and the Story

In a late-career book entitled *Deep South*,[4] Paul Theroux suggests of travel writing structure, "The quest, the getting there, the difficulty of the road, is the story; the journey not the arrival matters, and most of the time the traveler—the traveler's mood, especially—is the subject of the whole business" (9). This observation cuts to the core of how the genre tends to be analyzed. The journey itself has typically been the story, from the perspective of the traveller, instead of focusing on the subjects met along the way. Sometimes the self-centered nature of the journey works from a narrative perspective, and sometimes it falls flat, for various reasons. Vivian Gornick's book-length analysis of the personal narrative, *The Situation and the Story*, attempts to pinpoint what it is that makes a personal narrative fall flat. While not specific to travel writing, Gornick's work indeed serves as a parallel, with some crossover, and she suggests that a strong memoir requires three things from the author: 1) the specific *situation* they want to pinpoint; 2) the *story* that they want to tell about that *situation*; and 3) the consistent narrative *voice* that they choose to employ throughout. Her idea of *situation* immediately stands out, as, for Gornick, failing to find the balance between *the situation and the story* is what brings down a personal narrative. If a writer does not understand how the *situation* affects the story, they are blind to the subjects around them, who tend to either become objects or become subjects whose narrative weight is misjudged (i.e. the author may believe that the story has to do with their relationship with one person, whereas the story really has to do with their relationship with a city, or with another person), and the story fails. In this case, the writer's frustrations, mood, or even prejudice tends to take over, creating an imbalance. Analyzing her own work on her travels in Cairo,[5] Gornick suggests that she got caught up in the *situation* of the local community, allowed it to heavily affect her *voice* to the extent that her writing became as manic as the streets she walked, which consequently threw the entire story out of balance, as she was unable to find a true story (10-13). Unlike Theroux's suggestion of the rigours of travel so often being the story, Gornick's story became the *situation* of the local culture itself, or rather, the *voice* evoked within the *situation*. And yet, the issue that Gornick self-diagnoses remains somewhat similar to Theroux's "mood." In fact, Gornick believes that the writing of a personal narrative involves the creation of an entire literary universe, even if it is nonfiction (6-7), and the risk is that, while the effects of the travels on the traveller are indeed important, the traveller's "mood" can easily throw a work off track, skewing important objectivities within a given situation.

Furthermore, in a nonfiction literary universe created by travellers as they write about the experiences of their travels, ethical perils are rife. Though both Gornick and Theroux are discussing their subjective positions on literary merit, and not ethics, much of what works in their respective discussions also works with ethics. Therefore, if we employ Gornick's formula and Theroux's insight into "mood" as a basis, we can develop a new formula for ethical travel writing that finds a balance which fairly depicts the

1 Gornick, Vivian. *The Situation and the Story: The Art of Personal Narrative.* New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002.

2 McPhee, John. *Coming into the Country*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977.

3 Achenbach, Joel. "Writing with the Master", in *Princeton Alumni Weekly*.

4 Theroux, Paul. *Deep South: Four Seasons on Back Roads.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2015.

5 Gornick, Vivian. *In Search of Ali Mahmoud: An American Woman in Egypt.* Boston: E.P. Dutton, 1973.

struggles of local communities. Essentially, one difference between memoir and travel writing is the ability of the traveller to so often get across both a personal story and the story of the people met along the way simultaneously. Therefore, Gornick's formula could be restructured in travel writing to: 1) a *situation* already exists in the local community itself, to be found by the travel writer (e.g. fishing off the coast of Alaska and British Columbia no longer sustains communities like it once did, with various local responses, as Jonathan Raban found in *Passage to Juneau*);[6] 2) the travel writer can simultaneously set up a personal *situation* (e.g. Raban's divorce and the death of his father during his voyage to Juneau);[7] 3) both *situations* can merge and guide the story (e.g. life is not only a Transcendentalist daydream as experienced by nature writers but can also be a "whirling abyss," like the dangerous waters that Raban navigated on his way to Juneau – (191) - as well as all of the things that were happening in Raban's personal life and the lives of those he met along the way whose communities were suffering); 4) the traveller employs a consistent *voice* (e.g. Raban as erudite but dissolute traveller), while also allowing for a collage of voices from local communities. The key to this formula is an understanding by the traveller that the story is not merely the journey that is directly experienced by the traveller, but rather the traveller serves as a component, or a lens to relate the story beyond the traveller. Furthermore, the merging of the traveller's story with the stories of the communities met along the way not only makes for more complexity, it is more ethically responsible. Especially viewed through the lens of active decolonization in the 21st century, travel writing requires both writing and curation by the traveller, who often serves as the democratic mediator guiding a discussion between communities. John McPhee employed a similar formula throughout his career, which culminated technically in his work of travel to Alaska, *Coming into the Country*.

The Literature of Fact

John McPhee taught a class for decades that he called "The Literature of Fact." This is how the nonagenarian views his own writing, adamantly avoiding the labels "journalism," and "travel," and "environmentalism" (Howarth, 22).[8] Early in his career, he was often compared to the New Journalists, a group of young magazine and newspaper writers in the 1960s and 70s who went out into the world, threw themselves into culturally-pertinent situations and wrote about what they experienced with a literary bent.[9] Like these New Journalists, John McPhee also picked out culturally-pertinent situations, writing in a literary and journalistic manner, but there are some key ways that his "Literature of Fact" differs from their New Journalism. These differences mostly have to do with the manner in which John McPhee integrates the stories of others into his works, allowing those stories to guide and inform his works, while his personal story generally takes a back seat. By contrast, the New Journalists tended to merge the personal narrative of their travels with the pertinent cultural situation, with this merging typically being the primary story.

The upsides of New Journalism were that it tended to get at the underbelly of society and allow the reader right there alongside the writer, experiencing the same moods and emotions, whether it be Joe McGinness exposing the corruption and drug use of Juneau politicians,[10] or Norman Mailer getting arrested at a Vietnam protest,[11] or Tom Wolfe riding around on a bus full of people regularly taking hits of LSD.[12] The downsides are that in writing from a singular perspective there generally lacked a broader context to the story. The narrator's story was the story. However, with the 21st century decolonial ethics in mind, a travel writer, particularly an Arctic travel writer, must remember that the story of their travels is never their story completely. They must decenter away from total subjectivity and allow for the story of the lands and peoples they come across to become integral to the larger story. For instance,

6 Raban, Jonathan. *Passage to Juneau: A Sea and its Meanings.* London: Picador, 1999.

7 As we will see, some travel writers, such as John McPhee and Barry Lopez, mostly avoid the personal narrative aspects of the travelogue and entirely focus on the *situation* of the communities and lands through which they travel.

8 Howarth, William. "'Introducing John McPhee", in *Coming into McPhee Country.* Edited by Alan O. Weltzien and Susan N. Maher. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2003.

9 Wolfe T. and Johnson E. M. (eds.), *The New Journalism.* New York: Harper & Row, 1973.

10 McGinniss, Joe. *Going to Extremes*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980.

11 Mailer, Norman. *Armies of the Night: History as a Novel/The Novel as History.* New York: New American Library, 1968.

12 Wolfe, Tom. *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test.* New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1968.

despite writing an important work on pipeline-era Alaska, Joe McGinniss' *Going to Extremes* lacks the nuanced background of Alaskans and Alaska itself outside the author's narrow focus of travels, and it has been criticized particularly for its portrayal of a Yup'ik family near Bethel (Kollin, 169).[13]

By contrast, John McPhee's style tends to decenter away from his own personal narrative within his travels. The development of his style likely derived from his early career in magazine profiling, where McPhee would be asked by *Time* or *The New Yorker* magazines to investigate the life of a particular person and subsequently turn it into a story (Lounsberry, 82).[14] Once McPhee moved to writing books, he began to expand outward from that style instead of finding a new approach. His first book was an extended profile of the basketball player Bill Bradley, entitled *A Sense of Where You Are*.[15] Adding complexity, he soon moved on to profiling two people at a time with *Levels of the Game*,[16] which explored a professional tennis match and the backgrounds of the two athletes of differing race and socio-economic status: Arthur Ashe and Clark Graebner. Again adding another layer, McPhee wrote *Encounters with the Archdruid*,[17] pitting Sierra Club president, David Brower, against three foes to environmentalism, always profiling each character and their respective nuances as people. This background is important because by the time McPhee wrote *Coming into the Country*, often considered alongside *Annals of the Former World* as his magnum opus, his style had become much more dynamic and complex, but the remnants of his process nonetheless remained visible. In *Coming into the Country*, pipeline-era Alaska is the *situation*, and he offers micro profiles of individuals and communities throughout. But the profile always remains as a mode of description as he travels around the region.

The benefit of the technique of the profile in the way that John McPhee effects it is that it offers nuance to each individual. There is no good and no evil. And when multiple people are profiled, from multiple backgrounds, around any given region or topic, the story tends to arrive at what McPhee looks to accomplish in his work, calling it the "Panoptic" perspective (Lounsberry, 79) or "Life in the Round (Haynes, 78)."[18][19] This is what sets John McPhee's "Literature of Fact" apart from the New Journalism. The reader does not walk away from McPhee's works with only the perspective of the narrator, or only the story of the narrator, but ideally of multiple characters and geographic descriptions making up a given space.

Furthermore, by the time McPhee wrote *Coming into the Country* he had developed the ability to fit multiple areas of nuance and dry humor into a single sentence or paragraph, which would serve to incisively analyze the subject matter at hand from multiple angles:

> *Pourchot, after breakfast, goes off to measure the largest of the spruce near the campsite. He finds a tree twenty-two inches in diameter, breast high... Pourchot says he will write in his report that there is one tree of such girth. Otherwise, the Forest Service might think there's timber here (13).*

In the above excerpt, McPhee is in the process of profiling and interviewing Pat Pourchot, of the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation. Without broader context, the reader is able to take from this that Pourchot cares about the region's environment, that he is meticulous in analysis, and that he is witty and cutting in his jokes toward how the state government views trees as economic assets rather than as a natural environment. In this section of the book, McPhee is in fact simultaneously profiling both the people he meets and the government's yo-yo-ing response to managing potential civilization-level growth while caring for this land that has become so mythologized for its extensive nature, its primary attraction.

Allowing space for petty arguments is another technique that McPhee often employs. These

13 Kollin, Susan. *Nature's State: Imagining Alaska as a Last Frontier.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002.

14 Lounsberry, Barbara. "Pieces and the Frame: McPhee and Portraiture", in in Weltzien A. O. and Maher S. N. (eds.), *Coming into McPhee Country: John McPhee and the Art of Literary Nonfiction.* Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2003.

15 McPhee, John. *A Sense of Where You Are.* New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1965.

16 McPhee, John. *Levels of the Game*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969.

17 McPhee, John. *Encounters with the Archdruid*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1971.

18 Haynes, Jared. "'The Size and Shape of the Canvas': An Interview with John McPhee", in Weltzien A. O. and Maher S. N. (eds.), *Coming into McPhee Country: John McPhee and the Art of Literary Nonfiction.* Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2003.

19 Though Kathy Smith argues that McPhee manipulates the reader through structure (Smith, 269). See Smith K., "John McPhee Balances the Act" in Weltzien A. O. and Maher S. N. (eds.) *Coming into McPhee Country: John McPhee and the Art of Literary Nonfiction.*

arguments allow for the profiles of characters to be set in action so that the nuance of conflicts within communities can be explored more broadly. In Part 3 of *Coming into the Country*, the author describes communities of people in Interior Alaska who are attempting to live off the land and who view the extent of their survivalism as a matter of pride. Much of the section involves the awe in which McPhee views these accomplishments, as he weighs that awe against the casual racism and sexism that he comes across, as well as his ambivalence at the fact that these people are being pushed off the land to make way for preservation as part of the Native Claims Settlement Act, a deal struck to move forward with the pipeline system. At the same time, Hungwitchin Athabaskans, a group of semi-nomadic Alaska Natives who have survived for thousands of years by following caribou herds, live nearby and are brought into the petty arguments as well. The profiles, and the pitting of profiles against one another as seen in McPhee's former works, are here employed more dynamically throughout as McPhee explores a complex situation.

Gossip Ladder

Aside from the cutting and humorous micro profile, such as that of Pourchot, another pithy technique that McPhee had previously developed to explore the nuances of these petty arguments is his "gossip ladder" structure. Similar to that of Bob Marshall with *Arctic Village*[20] around half a century before, which exposed the conversations of leftover miners from the Alaska gold rush as they complained about one another in order to get at complex issues (often humorously), McPhee has long done the same. A major difference between the two styles is that Bob Marshall was independently wealthy and dispersed half of his $3,609 in royalties equally among his subjects on a return trip, totaling $18 per person in 1934 (xvii-xix), so the ethics of *Arctic Village* are quite unique. By contrast, McPhee's quotes are anonymous. They also read like conversations but may be separate quotes put together in a specific way in order to convey multiple sides of an issue from multiple points of view, often with subsequent opinions negating those previously expressed. These sets of quotes can span full pages, and sometimes even two or three pages. With a complex situation like that of Sierra Club president David Brower, who was highly egotistical and had heavily compromised his morals, but nonetheless accomplished unprecedented feats for that group, McPhee was able to get across a nuanced view from all sides of Brower's ousting in a San Francisco hotel in roughly three to four pages of anonymous quotes (Encounters, 208-211). In *Coming into the Country*, the young Athabaskan leader, Michael John David, is profiled. Within this profile, McPhee allows space for a gossip ladder that critiques both Chief Michael and his people from the perspective of the nearby white community of Eagle:

> *"They all wish they were something else. They have come to hate the fact they are Indian. They have adopted cowboy boots, of all things. They put cowboy boots on their kids."*
> *"They have difficulty coping with the regimented lifestyle that the capitalist system imposes on them."*
> *"Boys do not develop ambition. They do not want to get married."*
> *"The Indian man has been emasculated by the whites. Indian women want to marry whites."*
> *"The people are soft. They have no discipline. They have a job, and it's difficult, they say, 'It's too tough.'"*
> *"The village council does not get things done."*
> *"Now that Michael is chief, nothing will ever get done" (393).*

Unlike in the case of Brower, where quotes of various differing opinions were thrown together and expressed in ratatat fashion, McPhee offers the rather homogenous opinions of anonymous Eagle residents, before switching entirely to Chief Michael and allowing him the space to defend himself:

> *"I ask Michael, 'What do you do as Village Chief?' He grins widely and says, 'What do I do as chief? Ha! Ask them in Eagle what I do. When I was elected chief, Louise Waller said, "Now that Michael David is chief, nothing is going to get done." They are different people in Eagle. They don't understand us. We don't understand them. They are Christians and bootleggers, and they fight between each other. They once had twenty preachers there. My people were happier before those people ever were here. The Indians did more things for themselves than they do now.'" (395)*

In this case, McPhee expresses the complexities of his admiration for the people he is profiling in the white village of Eagle. He absolutely respects what they have

[20] Marshall, Robert. *Arctic Village: a 1930s Portrait of Wiseman, Alaska*. 1933. Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 1991.

been able to accomplish, but he also derides their ignorance and prejudice toward the Hungwitchin. Yet, McPhee almost always avoids overtly judging his subjects. Rather, he organizes the facts in a nuanced but condemnatory manner and allows readers to make judgments for themselves, without ever letting them to view his subjects from one single angle of either praise or hatred. He has said in interview that he likes to give his subjects the most room possible to get across their voices through quotes, and that his wife Yolanda has to reel him back in, forcing him to profile through his own descriptive phrasing (Haynes, 73). However, it is important to recognize the weight that McPhee places on granting people space for their own words. He could allow that in many ways, but his gossip ladders within his profiles succinctly get across his goal of both describing his subjects and how they view one another, while remaining readable, and often humorous.

Testimonial Injustice

This leaves us with a very important reflection in the 21st century, as we look at decolonial ethics in travel writing, a field that continues to be dominated by white writers from colonial powers. There truly exists what has been labeled an "epistemic injustice" in the history of perspectives, in need of being corrected. In this case, I am speaking in terms of what philosopher Miranda Fricker has called "testimonial injustice," which not only involves a lack of voice given to alterities but a lack of seriousness given to the testimonies of alterities.[21]John McPhee has taken an important step by allowing other's voices to permeate so prominently in his works, but his own instinct may have been even truer than his ego would allow. The more that travellers allow for the first person voices of their subjects, normalizing the empowerment of everyday voices alongside the voices of people in positions of power, the more that such "testimonial" epistemic injustice will be alleviated.

However, McPhee's discussions of spaces and their inhabitants have not been immune to criticism. Environmental writer David Quammen notably accused McPhee of "adamantine reserve" with regard to environmental discussions in his review of McPhee's *Annals of the Former World* in the *New York Times*.[22] Though readers of McPhee's books should indeed come away with a nuanced view of the subject matter, while always understanding McPhee's penchant for openness to people[23] and his deep belief in access to nature,[24] the reader may have to work to understand the writer's full intent. For McPhee, the principles of his "Literature of Fact" dictate that journalistic principles of nuance are more valuable in influencing opinion than that of trenchant side-taking (Phillipon, 282).[25]

This difference may be at least somewhat generational. For example, a recent academic work entitled *Black Lives of Alaska*[26] rethinks the historiography of the state while openly opining throughout on the "outsized influence" of African Americans to Alaska. This book and a coinciding museum piece by the same authors have both received much attention locally and are succeeding in a narrative shift among engaged communities. However, *Black Lives of Alaska* and *Coming into the Country* seek to accomplish different ends. The historiographic shift reaches out to those already engaged communities in hopes that their outsized influence on a broader community create a change in mindset that trickles down. The "Literature of Fact," by contrast, is set for a broader demographic base, with the idea that the nuance expressed therein will sit with the reader, without coming across as overly didactic. As a result, it is intended to cross cultural and political boundaries through journalistic integrity.

From the perspective of "epistemic injustice," however, there remains a weakness in McPhee's work. Even if he succeeds in reaching across cultures and politics, he does continue to have blind

[21] Fricker, Miranda. *Epistemic Injustice: Power and Ethics of Knowing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

[22] Quammen, David. "Rocks of Age." *New York Times*. "https://www.nytimes.com/1998/07/05/books/rocks-of-age.html." 5/7/1998.

[23] *Levels of the Game*, for instance, offers very detailed glimpses into the racial divide between tennis players, from the differing opportunities that black and white communities are offered to succeed to the meaning of the game itself for individuals from those respective communities.

[24] McPhee's penchant for investigating the gray areas between "Wise Use" conservation and "Deep" preservation can seem like his motivations are opaque, but many of his books (e.g. *Coming into the Country*, *Encounters with the Archdruid, and Founding Fish*) directly detail his love of the natural world.

[25] Phillipon, Daniel J. "'Academic Air': Teaching The Control of Nature", in Weltzien A. O. and Maher S. N. (eds.), *Coming into McPhee Country: John McPhee and the Art of Literary* Nonfiction. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2003.

[26] Hartman, Ian C. and David Reamer. *Black Lives in Alaska: A History of African Americans in the Far Northwest.* Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2022.

spots. Perhaps we cannot criticize *Coming into the Country* from the same light in hindsight, but the racism discussed in *Black Lives of Alaska* is almost nonexistent in McPhee's work. Though *Coming into the Country* is about Alaska as a space as it becomes a dynamic, living place for many communities and families, and what that means for their views of their homes as such, an economic and environmental shift is in the process of occurring, a simple profile of Michael John David is likely not enough. McPhee indeed details Chief Michael's struggles, personal and as chief, while also offering a brief look at the prejudices against the Hungwitchin community by the white community of Eagle, but McPhee likely could have done more to highlight the nuances of Alaska Native communities and the histories of cultural genocide in order to offer the reader that same "panoptic" view as the one that was offered to the white community. The result is that his work does very little to combat the testimonial injustice that Alaska Native peoples have faced since the introduction of European peoples and that they continue to face. *Black Lives of Alaska*, by contrast, leads toward a stronger position for historically disenfranchised communities, and it works to ameliorate "epistemic injustice." At the end of the day, we must remember that this is a cultural blindspot for McPhee, who was writing from a different epoch and from a different cultural perspective than that of the current moment. Each writer struggles in different ways, and *Coming into the Country* indeed offers a nuanced view of the difficult issues facing a little understood space to a broader literary community.

To return to travel writing as craft, McPhee moves through multiple communities in Alaska in the mid-1970s and finds the *situation* of the oil money creating great change for both the people and, as a result, the land. As for steps two and three, McPhee mostly avoids his own personal narrative. As *Coming into the Country* is not strictly a travelogue but is rather a journalistic "literature of fact," the author entirely circumvents the need for pulling back from his own narrative. Except, the "mood" of the writer can still affect the balance of the work, especially as McPhee often interjects himself as journalist in the first person. In this case, McPhee tends to avoid allowing his personal "moods" to affect his work, perhaps with the exception of his frustration expressed at the very end, of the homesteading families he admires being threatened by nature preservation set aside in order to enable the oil industry (379). Rather than negatively affect the quality of the work by succumbing to sentimentality, this point of subjectivity serves as a rare interjection that demands the reader's attention, serving as an exclamation point at the end of the work. This leads us to the fourth point, which is consistency in voice. Maintaining the persona of an objective journalist throughout his career, McPhee has always maintained an air of authority as a reliable narrator, which Gornick suggests is an absolute imperative in nonfiction.

To sum up, *Coming into the Country* is based on a *situation* of enormous transformation in Alaska due to the exploitation of oil in Prudhoe Bay and construction of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline. A *New Yorker* writer in his prime as a writer and journalist then investigates the results for various demographics. The resulting story is the power and influence of a sudden influx of wealth and its potential for greed and devastation of both the environment and everyday people and families. Though this story does not directly alleviate epistemic injustice, it indeed exposes a power dynamic whose effects cascade throughout the state. This investigation sets up a strong background for later investigations into those effects on specific alterities, such as *Black Lives in Alaska* and Nastassja Martin's ethnological study of the Gwich'in people after they are forced into a capitalist system due to the construction of the pipeline through their lands, entitled *Les âmes sauvages*.[27]

The Future of Arctic Travel Writing

In the work *Made of Salmon*,[28] edited by former Alaska Writer Laureate Nancy Lord, Alaskans of all sorts, from professional writers to average people, were asked about their experiences fishing, cooking, and eating salmon in their communities, and the resulting stories were published in a sort of collage, as a way to fight back against the proposed Pebble Mine that would compromise the largest salmon watershed left in the world, were it ever to open. *Made of Salmon* can be considered a natural extension of McPhee's profiles, as it allows characters to tell their own stories, with their own voices, in their own ways, in order to get at the depth and nuance of a subject. In that way, peoples are both united by the subject matter and empowered by their own voices.

[27] Martin, Nastassja. *Les âmes sauvages: Face à l'Occident, la résistance d'un peuple d'Alaska*. Paris: La Découverte, 2016.

[28] Lord N. (ed.), *Made of Salmon*: *Alaska Stories from The Salmon Project.* Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2016.

Furthermore, published alongside professional writers of multiple demographics, the testimonies of average people of a multitude of alterities are given more weight.

However, *Made of Salmon* is not a work of travel writing. Though it accomplishes many of the same goals as so many travel writing works (a particular subject is investigated throughout various parts of a given space, and people are given voice to express the nuances of that subject and space), there is no one narrator guiding the conversation and physically moving through the space, turning into one single place in the minds of the reader. What is important to understand is that the techniques employed in *Made of Salmon* could be merged into a travel narrative to strengthen responsible writing, offering agency to various subjects, especially in historically-Native spaces.

A similar work to *Made of Salmon*, but much more in line with journalistic travel writing, would be *The Whale and the Cupcake*.[29] In that 2019 work, Julia O'Malley, an Alaska food writer, moves around much of the state examining the relationship between subsistence food culture ("The Whale") and "longing" for food from the Contiguous United States ("The Cupcake"), with social unification of Alaska's broader population in mind. Like McPhee's *Coming into the Country* and Barry Lopez' celebrated travel work *Arctic Dreams, The Whale and the Cupcake* breaks from the tradition of the singular travel narrative, the travelogue. Instead, these works involve the subjectivity of a single traveller moving through a space and attempting to understand and convey specific subject matter to the reader, with that space and its inhabitants being more prevalent in the story than the travels themselves. As noted in the creative-writing-as-craft section, exploring Gornick's *The Situation and the Story*, the backgrounding of the travels does not necessarily make for ethical writing. If the spaces and inhabitants are given strong consideration within a singular narrative, the travels can offer just as much nuance. However, with Fricker's "epistemic injustice" in mind, *The Whale and the Cupcake* allows for the more complete voices of others to be conveyed on their own terms so that "testimonial injustice" is approached directly. With descriptions of local communities and their traditions given full consideration from that rare 1st-person perspective, involving full interviews and often recipes pertinent to the discussion, the reader is offered what McPhee would call the "panoptic" perspective. In this case, such a perspective offers the normalization of testimonies by alterities whose perspectives tend to be left out of mainstream narratives.[30] The reader is essentially educated to view the perspectives of different peoples on equal footing with one another. Though the reader may not learn about direct, systemic problems inside their community, their expectations of themselves and others may shift, potentially leading to a more open discussion toward Fricker's second part of "epistemic injustice," which she calls "hermeneutical injustice" (i.e. a lack of education surrounding concepts of injustice). While these effects may be idealized, such democratization as that experienced in O'Malley's work, building on McPhee's "panoptic" perspective, may indeed be viewed as a key development for the future of Arctic travel writing.

[29] O'Malley, Julia. *The Whale and the Cupcake: Stories of Subsistence, Longing, & Community in Alaska.* Seattle: The University of Washington Press, 2019.

[30] Pacific Islanders, the fastest growing demographic in Alaska, are approached in this work, as is the author's identification as part of the LGBTQIA+ community. These alterities are mostly invisible elsewhere in mainstream Alaskan literature.

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A HEALING JOURNEY TO ALASKA: MEETING WITH THE OTHER AS A QUEST FOR ONESELF. MARIE-HÉLÈNE FRAÏSSÉ'S ALASKA, L'ULTIME FRONTIÈR

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In *Alaska, l'ultime frontière. En terre amérindienne, de Vancouver à Anchorage,* Marie-Hélène Fraïssé[1] invites us to a discovery journey, a discovery that is both exterior and interior. The journey, nature, the meetings with Native people are the healing elements that are going to lead her to herself. That journey has nothing to do with all the trips she made in the past as an international reporter. It is a journey of resilience, after a loss, a journey in which the reality of the places and beings she meets faces the reality of her perception. In that journey conceived at the beginning as "an endeavour of detachment, of erasure,"[2] she writes a new page of her own life, through meetings. She shows us these Native peoples who, on the American continent and elsewhere, have undergone other kinds of erasure. Following her on her journey, the reader enters the Arctic universe that is going to fill the new empty space in her. Toponymy, arts (sculpture, painting, literature, music, cinema), geography, history, fishing techniques, offer us a multidimensional landscape from Canada to Alaska. Instead of tackling the topics in an abstract way, it is through dialogues that she shows them. An original travel book, *Alaska, l'ultime frontière* shows us the Other through a quest for the self. Built from a very personal approach, the narrative makes us discover human and nonhuman beings, people, places and works, from an original angle, and it shows us a land paradoxically seen from the inside by a traveller, a text about a real journey containing echoes of other texts and journeys of exploration. It is that light that Marie-Hélène Fraïssé reveals to us as a healing light of life. A woman's voice, while showing us the sublime landscapes of the Arctic as well as her interior world, changes a solitary journey into a multitude of meetings. Marie-Hélène Fraïssé shows us how to read the Other and ourselves. She turns an initial personal erasure into the writing of Arctic memory and life as a form of healing.

A book inserted in travel writing as a form

Marie-Hélène Fraïssé is an international reporter. Her book is first guided by the acute gaze of a reporter. But it is also a true travel book inserted from the start

[1] Marie-Hélène Fraïssé, *Alaska, l'ultime frontière. En terre amérindienne, de Vancouver à Anchorage*, Albin Michel, 2023. Marie-Hélène Fraïssé was awarded a special prize of fiction *L'Express-Écrire la Nature for Alaska, ultime frontière* (Albin Michel, 2023) at the "Festival Ecrire la Nature" in 2023. https://ecrirelanature.com/fr/festival/2023/prix-du-festival

[2] "Ce voyage, je l'ai conçu comme partie prenante d'une entreprise de détachement, d'effacement […]" (Fraïssé 21). Translation mine. Unless indicated otherwise, all translations from French to English are mine.

in the form of *travel writing* and showing a personal experience. This is asserted through the simple reference to a travel object (a rucksack) and a travel writing object (a notebook):

> *The back pocket of my rucksack also contains a leather notebook: closed with a lacet, in the manner of an 'Explorer Lady.' It's a gift from my oldest friend, a happy sedentary woman living in the heart of a sub-prefecture in Burgundy. A fan of Lady Stanhope and Alexandra David-Neel, she persists to see in my modest travels back and forth at the surface of the globe extravagant adventures. Hence the gift of that very chic little notebook. I would have been content with the standard notebook [F.B.: in English in the original text] with a moleskin cover, closed with an elastic, like those whose pages Bruce Chatwin, the master of travel writing [F.B.: in English in the original text], filled. But I have appreciated the intention and slipped the elegant object into the worn-out rucksack of my routardises.* (Fraïssé 13-14).[3]

The author's playful tone and self-derision are an original way of quoting women travellers and travel writers. First Lady Hester Stanhope (1776-1839), a British aristocrat who became an adventurer in the Near and Middle East: she persuaded the Ottoman authorities to let her excavate the site of Ashkelon north of Gaza. She was at the origin of the first excavation in Palestine and was one of the first archaeologists using texts to understand the archaeological finds. She then settled in what is now Lebanon between Tyre and Beirut. The novelist George Eliot, in Daniel Deronda (1876), mentions her as "Queen of the East." As for Alexandra David-Neel (1868-1969), she was a Belgian French explorer, opera singer, and writer who published more than 30 books about Eastern countries, and she was especially interested in Tibet. Her work influenced writers of the Beat generation like Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg. So, the playful tone used by Marie-Hélène Fraïssé mentioning both her friend's admiration for the two women travellers and for her, whom her friend sees in their lineage, is also a way of inserting her travels in women's travels and travel writing. She also mentions Bruce Chatwin (1940-1989), the British author of *In Patagonia* (1977), speaking about the kind of notebook she would have been content with. In fact, the notebook is an artefact allowing her to situate herself in the lineage of women travellers and travel writers and of inserting her own narrative in the form of *travel writing* as she presents Bruce Chatwin as "the master of travel writing." The playful use of the word "*routardises*" both makes her a traveller always on the road and is also perhaps a wink at the famous French guidebooks that are taken by travellers throughout the world (*Le guide du routard)*. Starting with a woman traveller born in the 18th century and another one born in the 19th century to go on with the 20th-century "master of *travel writing,*" she ends her presentation of her notebook with a neologism conjuring up modern guidebooks. With her narrative, we shift from the regions suggested by the mentions of the past travellers (the Near and Middle East, Tibet and Patagonia) to the Arctic. Marie-Hélène Fraïssé emphasizes the notion of meeting, and the notebook is the catalyst of all kinds of meetings: meeting of the reader with her friend and with the travellers she mentions and meetings that will appear in the notebook. Perhaps the self-derision of the tone and the insistence to speak about a notebook that does not correspond to her taste but is a gift of friendship, are discrete ways of hiding her emotions first and to suggest that this notebook is at the centre of not only her journey, but also her recovery. The notebook is a link between the others and herself; between the place she discovers and her inner space; between all the travellers who narrated their journeys before her and herself; it will be the white pages reflecting the white page of her new life. It is not an object (even if it is also an object): it is the human link that is at the core of her text and that will lead her to recovery.

This book is a story of resilience for the author, but it is also a beautiful journey in First Nations' cultures and lives. The subtitle (not appearing on the cover) is the following: "En terre amérindienne, de Vancouver à Anchorage" [On Native American land, from Vancouver to Anchorage]. And if the book is teeming with information and descriptions of all kinds, the meetings with people from the First Nations and the many references to the history of Native Americans are at the core of the book and they are part of the author's personal healing.

[3] "La poche arrière de mon sac à dos renferme également un carnet plein cuir fermé par un lacet, façon 'Dame exploratrice'. Un cadeau de ma plus ancienne amie, sédentaire heureuse au cœur d'une sous-préfecture de Bourgogne. Fan de Lady Stanhope et d'Alexandra David-Neel, elle persiste à voir dans mes modestes allées et venues à la surface du globe d'extravagantes aventures. D'où le cadeau de ce très chic petit cahier. Je me serais contentée du notebook modèle standard à couverture de moleskine, fermé par un élastique, du type de ceux dont Bruce Chatwin, maître du *travel writing*, noircissait les pages. Mais j'ai apprécié l'intention, et glissé l'élégant objet dans le sac à dos élimé de mes routardises".

The history of Native populations in place names

In this narrative, the landscapes of Canada and Alaska, the lives of men and spaces, of animals and languages, are described with an intense poetic force. In the narrative of her journey, Marie-Hélène Fraïssé insists on meetings: meetings with the "people of the word" (162),[4] with those who "devote the best part of their militant energy" to "the renewal of their language,"[5] meetings with the novelist Eden Robinson, with the Haida creator Robert Davidson. with Martine, the third wife of Bill Reid, whose sculpted raven at the origin of the Creation welcomes travellers in various parts of Canada. She had met Bill Reid himself in 1989. During this journey she meets Nika, the sculptor's granddaughter, who sings "the song of the hummingbird." She writes: "It is a Haida love song, which we have offered to the Nootka as a sign of union"[6] (a note explains that "the Nootka, or Nuu-chah-nulth, live in Vancouver Island, south from the archipelago occupied by the Haidas") (164).[7] All those meetings speak about benevolence, welcoming and union. "In our culture, we don't say *goodbye,* but *I'll see you again*," Nika says (164)[8]. In Alaska she also meets lots of people who make her enter deep into the places and into herself at the same time.

Throughout the book there are references to European and non-Native poets and artists in the epigraphs or in the main text: Rainer Maria Rilke (154), Claudio Magris (167), Jean-Michel Maulpoix (201), Edward Curtis (97, 98, 184), Charles Chaplin (210), Jack London (208), John Muir (209) and many others. There is also a reference to the impact of Native masks and artefacts on European artists with first Guillaume Apollinaire showing an African mask to André Breton. The French surrealist poet shared the emotion felt at the vision of what was called "primitive" art with other poets and artists like Paul Eluard, Man Ray or Yves Tanguy (36). Fraïssé does not provide that contextualization herself but through Colin Browne's explanations. Colin Browne is a Canadian writer, documentary filmmaker and academic who specialized in 20th-century arts of the Northwest Coast; Fraïssé had explained to him the project of her itinerary. It is through his voice that she evokes the surrealists' admiration for First Nation art. There are also lots of references to European travellers like James Cook (104), La Pérouse (242), Juan Perez (133), the Jesup expedition and Franz Boas (144) among others. All these references show a chain of meetings starting before the journey (meetings with authors and artists in books and with scholars) which are going to give way to meetings during the journey. The references explain the history and sufferings of Native people and the French woman's resilience journey is inserted into collective suffering and resilience.

In the wake of the two women travellers, she has quoted, Hester Stanhope meeting Oriental people and Alexandra David-Neel Tibetans, she meets Native people from Canada first and then from Alaska. In this travel book and document on Native cultures in Northwest Canada and Alaska, Marie-Hélène Fraïssé, speaks about men and women she met and others in the past, and she introduces us to Native peoples who have often been erased; but whereas her own erasure (after her companion's death) takes place within herself, the kind of erasure concerning these people is a tragic part of the history of the world. In Alaska, on the Northwest Coast, she says, there were no deportations, there was not the kind of acculturation that took place with the United States Native Americans. But erasure was also present, and place names are a way of telling their history.

Everything starts from the toponymy containing a history of spoliation and reappropriation of places. Toponymy is important to reveal the human link with the land: either a connection link (for Natives) or an appropriation link (for colonizers). The territory as seen by toponymy reveals a map speaking about two worlds in one landscape and one land. Explorers gave the country names speaking about the European history they brought there. In *Playing Dead*, Rudy Wiebe mentions the *Great Slave Lake*, introducing the notion of slavery while speaking about one

4 "gens de parole ».

5 "C'est peut-être à la renaissance de leur langue que les Haïdas consacrent le meilleur de leur énergie militante."

6 "C'est un chant d'amour Haïda, que nous avons offert aux Nootkas en signe d'union."

7 "les Nootkas, ou Nuu-chah-nulth, habitent l'île de Vancouver, au sud de l'archipel occupé par les Haïdas."

8 "Chez nous, on ne dit pas *goodbye*, mais *I'll see you again*". F.B.: in English in the original text.

of those peoples who have been given the name of "*Slaves*." To this new name is opposed, at the end of the essay, a rock called *Dogrib Rock,* from the name of the people who named it. Wiebe ends his essay by speaking about stories linked to this rock and told by a Native elder.

Erasing place names means erasing a people's identity; Marie-Hélène Fraïssé associates that erasure with the "systematic and brutal erasure of people's name."[9] When she is in Canada, in Vancouver, the traveller observes the boards along the road linking "the coast and the valleys of the hinterland" (48). These boards indicate the places and directions with two appellations— the old one and the modern one. We learn that "K'emk'emelày' is nothing else than Vancouver. The big city itself, Marilyn [her guide] explains to [her], has recently renamed several of its public squares with ancient names. And Radio Canada, at the 1 p.m. TV news that day, announced the 'reconciliation of the city with Native peoples'").[10] What she calls "the waltz of appellations"[11] gives the author the opportunity to show the relationship between names and land spoliation. She compares what happened in France and says that there was nothing comparable even if in the Southwest there were similar cases with pupils who were not allowed to speak their native language. At school they were punished if they did. But in Northern America things were more recent: "Here colonial history happened yesterday," she writes.[12] The evocation of place names leads her to speak about "implicit colonial violence", "eras[ing] any reference to their origins", appearing in "the collective 'tribal' appellations that were given without any discernment and were the fruit of mistakes or approximations."[13] She thus reminds us that the Sioux, Apaches, Montagnais or Iroquois among others were designated by those names which were not the way they defined themselves (49). Thus, in the distance, the travellers see Garibaldi volcano that is "the Squamish's sacred mountain"[14] and a little later they arrive in the city of Whistler. Being on the road with her guide Marylin in her Renault car, she alternates landscapes speaking about Native American spirituality and culture and colonial signs or place names mingling both nature and modern life. Whistler is the main Canadian station of mountain sports and also the place where the 2010 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games were organized. It also gave its name to several brands (sports clothes and spectacles), thus becoming part of an economic system replacing the original reference to the marmots in the mountains. The author informs us that the name of this mountain city comes from the presence of marmots all around and their whistling. Who remembers (or knows) that origin of the city name in nature as she suggests?

> *It's a very long time Whistler has forgotten its marmots to build its success story [F.B.: in English in the original text] around a mountain version of the narcissism typical of the West Coast 'between sky and peaks,' which yet has had the advantage of providing the Squamish and their neighbours the Lil'wats, whose rights as legitimate owners of these high valleys have been recognized and 'compensated,' with a substantial income.*[15]

Her reporter's eye is active and while showing us the places, she informs her readers of the various aspects of the places.

Place names often recover their origin now. Fraïssé mentions Haida Gwai, "Men's Land."[16]

9 "Tout aussi systématique et brutal fut l'effacement des noms de personnes" (49).

10 "Le long de la route qui relie la côte et les vallées de l'arrière-pays, les panneaux indiquent en lettres blanches sur fond vert les lieux et les directions sous deux appellations — l'ancienne et la moderne. On apprend ainsi que 'K'emk'emelày' n'est autre que Vancouver. La grande cité elle-même, m'explique Marilyn, a récemment rebaptisé de noms anciens plusieurs de ses places publiques. Et Radio Canada, au journal de 13 heures ce jour-là, annonce la 'réconciliation de la ville avec les peuples autochtones'" (48).

11 "Cette valse des appellations" (48).

12 "Ici l'histoire coloniale date d'hier" (48).

13 "gommer toute référence à leurs origines"; "les appellations collectives" "tribales qui furent attribuées sans discernement et fruit d'erreurs ou d'approximations" (49).

14 "montagne sacrée des Squamishs" (50).

15 "Il y a belle lurette que Whistler a oublié ses marmottes pour construire sa success story autour d'une version montagnarde du narcissisme typique de la Côte Ouest, 'entre ciel et cimes', ce qui a tout de même eu le mérite de fournir un revenu substantiel aux Squamishs et à leurs voisins les Lil'wats, dont les droits en tant que légitimes propriétaires de ces vallées d'altitude ont été reconnus et 'compensés'" (50-51).

16 "La Terre des Hommes."

A white explorers named it "Queen Charlotte's Island,"[17] thus erasing the Native name to replace it with the European history of colonization. But the Haidas gave it its original name back: Haida Gwai. The landscape that speaks to those who can listen to it is opposed to the landscape exploited or looked for without being seen, a landscape they think "naked" or empty. "The very naming of the wilderness as that vague space, the void, creates the compulsion for covenanting as an *actus foundatio* from the named abyss itself. The *terra nullius* of wilderness is a covenant of the land that finds itself endlessly repeated in representational practices," Jonathan Bordo writes (Bordo 29).

The landscape and the names naming it generate a meditation on one's relationship to the Other and on the reliability of the travel book. By inserting many quotations in her text, Fraïssé questions those texts, looks for the crack that did not let light enter and showed the explorers a naked world.

The nakedness that the stranger sees in that Arctic world that he/she does not know is not the true Arctic world. The reader enters the Arctic landscape seen from the plane window with the writer; the light that the traveller lets enter the modern vehicle throws light on a past that is not evoked for itself, but to illuminate the present, and to give everybody the possibility to let the light in and to be able to listen to the Other, which Native place names allow them to do. It is in 2009 that the archipelago recovers its name. Marie-Hélène Fraïssé explains:

> In 2009, the archipelago eventually finds its ancestral name again, demonstrating to the rest of the world that the Haida still considered themselves at home in that maze of some one hundred and fifty islands and islets of an amazing beauty, covered with dense mossy forests, circled with turquoise-coloured waters where thousands of salmon, halibut and killer whales, as well as the very rare grey whale swim… (124)[18].

The recovery of one's identity in her description goes together with the observation of wild nature. The human and nonhuman worlds cannot be separated in the recovered name.

Two opposed points of view

When reading Fraïssé's book and the different points of view between Native people and colonizers and later tourists, we can think about Richardson, a member of the first Franklin expedition, as presented by Rudy Wiebe in his novel *A Discovery of Strangers*, and about Wiebe's analysis of the English physician's words seeing the Arctic as a "naked land" instead of being able to recognize all the life in it, as Marie-Hélène Fraïssé does. The essay closing Wiebe's *Playing Dead* is entitled "Coursing a Naked Country." Wiebe borrowed a word from Richardson's journal, "naked," to prolong it with a meditation about the opposed perception of the people living on that land and of those who came to explore or colonize it. The face to face speaks about emptiness and nakedness on the one hand and teeming life on the other. John Richardson wrote on 9 September 1820, when he discovered the tundra:

> *By noon we reached a remarkable hill with precipitous sides called by thee Copper Indians Agnaatheh or the Dog-Rib Rock…From the time we quitted the banks of the Winter River [at Fort Enterprise] we saw only a few detached clumps of trees, but after passing Dog-rib rock even this disappeared, and we travelled through a naked country.*[19]

Richardson used the term "naked" and not "empty," thus making the Arctic a body and that course a programmed rape made by colonization, even when it put on the mask of exploration. To try to penetrate it without seeing it or seeing it like a naked country, is to assault it, to desecrate it. Yet it is on the gratuitous generosity of the Native people welcoming them that Fraïssé and Wiebe insist, thus showing that this so-called nakedness dwells on the blindness of the people refusing to let the light enter through the plane window. The Arctic as described in the series of essays by Wiebe appears as the place of a meeting between two peoples. The Arctic reveals open and blind gazes if man is unable to look at, and "list[en] to the land" (to borrow the title of Lee Schweninger's book[20]). When the nonhuman

17 "L'île de la reine Charlotte."

18 "en 2009, l'archipel finit par retrouver son nom ancestral, démontrant au reste du monde que les Haïdas se considéraient toujours chez eux dans ce dédale de quelque cent cinquante îles et îlots d'un beauté stupéfiante, couverts de denses forêts moussues, cerclés d'eaux turquoise où croisent par milliers saumons, flétans et orques, ainsi que la très rare rare baleine grise…"

19 John Richardson, Journal quoted in Rudy Wiebe, *Playing Dead*,142 (my underlining).

20 Lee Schweninger. *Listening to the Land: Native American Literary Responses to the Landscape*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008.

point of view, the point of view of the earth itself, is masked, leads travellers to see a "naked land." That vision of nakedness, of the emptiness felt by the traveller's arriving on a new land, either colons or explorers, is not something exceptional. Wendy Harding reminds us of that in *The Myth of Emptiness*:

> *[…] from the first years of colonial settlement in North America down to the present day, words like 'vacant,' 'void,' 'desert,' 'barren,' or 'uninhabited' have been used to describe the land, vying for place with contrasting descriptions of its bountiful plenitude. […] Emptiness is by no means a geographical feature; it is, instead, a cultural construction that is constantly revised as the settlers' interactions with the land change.* (Harding 27)

To oppose this supposed emptiness or nakedness to the real teeming life that can be seen in the Arctic, Wiebe shows the animals' point of view. In *A Discovery of Strangers*, from the first chapter, he shows a land opposed to the nakedness that the explorer saw in it: it is inhabited by innumerable animals whose point of view is the revealer (in the photographic sense of the term) of all the life present there. The theme of nakedness at the core of Wiebe's essay and appearing as an absurd quest for what the explorers want while thinking the land is naked also appears in Marie-Hélène Fraïssé's book:

> *Under the plane spreads a vast extent of fluffy white, drilled here and there by ghostly black peaks. But about those fierce desolations, probably inaccessible to any person walking on the ground, the passengers of flight TS709 of Air Transat don't care. Stunned, wrapped in their cosy polar wool blanket, their stomachs filled with a container of chicken-rice-vegetables and by 17,5 centilitres of cabernet sauvignon made in California [F.B.: in English in the original text], they let the vibration of the reactors lull them […] Would the second middle of the 20th century have annihilated the charm of places elsewhere? Nobody has even a quick glance at the sublime landscape.* (Fraïssé 10)[21]

Marie-Hélène Fraïssé's way of looking at the landscape out of the plane window while the other passengers sleep or are engrossed in the screen of their iPhone reminds the reader of Rudy Wiebe looking at the same landscape while the other passengers have closed the shutters of their windows, refusing that the Arctic light should touch them. Wiebe looked in the explorers' journals for a fissure preventing the light from entering as in the plane bringing him back to Canada, a light that the tourists wanted to be protected from by lowering the shutters of their windows, thus refusing to let the Arctic light reach them. Marie-Hélène Fraïssé, like Rudy Wiebe, starts from this simple travel fact conveying the tourists' desire for comfort. Wiebe makes it a symbol of that refusal of the colonizing people having become tourists now and no longer explorers; this is a refusal to see the Other, to see the Other's land, a land represented by the Arctic dazzling light they refuse to see. That gesture, apparently insignificant, echoes the erroneous perception of Richardson seeing 'a naked land' in the Arctic.

It is that difference of perception of the land that Marie-Hélène Fraïssé underlines. It is seen by the Natives as a space inhabited by natural and supernatural life, in close connection with humans' lives, whereas it is seen by the Europeans and non-Native people as an empty, naked territory to be dressed with their own economic vision, as they have led these people to replace their ancestral clothes with European uniforms. Thus, they have standardized the world instead of letting in the light, a world empty for them and yet rich of all its human and nonhuman life for the people they meet. The latter share their life with the life of the earth whereas the visitors look at the earth as a place of resources and not as a source of life. Marie-Hélène Fraïssé's journey echoes that historical face to face also appearing in a toponymic face to face transcribing, in the named land, the attitude of the colonizers and explorers to the people they met without seeing them, shutting the window opening on a new land not to be disturbed by the light of the Other.

21 "Sous l'avion s'étend une immensité de blanc cotonneux, trouée çà et là de fantomatiques pics noirs. Mais de ces désolations farouches, probablement inaccessibles à quiconque chemine sur la terre ferme, les passagers du vol TS709 d'Air Transat n'ont cure. Assommés, enveloppés dans leur douillette couverture de laine polaire, l'estomac calé par une barquette de poulet-riz-petits légumes et par 17,5 centilitres de cabernet sauvignon *made in California*, ils laissent la vibration des réacteurs les bercer. […] La seconde moitié du XXe siècle aurait-elle réduit à néant le charme des ailleurs ? Personne ne jette ne serait-ce qu'un rapide coup d'œil au sublime paysage."

From wounded nature to healing nature

Throughout the book allusions to nature and the damage made in nature are multiple: pollution by the Exxon Valdez, deforestation, mines (especially Pebble Mine) or the "bacterian shock" on Quadra Island bringing so many diseases to Native Americans (84). As for wild nature, it is important in the author's healing process.

Animals regularly appear. Allusions to Kodiak bears, fish, birds, sea otters, whales, have various functions: either included in peaceful natural scenes bringing peace to the traveller trying to find serenity, or informing her about Native people's ways of life, they are either mentioned in relationship with hunting and their sad fate being associated with the fate of Native people. She evokes the sea otter hunted by the Tinglit deported by Russian people in the past so that they should hunt for these animals for their fur. A woman, Margaret Roberts, the head of the Kodiak Area Native Association, is speaking about the Tlingit, on Poison Cove Beach where around 100 members from their people had died, after being recruited by the Russians. They had nothing to eat so they had eaten toxic shells and died. Fraïssé is told how men were often forcibly taken far from Kodiak and sent to California to hunt sea otter for its fur. Some were paid and adopted the Russian way of life, but others were slaves. She ends her story by saying: "It's a tragic violent story, rooted in our memory as in the Tlingit one. It's still hard for our elders to speak about it, it's like a black hole in our collective history."[22] Fraïssé wonders: "Will future generations see the healing completed?"[23] Very often in her book she speaks about healing and resilience, thus including her own process of healing and resilience into the fate and history of the communities she meets and of nature.

As opposed to the sea otters hunted for their fur, Fraïssé tells about the nice peaceful scene of "the sea otter floating on her back, […] busy breaking a shell between her teeth and little forepaws with claws, which she uses as hands."[24] Animals are a helpful presence and they have also paid a high tribute to humans' economic systems with industrial whale hunting for example. The traveller's meetings with people in Alaska are the opportunity for these populations to claim their traditional hunting which had nothing to do with the devastating modern industrial whale hunting.

Forests also have an important place in Fraïssé's journey. The damage made on forests often recurs in the book. She mentions deforestation on Alert Bay:

> *I pass the river Nimpkish that was situated in the middle of a primary forest that remained legendary, less than a century ago. Millions of salmon and the precious candlefish swam up the river in that valley whose sides were covered with hemlocks and cedars which had a diameter as big as four meters.*[25]

The time when forests covered the land is far and Fraïssé listens to all those who speak about deforestation and the blindness of those who saw nature as a resource and thought that the natural resources were endless:

> *Will the valley recover one day some of its past splendour? Anyway, it is still claimed as an ancestral territory by those who have been chased and whom I must join that evening at the place where they have been forcibly gathered: Alert Bay.*[26]

We can think about Emily Carr's paintings presenting an Alert Bay "Indian village" with Native people sitting and high totem poles watching over them. When Emily Carr painted these First Nations' villages, she showed the many totem poles standing on the Northwest Coast and whose memory she wanted to preserve. Fraïssé meets a man explaining to her that when photos represent lying totem poles, it does not mean that they had been destroyed but the

22 "C'est une histoire tragique et violente, enracinée dans notre mémoire comme dans celle des Tlingits. Il est encore difficile pour nos anciens d'en parler, c'est comme un trou noir dans une histoire collective" (310-311).

23 "Les générations suivantes verront-elles la guérison s'achever ?" (311).

24 "une loutre de mer flotte sur le dos, […] affairée à briser un coquillage entre ses dents et ses petites pattes avant, griffues, dont elle use comme de mains" (275-276).

25 "J'enjambe la rivière Nimpkish qui se situait il y a moins d'un siècle au milieu d'une forêt primaire restée légendaire. Les saumons et les précieux poissons-chandelles remontaient par millions cette vallée dont les flancs étaient couverts de pruches (*hemlock*) et de thuyas (*cedar*) mesurant jusqu'à quatre mètres de diamètre" (85-86)

26 "La vallée retrouvera-t-elle un jour un peu de sa splendeur passée ? Elle demeure en tout cas revendiquée en tant que territoire ancestral par ceux qui en ont été chassée et que je dois rejoindre ce soir là où on les a regroupés de force : Alert Bay" (86).

Natives voluntarily put them down as they consider that at one moment, they must return to the earth. Her paintings also reveal dense forests from where strange faces emerge representing Native spirits. These dense forests are evoked by Fraïssé: "[…] the forest resources seemed endless. The huge wooded coastal strip, running from California to the Polar Circle, was an endless treasure. […] Port Clements prospered until the 1970s. The two biggest wood transport vessels in the world came there: the *Haida Monarch* and the *Haida Brave*."[27]

Fraïssé clearly shows how forests were destroyed over centuries. But this wounded nature also becomes a healing nature for her. It is the place where she sits and listens to the river and observes the resilience of nature leading her to a meditation that will eventually lead her to her own resilience. The story of a special tree appears as this link between the life of nature and her own life. It links animals and forests: a raven and a tree. It is the story of "The Golden Tree and the White Raven" ("L'Arbre d'Or et le Corbeau Blanc") (149). It is the title of a subchapter and looks like the title of a myth.

The double story of the Golden Tree and the White Raven (written with capital letters) around Port Clements is both a real story of nature and a mythical story. Real natural facts become a spiritual sign foreshadowing the reality of the place. While visiting the small village museum celebrating all "the epic of the wood,"[28] she discovers the woodcutters' hard work and wooden objects: everyday objects like spinning wheels or churns; toys and games like dolls and giant quills (157). While walking on the Golden Spruce Trail, she sees that only a stump is left from the ancestral tree; she learns about the story that has given its name to the trail. The Golden Tree had been partly cut one night in 1997 by a depressive woodcutter having become an ecologist and a strong gush of wind had finished felling the tree. Fraïssé explains that "irrational gesture [was] supposed to protest against the abuse of deforestation" and instead distressed the Haida community who "worshipped that albinos they had baptized Kiidk'yaas, 'Ancestor Tree'" [Arbre Ancêtre]. That spruce is integrated into ancient narratives. This is a story of metamorphosis (of a young man becoming a tree as he has looked back, which he should not do) mingling real facts (a hard winter and starvation, only two survivors who are the characters of the story; a young man and his grandfather). There is a close connection between nature and myths for the communities the traveller meets. It is as if the broken destroyed tree offered her a new birth. By "sitting in the womb of the big rainy forest,"[29] she makes the forest a mother figure and she is her child, who is still unborn. These stories allow her to better understand the people she meets but they are also a way for her to get out of her personal story or at least to see it from a different point of view enlarged by the meetings and such stories as the one of the Golden Tree that has been cut and yet is now a source of life:

> *With time, the stump has started to split. Becoming a feeder, it is now what naturalists call a 'shelter-log': innumerable skinny little thread-like shrubs have taken root there, pumping its energy, competing to rise towards full light. Scheduled to disappear, the Ancestor-Tree sends an ultimate greeting to life by feeding tomorrow's forest.*[30]

What was the opportunity to talk about deforestation in general and the particular mad gesture of a man who wanted to defend the forest, destroying its most mythical member, leads first to the physical contact of the traveller with the tree through a walk and then to the living message given by the stump of the Ancestor-Tree. It is that interweaving of forest, myth, story and walk that brings about a meditation on mourning: "How much time should we grant mourning? At which moment should we fight it, give it up behind oneself and accept to join

27 "[…] les ressources forestières semblaient inépuisables. L'immense bande côtière boisée, courant de la Californie jusqu'au cercle polaire, était un trésor sans fin. […] Port Clements prospéra jusqu'aux années 1970. Venaient y faire escale les deux plus gros bateaux de transport de bois du monde : le *Haida Monarch* et le *Haida Brave*" (156).

28 "l'épopée du bois" (156).

29 "Je m'assieds dans le ventre de la grande forêt pluviale, face à ce moignon de tronc" (152).

30 "Avec le temps, la souche a commencé à se fendre. Devenue nourricière, elle est désormais ce que les naturalistes appellent une 'grume-abri': d'innombrables arbrisseaux filiformes y ont pris racine, pompant son énergie, rivalisant pour se hisser vers la pleine lumière. Promis à disparaître, l'Arbre-Ancêtre adresse un ultime salut à la vie en nourrissant la forêt de demain" (152).

the flux of the living, let oneself be taken away to the future?"[31] It is that world of nature and myths, of destruction and erasure on the one hand and creation and life on the other, that brings the author and traveller to questionings first and then to healing. To revive, she needs to meet both living people, singing birds and the stump of a destroyed tree that has become a place of life, feeds other species and sends a greeting to life. The tree and its stump lead her to question herself about her own personality:

> *Am I one of those who turn their head too much, with complacency, while I walk alone in this unknown country, silently stirring absence and loss? Am I like Loth's wife flying from her city to which she remains secretly attached because the most beautiful years of her life were lived there […]? Loth's wife walks ahead across the desert, divided against herself.*[32]

Moving in between Native Americans' myths and Biblical stories, on a trail named from an ancestral tree that has been destroyed and yet speaks about life, she is going to find her own self. She needs all these elements. She imagines Loth's walk in the desert. Nature, but a nature imagines and very far in space and time speaks to her about light ("a gleam of sunshine on the black shiny stones of the desert"[33]). Together with the Golden Tree story, there is the story of the White Raven. Here again a real animal is going to take a mythical dimension, all the more so as the raven is an important mythical animal on the Northwest Coast. She evokes "a strange coincidence," a "surprising anomaly of nature."[34] Starting with these redundant words conveying strangeness, she goes on with the "raven as white as snow."[35] Supernature and nature are superimposed. After a quarrel with other birds, the white raven thought he had a shelter on a transformer that was not well insulated and electrocuted him.

> *That sudden death, a few months after the criminal felling of the golden Tree, moved the population all the more so as the fatal short circuit plunged all homes into darkness. Now, according to the mythologies of this region of the Americas, Raven is the creator of light. Humans owe it to him to exist under the sun.*[36]

The double brutal disappearance of the Golden Tree and of the white raven in a few weeks (in 1997) might lead the population of the Haida archipelago to think that these were bad omens. Going on in her narrative with a ghost village and the opposition between the skyscrapers of big cities and success stories and that "other America" (157), with "isolated farms, bad lands, small lost cities […]" (158), Fraïssé shows a double world and it somewhat corresponds to her double mood: the sad self trying to heal after the drama of loss and the resilient and strong self, seeing all the connections in the world she discovers which heal her. Love and mourning are both present. At the end of the book, she realizes that "the so-called 'New' World was only new in the eyes of the egocentric travellers coming from the 'Old' one."[37]

"A resilience Journey":
The song of the hummingbird and the healing light of life

Marie-Hélène Fraïssé arrives in Alaska during a journey she defines as a "resilience journey," after a loss, and she writes a travel book where the reality of places and people faces the reality of her perception. Travelogues are a genre that is particularly adapted to resilience narratives as it allows people to travel

31 "Combien de temps faut-il accorder au deuil ? À quel moment faut-il se faire violence, l'abandonner derrière soi et accepter de rejoindre le flux du vivant, se laisser emporter vers l'avenir ?" (152)

32 "Suis-je de ceux et celles qui trop se retournent, avec complaisance, moi qui arpente en solitaire ce pays inconnu remuant en silence l'absence et la perte ? Suis-je comme la femme de Loth fuyant sa ville à laquelle elle reste secrètement attachée parce que c'est là que les plus belles années de sa vie se sont déroulées […] ? La femme de Loth avance à travers le désert, divisé contre elle-même" (153).

33 "Un éclat de soleil sur les pierres noires et brillantes du désert" (153).

34 "une curieuse coïncidence", une "surprenante anomalie de la nature" (157).

35 "un corbeau blanc comme neige" (157).

36 "Cette mort subite, quelques mois après l'abattage criminel de l'Arbre d'or, émut d'autant plus la population que le court-circuit fatal eut pour effet de plonger tous les foyers dans le noir. Or, selon les mythologies de cette région des Amériques, Corbeau est le créateur de lumière. C'est à lui que les humains doivent d'exister sous le soleil" (157).

37 "le prétendu 'Nouveau' Monde ne l'était que dans le regard égocentrique des voyageurs venus de l'Ancien'" (329).

in the wake of a lost person and to find him or her (through memories or signs or even in an irrational way) in their travels. We can think about two examples: in the nineteenth century, an Irish author, Denys Shyne Lawlor, after losing his wife, decided to make a resilience journey in the Pyrenees and the Landes, going to all the sanctuaries devoted to Virgin Mary. His travel book,[38] *Pilgrimage in the Pyrenees and the Landes*, is a healing journey fraught with spirituality. More recently, we can think about Bernard Chambaz's *Dernières nouvelles du martin-pêcheur.* Nineteen years after his son's death, he and his wife (he riding his bike and his wife by car) decided to cross the United Staes from East to West to meet their son. On the way, they discover America and American people as Marie-Hélène Fraïssé discovers First Nations and particular fates on her way.[39] Yet Chambaz's book that relates a real trip is called by the author a novel. The reader can attend mysterious scenes (fantastic scenes or spiritual encounters) where the parents see their son and even interact with him. This fantastic dimension is absent from Fraïssé's book and yet the same resilience appears and the same mixture of mourning and joy of discovery. Chambaz claims that mourning does not prevent joy and their experiences show that as the journey is a way of interacting with the lost loved person. There is a poetic echo between Bernard Chambaz's kingfisher who constantly speaks to him about his lost son and is like the visible presence of his son in nature or in names, and Marie-Hélène Fraïssé's hummingbird coming from a Haida love song and becoming the sign of her love during her journey. In both travel books, one (Marie-Hélène Fraïssé's) being presented as a report on Alaska and Northwestern Canada at the same time, and the other (Bernard Chambaz's), being presented as a novel, a rare bird accompanies their resilience journey and appears as a sign of love and of the loved person's presence during their travels.

Marie-Hélène Fraïssé has lost her companion and when she leaves, she is in quest of herself. She shows that we become new persons after the loss of beloved people. The new vacuum in a person is gradually filled. The journey, nature, the meetings with Native people are the healing elements that lead her to herself. The journalist invites us to a discovery journey, and the discovery is both exterior and interior. Her first perception of Alaska is defined as "*Love at first sight.*" The expression suggests a parallel between the beloved companion she has lost and this new love that Alaska becomes. This new love does not replace her love for her companion. It heals her by associating the two loves.

She had already met Alaska in her life as an international reporter, but that journey is of a different kind; it is an interior journey and a quest. And it allows the meeting with people from the First Nations. She had "had a glimpse [of Alaska] a first time, ages ago, in its fierce splendour, from a small Cessna two-seat, single-engine airplane equipped with skis" (Fraïssé 12).[40] She "flew, being the only passenger, the Canadian national park of Kluane."[41] She first sees Alaska from the sky, from a plane; it is only a visual contact. But it has the strength of a first meeting: "My first meeting with Alaska. The first click. *Love at first sight* [F.B.: in English in the original text] […]. This new journey is for good. '*Pour de bon*', as children say."[42] It is all the difference between her first meeting with Alaska when things were peaceful in her life and when it was just a glimpse and that deep meeting corresponding with a deep meeting with herself after a loss.

The stories and songs heard on her way are an important element in this resilience story. The song of the hummingbird (164) which is a Haida love song may sound like the sign of her love story which is at the beginning of her journey a story of loss and pain. So, it can both revive her lost love and be a song of peace softly leading her to resilience.

She refers to another love story in a cultural reference that can seem far from the topic of the book. Yet it appears important to her to mention it as it is inserted in her personal itinerary. When she refers to Clint Eastwood's "The Bridges of Madison County" (86), she makes the link between a river, bridges and personal feelings. The topic of the film is also a way of introducing her own perception of this intellectual and artistic reference: "Isn't a love remaining in suspense, interrupted art the climax of passion, a stainless

38 Denys Shyne Lawlor, *Pilgrimage in the Pyrenees and the Landes*, London, Longmans, Green and Co, 1870.

39 I would like to thank one of the reviewers for mentioning Bernard Chambaz's poignant book and making me discover it.

40 "entrevu [l'Alaska] une première fois, il y a des lustres, dans sa splendeur farouche, depuis un petit monomoteur biplace Cessna équipé de skis." (12)

41 "survolait, seule passagère, le parc national canadien de Kluane." (12)

42 "Ma première rencontre avec l'Alaska. Le premier déclic. *Love at first sight.* [… Ce nouveau voyage, c'est "pour de bon. 'Pour de vrai', comme disent les enfants" (13).

treasure of memory?"[43] Yet this beautiful positive assertion is counterbalanced by a more negative one. Whereas the "melancholic scene" "has made her weep when the film came out,"[44] now it "seems to her that the abnegation of the character embodied by Meryl Streep is more coward than admirable."[45] The reference to that film which has nothing to do either with the place or with Native American populations and is simply generated by a bridge, appears as a metaphorical bridge between her travelling discovery of other people and her own emotions. The film is about a passionate love story, and it is for her an opportunity to mention her emotions when watching the film and now when she remembers it after seeing a bridge. What matters is the woman's response to an intense love. The brief allusion to a film having no link with her project seems to be a necessity for her. It has a link with her own life. It is part of her interior journey to resilience. By analysing the character's choice, she comes back to her own emotions. Several times she alternates descriptions of places or dialogues with members of the different communities, with personal thoughts about herself. Before speaking about Prince Williams Bay, she starts with a personal meditation in the form of a questioning:

> *Already one month and a half that I left France for this solo drifting. I let time run across me, finding a kind of carfare insolence whose taste had vanished after childhood. I miss nothing and nobody. I am travelled. I conjugate hours and days in the passive voice. Healing in progress? Autonomy reconquered? Or—more unavowable —a transition towards indifference?*[46]

And she goes on with daybreak and the landscape of Whittier harbour in a mountainous setting.

Regularly in the narrative her journey brings her back to her interior world. Having alluded to Hugo Pratt's book *J'avais un rendez-vous*, she adds:

> *I have a date, too, here, at the end of the world—a geographically arbitrary notion on a spherical planet whose centre can be everywhere provided we should have our home, our garden and our family there. For me that centre vanished somewhere in France, atomized, disintegrated. It has taken the ultimate form of a little pound of grey ashes, piously spread—in accordance with the last will of the man whose ultimate remnant they were—along an indolent river where it had been good paddling in a cool place for so many summers. A shadowy river winding among Morvan bocages before flowing into the Yonne, which itself flows into the Seine, which eventually spreads out into the ocean, perhaps to find itself, with the movements of streams and winds, in a minute quantity, here in Kodiak, Alaska, at the other end of the Earth. Where I have a date.* (268)[47]

Starting with her companion's ashes (only designated in a vague way as if mentioning his link with her was too hard), it is his ashes spread in the French river that become the initial sad element changed into life through their spreading into that river. Shifting from the personal sphere and from a playful suggestion about a phrase, to the geographical field, she reveals her presence in this partiular place of Kodiak as a date organized by the waters of the Earth: French rivers and the ocean. The date is both with her companion and with the place and chiefly by reuniting the two through the natural elements, it is a date with love: love for him assimilated with her love for the place and for the world. Jayson Iwen, in "Epithalamion for Lovers," writes: "The earth is in you wherever you go, / in everything you know."[48]

43 "Un amour resté en suspens, interrompu au plus fort de la passion, n'est-il pas un inoxydable trésor de mémoire?" (86).

44 "Cette scène mélancolique m'a fait pleurer à l'époque où le film est sorti" (86).

45 "Aujourd'hui il me semble que l'abnégation du personnage incarné par Meryl Streep est plus lâche qu'admirable" (86).

46 "Déjà un mois et demi que j'ai quitté la France pour cette dérive en solitaire. Je laisse le temps me traverser, retrouvant une sorte d'insolence insouciante dont le goût s'était effacé au sortir de l'enfance. Rien ni personne ne me manque. Je suis voyagée. Je conjugue les heures et les jours à la forme passive. Guérison en cours ? Autonomie reconquise ? Ou bien — plus inavouable — transition vers l'indifférence ?" (259)

47 "J'en ai un, moi aussi, de rendez-vous ici au bout du monde — une notion géographiquement arbitraire sur une planète sphérique dont le centre peut se situer partout à condition qu'on y ait sa maison, son jardin et ses proches. Ce centre pour moi s'est évanoui quelque part en France, vaporisé, désintégré. Il a pris la forme ultime d'une petite livre de cendres grises, pieusement déversées — conformément aux dernières volontés de celui dont elles étaient l'ultime vestige — au fil d'une indolente rivière où il avait fait bon pagayer à la fraîche pendant tant d'étés. Une rivière ombreuse qui serpente au milieu des bocages morvandeaux avant de se jeter dans l'Yonne, qui elle-même se jette dans la Seine, laquelle se disperse finalement dans l'océan pour peut-être, par le jeu des courants et des vents, se retrouver en quantité infime ici même, à Kodiak, Alaska, de l'autre côté de la Terre. Où j'ai donc rendez-vous" (268).

48 Iwen, Jayson, "Epithalamion for Lovers," *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, Volume 27, Issue 1 (Winter 2020): 179.

The traveller sees in that place the meeting with a love that is beyond the one that had generated her despair. By loving the place, she simply recovers the feeling of love as a light guiding her in the way.

At the end of her narrative, she quotes James Cook's journal (314) to evoke his bitterness at the end of a few expeditions to check the areas and she adds: "Disappointment, the unavoidable ingredient of any journey, of any meeting, of any passion. Defeat, debacle, disillusion: what should we do with that *dé-* game[49] but live with it? Without bitterness. With elegance if possible, and chiefly with humour… English humour preferably."[50]

Even in a text evoking all those negative words, the play on words on the prefixes and the dice game discreetly but playfully introduces that touch of humour helping her to bear the weight of sadness and frustration. And it is when she uses a playful tone that she comes back to the sadness of her heart and what led her to make this journey. She entitles chapter 5 "Ferry Tales" thus playing on "fairy tales" and the ferry as a means of transport. The choice of starting the chapter with a pun suggests playfulness but this playful title is immediately followed by a profound quotation from Jean-Michel Maulpoix:

> *I write to forget someone.*
> *As others drink or feast.*
> *I write to be faithful to him/her.*
> *It's the same.*[51]

Before starting the chapter, she indirectly comes back to the chaos in her heart and mind through Maulpoix's quote. Writing as both a way of forgetting and of being united. An equation between the two.

Fraïssé's book teems with information and gives an encompassing vision of the places she sees. Nature and history, toponymy and economy, Native American cultures and tourism, spirituality and art, she sees the places under all their aspects. And that journey of discovery of places and Native cultures is also a quest allowing her to discover herself and her relationship with the world while being healed. To conclude her book, she writes:

> *Voyage rhymes with mirage. There are those who call you, which you save for the future, those towards whom you rush headlong, and which dissolve as you move. Eventually there are those that lead you to distant countries that are still richer than their first appearance indicated. You will know for certain only after your return, long after it. And perhaps, all in all, once you have come back home, the loop coming full circle, the luggage put down, you will have learnt two or three things about yourself and the world*[52].

It is an Arctic world, from Canada to Alaska, that is multiple, obscure and luminous, natural and spiritual, mysterious and transparent, that Marie-Hélène Fraïssé makes us discover in her deep love of people and places healing her after the loss of her love. This woman's voice, while showing us the wilderness of Northwest Canada and Alaska and the tragedies of history as well as her interior wounds, teaches us to read the Other and ourselves by listening to nature and all the humans or nonhuman creatures met on the way.

> *"For the end of all our quests*
> *Will be to arrive where we had started*
> *And for the first time to recognize that place."*[53]

49 She plays with the sound of the prefix *dé-* and the French word "*dé*s" meaning dice. So in French the "jeu du *dé-*" makes the reader think about the "jeu de dés" (dice game) and she thus makes the journey a game of chance.

50 "La déception, inévitable ingrédient de tout voyage, de toute rencontre, de toute passion. Défaite, déroute, déconvenue : que faire avec ce jeu du dé- sinon s'en accommoder ? Sans aigreur. Avec élégance si possible, et surtout avec humour…anglais de préférence" (314-315).

51 "J'écris pour oublier quelqu'un. / Comme d'autres boivent ou font la fête. / J'écris pour lui être fidèle. / C'est pareil." Jean-Michel Maulpoix. *Domaine public* (201).

52 "Voyage rime avec mirage. Il y a ceux qui vous appellent, qu'on garde en réserve pour l'avenir, ceux vers lesquels on fonce tête baissée, et qui se dissolvent chemin faisant. Ceux enfin qui conduisent à des lointains plus riches encore que ne le laissait présager leur apparence première. On n'en aura le cœur net qu'après le retour, longtemps après. Et il se peut, tout compte fait, une fois revenu au pays, la boucle bouclée, le bagage posé, qu'on ait appris deux ou trois choses sur soi-même et sur le monde" (334).

53 "Car le terme de toutes nos quêtes / Sera d'arriver là d'où nous étions partis / Et pour la première fois de reconnaître ce lieu." T.S. Eliot, "Little Gidding." (334).
She frames the epilogue with a quotation by Leonard Cohen and one by T.S. Eliot. The quote by Leonard Cohen as an epigraph of the epilogue reads: "And when she came back / She was nobody's wife" (331). This may sound negative. But T.S. Eliot 's final quote explains her perception. What matters for her is no longer the married link but the understanding of her relationship with place. She left because she had lost her love. Her journey healed her and made her find her love again through the understanding of her link with place.

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ENTRETIENS / *INTERVIEWS*

© Bruce Jackson, voyage avec Jean Malaurie à Nome et sa région, 1997
/ field trip with Jean Malaurie to Nome and its region, 1997

ENTRETIEN AVEC L'ARTISTE PLURIDISCIPLINAIRE IÑUPIAQ AISA WARDEN

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L'art interdisciplinaire comme continuité culturelle et résistance en Alaska

Aisa Warden[1], artiste interdisciplinaire iñupiat[2] née en 1972 à Fairbanks, en Alaska, est une figure majeure de l'art autochtone contemporain, reconnue pour son travail en tant que poète, musicienne, performeuse et artiste visuelle. Membre du village autochtone de Kaktovik (« tribal member of the Native Village of Kaktovik », avec des racines ancestrales à Utqiaġvik (Barrow), elle développe depuis plusieurs décennies une pratique qui remet en question les représentations conventionnelles de l'identité, de la langue et des enjeux environnementaux des Autochtones de l'Alaska. Son œuvre s'ancre profondément dans des réflexions sur la survie culturelle, la décolonisation et la revitalisation des traditions iñupiat, faisant d'elle une voix essentielle de l'expression artistique contemporaine dans l'Arctique.

Tout au long de sa carrière, Warden a résisté aux représentations statiques ou nostalgiques de la vie inuite et iñupiat, mettant plutôt de l'avant la continuité, l'adaptation et l'innovation. Son engagement envers le hip-hop, l'art performatif et la poésie reflète cette volonté d'hybridité artistique, intégrant les traditions artistiques occidentales et autochtones de manière à rendre compte à la fois des réalités historiques et contemporaines. Elle s'est d'abord faite connaître comme artiste de rap dans les années 1990 sous le nom de scène AKU-MATU, incorporant la langue iñupiat et des thématiques culturelles dans le hip-hop comme moyen d'engager les jeunes générations envers leur patrimoine linguistique et culturel. Son utilisation du rap comme outil de revitalisation linguistique s'inscrit dans une tendance plus large chez les artistes autochtones circumpolaires, qui se réapproprient les formes musicales contemporaines pour affirmer leur présence et leur agentivité.

Au-delà de la musique, le travail de Warden en art performatif et en installation interroge également les modes de représentation des corps et des systèmes de savoirs autochtones dans les espaces institutionnels et universitaires. Son exposition individuelle *Unipkaaġusiksuġuvik* (The Place of the Future/Ancient) présentée en 2016 au Anchorage Museum illustre son approche visant à créer des espaces qui mêlent les perspectives iñupiat du passé, du présent et du futur. L'installation recréait le « qargi », espace traditionnel de rassemblement iñupiat, en le réimaginant comme un lieu de résistance et de transformation culturelle. De manière similaire, sa performance *siku/siku* (2017) explore le traumatisme de la colonisation à travers la métaphore de la glace — « siku » signifiant à la fois la « glace » en iñupiat et, de manière colloquiale, la méthamphétamine — juxtaposant les thèmes de l'addiction et de la perte culturelle à ceux de la réappropriation linguistique et spirituelle.

L'œuvre de Warden est également profondément politique, bien que cette dernière résiste à la qualifier ainsi. Ses performances défient l'effacement historique et institutionnel des voix autochtones tout en affirmant simultanément la présence continue du peuple iñupiat. Elle s'est exprimée de manière engagée sur le rôle de l'artiste face aux enjeux environnementaux, notamment sur

[1] Autrefois connue sous le nom d'Allison Akootchook Warden, ou parfois, d'Allison Warden.

[2] https://www.aisawarden.com

l'impact des changements climatiques sur les communautés autochtones de l'Arctique. Sa participation à des projets tels que *Insidious Rising* (2018) reflète son engagement à utiliser l'art comme médium de critique écologique et sociale.

Si Warden s'est d'abord fait connaître par le rap et la performance, son passage récent vers la poésie marque une nouvelle phase dans sa trajectoire artistique. En 2013, elle a entamé un projet d'écriture poétique basé sur le format des messages de 140 caractères de Twitter. En 2017, le Anchorage Museum a rassemblé les meilleurs de ces poèmes sous forme d'un livre, publié dans le cadre de son projet créatif The Lab Project. Intitulée *Taimanisaaq/Akkupak = (Long Long Time Ago/Right Now): Twitter Poems*[3], ce recueil se présente comme un échange entre la poète et ses 87 000 abonnés, dans lequel elle affirme son identité contemporaine, imprégnée de savoirs ancestraux, comme dans cet extrait :

she holds up the sky
remembers how families are related
the old old stories run through her veins her
heart beats steady
for our village[4]

Elle témoigne également des luttes individuelles et collectives de son peuple, qu'elle vit au quotidien, comme le montre ce poème :

holding a root
so deep
bracing our souls
for the unadulterated truth our great great
grandparents envelop us
"hold tight, hold strong[5]*"*

Enfin, elle propose également une vision positive des relations entre les Iñupiat et le reste du monde, invitant ses abonnés à imaginer le meilleur pour leur avenir :

when your decolonized mind sees the madness
the disease
take a moment to transform it
visualize the most healed version
hold that space[6]

Son œuvre a également été publiée dans plusieurs revues littéraires, notamment dans *Poetry* et *Anomaly*, où elle explore des thèmes liés à la transmission des savoirs, à la reconnaissance territoriale et à l'expérience incarnée de la langue. Son poème de 2022, « we acknowledge ourselves[7] », publié dans *Poetry*, propose une réflexion sur l'auto-reconnaissance autochtone dans le contexte des géographies coloniales, tandis que « let's try it this way for the last ones[8] », publié dans *Anomaly*[9] en 2023, interroge les possibilités de résistance par la pratique linguistique et artistique.

Les contributions d'Aisa Warden à la culture de l'Alaska dépassent le cadre de sa production artistique ; elle s'est également engagée comme enseignante et mentore, travaillant avec de jeunes artistes et étudiants à travers l'Arctique afin de favoriser de nouvelles approches du récit autochtone. Pour son travail, elle a obtenu diverses reconnaissances, dont le *Rasmuson Foundation Award for Performance* (2012) ainsi que le *Alaska Governor's Award for the Arts and Humanities* (2015), consacrant son statut de figure importante parmi les artistes contemporains issus de l'Alaska.

Sa pratique incarne la nature dynamique et évolutive de l'identité iñupiat, résistant à l'idée selon

[3] Allison Akootchook Warden, *Taimanisaaq/Akkupak = (Long Long Time Ago/Right Now): Twitter Poems* (internal limited edition), Anchorage, Anchorage Museum, 2017, 135 p.

[4] 2017, p. 37. Je traduis : « elle soutient le ciel / se souvient des liens entre les familles / les très très vieux récits coulent dans ses veines / son cœur bat, régulier /pour notre village ».

[5] 2017, p. 87. Je traduis : « tenant une racine / si profondément / préparant nos esprits / à la vérité pure que nos arrière-arrière-grands-parents nous enveloppent / « tiens bon, reste fort ».

[6] 2017, p. 123. Je traduis : « quand ton esprit décolonisé voit la folie / la maladie / prends un moment pour la transformer / visualise la version la plus guérie / conserve cet espace ».

[7] Lors de son passage à Montréal, nous avons réalisé une lecture de ce poème par l'autrice, que l'on peut retrouver à l'adresse suivante : https://youtu.be/MrTR1XVi3-A?si=hbZs0EVTq-uocdcp

[8] Nous avons aussi réalisé une lecture de ce poème, que l'on peut retrouver à l'adresse suivante : https://youtu.be/Z_ExW9uDnVs?si=n4_BZ_YwVk4uU3uS

[9] Allison Akootchook Warden, "let's try it this way for the last ones", *Anomaly* 36, 2023, en ligne, <https://anmly.org/ap36/allison-akootchook-warden/>, site visité le 2 juillet 2025.

laquelle une culture autochtone appartiendrait uniquement au passé. Warden propose plutôt une vision de l'art autochtone de l'Alaska comme un art fluide, expérimental et profondément engagé face aux réalités sociales, politiques et environnementales pressantes de l'Arctique. Alors que l'Alaska continue d'être un lieu de récits divergents — crise climatique, extraction des ressources, souveraineté autochtone — l'œuvre d'Aisa Warden se dresse comme un témoignage du rôle de l'art dans la création d'avenirs positifs tout en honorant les savoirs ancestraux.

Contexte de l'entretien avec Aisa Warden

L'entretien suivant avec Aisa Warden a été réalisé à l'Université du Québec à Montréal en novembre 2024, lors de sa visite au Québec dans le cadre de la Chaire UArctic sur l'imaginaire, les perceptions et les représentations de l'Arctique. Une version vidéo de cet entretien a été publiée[10], et la traduction de la transcription qui suit a été autorisée par l'artiste.

Dans cet entretien, Aisa Warden propose une exploration des relations entre langue, identité, performance et continuité culturelle dans l'expression artistique autochtone contemporaine. En tant que créatrice pluridisciplinaire — poète, artiste visuelle, musicienne et artiste de performance — Warden remet en question les représentations conventionnelles des Inuits, en particulier dans les espaces qui tendent à cadrer et figer les cultures autochtones. Son travail cherche à déconstruire ces récits en affirmant le caractère à la fois durable et évolutif de l'identité iñupiaq au présent.

L'un des thèmes centraux de cet entretien porte sur l'engagement profond de Warden envers la langue iñupiaq, qu'elle décrit comme un vecteur de savoirs culturels à la fois intraduisible et irremplaçable. Même si elle ne possède pas une maîtrise complète de cette langue, elle en intègre des fragments dans sa pratique artistique, en soulignant le poids émotionnel et historique qu'elle porte. Pour Warden, la langue n'est pas seulement un moyen de communication, mais également le marqueur d'une vision du monde qui ne peut être entièrement rendue en anglais. En ce sens, son œuvre fonctionne comme un acte de préservation et de transmission culturelles, veillant à ce que l'iñupiaq demeure au cœur de la production artistique pour les générations futures.

Au-delà de la question linguistique, Warden aborde l'exotisation et la romantisation des Inuits, particulièrement dans les milieux universitaires où les chercheurs peuvent s'intéresser à la culture inuite à distance, souvent sans interaction directe avec des personnes inuites. Elle évoque une performance qu'elle a réalisée à Montréal[11], au cours de laquelle elle a invité des chercheurs spécialistes de l'Arctique à la toucher physiquement, soulignant ensuite l'ironie du fait que nombre d'entre eux avaient consacré leur carrière à l'étude de l'Arctique sans jamais avoir interagi de manière tangible avec une personne inuite. Ce geste performatif met en lumière un thème plus large dans son travail : l'importance de la présence incarnée pour refaçonner les récits qui portent sur la vie et l'identité des Inuits.

Les notions d'adaptation et d'innovation parcourent également les réflexions de Warden. S'appuyant sur des exemples à la fois historiques et contemporains, elle illustre comment la culture iñupiaq a toujours été dynamique et réceptive au changement. De son engagement précoce avec le rap — une forme artistique qu'elle a adaptée dans un contexte iñupiaq — aux façons dont ses ancêtres ont accueilli de nouvelles technologies tout en préservant leur intégrité culturelle, Warden inscrit sa pratique artistique dans la continuité de cette tradition de résilience et de réinvention. Selon elle, il n'existe pas de rupture entre l'existence des Inuits d'hier et celle d'aujourd'hui ; il existe au contraire une continuité vivante, dans laquelle de nouvelles formes artistiques et technologiques sont intégrées à un cadre résolument iñupiaq.

Bien que Warden ne décrive pas explicitement son travail comme politique, elle reconnaît que sa simple présence dans certains espaces — que ce soit en tant que performeuse, artiste ou simplement comme femme inuite dans un monde globalisé — devient un acte politique. La rareté de la représentation des Inuits dans de nombreux espaces culturels, sociaux et universitaires engendre des situations où son identité induit une réévaluation des lieux communs concernant le Nord et ses habitants. Toutefois, plutôt que de réagir lors de ces moments par la confrontation, elle privilégie la réaction par l'humour, la générosité et l'engagement, favorisant ainsi des occasions de dialogue et de remise en question des frontières psychologiques et culturelles qui définissent les relations entre Autochtones et allochtones.

[10] https://youtu.be/wxtSo1RgwHk?si=hr8Bu4mBBzg6a_on

[11] Le 4 novembre 2024, à l'Université du Québec à Montréal, dans le cadre d'un événement intitulé « Journée de la recherche nordique ».

Cet entretien apporte un éclairage sur les réalités vécues par les artistes inuits contemporains, tout en interrogeant les conceptions préconçues de la vie arctique et en mettant de l'avant la capacité des artistes autochtones à s'approprier leurs propres récits. Les réflexions de Warden s'inscrivent dans les discussions actuelles en études inuites, en recherches arctiques et en études de la performance, et constituent une démonstration convaincante du rôle de l'art dans l'affirmation de la présence culturelle, la résistance à l'effacement minoritaire et la construction de nouvelles expressions de l'identité inuite.

Entretien avec Aisa Warden

DC: Aisa Warden, votre musique et vos performances intègrent souvent des mots en iñupiaq. Quelle importance accordez-vous à la langue, et quel effet l'usage de l'iñupiaq produit-il sur votre public ?

AW: Je n'ai pas la pleine maîtrise de l'iñupiaq, bien que, parfois dans mes rêves, je prononce de très beaux discours dans cette langue, éloquents et fluides. J'ai grandi dans un environnement où cette langue était présente, entourée d'aînés qui ne parlaient que l'iñupiaq — des aînés qui avaient grandi dans des maisons de tourbe, toujours sur le territoire. J'ai eu la grande chance d'être immergée dans cet environnement dès mon plus jeune âge ; je me souviens de la pensée de ces personnes, et de ce qu'ils incarnaient. C'est de là que vient ma pratique performative : de l'incarnation de ce qu'ils sont.
La langue est notre empreinte unique sur la Terre. Elle est propre à ce que nous sommes, nous distinguant de tous les autres, qu'ils soient en Ouganda ou à Montréal. Notre langue porte une vision du monde qui est uniquement iñupiaq, et plus précisément celle des Kaktovikamiut, de ceux et de celles qui vivent sur mon île de l'océan Arctique. Nous avons notre propre dialecte, tout en étant liés à l'ensemble des Inuits. En tant que peuple circumpolaire, nous ne faisons qu'un. La langue occupe une place importante dans mon travail, car je me préoccupe de l'avenir. Je pense aux jeunes qui, dans cinquante ans, entreront en contact avec mon œuvre. Je souhaite qu'ils entendent cette langue et sachent qu'elle était au cœur de mes réflexions et de ma pratique. Elle exprime notre vision du monde d'une manière qui ne peut être traduite en anglais. Nous ne traduisons pas en anglais. Bien que nous puissions négocier les significations, de nombreux aspects de notre identité n'ont pas d'équivalent direct. Je place la langue au premier plan afin qu'elle puisse être vécue. Le ressenti demeure — il ne vous est pas nécessaire de comprendre tout ce que je dis pour ressentir qui nous sommes, jusque dans vos os.

DC: Aujourd'hui, vous avez réalisé une performance artistique à l'université devant des chercheurs et des professeurs spécialistes de l'Arctique. À la fin de la performance, vous leur avez demandé de vous toucher. Par la suite, vous m'avez dit : « Tous ces gens connaissent l'Arctique, mais ils n'avaient jamais touché une femme inuite. » Que souhaitez-vous exprimer à travers ce geste?

AW: Les Iñupiat vivent aux confins du monde. Je considère que nous existons également aux confins du cadre psychologique des représentations de l'Autre. Nous faisons souvent l'objet d'une idéalisation, d'un regard « fantalogique », nous percevant comme des êtres humains vivant dans le froid, dans des maisons de neige, dans la terre, dans des iglous, survivant aux marges de tout, dans les lieux les plus hostiles. Je constate que, particulièrement dans le milieu universitaire, notre peuple est fréquemment soumis à cette idéalisation. Il existe une tendance à nous considérer comme un peuple appartenant au passé, en grande partie parce qu'il y a eu peu d'engagement direct avec nous. Cela crée une dissociation entre ce que nous sommes aujourd'hui, et l'idée que l'on se fait de nous, laquelle est souvent ancrée dans le passé. Pour ma part, il n'existe toutefois aucune séparation entre le passé et le présent. Il n'y a jamais eu de rupture dans notre identité, seulement une continuité. Même s'il semble qu'il aurait dû y avoir une rupture, il n'en est rien. Je suis la version 2024 de mon arrière-arrière-arrière-grand-mère. Si mon arrière-arrière-arrière-arrière-arrière-grand-mère vivait en 2024, elle serait artiste de performance, poétesse, artiste visuelle, créant des regalia qui reflètent notre époque. Notre culture est une culture de l'adaptation.
Permettez-moi de partager une autre histoire au sujet de nos aînés. Lorsqu'une première photocopieuse est apparue, mon grand-oncle en a acheté une énorme et l'a fait expédier dans notre village. C'était une machine immense – imaginez cela dans les années 1970, l'un des premiers prototypes. Il l'avait achetée parce qu'il ne voulait pas porter de lunettes, et il l'utilisait lui-même pour agrandir les textes. Il était alors dans ses quatre-vingts ans. Un autre de mes grands-oncles, qui avait des difficultés d'audition, avait bricolé une lumière sur son téléphone afin qu'elle clignote lorsqu'il recevait un appel. Il avait fixé une lumière d'urgence, comme celles des ambulances, sur son téléphone. Chaque fois que le téléphone sonnait, la lumière clignotait dans toute sa maison. Il avait

installé deux lumières qui clignotaient ainsi rapidement pour le prévenir lorsqu'il recevait un appel. Nous avons toujours pris ce que le monde occidental offrait en termes de technologies, nous l'adaptions et nous le rendions iñupiaq. Ainsi, lorsque je m'engage dans la performance, les arts visuels ou la poésie, j'agis de la même manière.

DC: Vous avez d'abord choisi l'expression culturelle par le rap, ce qui constituait également une forme d'adaptation au contexte iñupiaq. Pourquoi avoir choisi ce genre musical ?

AW: Je n'en fais plus autant aujourd'hui, mais j'ai commencé le rap il y a environ trente-deux ans. C'était une manière d'établir un lien avec les jeunes. Le rap entretient un lien étroit avec la poésie. Aujourd'hui, je me consacre explicitement à la poésie, car j'apprécie le pouvoir des mots sur la page, qui demeurent en attente d'une rencontre, laissant à chacun la liberté de les appréhender selon son propre rythme. Hier, j'ai remis à une étudiante un de mes textes pour qu'elle le lise à sa manière, afin de voir si le ton conviendrait ensuite au groupe. J'ai apprécié la manière dont cela s'est déroulé, avec son plein consentement : elle pouvait s'engager dans le texte à sa manière. Ce n'était pas comme une mitraillette de mots qu'elle aurait dû assimiler en une seule fois. Elle avait la possibilité d'y revenir après une pause, d'aller marcher, puis de reprendre sa lecture. Elle pouvait choisir de le lire ou non ; je ne lui imposais pas un défi pour m'aider à comprendre le public. Elle aurait pu dire : « Je ne peux pas le lire maintenant, mais je le lirai en fin de semaine. » La poésie offre une plus grande flexibilité dans la manière dont elle entre en relation avec le public, comparativement à la performance en direct où l'on est présent ou absent, sans possibilité de dialogue sur la manière de recevoir le texte, sauf dans le cas d'une vidéo, où l'on peut mettre sur pause pour réfléchir.
Dans les années 1990, mes cousins écoutaient du rap et je me disais : « Pourquoi écoutez-vous cela ? Cela n'a rien à voir avec ce que nous sommes. » Puis, j'ai assisté à une performance, et là encore, cela n'avait rien à voir avec notre expérience. Pourtant, j'aime le hip-hop et le rap, car c'est un langage universel, porteur d'un ethos qui transcende les cultures. On comprend que c'est un médium que chacun peut utiliser pour exprimer son identité, ses préoccupations ou ses positions politiques. Le cadre du hip-hop et du rap est adaptable à toutes les cultures. J'en ai créé ma propre version, profondément iñupiaq. Par exemple, je rappe en incarnant des animaux, un ancêtre ou une aînée venue du futur. J'ai utilisé le rap de multiples façons, sans suivre une trajectoire linéaire. C'est un médium formidable.
Quant à la poésie, j'aime la tranquillité qu'elle offre dans la relation aux mots. C'est comme de la couture, en cousant silencieusement les mots sur la page, en imaginant une personne, comme cette étudiante qui m'a lue, accueillir calmement les mots, les porter jusqu'à ce moment. C'est une expérience intime, privée. Au lieu d'être : « POW ! POW POW! OUUUAAAARRR ! » et « AHHHHHHHH ! », c'est plutôt : « Oh, un livre, ohhh. » On peut produire le même effet, mais de manière silencieuse, en donnant au lecteur la permission de s'y engager à son propre rythme.

DC: Mais vous aimez aussi lire vos poèmes à voix haute ?

AW: Oui ! Cela devient alors une performance. Ce n'était pas quelque chose que j'avais anticipé au départ. Je me souviens qu'il y a longtemps, un article avait été publié à mon sujet, me présentant comme « la poétesse de spoken word Allison Akootchook Warden ». Je m'étais dit : « Je ne fais pas de spoken word. Je n'en ai jamais fait. D'où cela vient-il ? » J'ai donc décidé d'adopter cette étiquette, car je trouvais cela amusant.
J'ai écrit de la poésie tout au long de ma vie, mais je publie davantage depuis quelque temps. Il y a environ un an, je lisais mes poèmes à Stuttgart, en Allemagne, et je n'avais pas réalisé, en commençant à les lire à voix haute, qu'ils se transformeraient en une véritable performance. Je ne m'attendais pas à ce que, en les lisant, ils prennent vie et deviennent une entité autonome. Je pensais simplement qu'il s'agirait d'une lecture, mais cela s'est mué en une forme artistique à part entière, et j'en tire une grande joie. Il y a indéniablement une force dans l'acte de lecture à voix haute, mais je n'écris pas en pensant à cet effet. J'écris pour la personne qui souhaite lire dans un café ou chez elle, enveloppée dans une couverture sur son canapé. Elle peut s'y engager à sa manière. Et si cela se traduit par une performance, alors… ainsi soit-il, car je suis, par essence, une performeuse. Je fais de la performance depuis l'âge de huit ans, de sorte que tout ce que je crée portera naturellement une dimension performative. Même en ce moment !
DC: Vous considérez-vous comme une artiste iñupiaq ou simplement comme une artiste ?

AW: Je suis Iñupiaq. Je suis aussi à moitié Missourienne, mais j'ai été élevée comme une

Iñupiaq. J'ai grandi dans les façons d'être iñupiaq. Ma mère adoptait une approche presque scientifique dans la manière dont elle m'a élevée, veillant à ce que je sois véritablement iñupiaq. Elle s'est assurée que je sache coudre, que je comprenne nos valeurs, et elle a été très stratégique dans son éducation afin que je porte en moi, avant toute chose, la continuité de notre lignée familiale. Je ne détiens pas toutes les connaissances. Certains de mes cousins portent d'autres aspects de notre culture, et nous portons chacun ce que nous pouvons, du mieux que nous le pouvons. Je suis Iñupiaq. Je suis Iñupiaq, et je suis également artiste.
Quand je pense à mon village, dans lequel je n'ai pas grandi, mais auquel j'appartiens en tant que membre de la communauté, je constate que la plupart des personnes sont artistiques. Beaucoup de membres de ma famille ont un grand sens artistique. Ont-ils choisi d'en faire une profession, de la même manière ambitieuse et un peu folle que moi, en voyageant à travers le monde ? Non. Mais ils créent à la maison, utilisant divers matériaux. J'ai entendu dire : « Notre art n'est pas séparé de notre culture. » Il fait simplement partie de ce que nous sommes en tant que peuple. Notre art est inscrit dans nos vêtements, dans tout ce que nous sommes. Il n'existe pas de séparation. Ainsi, je dirais que la plupart des Iñupiat sont artistes, même s'ils ne poursuivent pas cette voie de manière incessante comme une carrière, ce qui est un chemin très particulier. Mais moi, je le poursuis, et d'autres également.

DC: La plupart de vos œuvres comportent une dimension politique. Comment intégrez-vous les valeurs ou les points de vue dans une forme d'art contemporaine ?

AW: Je ne raisonne pas en termes de politique, mais il se trouve que mon corps est politique. Ma présence dans un espace, alors que je représente moins de 0,0 quelque pour cent de la population mondiale, est politique. Être une femme autochtone est politique. Lorsque j'entre dans un espace, je suis simplement moi-même : je suis Iñupiaq. Cet acte d'être Iñupiaq est perçu comme un geste politique, car l'on me considère comme un être exotique, presque comme une anomalie dans le monde globalisé. C'est comme: « Oh ! Un Esquimau ! Un Esquimau ! Oh ! Je n'en ai jamais rencontré un. » Sauf lorsque je suis dans une communauté inuite, je suis souvent la seule comme je le suis, ou la première à entrer dans cet espace. Cela, en soi, devient un geste politique – le simple fait d'entrer dans une pièce. Les gens se sentent contraints de réagir à ma présence. Je ne leur impose rien ; j'entre simplement, j'ai faim, je veux faire ce que font les humains. J'ai dix doigts et dix orteils, je prends un café. Je ne sais pas ce que je fais d'autre. Je suis simplement là. Mais lorsqu'ils apprennent d'où je viens, cela les place dans une position qui crée soudainement une relation. Souvent, ils se disent:
« Je n'ai jamais pensé aux personnes venant de là-bas, mais maintenant tu es ici, tu es réelle, tu as du sang, et tu veux un café, comme moi. Tu es vivante. »
Cela déclenche tout un flot de réflexions chez eux. Je le vois à chaque fois : « Oh ! Tu es réelle », et moi je réponds simplement : « Oui, je suis réelle, et j'ai faim. Y a-t-il une place pour moi ici ? »
Cela suscite chez les gens une réaction qui les amène à reconsidérer les frontières psychologiques de ce qu'ils pensaient être l'humanité. Je viens d'un lieu si éloigné qu'ils n'avaient jamais imaginé que des êtres humains puissent en provenir, et pourtant, me voici. J'existe dans l'abstraction, dans un imaginaire lointain, romantisé, figé dans le passé. Mais soudainement, je porte des vêtements excentriques, je suis dans l'espace commun, et je veux du fromage ! Le simple fait d'être moi-même dans un espace devient un acte politique. Alors, j'aborde cela avec amour et avec bienveillance, encore et encore et encore et encore et encore et encore et encore et encore et encore et encore et encore et encore et encore et encore et encore. C'est une part de ce que signifie être membre d'un peuple autochtone dans ce monde globalisé, et je suis en paix avec cela. J'y trouve même de la joie ; j'en fais une source de joie. Lorsque j'avais treize ans, ce n'était pas si amusant, non. Mais aujourd'hui, à mon âge, c'est joyeux, c'est beau, c'est une chose merveilleuse. L'enthousiasme que manifestent parfois les gens à l'idée de rencontrer une Inuite est d'une grande douceur.
Je suis peut-être la seule Iñupiaq que certaines personnes rencontreront dans leur vie. Lorsque je retourne dans mon village, je trouve amusant de dire: « Je suis allée à Stuttgart et j'ai dit à tout le monde que nous étions tous pareils, tous comme moi. » Et ils me répondent : « Tu as encore fait ça ! » Puis ils rient. J'aime cette manière d'entrer en relation avec les gens, de leur offrir un petit aperçu de qui nous sommes.

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INTERVIEW WITH IÑUPIAQ CONTEMPORARY ARTIST AISA WARDEN

DANIEL CHARTIER

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Interdisciplinary Art as Cultural Continuity and Resistance in Alaska

Aisa Warden[1], an Iñupiaq interdisciplinary artist[2] born in 1972 in Fairbanks, Alaska, is a prominent figure in contemporary Indigenous art, known for her work as a poet, musician, performer, and visual artist. A tribal member of the Native Village of Kaktovik, with ancestral roots in Utqiaġvik (Barrow), she has spent decades developing a practice that challenges conventional representations of Alaska Native identity, language, and environmental concerns. Her work engages deeply with questions of cultural survival, decolonization, and the revitalization of Iñupiaq traditions, making her a key voice in contemporary Arctic artistic expression.

Throughout her career, Warden has resisted static or nostalgic portrayals of Inuit and Iñupiaq life, emphasizing instead continuity, adaptation, and innovation. Her engagement with hip-hop, performance art, and poetry reflects this commitment to artistic hybridity, integrating Western and Indigenous artistic traditions in ways that speak to both historical and present realities. She first emerged as a rap artist in the 1990s under the stage name AKU-MATU, incorporating Iñupiaq language and themes into hip-hop as a means of engaging younger generations with their linguistic and cultural heritage. Her use of rap as a tool for language revitalization reflects a broader trend among circumpolar Indigenous artists, who reclaim contemporary musical forms to assert their presence and agency.

Beyond music, Warden's work in performance art and installation further interrogates the ways in which Indigenous bodies and knowledge systems are represented in institutional and academic settings. Her 2016 solo exhibition *Unipkaaġusiksuġuvik* (The Place of the Future/Ancient) at the Anchorage Museum exemplifies her approach to creating spaces that blend past, present, and future Iñupiaq perspectives. The installation recreated the "qargi", a traditional Iñupiaq gathering space, reimagining it as a site of cultural endurance and transformation. Similarly, her performance *siku/siku* (2017) explores the trauma of colonization through the metaphor of ice—"siku" meaning both "ice" in Iñupiaq and, colloquially, methamphetamine—juxtaposing themes of addiction and cultural loss with linguistic and spiritual reclamation.

Warden's work is also deeply political, even though she resists defining it as such. Her performances challenge the historical and institutional erasure of Indigenous voices while simultaneously asserting the ongoing presence of Iñupiaq people. She has been outspoken about the role of the artist in confronting environmental issues, particularly the impact of climate change on Arctic Indigenous communities. Her participation in projects such as "Insidious Rising" (2018), reflects her commitment to using art as a medium for ecological and social critique.

While Warden initially gained recognition through rap and performance, her recent shift toward poetry has marked a new phase in her artistic itinerary.

In 2013, she began a poem-writing project based on Twitter's 140-character message format. In 2017, the Anchorage Museum collected the best of these poems in the form of a book, which it published

[1] Also previously known as Allison Akootchook Warden, or sometimes, Allison Warden.

[2] https://www.aisawarden.com

as part of its creative project "The Lab project". Entitled *Taimanisaaq/Akkupak = (Long Long Time Ago/Right Now): Twitter Poems*[3], this collection is an exchange between the poet and her 87,000 followers, in which she asserts her contemporary identity, steeped in ancestral knowledge:

she holds up the sky
remembers how families are related
the old old stories run through her veins her heart
beats steady
for our village[4]

She also bears witness to the individual and collective struggles of her people, which she experiences on a daily basis, as in this poem:

holding a root
so deep
bracing our souls
for the unadulterated truth our great great grandparents envelop us
"hold tight, hold strong[5]*"*

Finally, she also offers a positive vision of the relationship between the Iñupiaq and the rest of the world, inviting her followers to imagine the best for their future:

when your decolonized mind sees the madness
the disease
take a moment to transform it
visualize the most healed version
hold that space[6]

Her work has also been featured in various literary journals, including *Poetry* and *Anomaly*, where she explores themes of knowledge transmission, territorial acknowledgment, and the embodied experience of language. Her 2022 poem "we acknowledge ourselves[7]", published in *Poetry*[8], offers a reflection on Indigenous self-recognition in the context of colonial geographies, while "let's try it this way for the last ones[9]", published in *Anomaly*[10] (2023), interrogates the possibilities of resistance through linguistic and artistic practice.

Aisa Warden's contributions to Alaska's cultural landscape extend beyond her artistic production; she has also been active as a teacher and mentor, working with young artists and students across the Arctic to foster new approaches to Indigenous storytelling. Her recognition includes the Rasmuson Foundation Award for Performance (2012) and the Alaska Governor's Award for the Arts and Humanities (2015), cementing her status as one of the most significant contemporary artists to emerge from Alaska.

Her practice embodies the dynamic and evolving nature of Iñupiaq identity, resisting the idea that Indigenous culture belongs solely to the past. Instead, Warden asserts a vision of Alaska Native art that is fluid, experimental, and deeply engaged with the pressing social, political, and environmental realities of the Arctic. As Alaska continues to be a site of contested narratives— about the climate crisis, resource extraction, and Indigenous sovereignty—Aisa Warden's work stands as a testament to the role of art in shaping new futures while honoring ancestral knowledge.

Context of the interview with Aisa Warden

The following interview with Aisa Warden was conducted at the Université du Québec à Montréal in November 2024, during her visit to Quebec, invited by the UArctic Chair on Images, Perceptions

[3] Allison Akootchook Warden, *Taimanisaaq/Akkupak = (Long Long Time Ago/Right Now): Twitter Poems* (internal limited edition), Anchorage, Anchorage Museum, 2017, 135 p.

[4] 2017, p. 37.

[5] 2017, p. 87.

[6] 2017, p. 123.

[7] During her visit to Montreal, Aisa Warden recorded a reading of this poem, which can be consulted at : https://youtu.be/MrTR1XVi3-A?si=hbZs0EVTq-uocdcp

[8] Allison Akootchook Warden, "we acknowledge ourselves", *Poetry*, July-August 2022, online, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/158110/we-acknowledge-ourselves>, accessed March 6, 2025.

[9] She also recorded a lecture of this poem, which can be found at : https://youtu.be/Z_ExW9uDnVs?si=n4_BZ_YwVk4uU3uS

[10] Allison Akootchook Warden, "let's try it this way for the last ones", *Anomaly* 36, 2023, online, <https://anmly.org/ap36/allison-akootchook-waden/>, accessed March 6, 2025.

and Mediations of the Arctic. A video version of the interview we conducted is available[11], and the following transcript has been authorized by the artist.

In this interview, Warden offers an exploration of the intersections between language, identity, performance, and cultural continuity in contemporary Indigenous artistic expression. As a multifaceted creator—poet, visual artist, musician, and performance artist—Warden challenges conventional representations of Inuit people, particularly within spaces that often frame Indigenous cultures. Her work seeks to disrupt these narratives by asserting the enduring and evolving nature of Iñupiaq identity in the present.

A central theme of the discussion is Warden's deep engagement with the Iñupiaq language, which she describes as an untranslatable and an irreplaceable vessel of cultural knowledge. While not a fluent speaker herself, she integrates the language into her artistic practice, emphasizing its emotional and historical weight. For Warden, language is not only a means of communication but also a marker of a worldview that cannot be fully rendered in English. In this sense, her work functions as an act of cultural preservation and transmission, ensuring that Iñupiaq remains at the forefront of artistic production for future generations.

Beyond language, Warden addresses the exoticization and romanticization of Inuit people, particularly in academic settings where Arctic researchers may engage with Inuit culture from a distance, often without direct interaction with Inuit individuals. She recounts a performance in Montreal[12], at the end of which she invited Arctic scholars to physically touch her, later remarking on the irony that many of them had dedicated their careers to studying the Arctic without ever having interacted with an Inuit person in a tangible way. This performative gesture underscores a broader theme in her work: the importance of embodied presence in reshaping narratives about Inuit life and identity.

Adaptation and innovation emerge as additional concepts in Warden's reflections. Drawing on both historical and contemporary examples, she illustrates how Iñupiaq culture has always been dynamic and responsive to change. From her early engagement with rap—an art form she adapted into an Iñupiaq context—to the ways in which her ancestors embraced new technologies while maintaining cultural integrity, Warden positions her artistic practice as a continuation of this tradition of resilience and reinvention. In her view, there is no rupture between past and present Inuit existence; rather, there is an ongoing continuity, wherein new artistic and technological forms are integrated into a distinctly Iñupiaq framework.

While Warden does not explicitly define her work as political, she acknowledges that her mere presence in certain spaces—whether as a performer, an artist, or simply an Inuit woman existing in a globalized world—becomes a political act. The rarity of Inuit representation in many cultural and academic spaces results in encounters where her identity forces a re-evaluation of assumptions about the North and its people. Yet, rather than approaching these moments through confrontation, she embraces them with humour, generosity, and engagement, creating opportunities for dialogue and rethinking the psychological and cultural boundaries that often define Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations.

This interview offers a perspective on the lived realities of contemporary Inuit artists, challenging conceptions of Arctic life while emphasizing the agency of Indigenous artists in shaping their own narratives. Warden's insights contribute to broader discussions in Inuit studies, Arctic research, and performance studies, providing a compelling case for the role of art in asserting cultural presence, resisting erasure, and fostering new understandings of contemporary Inuit identity.

Interview with Aisa Warden

DC: Aisa Warden, your music and performances often include Iñupiaq words. Which importance do you give to language, and which effect does the use of Iñupiaq have on your public?

AW: I am not a fluent speaker of Iñupiaq, though, sometimes in my dreams, I make very beautiful, eloquent Iñupiaq speeches. I grew up around the language and around elders who spoke only Iñupiaq—elders who grew up in sod houses, completely on the land. I was very fortunate to be immersed in this environment as a very young person; I remember how they were in their spirit. That is where my performance comes from: embodying who they are.

[11] https://youtu.be/wxtSo1RgwHk?si=hr8Bu4mBBzg6a_on

[12] On November 4th, 2024, at the Université du Québec à Montréal during an event called "Journée de la recherche nordique".

Language is our unique fingerprint on the Earth. It is unique to who we are, setting us apart from all others, whether in Uganda or in Montreal. It's a unique worldview that is only Iñupiaq, specifically Kaktovikamiut, an island in the Arctic Ocean. We have our own dialect, but we are related to all Inuit. As circumpolar people, we are one.
Language is important in my work because I think of the future. I think of young people, fifty years from now, who will engage with my work. I want them to hear the language and know that it was at the forefront of my thoughts and my practice. It expresses our worldview in a way that cannot be translated to English. We don't translate into English. While we can negotiate meanings, many aspects of our identity have no direct translation. I place the language at the forefront so that it can be experienced. The feeling is there—you don't have to understand what I am saying to feel who we are, deep in your bones.

DC: Today, you did a performance at the university in front of Arctic researchers and professors. At the end of the performance, you asked them to touch you. After that you told me: "All those people know about the Arctic, but they never touched an Inuit woman." What do you want to express thanks to this gesture?

AW: Iñupiaq people live on the very edge of the world. I consider us to exist on the very edge of the psychological mind frame of people. We are often romanticized— viewed through a "fantalogical" lens, as human beings living in the cold, in snow houses, inside the ground, in ice houses, and surviving on the very edges of everything, in the very coldest places. I find that, in academia especially, our people are often subject to romanticization. There is a tendency to view us as a people of the past, largely because there has been limited direct engagement with us. This creates a dissociation between our present selves and the idea of who we are, which is often rooted in the past. But for me, there is no separation between the past and the present. There was no break in our identity—only continuity. Even though it seems like there should have been a break in who we are, there wasn't. I am the 2024 version of my great-great-great-grandmother. If my great-great-great-great-great-grandmother were alive in 2024, she would be a performance artist, a poet, a visual artist, creating regalia that reflects the time. Our culture is one of adaptation.
Let me share one more story about our elders. When the first photocopying machine was introduced, my great-uncle bought a huge one and had it shipped to our village. It was a huge object —imagine this in the 1970s, one of the first prototypes. He bought it because he didn't want to wear glasses, so he used the copy machine himself to enlarge the text. He was in his 80s when he did this. My other great-uncle, who had difficulties in hearing, rigged up a light to his phone so it would blink when it rang. He attached an emergency light, like those on ambulances, to his phone. Every time the phone rang, it would flash around his house. He had two lights, blinking rapidly to alert him when the phone was ringing. We would take whatever the Western world had to offer in terms of technology, adapt it, and make it Iñupiaq. So, when I engage in performance art, visual art, or poetry, I do the same.

DC: You first decided to perform rap, which was also a kind of adaptation into the Iñupiaq context. Why did you decide to choose this musical genre?

AW: I don't rap as much anymore, but I started about 32 years ago. It was a way to connect with young people. Rap has a strong link to poetry. Now, I've transitioned explicitly into a poet, because I like the power of the words on paper, quietly awaiting to be digested by people at their own pace. Yesterday, I gave a student a piece of my work to read at her own pace, to see if the tone would be appropriate for the group. I appreciated how it was done with her own permission—she could engage with the work in her own way. It wasn't barrelled at her like a machine gun of words that she had to absorb in one sitting. She had her own agency to engage with it, take a break, go for a walk, come back to it, read a little more. She could choose to read it or not; it wasn't a challenge I was imposing on her to help me understand the audience. She could've said: "I can't handle it now, but I will read it this weekend". There is more flexibility in how poetry engages with the audience, compared to live performance where you're either present with me or not. When you are in the audience, you take what is given to you, with no opportunity for dialogue on how you take it in—unless it's a video, where you can pause and reflect.
In the 90's, my cousins were listening to rap, and I thought: "Why are you listening to this? It has nothing to do with who we are". Then I saw a performance, and once again, it had nothing to do with our experience. Yet, I like hip hop and rap because it's a universal language with an *ethos* that transcends culture. There's an understanding that it's a medium anyone can use as a way to express their identity,

issues, or politics. The framework of hip hop and rap is adaptable to any culture. I've created my own version that's deeply Iñupiaq. For instance, I rap as the animals, as an ancestor, as an elder that came from the future. I've used rap in many ways, but it hasn't followed a linear arc. It's a wonderful medium.
With poetry, I love the quietness of taking words. It's like sewing, quietly stitching the words onto a page, imagining someone, like this student, quietly taking it in, wearing it in that moment. It's such a private, intimate experience. Instead of: "POW! POW POW! OUUUAAAARRR!" and "AHHHHHHHH!", it's more like: "Oh! a book, ohhh." You can have the same effect, but in a quiet way that gives the reader permission to get engaged at their own pace.

DC: But you also like to read aloud your poetry?

AW: Yes! That becomes a performance. I didn't expect that initially. I recall that, a long time ago, an article was published about me, and it referred to me as: "Spoken word poet Allison Akootchook Warden." I thought: "I don't do spoken word. I've never done spoken word. Where does this come from?" So, I decided to embrace that label because I found it amusing.
I have written poetry throughout my life, but recently, I have been publishing more. I was reading poetry about a year ago in Stuttgart, Germany, and I didn't realize, when I started to read it aloud, that it would transform into such a performance. I didn't expect that when I read it, that it would just come to life and become its own thing. I expected it would simply be reading, but instead, it transformed into its own form of art, and I enjoy that.
There is a certain power to it, but I don't write with that in mind. I write for the person who wants to be at a café or at home on their couch with a blanket. They can engage with it how they want. And if it translates to performance, then… well, it will, because I am inherently a performer. I have been performing since I was 8, so everything I do will naturally have a performance element. Even this right now!

DC: Do you consider yourself an Iñupiaq artist, or an artist?

AW: I am Iñupiaq. I am also half Missourian, but I was raised as an Iñupiaq. I grew up in the ways of the Iñupiaq. My mother was almost scientific in her approach to raising me, ensuring that I was truly Iñupiaq. She made sure I knew how to sew, that I understood our values, and she was very strategic in how she raised me to ensure that I was carrying forward the family tree, especially. I don't know everything. Some of my cousins hold different aspects of our culture, and we each carry what we can as best as we can.
I am Iñupiaq. I am Iñupiaq, and I also am an artist. When I think of my village, which I didn't grow up in, but to which I belong as a tribal member, most people are artistic. Many of my family members are very artistic. Did they choose to pursue it professionally, in the same big and somewhat crazy way that I did, travelling all over the world? No. But they do create at home, using various materials. I've heard it say: "Our art is not separate from our culture". It's simply part of who we are as a people. Our art is embedded in our clothing, in everything that we are. There is no separation. So, I would say that most Iñupiaq people are artists, though they may not pursue it relentlessly as a profession, which is a very specific path. But I am pursuing it, and others are as well.

DC: Most of your work has a political content. How do you incorporate values or points of view in a contemporary art form?

AW: I don't think in terms of politics, but it just happens to be that my body is political. Me being in a space where I'm less than 0.0 something percent of the global population is political. Me being an Indigenous woman is political. When I come into a space, I am simply myself; I am Iñupiaq. That act of being Iñupiaq is perceived in a political way, because I am seen as an exotic creature, almost like an anomaly, within the broader global world. It's like: "Oh! Eskimo! Eskimo! Oh! I've never met one of you." Unless I am in an Inuit community, I am often the only Inuit, or the first one ever to enter that space. That alone becomes a political gesture—just by entering a space. People are compelled to respond to my presence. I'm not forcing anything on them; I am just entering the room, I am hungry, I want to do what humans do. I have ten fingers and ten toes, I am getting a coffee. I don't know what I am doing. I am simply there. But when they find out where I'm from, it puts them in a position which suddenly creates a relationship. Often, it's like: "I never thought about people from there, but now you're here, you're real, you have blood, and you want a coffee, just like me. You're alive." It triggers all these thoughts in them. I can see it every time— "Oh! You're real," and I'm just

like: "Yes, I'm real, and I'm hungry. Is there a place for me here?"
It creates a reaction within people that forces them to reconsider the very psychological boundaries of what they thought humanity was. I'm from the furthest edge of a place they never imagined people could be from, but here I am. I exist in the abstract, I am far away, romanticized, and positioned in the past. But suddenly, I'm wearing funky clothes, I'm in the space and I want cheese! Just being myself in any space is a political act. So, I approach it with love and kindness, again and again and again and again and again and again and again and again and again and again and again and again and again and again. That's part of being a member of an Indigenous people in this larger global world, and I am at peace with that. I think it's fun; I make it fun. When I was 13, it wasn't so much fun, no. Now, at my age, it's fun, it's beautiful, it's a wonderful thing. The kind of excitement that people have sometimes from meeting an Inuit is so sweet.
I might be the only Iñupiaq some people will ever meet. When I return to my village, I find it funny to say: "I went to Stuttgart and I told everyone we are all the same, all like me". And they respond: "You did that again!" Then they laugh. I think it's fun to engage with people and let them have a little taste of who we are.

INTERVIEW WITH LYN TRODAHL CHYNOWETH

BEN FERGUSON

BF: Lyn, your father was a missionary with the Moravian Church. As a result, you had the unique experience of being raised in a small village near Bethel, Alaska. That area along the Kuskokwim River is fairly secluded, even today, with no roads in or out. Could you set the background by explaining what you remember of the place itself and the local community?

LTC: Actually, we were not even in a village. Bethel was the nearest 'city.' About 17 miles up river was a village called Kwethluk. Travelling east on the Kwethluk River about three miles brought you to Nunapitsinghak, the site of the Moravian Children's Home where I spent my early years. Yes, no roads in or out (nor are there any in Bethel today, despite its growth.)

Let me give you a bit of background of my family and the Moravian mission there. The Moravians were known from the 18th century for their global outreach. So, when Alaska was purchased, the government (and others) began to take an interest in the territory. Sheldon Jackson reached out to the Moravians to see if they would be interested in working with the native population in the Kuskokwim River Delta. They were, and a mission field began (in the 1880's).

My grandfather went to Alaska as a handyman on the mission field in 1907. My grandmother, newly widowed, went up to teach on the mission field in 1909. My mother was born in Bethel in 1914. She came 'outside' to school (high school and college) and went back to Bethel to see her family before she was to return to NC. That was 1936. Dad arrived, a single man coming to take over the youth ministry in Alaska, and they married in 1938.

BF: So, were you and your siblings born in Bethel?

LTC: My sister and one brother were born in Bethel. My other brother was born in Wisconsin while the family was on furlough. In those days, missionaries went to places like Alaska for 7 years, then got a yearlong furlough. When they returned to Alaska from that furlough, they moved to the Moravian Children's Home where my dad eventually assumed the superintendent role. I came along a couple years later and yes, I too was born in Bethel. It was the only hospital around that region.

BF: Tell me about the Children's Home.

LTC: The Kuskokwim River has many villages, all of them populated by natives who hunt and fish to survive. There were few schools. Even the Yup'ik language was undocumented until missionaries began to translate the Bible into the native language. In 1926, the Moravian Children's Home was established. It was a home for orphaned children or children whose parents were unable to care for them (tuberculosis was rampant). We were there in the 40's to mid-50's. As I mentioned, the home was on an isolated site called Nunapitsinghak, meaning "Great little land."

The home consisted of a boys' dorm (which also housed a caretaker's apartment and one school room for grades 1-3),[1] some buildings for the 'plant' (power house, workshop, etc.), the superintendent's house, and the girls' dorm (which also housed quarters for staff, one school room for grades 4-8,[2] the kitchen, the laundry, and the dining room). There was also a greenhouse, outhouses and a small building where we sometimes played. In 1954 a chapel was built.

We were very isolated. Our only transportation in and out was on the river. Boats in the summer could navigate the rivers and sloughs. Typically, currents were very strong. Drowning was a relatively common occurrence in the region. In the winter, we had dog teams and sleds. We had a tractor to help with heavy chores around the plant. We also skated, snowshoed and cross-country skied, but that was largely for chores (hunting, emptying the rabbit traps, getting wood) or transportation, rather than recreation.

[1] Typically, ages 6-8 in the US educational system.

[2] Ages 9-13.

View of the former Moravian Children's Home at Nunapitsinghak, on the Kwethluk River in Alaska
© Lyn Trodahl Chynoweth

I do remember a toboggan that we used for fun (and sometimes for transportation). Travel was essentially impossible in the spring at breakup, and in the fall as the river was freezing. During those times, the only way to get in or out was by foot on the tundra. Communication was difficult too, and sporadic. Dad was a ham radio operator, so he had that source of information from the 'outside' maybe once or twice a day. But we had no radios, no tv's, no telephones, no stores, no movies. We got mail sporadically, maybe once a month, sometimes a little more often (oh, the joys of getting letters from relatives and pen pals!). We had books (but surely not a full library), a victrola with a few records. We learned early how to entertain ourselves.

BF: That certainly is an interesting upbringing. What was your relationship like with the Yup'ik children who lived in the home? Were you and your siblings close with them, or were you kept apart? Was communication ever a barrier?

LTC: Good question, Ben. I never thought of us as anything other than close. We were all one big family. I suppose, when you ask if we were kept apart, we were to the degree that we lived with our parents in the superintendent's house. So, we slept in our own bedrooms and usually ate together as a family. But for all else, we were totally like brothers and sisters. We went to school together. We worked together. We played together. We had group events that included us all. And we shared our parents with all the children. As an example, Mother would often be at the girls' dorm helping, maybe tucking the girls in at night and telling stories.

There were lots of chores to do to keep the home running, and we all took part in those. The boys joined in to feed the dogs, gather wood, pump water up from the river, do maintenance on buildings and machines, clean and gut the fish, skin the rabbits, empty the honey pots (yes, we had indoor toilets, but they were not flush toilets so needed emptying daily), etc. The girls did the cooking, baking, cleaning, mending, ironing, canning, etc. We all had to learn age- and gender-specific jobs (yes, back then there were very gender-specific roles). The school curriculum was much aligned with what schools in the "outside" were using, but at the home it was necessary to teach basic survival skills too. And yes, I was just a little girl, but I had to learn how to dust and darn socks and knead bread and do things like that.

As for the language, I regret that we never learned Yup'ik. Some of the children did speak English when they came, but some spoke only the native dialect. It was mandatory that we speak English, so we never learned much of the Yup'ik language.

I expect my brothers learned a few words that would not have been repeatable in English!

BF: You go into some interesting detail on daily life. I want to go back to something that particularly stuck out to me, and that is the isolation you mentioned. Margaret Murie noted the same thing in her memoir on her early years in Fairbanks, *Two in the Far North*. She particularly talked about the spring breakup of the Chena River. For Murie, that was the moment when her community was reconnected with the outside world, and she considered it a major event every year. You said that there was a major problem with drowning from the river currents, I'm guessing in the Kuskokwim. What was your family's, and your community's, relationship like with the river?

LTC: The Kuskokwim is the second largest river in Alaska. In the early days, it was the only way people could get in and out of the villages (other than walking across the tundra). The Kuskokwim was dredged to Bethel in 1914 to accommodate larger vessels coming up from the coast, which opened opportunities for more transportation of goods. We were dependent on that, so that our annual order of supplies that we needed to survive could get up the river to Bethel.

The Kuskokwim and the other rivers and tributaries were a lifeline–the center of life. We were totally dependent. They provided food, water and transportation during summer and winter. The fish provided fresh protein and adequate supply for smoking, drying or canning to have it all winter when food was not as plentiful. We pumped water from the river (the Kwethluk, in our case) to fill the tanks that we had at the Children's Home. It was our only source of water (yes, we drank it since we 'purified' it with clorox). The tundra was full of wildlife that also depended on the water…not to mention the plants (berries were a source of vitamins we needed). Of course, we travelled on the river by boat in the summer and by sled in the winter. The people in the villages had the same dependencies.

We had a healthy respect for the waters. Currents were strong and treacherous. Lives were lost even in summer months. Then, as the temperatures got colder, the rivers began to freeze. But freezing took a long time. During that period, the river was neither good for boat travel nor sled or vehicle travel. My grandfather, in December of '37, thought the river was frozen enough to accommodate his truck from Bethel, but he went through the ice and drowned. That is just one incident. There were many.

Breakup in the spring was a joyful sign of warmer weather and longer daylight hours. But the process of breakup could be treacherous too. It often caused flooding as large ice chunks got stuck. We waited for nature to take its course.

As for isolation caused by all this? I am sure we had more visitors in Alaska in the summer than in the winter. Surely boat travel was a bit easier and faster than dog teams in the cold of winter. But I personally don't remember much in the way of difference in life. We were isolated from the rest of the world, but we were a large and close 'family.' There was always the staff and the 40 or so children in the care of the Home. So, we had 'community.' That was likely adequate for a young girl. I'm sure the adults were much more attuned to the lack of family and friends from previous lives in the lower 48 and were much more negatively affected by the seven years away. For me, it was all I knew, really.

The one thing I know my parents were focused on about our 'isolation' was whether or not we kids would have adequate table manners when we went to the lower '48. I suppose not being exposed to many different households and social events caused them to worry about us when we did travel outside. Would we behave properly? A tough thing to teach when our exposure was so limited.

Someone asked me recently if we had any visibility to what was going on in the world. The answer is that we didn't have a lot of contact with the rest of the world. We didn't have newscasts or newspapers or radios to provide that kind of information. The ham radio connection was the only source, really, of information other than the letters that I've already said came sporadically.

BF: I can imagine that your social instincts and community mores would have been different from those Outside, even if you had a large family surrounding you. There has been a decent amount of documentation on how some children can become "bushy," or lose social ease when living in rural Alaska, receding into themselves. How would you describe your first experiences heading Outside Alaska, or even into the larger towns when travelling?

LTC: The first experiences on the trip out (a long slog down the unpaved AlCan Highway)[3] were exciting because it was something different. As we entered the Lower 48, we stopped to see / meet relatives and friends across the country. Every experience was a new one for me. Our parents had taught us good manners, both in terms of social engagement as well as with table manners and the like. But all the stuff we saw was new to me. Stores! Cars everywhere! People! As we settled into the new schools, my social issues were little kid issues. I couldn't understand the lives of the other kids. Who ever heard of a dad who was a mailman or a banker or (more commonly) a farmer. There were so many kids in my class (18), and they all had clothes that were very different from mine. I was in 4th grade. I pretty quickly adapted and made friends. The transition was very much different for my siblings, I'm sure.

BF: I want to switch gears a little bit. You mention how isolated your family was from life in the Lower 48 during your time in Alaska. What about the Moravian missions globally? Was your family occasionally in touch with Moravian communities Outside, or stories and reports from those communities? Was there perhaps any cooperation between missions, or was the Kuskokwim mission left to its own devices in how it accomplished its goals?

LTC: Thanks for that question. Surely there were other missionaries up and down the river with whom my parents communicated. There was the headquarters of the Alaska mission in Bethel and other pastors and teachers in other villages. They were all in communication. For a while, one of the pastors had a plane, so he'd occasionally show up for a visit. The Alaska mission reported to the Moravian Church in the Lower 48. So, we would have visits from the leadership in Bethlehem from time to time. And other Moravian personnel (bishops and medical missionaries) would visit from time to time. My Dad wrote a daily diary of what happened at the Children's Home (it is in the Moravian Archives in Bethlehem). So, though we were isolated, communication certainly did occur.

The other way we were in touch was by way of generous gifts. Often a family or a church or a group in the Lower 48 would 'adopt' a child at the Children's Home. They would keep tabs of that child's growth and interests and be sure to send gifts at Christmas and birthday. There were also mission barrels that would arrive at the Home. They would be full of clothing, shoes, personal care items that we would get and distribute among all the children. Our benefactors were abundant.

BF: It sounds like you had a fairly tight-knit Moravian community in the region, and I'm sure the institutional support made you feel connected to the outside world to a certain extent. What about the missions in Europe and elsewhere. Were you aware of the Moravian Church's broad reach as a child, and do you think your parents had any connection with those missions, or was the Alaska mission likely isolated locally and to the institutions in Pennsylvania?

LTC: The Moravian Church is known for its interest and success in mission work throughout the world. In the early 1730's, as the church was revived in Europe, missionaries were sent throughout the world. I am sure that we talked about that in our family. The mission board kept in touch with all the missionaries who were serving globally and wrote regular updates in newsletter form about the work being done. These updates were shared with all.

As for direct connections? Yes, my parents had friends who were in Central America for sure – friends from Seminary and other places. Writing letters was the main method of communicating, and both my parents corresponded in that way to many people.

But, Ben, I need to describe how the Moravians successfully managed to develop the mission field. While there was the underlying intent of spreading the gospel, the way in which they did (or intended) was to first get to know the people. That is to say, they needed to understand and respect the various cultures and traditions of the people to whom they ministered. That knowledge, that integration, was needed before they could introduce the religious teachings. So, interaction with missionaries in different cultures may or may not have served a direct purpose. All the energy and time that my parents had spent in day-to-day activities required to keep the children safe, fed and learning, all the while respecting the culture from which they came and learning from it. Isolation perhaps was a benefit in achieving that, since there were few distractions other than to manage to live and care for those for whom they were responsible.

[3] A highway that runs through Canada, connecting Alaska to the Contiguous United States.

BF: That sounds like a sensible approach. I know that different groups have vastly different reputations in their mission work, and perhaps this intent to learn from the people as you teach them has been beneficial to Moravian success? Also, what are some of the things that you and your family learned from the Yup'ik people that enabled you to better work with them?

LTC: We had to learn everything from the Yupiit. The missionaries had to learn how to survive in that environment. While much learning was specific to survival, along with it came appreciating a new culture. Simple interaction with people was different, so we had to learn how to interact effectively with them (and they with us). Travel was specific to the climate, and the Yupiit were good teachers. None of us would ever be Yup'ik but we learned how to be people that could be accepted.

Our dependence on the Yupiit made us appreciative of all they went through to raise families and survive for generations. The missionaries were friendly and kind, and they knew that they would not be the same as the Yupiit, and that was okay. We respected and learned from each other. In all interactions, we attempted to accommodate their culture into our thinking and actions.

BF: Were the Yup'ik communities around you still living communally in *qalgi*, with the men all sharing a single space and the women in housing around this space, or had they moved to single-family homes by that point?

LTC: The Yup'ik communities around us definitely had single-family homes. The men still had kashuges where they met, but they had families in their own homes. We had little exposure to people in the villages, other than sometimes we had helpers, mostly Kwethluk men and women who would come to the Children's Home to help us learn how to do things or to teach us about Yup'ik culture / habits. Again, Ben, other than my father going to the villages to visit and provide some pastoral support and occasionally going to Bethel for medical emergencies or some supplies, we were at the Children's Home keeping our little space running. Even the questions you ask make me realize that the kind of total isolation in which we lived and survived is totally incomprehensible in today's world.

BF: It does seem that you were quite isolated, but you also had that strong community around you to make up for it, which is something that so many of us lack today. Having experienced a world that over the past few decades has grown outward but more introverted toward technology, do you look nostalgically at that small community and the purpose that it gave? Or do you struggle with those memories of isolation? Also, speaking of purpose, you mention staying busy with chores, and with setting traps for rabbits. Are there any skills that you can look back on from your time in Alaska that have stuck with you and your family? I'm sure you all can do wonders in the kitchen with some limited resources and wild game!

LTC: Your comments are sound. Yes, we were isolated from the outside community. But the community at the Children's Home was very much a supportive community. 8 adults and 40-ish children who lived and survived and thrived together. To this day, I keep in touch with several friends from that era, and I value the friendships forged so long ago. In my small girl's world, the isolation was simply what was. I have no struggles at all with the memories I have. I am not sure if my siblings would respond in the same way.

What did we learn? We all had daily chores. We learned how to entertain ourselves. We read…a lot. We played games, some of which were real games, but many we just invented. I am still perfectly content to sit in a quiet place and read a book of any kind. We didn't have a source for new clothes, so we had to alter or mend what we did have. YEP: I still darn our socks when the need arises. I even have the old darning egg. We caught, grew and preserved food. So, today I cannot play a trivia game that focuses on tv or radio show characters (who is Howdy Doody?), but I can do a number of other things. Well, I can't skin a rabbit, but my brother can. I would not be uncomfortable having to scale, gut and bone a fish, though I don't do it enough to be good at it. But here are a few learnings / actions that have never left me–most related to food:

I bake all our bread (as my siblings do or did). We grow and can vegetables and fruits–my husband and I both still do that despite the fact that we feed just the two of us. We throw away no food if there is anything that is not spoiled and usable for something. When the milk is sour, I make biscuits or pancakes or put it in the next batch of bread. There is always a sourdough starter ready to go. Veggies that are getting old get cooked more aggressively and added to soup or a stir-fry. I work at a food pantry here in Bethlehem and am totally sympathetic to food

insecurity. But when the last 4 peppers are wrinkled and the volunteers decide to toss them, I yell. A wrinkled pepper in my youth would have been like candy! Do something creative with it! Cut off the spoiled section of that potato. Use the part of the onion that is still salvageable. They laugh at me… but some have started using imperfect foods more creatively. And when our clients balk a little, I offer suggestions of use, rather than pass up an item that can still add something to a dish. And yes, I've gone back to Bethel to cook for tour groups. I did whip up a caribou stew that even the Yupiit approved!

BF: So, what would you say made up most of your food at the time? Your family trapped rabbits and hunted caribou. I'm assuming you grew vegetables in the short summer season with its long days. If the market in Anchorage is any indication, the vegetables grew very, very large due to the 24-hour sunlight. Is this the case?

There is a recently published book entitled *The Whale and the Cupcake*, by Julia O'Malley, and she travels throughout Alaska learning about the creative push and pull between this exotic, subsistence-style living that you mention (the whale) and the comforts of industrialized foods from the Lower 48 (the cupcake). One of her primary examples is the long-shelf-life, boxed, cake mixes that are out of fashion in much of the Contiguous U.S. but continue to be sold in high numbers in Alaska. And those cake mixes might have subsistence ingredients like animal fat substituted for butter and gathered salmonberries for flavour. Does your experience in some ways relate to this idea?

LTC: Your questions always make me realize that a little comment leads to misunderstanding. Yes, my family (the kids at the Children's Home) trapped rabbits. We did not hunt large game on a regular basis. Because of our status as a home for children, if someone caught a moose or caribou illegally or it was killed in a railroad accident somewhere in Alaska, we might get it…quite happily. The Yupiit could hunt and fish because of their subsistence status (and we bought some of their 'catch' to supplement what we were able to net). But let me be totally clear. We did NOT have any stores. There was one in Bethel, I suppose, but that was a long way away. We ordered food that came in by boat in June. That was our yearly supply of food. Yes, really, our yearly supply of food and necessities, which included things from toilet paper and toothpicks to building supplies. The main boatload came in June, with a smaller shipment sometimes in August. When I tell people that, they are incredulous. But for the whole children's home, ordering barrels of powdered milk, barrels of split peas and dried beans, barrels of powdered eggs, cases of canned veggies and fruits and cereals…that was fine. We shared all the supplies we got. As a side note, when my parents went back up to Bethel to work in the late 60's, they ordered annually too, but Mother complained about the fact that, as a couple, they got sick of Corn Flakes and lemon Jell-O[4] (hints at a lack of variety when feeding only two). What supplies we didn't get from the order, we grew (yes, there was a garden, and we did grow fresh vegetables, but feeding 50 mouths made short shrift of what we grew) or caught. Oh, by the way, since we were on the river, not the ocean, we didn't have whales or seals hanging around.

Fish was by far the biggest protein staple. We were able to catch as many fish as possible (smelt, whitefish, king salmon…). We ate it fresh, dried it, smoked it, and canned it for use all year. The meats that I remember are the occasional rabbit, the occasional game (moose, caribou, reindeer, ptarmigan, goose), and Spam…lots of Spam.[5]

Berry picking was a special treat. Having fresh fruit was fantastic, and it was a fun time. We had blueberries, currants, cranberries, blackberries and those delightful salmonberries! Those were our fresh fruits. We ate them, made pies, made jams, and canned them if the crop was particularly abundant.

I have gone back to Alaska to tour and to Bethel to cook for tour groups (2013 and 2019). I shipped up some things I would need that I knew would be either expensive or unavailable there. And I always arranged to have either moose or caribou available for one main meal and salmon on another evening. And we always tried to give a berry picking experience too! But I did go to the large grocery that exists today in Bethel. The stores are pretty well stocked, though very expensive by Lower 48 standards. The best veggie options tend to be frozen. And yes, anything with a long shelf life is really important. All the dry goods have to be shipped up, and people in the villages don't go on shopping sprees daily, like we can do, if needed. So, long shelf-life items are a necessity, not a luxury.

[4] A popular American breakfast cereal and a gelatin dessert, respectively.

[5] A well-known brand of canned meat that was made popular in the U.S. during World War II.

BF: It's quite interesting that Spam has continued to hang around in places that are logistically difficult to reach, evolving with Alaskan and Pacific islander cultures into creations like Spam musubi (a sort of Spam/sushi fusion). I knew that the military had made Spam ubiquitous around their bases in Anchorage, but I had not thought about the extent to which it served as a protein source all the way out on the Kuskokwim. But that makes perfect sense.
It's funny how some things change, and yet other things never do. I can imagine the difference that a supermarket has made in Bethel, and I have seen the immediate difference in lifestyles that have occurred since the arrival of Costco and cheap Amazon deliveries in Fairbanks. What were the biggest differences you noticed when you went back, and what were the things that you were glad to see had stayed the same?

LTC: Just having grocery stores so prevalent, even in the villages, was different. We took a hovercraft to the villages, and in one I found apples from New Zealand! My brother and his wife who live in NZ were on that trip, and I had to buy an apple for them (note: *an* apple: they were expensive!). The other thing that was very different was the availability of processed food and drinks. Lots of sodas…lots of chips…things I never even knew existed when we grew up (and not necessarily a plus!).
The lovely things that were the same were things like the Yupiit still fish as they wish and keep their fish camps and catch, dry, smoke (and now freeze) their own fish for use all year. They still go picking the gorgeous berries that the tundra yields, and wild rhubarb. They still make *akutaq*[6] (though with Crisco[7] these days).
Outside the food realm, the transportation differences were very obvious. Snow machines are all over the place, and thus the need for fuel. Fewer dog teams. But the water and sewage tanks were still prevalent at homes and / or in neighborhoods. And people in a city like Bethel are dependent on water delivery when tanks get low.

BF: The rise of modern technology has definitely made a difference in people's lives. However, there is also a backlash. More and more people believe in a lifestyle that harkens back to simpler times. Just before he died a few years ago, the French philosopher, Michel Serres, wrote a book entitled *C'était mieux avant* (*Things Were Better Before*), in which he took aim at those who advocate for this perspective. Serres explained his life growing up as a peasant in southern France, and he argued that what could perhaps be called the simple life is not as glorious as people make it out to be. He did not have access to regular plumbing and showers, maladies were not easily managed, and life was generally difficult. I am interested in hearing your perspective. Having grown up in a place and time with minimal modern technology, how do you compare the well-being of Southwest Alaska as you experienced it as a young girl versus the well-being of the place you experienced when you returned, with logistical chains being much more accessible and snow machines ubiquitous. Of course, I understand as well that you were young and somewhat sheltered within your mission.

LTC: I am not qualified to speak definitively about all this, but I'll offer some observations from my rare visits and communications. Bethel is where I visited, and it is a city with access to stores, hospitals, medical care, schools, water delivery, fuel stations, etc. There is not as much industry as you might think, so many customs remain the same as before. Cell service is quite sporadic, so our phones often did not work. But there was internet.
In the villages, little has changed, from what I know. There are schools in almost all the villages. But with little industry, people continue to fish and hunt to survive. Electricity, if available, is often through individual generators. Fuel, if needed, is expensive and not always readily available. Plumbing is often not modernized. Water still cannot be easily obtained other than from the rivers. (Even in Bethel in 2019, people on the tour group were shocked that we had to trade off doing laundry or flushing toilets until we had an emergency water delivery arranged.) Medical care is in Bethel (and a couple other larger places) only. Dentists visit villages only sporadically.
The last time I left Bethel, we flew on a native airline, from the local terminal. There was no security to pass through. There was a couple with a newborn, heading home to a remote village where there are no doctors. They were nervous, because if anything went wrong, they were on their own.

BF: Such a different existence from most of us. As rural Alaska continues to be idealized for its remoteness

[6] An Alaskan dessert, sometimes known as 'Alaskan ice cream,' that traditionally mixed wild berries, and whipped fat.

[7] A brand of vegetable 'shortening' used in place of cooking oil.

and beauty, I'm sure that it remains a dream escape in the minds of many, while also seeming frightening to others. Whether viewed as a dream or a nightmare, you were offered that rare experience of growing up in a very remote place while also getting the opportunity to experience everything that civilization had to offer after you left.
Of all the places to end up, you have found a home near Moravian University in Pennsylvania, which is not only your alma mater but also serves as a kind of heart of the Moravian Church in America, including an impressive archive. I'd like to sincerely thank you for your time and unique insights, and I'd like to leave you the space to reflect a little for our readers what it is that has kept you close to that university and its links to so many historical missions.

LTC: Our decision to retire in Bethlehem was made based on finances and proximity to children and grandchildren. I had not lived in a community close to Moravians since I left in 1972. In the interim, I had been very active on the board of the university and had been doing consulting work for the church for several decades. We had travelled to Bethlehem often. For me, coming to Bethlehem was like a homecoming. Since settling here, I've had a chance to reconnect with the entire Moravian community. One thing that has surprised me is the interest that others feel about the upbringing we had. I do speak from time to time at various events, and the interest and incredulity is amazing to me. Perhaps that has added to our impetus (my siblings and I) to write our memoirs. We have a lot drafted. Maybe, one day, we'll even publish.
Ben, it has been a lovely trip down memory lane to share our story with you. As you have led me through the reflection of my youth, I realize again how grateful I am for the time spent in Alaska. One sad thing that occurred as we were communicating is that the Moravian Children's Home, no longer in use and subject to vandalism, was burned down. Seeing the pictures of the buildings and chapel in flames was stunning and heart-breaking for me. But I treasure the memories, the friendships and the lessons learned. Understand that these are my memories, based on stories, family research and some lovely conversations with the people in Alaska (and elsewhere) with whom I stay in touch.

POINT DE VUE / *VIEWPOINT*

© Bruce Jackson, voyage avec Jean Malaurie à Nome et sa région, 1997
/ field trip with Jean Malaurie to Nome and its region, 1997

GLOBAL LITERARY ARCTIC ZONE. TOWARDS A FRAMEWORK TO STUDY LITERATURE OF THE CIRCUMPOLAR NORTH

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Introduction

The aim of this article is to present a framework for the reading of the literature of the circumpolar North (Northern Europe, Greenland, North America and Siberia) in the light of the current issues surrounding climate change, of which this geographical area is the sentinel. As the ice cap continues to melt and the Arctic turns from white to blue, this area, until now relegated to the periphery of world trade, is becoming a central hub for geopolitical issues. As a transit zone linking the Atlantic and Pacific worlds, the Arctic oceanic world is a contact zone in its own right between all the territories that depend on the coastline of the Arctic Ocean and allows today for a new cultural ecosystem to emerge.

This framework introduces the critical field of *Blue Humanities* to explore interactions between culture and the marine environment. This is a new epistemological prism based on the decentring of our view of culture through the adoption of an oceano-centric perspective. Steve Mentz has provided a synthetic definition of this emerging field: "Blue Humanities names an offshore trajectory that places cultural history in an oceanic rather than terrestrial context." (Mentz 2018: 69) This shift in perspective is reflected by the importance of the oceans in current thought about climate change. As ecosystems that challenge the living world through their regulating power (they massively absorb carbon emissions) and their erosive force, threatening coastlines and human societies, the oceans are emerging as a laboratory for measuring the consequences of climate change, its impact on societies and, more broadly, the advent of the Anthropocene as a new period in the history of the Earth. For the *Blue Humanities*, the oceans are not defined solely as geographical or physical places: rather, they are seen as cultural, political, economic, infrastructural and social spaces that are embedded in history and culture throughout the ages, as well as being spaces of mediation and a heuristic paradigm. In other terms, for the *Blue Humanities*, the oceans are both physical and cultural ecosystems.

The emerging critical field of *Blue Humanities*, theorised in Anglophone research in recent years (Dobrin 2021; Jue 2020; Mentz 2018, 2019, 2020, 2023 & 2024; Opperman 2023) invites us to look at the seas and oceans not only as privileged thematic spaces of artistic and literary representations, but also as spaces of creation and exploration. Over the last twenty years, there has been a maritime turn in the historical sciences (Buchet 2017; Cohen 2021) and then more widely in the humanities with the birth of the *Blue Humanities* and its corollaries, *New Thalassology* (Horden & Purcell, 2006), *Hydrocriticism* (Blum 2010 & 2013), *Maritime Humanities, Maritime Literary Criticism, Blue Cultural Studies* (Mentz 2009) and *Critical Ocean Studies* (DeLoughrey 2017).

Inspired by the framework of the *Blue Humanities*, my aim here is to renew a literary history traditionally structured around terrestrial (nation, region) and linguistic spaces by taking oceanic spaces (such as the

Arctic Ocean and the Barents Sea) as the structuring device of analysis. Literary history is traditionally structured around terrestrial spaces (in particular nations or regions such as Scandinavia or Europe) and linguistic spaces (history of literature delimited by a language, such as Swedish-language literature).

However, taking an ocean as unit of analysis makes it possible to go beyond these delimitations and to bring together in a corpus of study literatures written in distant languages but linked by oceanic space (see Moura 2016) and a common experience. Thus, rather than mobilising the criteria of linguistic families such as the Scandinavian, Slavic or Finno-Ugric languages, it is possible to compare Inuit, Siberian and Sámi literature and assess whether they belong to the same cultural space linked by the Arctic ocean world. Histories of Danish, Icelandic, Norwegian, Swedish, Finnish, Canadian, Japanese or Russian literature could be supplemented by an Arctic literary history. The disciplinary boundaries in the academic field between Scandinavian studies, Slavic studies and Arctic studies, traditionally structured around philological considerations, could thus be overcome. This new dialogue between area studies echoes a repositioning of the geopolitical centre of gravity of the countries of northern Europe, America and Asia towards the Arctic.

The Arctic conceptualised as an oceanic world

The Arctic can be defined through multiple disciplinary perspectives, reflecting its complex geographical, climatic, ecological, and socio-political characteristics: geographically by the Arctic Circle, climatically by the 10 °C July isotherm and the treeline, geomorphologically by permafrost, or oceanographically by sea ice and water conditions. Building on The Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme (AMAP)'s framework, the Arctic Human Development Report (AHDR) offers a human-centred definition emphasizing social, economic, and cultural dimensions and frames the Arctic in terms of human development, governance, and social well-being, highlighting how Arctic communities adapt to and are affected by environmental and global changes. The definition of the Arctic by the AHDR includes all of Alaska, northern Canada, Greenland, Iceland, the Faroe Islands, northern Fennoscandia, and selected Russian Arctic regions (AHDR, 2004). These multiple definitions demonstrate the necessity of context-sensitive, multi-layered and interdisciplinary approaches to conceptualizing the Arctic.

In her essay, "Connecting Atlantic and Pacific: Theorizing the Arctic," (2018), Nicole Waller argues that the Arctic should be understood not merely as a frozen frontier but as a dynamic maritime space that connects the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans in unprecedented ways. She explains that it is possible to theorise the Arctic as an oceanic world (Waller 2018: 257), a perspective that challenges traditional, land-centric views of the region, and invites to a Blue Humanities gaze. Waller emphasizes the Arctic's role as a transoceanic connector, particularly through the Northwest Passage, which links the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. This shift from a land-based to an oceanic perspective reimagines the Arctic as a fluid, interconnected space. Drawing from Atlantic and Pacific studies, Waller introduces the idea of the Arctic as a "contact zone" and a space of "oceanic order", akin to the historical Atlantic world: "Like the Atlantic Ocean, the Arctic Ocean gives rise to an oceanic order with global repercussions." (Waller 2018: 257)

More specifically, the literary historiography can be revised based on the mobilisation of a "transoceanic frame" (Cohen 2010: 658). This transoceanic spatial scale overturns the epistemological paradigms of literary criticism (Moura 2016) and leads to the idea of a literary Atlantic (Moura & Porra 2015; Moura 2016) which involves the consideration of oceans as a structuring category and a unifying cultural denominator for literary historiography. It thus opens stimulating perspectives for reading world literature of the Anthropocene (DeLoughrey 2019), at a time when climate change is transforming all our maps. This scale of analysis allows us to engage with the critiques of the concept of world literature formulated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (2003), Ursula K. Heise (2008) and Emily Apter (2011), considering the singularity of local spaces while highlighting the similarities in structure (patterns) between them.

The idea of drawing a global zone around the Arctic thus invites a postcolonial reading through the deconstruction of national categories in the colonial space of the Arctic (Blum 2019). In that sense Gilroy's idea of the *Black Atlantic* (1993) could be transposed to the Arctic zone. As a resonance of the *Black Atlantic*, a *Blue Arctic* would be defined as a physical ecosystem (the Arctic oceanic world in the context of climate change and the melting of sea ice and icebergs), and a cultural ecosystem (shaped by a colonial and a postcolonial history in the circumpolar North). This cultural ecosystem as a common space would link, by a geographical marine

unit (a transoceanic frame), territories that national historiographies had separated.

Through an interplay of scales that renews spatialisation in literary theory, one could argue for a *Global Literary Arctic Zone,* which will bring together the literatures of the *Blue Arctic*. The concept of zone can be mobilised here in a triple sense: contact zone, global/planetary zone and critical zone.

Contact zone

The idea of *zone* gives new meanings to the delimited space as it refers to the notion of *contact zone* developed by Mary Louise Pratt as "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other" (Pratt 1991: 33). It can be viewed as a heterogeneous network of actors (human and non-human) whose interactions cannot be reduced to a binary pattern of domination and resistance (Pratt 2022). Following Mary Louise Pratt's idea that a contact zone is a place of unequal exchange, the "transculturation" that takes place there should be thought of not as a simple phenomenon of assimilation, but as a redistribution of capacities for action, where each element participates in the reconfiguration of power relations. The contact zone includes interactions between humans and non-human agents, as Donna Haraway has previously argued (Haraway 2008, 214–220). Pratt refers to an "interspecies contact zone" (Pratt 2022: 131) and invites us to analyse these interconnections in terms of the "force field" (Pratt 2022: 136) that runs through it. In other words, the contact zone is not a theatre where pre-established conflicts are played out, but a laboratory of experimentation where the very terms of interaction are continually being redefined.

Global/planetary zone

The adjective *global* refers to the proposal to read literature through the prism of the oceans and invites us to rethink world literature as a "poetics of planetary water" (Mentz 2023) arising from the circulation that unites all the seas of our planet. In this sense, global refers to a worldwide, planetary (Pratt 2022) dimension. However, Dipesh Chakrabarty urges us not to confuse two intertwined but distinct modes of existence: the *global* and the *planetary*. The global is the product of vast interconnected operations that have enabled modern humans to unify, in their own way, the terrestrial space under the aegis of capitalism and globalisation. But this human endeavour to organise the world conceals the insistent presence of another agent, too long relegated to the background: the Earth itself, in its planetary dimension. It is in this tension, between the fabrication of the world by humans and the resistance of the Earth, which does not allow itself to be entirely bent to their designs, that the need to rethink history, literature and art, in the era of climate change and the Anthropocene, is now being played out.

Integrating the notion of contact zones into this planetary perspective allows us to conceive of literature not only as the product of interacting human cultures, but also as the result of complex relationships between humanity and the planet itself. By recognising that literary works emerge from these expanded contact zones, we adopt a planetary approach to literature that considers the interdependencies between the human and non-human spheres in light of current environmental challenges.

Critical zone

Finally, the zone points to the idea of the *critical zone* as a fragmented and irregular space where interactions between living organisms and their environment are constantly being reworked, where stability regimes themselves prove to be precarious, discontinuous, and the product of an ever-threatened equilibrium. More specifically, the critical zone refers to the Earth's life-supporting layer extending from the lower atmosphere to unaltered bedrock. This zone encompasses the atmosphere, soil, groundwater, and surface rocks, forming a dynamic interface where complex interactions between geological, hydrological, biological, and atmospheric processes occur. It is a zone of interaction between water, soil and subsoil, where life, particularly human life, is concentrated

Geochemist Jérôme Gaillardet's work emphasizes the critical zone's role in sustaining life by regulating essential resources and biogeochemical cycles. In his book *La Terre habitable – ou l'épopée de la zone critique* (2023), Gaillardet explores the critical zone as a fragile and interconnected system. He highlights how this zone, influenced by both solar energy and tectonic activity, supports life through processes like the carbon cycle and mineral weathering. Gaillardet underscores the importance of interdisciplinary research in understanding and preserving this vital layer, advocating for a holistic approach that integrates geochemistry, ecology, and social sciences to address

environmental challenges.[1] One of the challenges of the climate crisis revolves around the need to learn to inhabit this "critical zone" differently (Latour, 2015). It raises the question of the habitability of oceanic worlds in the Anthropocene era.

Global Literary Arctic Zone

The *Global Literary Arctic Zone* opens up the possibility of comparative studies including Indigenous, regional, national and non-Indigenous literatures of the circumpolar North. It also allows narratives traditionally ignored by critics to emerge (particularly those from Greenlandic, Sámi, Innu, Inuit, Iñupiaq, Yup'ik, Ainu, Nenets, Nivkh, Nganassan, Yakut, Chukchi, etc.), in the wake of the work of Daniel Chartier and his Research Laboratory on the Imaginary of the North, Winter, and the Arctic (UQAM).

The granularity of the reading perspectives invites a scale game that cracks the global order and articulates the tension between the singularity of individual experience and the vastness of the Earth (Spivak 2003: 70-102). Thinking about Arctic literature through the lens of the planetary does not mean returning to a unified totality but rather accepting that it is driven by forces that prevent unification. In his reading of Nordic poetry, Dan Ringgaard describes this planetary thinking as follows:

> *The incompatibility to the planetary means that the scales cannot be subsumed into one another. They cannot be neither systemic (global) nor synthetic (holistic). The shifting and twisted scales calls for the same kind of thick description that Zach Horton recommends for the anthropocene (Horton 2019: 6). Understanding planetarity is all about the reflective construction of assemblages.* (Ringgaard 2025)

According to Frits Andersen (2023), we need a "planetary education" ("planetær dannelse") linked to an "ocean education" ("Ocean Bildung") that encourages us to become aware of scales ("skalabevidsthed"). This awareness of scale is necessary in light of our inability to predict "what, for example, migration and sea level rise mean for the definition of borders, and where the relationship between territory and nation, or between the local and the global, is in fluid motion" (Andersen 2023: 19).

The *Blue Humanities* have not yet established a real dialogue with literary geography and, more specifically, geocriticism (*géocritique*). Articulating a literary history around the *Global Literary Arctic Zone* is intrinsically part of geocriticism, defined by Bertrand Westphal as the geocentric study of texts linked by a place or territory (Westphal 2007). The multifocusing of views on a given space (the Arctic Ocean) leads to the creation of a corpus of texts linked to this space paradigm (which I call the Global Literary Arctic Zone). By going beyond an egocentric study that would focus on just a few authors, the isotopic methodology of geocriticism interested in a broad corpus will make it possible to complement the imagological studies (Moura 1998) on the circumpolar North (Chartier 2016). The meaning of isotopic here is twofold: it refers to the set of texts linked by the same space, both for the places of writing and for the places described in fiction, which I propose to call the literary zone; but it also evokes isotopic hydrology, using techniques to trace various elements of the water cycle.

In her article "Oceanic Comparativism and World Literature", Debjani Ganguly calls for the development of an "oceanic comparativism" allowing for comparisons to be drawn between texts that terra-centric criticism had separated due to geographical distance which can foster "terraqueous transregionalisms – thalassic zones smaller than continents but larger than nations that do not coincide with familiar geopolitical divisions of the world" (2021: 443). These thalassic zones form *cultural areas,* as defined by Christopher Bush as "larger than the nation, smaller than the world" (Bush 2017). This new oceanic comparatist method embraces "an oceanic literary aesthetic that encompasses planetary space–time, natural logic, and human–nonhuman entanglement" (Ganguly 2021: 451).

The blue reading of Arctic literature thus initiates a new literary history of the circumpolar North based on an Arctic Oceanic Comparativism.

Arctic values and the Circumpolar North

This approach will make it possible to weave new comparisons between texts sharing similarities in terms of cultural heritage and worldview related to

[1] Gaillardet is a key figure in the OZCAR network (Observatories of the Critical Zone), which purports to monitor and study the Critical Zone's dynamics across various ecosystems. In the map of this network, it can be noticed that no observatory is located in the Arctic (https://www.ozcar-ri.org/fr/les-observatoires/les-observatoires/).

indigeneity in the Arctic environment. In this sense, the study of the *Global Literary Arctic Zone* extends Daniel Chartier's work on Arctic Indigenous literatures, and complements it by adding a new dimension, that of an ocean-centric perspective, allowing for a new cultural cartography of the circumpolar North to emerge. To the common denominator defined by Daniel Chartier as the "imagined North", is added the advent of a geographical and cultural contact zone, the Arctic oceanic world.

Chartier defines the imagined North as a cultural construct shaped over centuries by accumulated layers of discourse and representation covering regions from Fennoscandia and Greenland to Russia, the Far North, and the North polar region (Chartier 2016). He emphasizes that this "North" is the product of a dual perspective: an external gaze, shaped by often simplified and romanticized Western imaginaries of the North, primarily produced by Western artists, writers, and explorers; an internal perspective, belonging to the Northern Indigenous cultures themselves, which are frequently underrepresented or overshadowed.

Chartier critiques how this imaginary often results in oversimplification, failing to acknowledge the multiplicity of "Norths" and the diversity of cultures they encompass. In order to "recomplexify" the Arctic images, ethical principles should guide our consideration of Northern cultures to ensure a more complete, respectful, and nuanced understanding—especially of those marginalized by the dominant Southern narratives (Chartier 2016). By adopting ethical frameworks such as circumpolarity, multilingualism, and interdisciplinarity, we can reintroduce complexity and cultural authenticity, rather than perpetuate oversimplified or exoticized portrayals.

The specificity and identity of the Arctic can be also found in the values shared by the people living in this geographical area. Anthropologist Alexandra Lavrillier argues that a set of core Arctic values can be defined, which illustrates Arctic Indigenous worldviews on human-environment relations: the Indigenous peoples of the Arctic hold a profound and intricate relationship with their environment, rooted in a core value system centred on a reciprocal relationship of gifting and counter-gifting (Lavrillier & Gabyshev 2017, and Lavrillier 2020). This worldview considers humans and the environment not as separate entities, but as participants in a continuous exchange. A key aspect of this belief system is the understanding that the natural world is inhabited by spirits. Animals, trees, rivers, and mountains are not merely biophysical elements, but are imbued with a spiritual essence. This spiritual dimension is still prevalent among some communities in Siberia, among the Inuit, and the Sámi (Bergman and Östlund 2022).

In addition to its spiritual significance, the Arctic environment is considered a feeding home, as Sheila Watt-Cloutier argues in her book *The Right to Be Cold* (2015). She underscores the environment's role as the primary source of life and sustenance: "The Arctic may seem cold and desolate but to us Inuit families, it brought us and still brings us the most succulent and nutritious food" (Watt-Cloutier 2015b). As a consequence, the melting of ice is not just environmental change but a direct threat to the Inuit culture, identity, and survival (Watt-Cloutier 2015a).

Arctic shared values can be identified as a set of shared worldviews intrinsically linked to an "Arctic Indigenous epistemology" defined as holistic understanding, experiential and observational learning, oral tradition and storytelling, respect for nature and inter-species Relationships, and spiritual dimension.[2] These values are not abstract ideas but lived ethics, embedded in everyday life, rituals, and communal practices (Nuttal 1992).

Aesthetic and Poetic Fabrication of the Arctic

In previous works, I have proposed to re-semanticize the concept of *borealism* as an aesthetic movement. While the term "borealism" was introduced by Gunnar Broberg in 1982 as a Nordic counterpart to Edward Said's "Orientalism," I have suggested to use it in a broader sense: not merely as a mirror or inversion of Orientalism, but a heterogeneous, transdisciplinary process (Briens 2018). According to such poetics, the North becomes a literary and metaphorical space, crafted through imagery, emotion, and creative discourse. I have framed *borealism* as an aesthetic movement, a literary and poetic construction of the North in which the North is defined as a *locus*, place in the imagination, and a *matrix*, a generative space for creative expression. *Borealism* highlights the ongoing process by which artistic, literary, and cultural narratives continually remake the North, without fixing it into a single essence. Applying the *Borealism* framework to the Arctic would invite to

[2] See https://energy.sustainability-directory.com/term/arctic-indigenous-epistemology/

consider the Arctic as both a site of imagination and a generative space for cultural production.

It is thus crucial to adopt two ethical frameworks. The first is to re-anchor the poetics of the Arctic outlined here in the local Indigenous literary production. Considering the Arctic from a circumpolar perspective invites a "geostrategic redeployment in which autochthony plays a predominant role" (Chartier 2019: 29) and follows what Kirstin Lorentsen and Jakob Stougaard-Nielsen call the "'North Atlantic Drift in contemporary Nordic literature" (Lorentsen & Stougaard-Nielsen 2020: 132). While the Arctic is usually thought of as a space for scientific exploration and economic exploitation, the *Global Literary Arctic Zone* reveals another identity, that of a cultural space nourished by the plurality of minority voices. Its literature expresses not only minority languages and human rights, but also their struggles for justice across the national borders of the region. The Arctic oceanic world is not simply a juxtaposition of communities, but a cultural space in its own right, with Indigenous cultures forming the link. By transcending national and philological boundaries, the comparative analysis of native and non-native narratives offers a new cartography of the Arctic ocean ecosystem.

The second ethical framework is to place the poetics of the Arctic in dialogue with other forms of knowledge in the context of the Anthropocene, which means to re-define Arctic literature within a global or planetary framework.

Defining Arctic Literature within a Global Framework

If the geographical dimension is part of the definition of Arctic literature, it is thus not sufficient, as the Arctic is also defined by its representation and a set of images working as palimpsest in the context of what I have called *borealism*. Following in the footsteps of works by Malan Marnersdóttir and Henning Howlid Wærp, I argue that the category *Arctic Literature* names a shifting constellation of works that are bound by geography, theme, and perspective.

Arctic literature consistently engages with thematic features related to nature, climate, and the environment such as ice, sea, tundra, permafrost, storms, darkness and light cycles. For Marnersdóttir, Arctic and sub-Arctic literature takes the surrounding landscape as a symbolic tool to represent the uniqueness of the Faroe Islands, its people, language, and history (Marnersdóttir 2021). This is often described through the study of human–nonhuman interactions in ecological interdependence. Isolation and extremity are correlated here with the ideas of remoteness, survival, vulnerability, which are counter-balanced by the kinship and solidarity relations weaved inside the communities and with ecosystems.

Moreover, Arctic literature is not just fiction but experiments a plurality of genres. Wærp argues that "Arctic literature" must be understood in a broad sense, including all types of texts expressing "voices from the Nordic Arctic"[3] (Wærp 2017: 30), not only novels and poetry, but also expedition narratives, travelogues, hunting stories, children's literature, and oral traditions. Importantly, he reminds us of the fact that the Arctic is not an empty wilderness: "If you only think of the Arctic as desolate seas, ice, tundra and wildlife, you forget that four million people live north of the Arctic Circle. For some, the Arctic is a foreign place, for others it is home" (on the bookseller page).[4]

Another dimension of Arctic literature is shaped by the historical colonial and postcolonial context. This literature foregrounds identity, cultural memory, and historical consciousness. The literary expressions engaging with the cultural autonomy struggle with the voices of explorers, missionaries, and settlers. The tension between the insider and the outsider perspectives shapes how "Arctic literature" is defined and received. Whereas insider perspectives produced by Indigenous writers, local authors, island voices claim a representation of the Arctic as lived homeland, outsider perspectives such as those of explorers, travellers, colonial writers or scientists often exoticize or instrumentalise the Arctic as a place of exploration, discovery or resource extraction. Indigenous and local perspectives coexist with colonial and settler narratives, creating a literary field attentive to the complex social, political, and ecological histories of the North. Literary works within this

[3] "stemmene ifra det nordiske Arktis".

[4] "Hvis man kun ser for seg Arktis som øde havområder, is, tundra og dyreliv, glemmer man at det bor fire millioner mennesker nord for polarsirkelen. For noen er Arktis et fremmed sted, for andre et hjem." In his book, Wærp does not mention any text from Sámi literature, which is problematic in regard to the quotation.

zone negotiate the tension between home and otherness, situating human life in a broader ecological and planetary context.

Consequently, Arctic literature is often articulated around the reflection on identity and belonging. This is sharpened by the fact that the cultural loss resonates with the threat of the environmental balance in the Anthropocene.

One of the defining features of Arctic literature can be found in the development of a *cryopetics*. It explores how ice, in its material and symbolic dimensions, moulds literary and artistic representations, from fascination to political urgency. According to this aesthetics, the Arctic (as well as the Antarctic) emerge not only as geographical extremes but as settings where the beauty of ice coexists with its precarity. Arctic literature is about the affective dimensions of living in or writing about fragile ecosystems. In earlier periods, Arctic landscapes and seascapes often served as symbols of sublimity, endurance, or national uniqueness. In more recent decades, however, they appear as sites of ecological precarity and loss. Poetry in particular has become a medium for expressing grief, anger, fear, and hope in response to the accelerating climate crisis.

To summarise, Arctic literature can be defined by the texts of fiction and nonfiction, oral and written that are produced in, about, or in dialogue with the Arctic and sub-Arctic regions. It is characterized by an engagement with northern ecologies, climates, landscapes and seascapes; by tensions between insider and outsider perspectives; and by its role in shaping and contesting identities, histories, and futures of the far North. This definition makes room for both the colonial legacy of exploration writing and the contemporary vitality of Indigenous poetry. It acknowledges the plurality of genres while foregrounding a thematic core, the entanglement of human life with northern environments. It intends to document and imagine life in extreme northern conditions, to construct identity for northern communities (national, Indigenous, ecological), and to aestheticize landscape (nature as sublime, symbolic, threatening, nurturing).

A recent trend in Arctic literature is to address climate change and to mediate eco-anxieties. A defining feature of the *Global Literary Arctic Zone* is its attention to eco-emotions as affective responses generated by living in, observing, or writing about fragile ecosystems. Arctic literature emerges in this context not as an isolated category but as a node in a planetary network of environmentally engaged writing. It gives voice to the lived experience of northern communities, while simultaneously reaching across oceans to connect with other vulnerable geographies. In this sense, Arctic literature can operate relationally while crystallizing local emotions and forging new literary planetary solidarities.

Building on the insights of this definition of Arctic literature in relation to the planetary dimension, the framework of the *Global Literary Arctic Zone* foregrounds a transnational and transoceanic literary space where ecological, cultural, and political concerns converge. It expands the traditional boundaries of Arctic literature, which have often been limited geographically to Canada, Alaska, Siberia, Greenland and Sápmi, or thematically to explorations of extreme landscapes. *The Global Literary Arctic Zone* synthesizes these approaches while integrating affective and ecological dimensions, positioning Arctic literature as both locally grounded and globally resonant.

In sum, the *Global Literary Arctic Zone* is a conceptual space in which Arctic literature becomes simultaneously local and global, personal and planetary. It frames northern ecologies and communities as sites of literary imagination and ethical reflection, while linking Arctic narratives to other vulnerable geographies through transoceanic solidarity. Within this framework, Arctic literature can articulate eco-emotions, preserve and contest cultural identity, and foster literary and ethical connections across oceans, offering a model for understanding the Arctic not as a remote or isolated zone but as an active node in a global literary ecology.

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HOMMAGE / *HOMAGE*

© Bruce Jackson, voyage avec Jean Malaurie à Nome et sa région, 1997
/ field trip with Jean Malaurie to Nome and its region, 1997

R.I.P., TOM LOWENSTEIN, 1941-2025

JAN BORM

The British poet and anthropologist Tom Lowenstein passed away on March 21, 2025. Author of a remarkable œuvre, co-constructed in parts with the Iñupiaq storyteller Asatchaq (1891-1980), Tom Lowenstein published several outstanding works collecting the oral history of the Iñupiat of Tikigaq (Point Hope) and writing their history in the period 1826-1909, notably. His book *Ancient Land: Sacred Whale*, published by Bloomsbury in 1993[1] and reissued by the Harvill Press in 1999, is both a monument to the culture of the Iñupiat of Tikigaq and a lasting achievement in trying to « bring across » the oral history of those he visited regularly and for prolonged periods of time in the 1970s and 80s. Ted Hughues is quoted in the blurbs on the cover of the original edition as having stated that Lowenstein's translations were "at once works of detailed scholarship and high poetic achievement." Such distinguished praise notwithstanding, Francis Spufford raised "the question of Lowenstein's poetic aptness to the Tikigaq-ish task[2]," an issue that Barbara Bodenhorn discussed in her review of the volume published by *Polar Record*, concluding: "The translation of 'high Iñupiaq' – performed as powerful, evocative formal speech – into the prose of daily English usage has often seemed problematic to me – much of the strength and rhythm getting lost in the process. It takes a poet of English to do justice to the poetry of the Iñupiaq. But equally it demands the sensitivity of one who listens carefully to what others saying. Lowenstein's teachers took him seriously, and he has listened very carefully, indeed. The book is a delight[3]." We are grateful to Tom Lowenstein's literary executors to let us republish here excerpts of his pieces about summer and autumn, both in the English original and the French translations by Professor Hélène Aji of the École normale supérieure in Paris, an internationally recognised specialist of American poetry. Many thanks to Hélène for having made these lines come alive in French.

The ways in which Lowenstein not only listened very carefully but also shared the life of the Iñupiaq of Tikigaq were accounted for by him in another remarkable volume entitled *The Structure of Days Out* which has not received the attention it deserves[4]. Lowenstein draws on his own diaries, correspondence and unpublished poems to allow the reader insight into the writer's own observations and emotion in the field, being both candid and self-reflective, possibly too critical, about his own role, as he does in this letter from 1976: " 'I had pious hopes when I first arrived that I was to be some sort of old-ways rehabilitation saint, "working for and with the community" etc. Some locals treated me at first within those terms. But this was temporary and born of a sort of wish-fulfilment about "giving culture back" – an issue far too difficult to address here. As for my own role in reclamation, I realise that my work is largely clerical, and that at bottom I'm simply the old man's amanuensis.'" Lowenstein is no doubt too modest about his own contribution, be that a question of etiquette or not. His sharing of lived experience with the whale hunters out on the ice is a fascinating, wistful meditation on cryopoetics: "These words attempt a kind of verbal archeology of what never can be recovered. […] Language springs to the page from silent layers of subverbal unconsciousness. […] We may recall last week's or last year's places on the ice, but we can never revisit them."

His renderings of the stories told by Asatchaq and attemps to word "the complexity of the unseen" (*The Structure of Days Out*, 294) will continue to resonate with us as these lines do, taken from the prologue of "The Land Whale Story":

Asatchaq:
That's why Tikigaq's the animal.
The land is alive.
It's a whale harpooned
when Raven Man married the uiluaqtaq[5].

Ken Lisbourne (1950-2017), "Salmon Catch", Point Hope, Alaska, 1984
© Collection privé/ Private collection

1 I have consulted Jean Malaurie's copy of the first edition with his annotations and page markers still in place.

2 Francis Spufford, "Read my toes", *London Review of Books*, vol. 15, no. 15, 5 August 1993, available online: https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v15/n15/francis-spufford/read-my-toes.

3 Barbara Bodenhorn, review, *Polar Record*, volume 31, issue 179, October 1995, 438.
DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/S0032247400027522.

4 Tom Lowenstein, *The Structure of Days Out: With storytellers, hunters and their descendants in a Native Alaskan Community, 1973-1981*, Swindon: Shearsman Books, 2021.

5 uiluaqtak (weel-yawk-tuk): literally: "woman who won't take a husband" (*Ancient Land: Sacred Whale*, glossary, 1999, 155).

POÈMES TRADUITS PAR HÉLÈNE AJI

TOM LOWENSTEIN

SUMMER (excerpt)

***Ancient Land*: *Sacred Whale,* London, Harvill Press, 1999, pp. 55-57**

The poor, who have no skinboats, travel east on foot,
in bands, where the caribou take them,
children in their mothers' parkas, dogs with the tent skins, poles
and side packs.
Behind the cliffs, they climb the hill-tops –
flints and fossil-coral grinding their boot-soles –
walking north-east for the valleys where the game feeds,
setting traps for wolf, fox, marmot, lynx and wolverine.

Over the hill, they hear loons on the river,
watch peregrines hunt from the bluffs of Kuukpak,
below, through mosquitoes, the tundra stretches, brown and purple,
ravens quarrelling with foxes over caribou the wolves have taken,
the half-sunk antlers' rib-spread arched in hunger,
wind rushing through them.
The men stalk, singing *taqsiun* [lure songs]: "Qa-in! Approach!
Qa-in! Qa-in!"
herd the caribou through lakes and rivers
where they chase them in kayaks; line migration tracks
with cairns and drive them into gulleys.
Eating and drying out the meat all night at sunlit hill camps,
they skirt the routes their enemies have taken,
and the graves of murdered children whose teeth they hear
grinding.

Then there is the outcast, poor boy,
Who was thrown away, and lived with the dogs in ruined iglus,
and who travels alone, to return as a shaman.
The outcast walks hungry. The wind cuts his parka;
His boots rot in the marshes. The dream from his mind extends
to where the sky meets tundra, waking vision, never sleeping
while the daylight fills his body,
sky pours through the sutures and the eye-holes, thorax hollows,
and he sees his skeleton, ablaze and freezing, numbering the
bones, knows them,
calling each by name until it sings its answer,
identifies the life-souls clustered at the joints and organs,
tastes self-meat, comprehending it has died, continues living:

TRADUCTION: HÉLÈNE AJI

ÉTÉ (extrait)

Les pauvres, qui n'ont pas d'embarcations, vont vers l'est à pied,
en groupes, là où les mènent les caribous,
les enfants dans la parka de leur mère, les chiens tirant les tentes, les piquets
et les paquetages.
Au-delà des falaises, ils gravissent les collines –
silex et coraux fossiles usent les semelles de leurs bottes –
ils marchent vers le nord-est en quête des vallées où se nourrit le gibier,
placent des pièges pour les loups, renards, marmottes, lynx et carcajous.

Du haut de la colline, ils entendent les huards sur la rivière,
observent les faucons qui chassent depuis les pics de Kuukpak,
en contrebas, dans les moustiques, la toundra s'étale, brune et violette,
les corbeaux disputent aux renards le caribou que les loups ont pris,
sa ramure abattue telle des côtes arquées par la faim,
traversée par les bourrasques de vent.
Les hommes chassent, chantant des *taqsiun* [chants de séduction] : « Qa-in ! Approche !
Qa-in ! Qa-in ! »,
ils rabattent les caribous vers les lacs et les rivières
où ils les poursuivent en kayak ; marquent les routes de migration
par des cairns et les poussent dans des gorges.
Ils mangent et font sécher la viande sous le soleil de nuit dans des camps sur les collines,
ils évitent les itinéraires empruntés par leurs ennemis
et les tombes des enfants assassinés dont ils entendent les dents
grincer.

Il y a aussi le banni, pauvre garçon,
qui a été rejeté et a vécu avec les chiens dans les ruines des igloos
et qui voyage seul, avant de revenir en chaman.
Le banni marche et il a faim. Le vent transperce sa parka ;
ses bottes pourrissent dans le marécage. Le rêve de son esprit s'étend
jusqu'où le ciel rencontre la toundra, sa vision s'éveille, il ne dort jamais
tandis que la lumière du jour emplit son corps,
que le ciel se déverse par les sutures et les plaies, son thorax se creuse
et il voit son squelette, en flammes et gelé, dénombre les
os, les apprend,
appelle chacun par son nom jusqu'à ce qu'il chante en réponse,
identifie les âmes vives nichées dans les articulations et les organes,
goûte à la viande de son corps, concevant que morte elle continue de vivre :

same, no different from companion species,
  and he lies down with the ptarmigan and foxes:
intercourse and inanition: thighs smeared with feathers,
  fox eats his tongue, eyes, heart and liver,
bird-wife escapes with his usuk[1] and testes:
  dog-mother history vomited on stream-bed,
dry with vertebrae, and amulets the moon excreted.

The animals take pity, and undo his ligaments,
  the guts are dried and knotted around tundra hummocks,
jerked toward the light by raven, into winter by the peregrine,
  scavenging his colon, they peck and trample,
leaving the skin empty and his mind in a circle.

Another, destitute, leaves Tikigaq: abandons his weapons,
  joins the wolves, and learns to speak their language,
runs all summer with them, along rivers, with the lame and pregnant,
  eating rodents and foxes, takes a wife among them, a young
      woman,
who fucks and then eats him.
  Then the wolf umialik[2] calls him and approaches,
butts his wolf-skull on the tundra,
  scrapes back the wolf-mask, showing his inua[3]
the round face-disc, nameless person-spirit, naked, radiant, saying:

"You humans, who have seen us become human, animals
  and human, who have lived with us and shared our food,
who have wives among our people and who know our children:
  you who have come, you'll return to your own people,
and with what you have seen, invite the wolf soul
  to your rituals and dances, so those first times - separated from us
when humans were animals and animals were people –
  are made whole in your story, when you tell them what your
      dream was.

"Go back now. You are one of us. Because of your visit,
  You have made us happy. You have joined us. Thank you.
When you were a child, and had no kin, your hunger drove you
      from the village.
  Now you are a shaman. You will tell your people how to treat us.
Whenever you sing, you'll remember your wife and your kinsmen
      among us.
And when you hunt the whale in spring, we will help you.

"All this, because you have visited our people.
  But don't be like those other shamans who come once and then
      leave us
and say nothing, leave the story broken, and forget to revisit us."

[1] Usuk (oo-sook): penis (*Ancient Land: Sacred Whale*, glossary, 1999, 155).

[2] Umialik (oomaylik): male or female skinboat owner (*Ancient Land: Sacred Whale*, glossary, 1999, 155).

[3] Inua (in-yoo-u): 1) resident spirit 2) "human" component in animal soul structure (*Ancient Land: Sacred Whale*, glossary, 1999, 154).

pareille, indifférenciée de celle de l'espèce sœur,
  et il se couche avec les lagopèdes et les renards :
sexe et inanition : les cuisses enduites de plumes,
  le renard mange sa langue, ses yeux, son cœur et son foie,
l'oiselle s'échappe avec son usuk et ses testicules :
  chienne mère, l'histoire a vomi sur le lit du ruisseau
sec, jonché de vertèbres et d'amulettes excrétées par la lune.

Les animaux prennent pitié et défont ses muscles,
  ses tripes sont séchées et nouées autour des tertres de la toundra,
jetées vers la lumière par le corbeau, dans l'hiver par le faucon,
  ravageant son colon, ils picorent et piétinent,
laissant sa peau vide et son esprit en cercle.

Un autre, miséreux, quitte Tikigaq : abandonne ses armes,
  rejoint les loups et apprend à parler leur langue,
court dans leur meute tout l'été, le long des rivières, avec les faibles et les femelles,
  mange rongeurs et renards, prend femme parmi eux, une jeune
      femme
qui le baise puis le dévore.
  Puis l'umialik loup l'appelle et s'approche,
cogne son crâne de loup contre la toundra,
  se dépouille de son masque de loup, montre son inua,
le disque facial rond, l'esprit sans nom de la personne, nu, rayonnant, qui dit :

« Vous humains, qui nous avez vu devenir humains, animaux
  et humains, qui avez vécu avec nous et partagé notre nourriture,
qui avez des femmes dans notre peuple et qui connaissez nos enfants :
  vous qui êtes venus, vous retournerez dans votre propre peuple
et, avec ce que vous avez vu, inviterez l'âme du loup
  à vos rituels et vos danses, afin que ces temps premiers – loin de nous
où les humains étaient des animaux et les animaux des gens –
  soient réunis dans votre histoire, quand vous leur racontez ce que votre
      rêve a été.

« Repars maintenant. Tu es un des nôtres. Par ta visite,
  tu nous as rendus heureux. Tu t'es joint à nous. Merci.
Quand tu étais un enfant, sans famille, ta faim t'a guidé
      loin du village.
  Maintenant tu es un chaman. Tu diras à ton peuple comment nous traiter.
Quand tu chanteras, tu te souviendras de ta femme et de ta famille
      parmi nous.
Et quand tu chasseras la baleine au printemps, nous t'aiderons.

« Tout cela, parce que tu as rendu visite à notre peuple.
  Mais ne sois pas comme les autres chamans qui viennent une fois puis
      nous laissent
sans rien dire, laissent l'histoire rompue et oublient de revenir nous rendre visite. »

The soft, thick hood slips back and the wolf umialik vanishes.
  Home in Tikigaq, the young shaman sleeps all winter:
mind curled in the earth-wound,
  dreams of whale's flukes breaching in the iglu.
They'll catch whales next season.

Le capuchon mou et épais reprend sa place et l'umialik loup s'évanouit.
  De retour à Tikigaq, le jeune chaman dort tout l'hiver :
l'esprit enroulé dans la blessure de la terre,
  il rêve de harpons à baleine transperçant l'igloo.
Ils attraperont des baleines à la prochaine saison.

AUTUMN (excerpt)

***Ancient Land: Sacred Whale,* London, Harvill Press, 1999, pp. 74-77**

Samaruna said:
The sun goes round.
It's come from round the north.
It's circled Tikigaq
all spring and summer.
Now the sun goes round,
it touches the Point,
and goes down through the sea
on the western horizon.

Asatchaq:
It goes south in the winter,
to where the whales live.
Next spring it returns
with the migrant animals.

When the sun went down and the moon lit the twilight, the men swept up their work and pushed it underneath the benches.

Now the sun had touched the Point, the old men started talking. The old men, who had been sleeping or singing and fixing their drum heads, started to tell stories, and the qalgi[4] rituals started.

Asatchaq:
The old men have their places.
They sit on their benches
in the middle of the qalgi.
The old men sit.
Their work is finished.
They do nothing.

Samaruna:
The old men are frightening.
What they know is powerful:
What they know has qilya and is qilya[5]:
songs and stories gathered
in them over many winters.

If anyone offends old men,
withholds meat and keeps it hidden,
walks past the old men without their permission:
that man may have to wait,
but his punishment comes later:
a hand, a leg or the belly will swell,
his fingers will grow numb
when he fixes his bow string,

[4] qalgi: ceremonial house

[5] qilya: shamanic power

AUTOMNE (extrait)

Samaruna a dit:
Le soleil tourne.
Il est retourné par le nord.
Il a encerclé Tikigaq
tout le printemps et tout l'été.
Maintenant le soleil tourne,
il touche la Pointe
et descend dans la mer
sur l'horizon occidental.

Asatchaq:
Il va dans le sud en hiver,
où vivent les baleines.
Au printemps suivant il revient
avec les animaux migrateurs.

Quand le soleil fut descendu et que la lune éclairait le crépuscule, les hommes ramassèrent leur travail et le rangèrent sous les bancs.

À présent, le soleil avait atteint la Pointe[1], les anciens commencèrent à parler. Les anciens, qui avaient dormi ou chanté en réparant leurs tambours, commencèrent à raconter des histoires et les rituels du qalgi commencèrent.

Asatchaq:
Les anciens ont pris place.
Ils sont assis sur leurs bancs
au milieu du qalgi.
Les anciens sont assis.
Leur travail est fini.
Ils ne font rien.

Samaruna:
Les anciens sont effrayés.
Ce qu'ils savent est puissant :
ce qu'ils savent a du qilya, est le qilya :
chansons et histoires réunies
en eux pendant nombre d'hivers.

Si quelqu'un offense les anciens,
garde de la viande et la tient cachée,
passe devant les anciens sans leur permission :
cet homme attendra peut-être,
mais sa punition viendra plus tard :
une main, une jambe ou son ventre gonflera,
ses doigts s'engourdiront
quand il répare la corde de son arc,
la glace craquera,

[1] N.d.T.: La Pointe de la Péninsule de Tikigaq.

the ice will crack,
in fair weather, and maroon him:
in its time, this will come,
because old men have qilya.

Asatchaq:
Their songs travel and attack the body.
Their stories have qilya.
What happened in the past
lives on in stories.
They use this like shamans.
Old men are shamans.

For the old have survived, by skill and luck manipulated
through lives long enough to validate the knowledge
they inherited from elders who, themselves from elders,
learned to tackle and survive extreme conditions:
each near-impossibility converted to procedure and tactic:
threading *ways* through sea-ice for their seal and bear meat,
with the acquisition, on each safe return with meat, of knowledge:
the path of each journey, worked in with the knowledge pattern,
passed vertically down kin lines, and spread through the qalgis.

What the old men knew and taught were knowledge systems
which had power, qilya, and exerted qilya:
and these were deployed against energies
that made life dangerous and unpleasant:
high wind and currents, snow-drift, blizzards,
rivers impassable or too shallow to navigate,
high seas, winter darkness, summer marsh lands and mosquitoes,
rough capes, hunting in famine through vast empty tundra,
walking tangled shifting sea-ice, kayaking through young mush,
dragging animals up-wind over sea-ice through darkness,
hunting polar bear and brown bear, great souls, dangerous,
whose skins torn, meat ingested, shades placated,
demanded expeditions, expiation and their repetition:
these – the totality, at each angle preying on the hunter's body,
assaulting what the mind deflected or was bent to –
were daily confronted by Tikigaq hunters;
and generated by their opposition, means, skill and qilya:
an elaborated system, matching, formal counter-construct
transmitted by examples and in stories.

On account of what they'd known and told, and therefore given,
the ancestors were complete and perfect:
and the living, who inherited the forebears' name souls,
were a partial incarnation of these namesakes.
But the living were faced daily with ordeals
revealing human imperfection,
and so they faltered, they thought, badly.
Divided between present and ancestral selves,
the discord made the makeshift of the present seem a failure,
and this bound them closer to the elders' precepts.

par beau temps, et l'égarera :
en son heure, cela viendra,
parce que les anciens
ont du qilya.

Asatchaq:
Leurs chants voyagent et attaquent le corps.
Leurs histoires ont du qilya.
Ce qui est arrivé dans le passé
vit encore dans les histoires.
Ils s'en servent comme les chamans.
Les anciens sont des chamans.

Car les anciens ont survécu, par habileté et par chance mises à profit
au cours de vies assez longues pour valider la connaissance
héritée de leurs aînés qui, eux-mêmes apprenant de leurs aînés,
savent faire face et survivre dans des conditions extrêmes :
chaque quasi-impossibilité convertie en procédé et en tactique :
ils tracent leurs *chemins* sur la banquise ramenant la viande de phoque et d'ours,
et acquièrent, à chaque retour, indemnes et chargés de viande, de la connaissance :
l'itinéraire de chaque voyage, entrelacé avec le dessin de la connaissance,
transmis verticalement par les liens de parenté et exposé dans les qalgis.

Ce que les anciens savaient et enseignaient, c'étaient des systèmes de connaissance
qui avaient du pouvoir, du qilya et exerçaient du qilya :
et ces systèmes étaient déployés contre les énergies
qui rendaient la vie dangereuse et désagréable :
les vents déchaînés et les courants, les congères, les blizzards,
les rivières infranchissables ou pas assez profondes pour la navigation,
les mers démontées, l'obscurité des hivers, les marécages de l'été et les moustiques,
les caps déchiquetés, la chasse affamée sur la vaste toundra déserte,
marcher péniblement sur la banquise mouvante, voyager en kayak dans la boue fraîche,
traîner des animaux sous le vent sur la banquise dans l'obscurité,
chasser l'ours polaire et l'ours brun, de grandes âmes, dangereuses,
dont les peaux déchirées, la viande ingérée, les ombres pacifiées
exigeaient des expéditions, l'expiation, encore et encore :
voilà—cette totalité, de tout côté guettant le corps du chasseur,
assaillant ce que l'esprit esquivait ou acceptait—
voilà ce qu'affrontaient chaque jour les chasseurs de Tikigaq ;
ils engendraient, par leur résistance, les moyens, l'habileté et le qilya :
un système élaboré, une contre-structure formelle adaptée
transmise par l'exemple et les histoires.

En raison de ce qu'ils avaient connu et raconté et par conséquent donné,
les ancêtres étaient complets et parfaits :
et les vivants, qui héritaient des âmes de nom de leurs prédécesseurs,
étaient une incarnation partielle de leurs homonymes.
Mais les vivants étaient chaque jour confrontés à des épreuves
qui révélaient l'imperfection humaine,
c'est pourquoi ils échouaient, à leurs yeux, gravement.
Tiraillant entre leurs êtres présents et leurs êtres ancestraux,
la discorde donnait aux expédients du présent l'allure de l'échec,
et cela les liait plus fortement aux préceptes des aînés.

Halfway towards ancestral status, their hunting finished,
  with a knowledge of the dead that they alone remembered,
the elders, too, were sacred:
  and the stories they recited every autumn formed a web that
        united past and present,
  and sacralised the present before winter started.

So in autumn, the old men started to tell stories.
  All that evening, when the sun touched the Point,
and next day, and the nights and days that followed,
  they told Tikigaq's stories,
tying everyone who had been out all summer
  along sea coasts and inland among strangers,
to the narratives, precisely recollected,
  that united them with all Tikigaq people.

Now the past returned. It *came round* to the present
  In the *things that had been said*, their genealogies and actions,
drawing lines from *back then* closer, so the kin ties
  between namesakes and their forebears reached the present
        unbroken.

À mi-chemin de leur statut ancestral, leur vie de chasseurs achevée,
  possédant une connaissance des morts dont eux seuls avaient le souvenir,
les aînés aussi étaient sacrés :
  et les histoires qu'ils racontaient chaque automne formaient un réseau qui
        unissait passé et présent
  et sacralisait le présent avant le début de l'hiver.

Ainsi en automne, les anciens commençaient à raconter des histoires.
  Tout ce soir-là, quand le soleil toucha la Pointe,
et le jour suivant, et les nuits et les jours qui suivirent,
  ils racontèrent les histoires de Tikigaq,
rattachant chacun de ceux qui avaient été loin tout l'été
  sur les côtes et dans les terres parmi des étrangers
aux récits, remémorés avec précision,
  qui les unissaient à tout le peuple de Tikigaq.

Maintenant le passé revenait. Il *retournait* au présent
  dans les *choses qui avaient été dites*, leurs généalogies et leurs actions,
tirant plus près les fils d'*avant*, afin que les liens de parenté
  entre les homonymes et leurs prédécesseurs atteignent le présent
        intacts.

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/ field trip with Jean Malaurie to Nome and its region, 1997

ARCTIC ICONOTEXTS: JETTE BANG AND ISOBEL WYLIE HUTCHISON IN GREENLAND

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Introduction

The Scottish botanist Isobel Wylie Hutchison (1889-1982) and the Danish photographer Jette Bang (1914-1964) were both independent travellers whose respective areas of expertise granted them access to Greenland. This article will compare Bang's *30000 kilometer med sneglefart* ("30000 Kilometres at a Snail's Pace", 1941) and Wylie Hutchison's *On Greenland's Closed Shore: The Fairyland of the Arctic* (1930). I will pay particular attention to the ways in which the two travellers write themselves into a tradition of Greenland exploration. They offer distinct perspectives, mediated through photography, film-making, painting and botany, on the experience of travelling as a woman on routes which had mostly been the preserve of male explorers. I will argue that the travel memoir provides a space for each of them to take centre stage, giving voice to their personal impressions of Greenland, and to affirm their authority both as Arctic explorers and as creators. For both, the written word is one of several modes of expression: both women were filmmakers, although it was Bang's livelihood and only one of Wylie Hutchison's favoured artforms, alongside painting, travel writing and poetry. Accordingly, both works are iconotexts[1] in which the interdependence between text and image contributes to the portrayal of Greenland and the differing power dynamics surrounding each of their journeys.

Almost a decade separates the two women's Greenland travels: Wylie Hutchison visited from 1927 to 1930, and Bang's journeys took place between 1936 and 1939. Both had to obtain official permission, and Wylie Hutchison's first plans to travel to Greenland in 1926 were refused, meaning she waited a year until she could apply again. In 1927 she was granted access to the "closed shores" for a summer, and then again for a full year of collecting plant specimens (Hoyle, 2000: 3). While Bang's first journey, in 1936, was her own initiative, the following ones were funded by the Danish Greenland administration, *Grønlands Styrelsen*. Bang's position as official photographer frames her outlook on the colonial structures while affording her privileged access to a variety of social and geographical settings.

Both are independent women with elite social status, through personal circumstances and professional legitimation. Their high-profile journeys received attention, leading them to be invited to give public talks, as well as exhibitions and screenings in Bang's case. According to her biographer, Wylie Hutchison was "much in demand as a lecturer—at the Royal Geographical Society in London, the Scott Polar Research Institute

[1] A number of theoretical studies are dedicated to this concept, see for example: Liliane Louvel, *Poetics of the Iconotext*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2011; Peter Wagner, *Icons – Texts – Iconotexts*, Berlin, de Gruyter, 1996; Kristin Hallberg, "Ikonotext revisited – ett begrepp och dess historia", *Barnelitterært forskningstidsskrift*, Vol.13, Iss.1, pp. 1-10, 2022.

of Cambridge University, and the Royal Scottish Geographical Society, as well as in village halls throughout Scotland and parts of England. She also gave short radio talks for the British Broadcasting corporation." (Hoyle, 2000: 5) Similarly, Jørgensen notes that Bang's works "must have been perceived as rather authoritative testimonies to life in Greenland. Reading about her and her films, books and public presentations, she appears to have been a popular public figure and a prominent disseminator of images of the faraway colony, Greenland." (2014, 241)

Greenland travel writing traditions

Both Bang and Wylie Hutchison acknowledge that they are not the first explorers to reach these destinations, while also implicitly underlining their pioneering status as women travellers, and as writers. They draw legitimacy through references to previous explorations, and especially to one transmitter of Greenland culture: Knud Rasmussen. The Danish explorer, who grew up in Greenland with an Inuk-Danish mother, conducted numerous tours of the country, providing written accounts of his travels as well as a significant contribution to the awareness of Greenland's literary culture: from his collections of folk tales to his 1915 translation of Matthias Storch's *Singnagtugaq* ("A Greenlander's Dream"), known as the first Greenlandic language novel. He appears as a frequent reference point in Bang's text; Bang takes part in several journeys with "Dagmar", the boat from Rasmussen's seventh Thule expedition (1941: 176), and she compares her guide Hannibal Fencker with him (1941: 21). He makes two appearances in Wylie Hutchison's text: as the writer of the preface, and in a scene where he delivers a talk in Nanortalik (1930: 100). The preface confers a particular legitimacy to Wylie Hutchison's text; Rasmussen summarises British contributions to Greenland exploration and argues that the "present day layman in England is astonishingly ignorant of the Greenland and its people whom his forefathers helped to rediscover, explore and describe."(x) He concludes that the text is "topical", in the context of a contemporary expedition led by Henry Watkins, as well as in relation to Britain's forgotten history of Greenland exploration. He applauds this "intrepid Scottish woman" and her "humble mind and great store of knowledge", as well as the text's stylistic qualities and its passages of "charming verse": "she is not only a raconteuse with humour, sympathy and delicacy of feeling; she is a true artist" (xi). Rasmussen's appraisal highlights two key features of Wylie Hutchison's writing: both a feminine-coded "charm" in its narration of Greenland life, and a sense of mastery of her craft.

Both texts also acknowledge other Arctic predecessors. Tracing the backdrop of the polar narratives "from ancient times all the way up to Scott's South pole journey"[2] (1940: 70), then continuing with more recent texts, she notes that older narratives focus on the physical challenges and "inhuman suffering caused by the cold"[3], while Amundsen and Rasmussen herald a new era in exploration narratives as "a manly song of praise to the experience of the great expanse"[4] (70). With this approach comes a convention of "showing one's indifference to the cold by neglecting it"[5] (1941: 70), and Bang argues that the cold merits "a description even in entertainment literature"[6] (1941: 71). This description provides a vivid evocation of the physical experience of the Arctic cold, which does not just "affect the skin, but the muscles"[7] (71). Far from the excitement of "great expanses", Bang emphasises the difficulty of small tasks, like "sticking one's hand in one's trouser pocket"[8] which becomes a "slow undertaking"[9] (71), vividly evoking the more mundane aspects of the Arctic climate. Bang sets herself apart through a brief diachronic survey of changing representational codes, which aligns with Chartier's concept of the North as "a plural and shifting sign system, which functions in a variable manner according to the contexts of enunciation and reception" (2018: 12). By noting the gaps in

[2] All translations from the Danish are my own. Original: "fra gammel tid og helt op til Scotts Sydpolsfærd"

[3] "umenneskelige Lidelser foraarsaget af Kulden"

[4] "en mandig Lovsang til de store Vidders Oplevelse"

[5] "vist sin Uafhængighed af Kulden ved at negligere den"

[6] "en beskrivelse selv in Underholdningslitteraturen"

[7] "det er ikke Huden, men musklerne, der paavirkes"

[8] "at stikke Haanden ned i sin Bukselomme"

[9] "et langsommeligt Forehavende"

other exploration narratives, Bang plays with the conventions and suggests that she is writing the cold back into the setting and affirming her own place in the literary Arctic.

Wylie Hutchison's ascent to the highest point in Greenland is accompanied by a description of the traces left by previous Danish explorers (1930: 364) and an homage to Edward Whymper, leaving "my little sixpenny Union Jack in honour of Whymper, the first man to stand upon Kilertinguit's frozen height" (1930: 365). The Danish travellers have left a newspaper clipping bearing their names, but Wylie Hutchison sees no mark of Whymper's visit. Both fill in the blanks in previous narratives, although in rather different ways. While Bang presents herself as a blunt voice of truth, alerting her reader to the unglamorous realities which were omitted from the male accounts, Wylie Hutchison affirms her heritage in a British tradition of Greenland travel, implicitly placing herself among the great explorers.

Both also distance themselves from symbols of traditional femininity: Bang's text opens with a quotation from a women's magazine providing skincare advice and reading it as she passes through an Arctic landscape in a motorboat, she views it as "a message from a very distant world"[10] (1941:7). Wylie Hutchison makes much humour of an attempt at cooking, offering her company "my sacrifice and literal burnt offering" (1930:59), and rejects the idea of an innate liking for children, other than as human beings (1930: 202). She takes particular interest in unconventional women, pointing out "the unique attraction of a woman cateket"[11] (1930: 339) and the "pleasant and unusual find in Greenland" of "a married woman with no family" (346). In Bang's text, the focus is on her own status as a woman traveller on certain complicated journeys. She describes a reindeer hunt which is successful despite predictions that her presence as a white woman would jeopardise the hunt[12] (1940:171) and reflects on the impressions people might have of her as a traveller:

> *Many people find a woman travelling alone under unusual circumstances difficult to work out. It may take a few days to look her over and try to place her under the various categories: Bluestocking, adventuress, and so on.*[13]

These questions of social perception highlight the marginal status of female polar narratives. As Urberg notes in her study of women's Svalbard narratives, for a female writer to take her place in the "no woman's land" of the Arctic means finding ways of "authoriz[ing] her claim to writing", the "most direct" of which is "by emphasizing their pioneering status as women in Svalbard's male dominated society" (2007: 171-2). Both Bang and Wylie Hutchison adopt a narrative pose connected with their status as independent female explorers. This self-portrayal relies on bravery and initiative, but also on the act of writing itself and having one's own story to tell about Greenland.

However, Jette Bang's work also tells the story of Greenland and its inhabitants which the *Grønlands Styrelse* asked her to capture. The images were intended for entry in the international Polar Exhibition in Bergen, 1941, an event which was cancelled as World War II broke out. Bang quotes the detailed instructions she was given in the opening pages of the book. She is asked to record scenes from everyday life and their specific atmospheres: "Sledding should be shown with all its hardships and dangers."[14] (1941: 9) Listing the situations she is expected to capture, which range from nature aesthetics to annual festivities and political meetings, she emphasises the challenging nature of her task:

> *And quoted at random: transporting patients, hospitals, the seminary, ptarmigans flying over the snow in the sunshine, mining, hymn singing, baptism, drum dancing, folk dancing, folk meetings, referendum, Shrovetide festivities, haymaking.*[15] (1941: 9)

10 "Bud fra en meget fjern Verden"

11 a woman catechist

12 "Hans Kone havde ved Afskeden sagt, at han vilde komme hjem uden Rensdyr, fordi han skulle have en hvid Kvinde med paa Jagten"

13 "Mange Mennesker har vanskeligt ved at bestemme en Kvinde, der rejser alene under usædvanlige Forhold. Der gaar gerne et Par Dage med at se hende an og prøve at anbringe hende under de forskellige Kategorier: Blaastrømpe, Eventyrerske, og saa videre."

14 "Slædekørsel bør vises med alle dens Strabadser og Farer."

15 "Og citeret i Flæng: Transport af Patienter, Sygehuse, Seminariet, I Solskin flyvende Ryper over Sneen, Minedrift, Salmesang, Barnedaab, Trommedans, Folkedans, Folkemøde, Folkeafstemning, Fastelavnsløjer, Høbjergning."

She is also instructed to reflect a typical colonial perspective on Greenland through sequences displaying the progress of modernity thanks to Danish intervention:

> *It would be ideal if a film could be made showing a Greenlandic family under the original, primitive conditions of the past, and then if we could see the descendants of this family progress step by step to the present highest point.*[16] (1941: 9)

Bang's only criticism is that she considers the full list of tasks impossible to achieve and the mission "neck-breaking"[17]; this image of a physical challenge seems more to prove Bang's mettle, in confronting her weighty assignment, than to indicate a questioning of the principles behind the project she is working for (although her perspective on Denmark's presence in Greenland would later become more negative, as mentioned in the final section). The difficulty of producing the images and carrying cumbersome equipment with her on treacherous journeys forms much of the narrative. While the initial journey in 1936 was only supported by the photography company in Copenhagen she had trained with, the 1938-9 journey funded by the *Styrelse* brought recognition and easier access to the sights she wanted to film (1941:184). She emphasises the teamwork involved in producing the requested images, adding that without local help she would have "missed many of the meaningful scenes for [her] film"[18] (1941: 132).

The journey is structured by the photographic checklist that brings her to Greenland in the first place, but the text also offers a focus on the traveller herself. Bang describes her time in Greenland as "one of the strangest periods in my life"[19] (1941: 66). The text gives voice to her own experiences rather than solely focusing on an official narrative. Bang underlines her independence in mapping out her itinerary: reflecting on the risk that Danes might be sent home because of the outbreak of World War II, she "escapes"[20] (1941: 158) to witness a reindeer hunt, one of the major features[21] (1941: 158) she has yet to experience.

A room of one's own creation: Greenland in words and images

In Isobel Wylie Hutchison's account, a rich aesthetic repertoire is built around the "Fairyland" of the title. The text contains many vivid descriptions of Greenland's nature and the setting's specificity and exoticism; these echo the conception of Northern travel as a "poetic journey" which defines borealism as an aesthetic and literary process (Rasmussen, Briens, Stougaard-Nielsen, 2023: 4). The nature descriptions are also in line with the wider sense of Arctic travel as an opportunity for self-actualisation and inspiration for women[22]. Analysing women's writing about Svalbard, Urberg views the Arctic as a space for enrichment and independence:

> *These descriptions make it clear that the isolation of the landscape and their intimate interactions with it provide each of these women with–in the language of Virginia Woolf– a room of her own, in which she has the space and solitude to explore and reflect on her own identity and development.* (2007: 190)

In both texts, the Arctic settings represent a challenge for the writers, both as explorers and as literary creators. Reeploeg emphasises the traditionally female nature of Wylie Hutchison's activities, highlighting that "along with the 'feminine' science of botany, sketching is probably one of the most common female travel activities encountered in travel literature" (2017: 38), but also her desire to get away from social restrictions: "As many of her contemporaries, Isobel Wylie Hutchison saw the Arctic as a fairyland, a place to escape to from the noise of industrialization and modernity, but also as an escape

16 "Det ideelle ville være, om der kunde fremstilles Film, visende en grønlandsk Familie under Fortidens oprindelige, primitive Forhold, og derefter om man kunde se denne Families Efterkommere Skridt for Skridt gaa frem til det nuværende højeste Standpunkt."

17 "uigennemførlige", "halsbrækkende"

18 "gaaet Glip af mange betydningsfulde Scener i min Film."

19 "en af de mærkeligste Perioder i mit liv"

20 "stak af"

21 "store Grønlandsoplevelser"

22 See for example Hansson 2009, Reeploeg 2019, Urberg 2007.

from her gender role at home." (2017: 39). This dual stance, both following conventions and rejecting them, makes Wylie Hutchison's text a valuable resource for understanding women's Arctic travel narratives of the early 20th century. By rejecting gender conventions through forms of expression that are themselves conventionally gendered, Wylie Hutchison both packages her experience according to expectations, and expands the expressive potential of her form, while also, as a recognised botanist and speaker, placing herself in a frame of authority and expertise.

The "fairyland" aspects of Greenland play an important part in the aesthetics of Wylie Hutchison's text, producing a vivid array of colours and sensations that bring her Greenland impressions directly to the reader's mind's eye:

The narrow fjord is to-day crystal-still, reflecting the ice-blocks as if through gauze. (1930: 132)

> *Across the west stretches a level band of light which the moving waters catch and reflect. Slowly it travels up the arid mountains, resting on their crests in a rosy elfin fire; this fades to a dusky lavender, burns out at last into cold ashen-grey.* (1930: 158)

Tracing how the colours and visual effects change over the course of the day or according to meteorological conditions, almost ekphrastic reflections like these appear throughout the text. They respond to Wylie Hutchison's promise to introduce readers to a "closed", exotic setting, and relate to the theme of visual art which is present throughout the text. Numerous watercolour sketches (as noted by Reeploeg) appear throughout the text, as do works by local artists, such as Gert Lyberth, whose "striking picture" Wylie Hutchison purchases and features in her text with a description: "a night-piece taken from his own window, which commanded a fine view of the harbour, showing Disko's searchlight illuminating the rocks and the houses with their lighted windows in the darkness beyond" (1930: 121). Artistic representation is a theme of the text, which emerges as a narrative not just of exploration but also of finding fitting aesthetic codes to communicate the country's appeal. Scenes where Wylie Hutchison portrays her purchase of artworks, including one humorous passage where a series of local artists of all ages visit her to sell their work, become a way in which she connects with her setting and implicitly reminds readers that her perspective is only one of many. Although she claims she is "no skilled artist" (104), the text is in some ways an artist's diary as well as a travel account, and many passages highlight the appeal the landscape has for a painter, with its "views" and "colour-pictures":

> *The farther side of the beach is bare of all growth save some clusters of the golden-green sandwort (Honckenya peploides) and a little willow, but the view to seaward is one of the most brilliant colour-pictures imaginable—the shades of green and emerald in the icebergs, with the lavender and grey mountains –the blue sea with the dancing, crystal-pure ice-reflections, and beyond these the ice-braes of Upernivik island—white roads leading up and on to eternity——* (1930: 346)

The sense of vastness and beauty is punctuated with a scientific note, rather didactically providing the name of the species of sandwort among the magically shifting colours which highlight subjective perception. Dramatic visual passages also highlight the exoticism of the setting, and nature descriptions shift between exact science and Swiftian fantasy world:

> *A fjord powdered to-day with innumerable splinters of ice, which one may liken to Brobdingnagian water-lilies or lumps of loaf-sugar, according to temperament, and filled with drifting icebergs and shapes fantastic as faerie; for this is 'Eventyrland,' Fairyland—a land very far to the north (to be exact, 71 degrees 40 seconds N. lat.), and sometimes it is a white swan with wings outspread, or a prehistorical mammoth with folded paws and square head as inscrutable as a sphinx, which drift up under my windows, sometimes a pinnacle castle built over arched caverns and green grottoes reflecting light lovelier than far-famed Capri; or a king seated upon a perilous throne already undermined by the insidious billows, which topples presently with a roar as of artillery, flinging king, throne and crown farther than the shattered Phaeton upon the dark-blue waters.* (1930: 132)

The landscape is so astonishing it can only be described through images of magical creatures and mythological scenes. Lilliputian elements serve to present Greenland according to colonial paradigms, or as Reeploeg describes the Sápmi of Emilie Demant-Hatt, a "fairy-tale world of primitive beings in harmony with nature" (2019: 194). In portraying these magical scenes, Wylie Hutchison also turns Greenland into something of a toy town: "The

colours of Fairyland are drawing down over the little town and its gnome-like houses" (1930: 173).

Bang's descriptions are less elaborate, although she at times emphasises visual moments of gazing in amazement, where the spatial seems to take over from the temporal as the narrative pauses to create a tableau. As she "enjoys all of the splendour around me, she lives in the moment"[23] (1941: 105). Seeing America from a fjord, she watches the distant coast "grow in the mirages—grow and fall, grow and fall. Many splendid peaks shot up, changed shape, and collapsed into a flat stretch of land in the next moment. Then they grew up again and repeated the spectacle until we turned round a corner and our own mountains hid the distant Akilinek..."[24] (105).

In this passage, Bang highlights a sense of movement, where the coast seen from her boat becomes a dramatically shifting mirage. The moving pictures bring a sense of the cinematic, and Bang maintains an awareness of the interaction between the different forms expressing her Greenland experience. This visual drama is not applied to Greenland, but to America, using the word "Akilinek", meaning "on the other side"[25]. In comparing the two texts, it seems unsurprising that the Danish account makes less of the visual exoticism, mirroring the historical context and sense of ownership or belonging Greenland may have represented for a Danish traveller, unlike a British one[26]. Wylie Hutchison also offers scenes bordering on the cinematic or using hypotyposis to produce a strong sensory impression. Moonlight over a lake forms a set of moving images:

> *Just after she had risen and was flooding lake and snow with her mellowed, distilled sunshine, came a shout and a clatter, a crowd of children running, and over the lake careered a sledge drawn by five dogs—the first I had seen. […] and I too was speeding over the moonlit lake behind a dog-team and my favourite dog.* (1930: 204)

Dramatic pictures of sensory moments also emerge from a stationary vantage point, where the characters are reduced to visual effects in the fairytale landscape:

> *Far as eye can reach the sea is covered with white ice and snow, darker patches amid the bergs showing where there are still stretches of water. On the crest of Sagdliarusek, the Big Island, the sun rests in a soft rosy light. Far away down at the foot of the fjord it lay a few minutes since on the round poll of Umanatsiak in the same gentle radiance. Away over the ice can be seen a moving black dot, some hunter out for his evening toil. The atmosphere is so crystal clear that the island eight kilometres distant seems scarcely half a mile away. The hush and peace of evening blesses everything. Elena in her igdlo below breaks wood for her supper fire; smoke rolls up in a saffron volume from the bakehouse chimney; the voices of children playing come up to me from time to time.* (1930: 292)

Hunters and children form visual and auditory dots and lines in the sensory tableau Wylie Hutchison paints. Her account stands out as particularly ekphrastic. Although Bang also notes some of the striking visuals she encounters, she does not approach the detailed, dramatic visual passages of Wylie Hutchison's text. Fantastical elements, following the title, are also an important feature of Wylie Hutchison's text. As well as fairies and mythical creatures, she draws on a sense of the cosmic to portray the singularity of the setting. Gathering plant samples, she wonders if the "saxifrages, poppy, rhododendron" she finds "will […] flourish in our British gardens […] setting seed down the centuries long after we are less than the dust of cosmic meteors, or perhaps inhabitants of the Red Planet that soared above the island plateau opposite my high window and shone last night across my table?" (1930: 145) Jupiter's "blazing crown outshines the red fire and elfin afterglow of a Greenland sunset some little time before any of the other stars are visible from earth" (1930: 145), and seeing Mars in the night

[23] "nød alt det pragtfulde omkring mig; jeg levede i øjeblikket."

[24] "vokse i Luftspejlingerne—vokse og falde, vokse og falde. Høje pragtfulde Tinder skød op, skiftede Form og faldt sammen til en flad Landstrækning i næste Øjeblik. Saa groede de op paany og gentog Skuespillet, indtil vi drejede om et Næs, og vore egne Fjelde skjuldte det fjerne Akilinek…"

[25] Ordbog.gl, "akilineq," accessed 30 July, 2025, https://ordbog.gl/?st=akilineq&pm=on#results

[26] More information on this historical context and on contemporary Greenland is accessible through the IWGIA (International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs) website, including the annual issue of *The Indigenous World*. https://iwgia.org/en/kalaallit-nunaat-greenland.html

sky produces an imaginary tableau combining Greenland and Scotland:

> *[…] burning above the show and the inland ice as he burns above the haunted woods of a Scottish Hallowe'en, which rise before my mind's eye rain-lashed, wind-swept (the radio tells us there has been a gale over England), with that sweet wet smell of decaying foliage which Greenland too must have known in ages long past.* (1930: 146)

Bang occasionally makes use of fantastical aspects, using the same term, "Eventyrland" (1941: 127), as Wylie Hutchison, and suggesting that the difference from home is so great she might be witnessing the "mysteries of a foreign planet"[27] (1941: 182) when she takes part in a whaling expedition. She also introduces a Swiftian sense of distance, although Bang applies this to Denmark. As the ship approaches home, she remarks upon the "strange, freshly washed Lilliput coast"[28] dotted with "toy houses"[29] (1941: 190). Wylie Hutchison achieves a similar sense that home has become abroad when describing a radio play entitled "The Ice Princess": "So strange it was to hear a description from the heated make-believe life three thousand miles away describing what we had only to look out of the window to see in its ice-pure reality!" (1930: 272) This leads to a sense of authenticity and purity in the colonial setting: "Up here a man lives the true life of nature, yonder lies the artificial." (1930: 272) The sense of an encounter with purity untainted by modernity corresponds to the image of "'timeless primitives' (Fienup-Riordan 1995: 52) who peacefully spend all their time working for subsistence in harmonious symbiosis with surrounding nature" which Jørgensen identifies in Bang's films (2014: 237). Wylie Hutchison's text produces an oscillation between reality and artifice, and as the Arctic journey progresses it is unclear whether Greenland or Scotland is more real. The colours are so bright they seem painted on: "Now into the sky steals the clear wonderful blue of sundown, shading into saffron and rose that have the brilliant unreal colouring of a picture-postcard." (1930: 173) Other descriptions suggest theatre scenery, with the evening light forming "a theatrical Alpenglow like rouge upon a dead face" (1930: 189). Descriptions like these emphasise a certain mise-en-scène, again underlining Wylie Hutchison's own artistic perspective which directs the narrative.

As for Bang, the mysterious and unreal elements are at times downplayed through humour. Seeing a whale, she describes its astonishing size with rather a prosaic image, as it has "a tongue as large as a modern maid's room"[30]. A roaring polar bear sounds "'as if a hundred cigarette smokers were simultaneously puffing out smoke in one long breath."[31] (1941: 118) She refers twice to the amusement park Tivoli to describe her travels: her boat running aground and being swayed by the tides is similar to the "haunted house in Tivoli"[32], and as she learns about polar bears with a guide, she imagines them enjoying a "cheerful Tivoli ride" on a "Bear slide"[33] (1941: 119). Images like these are immediately recognisable to her Danish readers and serve to somewhat domesticate the drama of seeing these creatures. Landscapes are also domesticated, and travelling in the sun is compared with a summer's day on the Jutland heaths[34] (1941: 166), while large icebergs are described as the size of Kongens Nytorv (1941: 124), the largest square in Copenhagen. Wylie Hutchison also brings her own country with her as she travels, although in a more romantic light: her final goal is to see the burial place of a Scottish harpooner, which is surrounded by "Scotch mist". She performs a final funereal gesture: "I took a twig to root at home in Bonnie Scotland in memory of her far-off son. And so again, in the closing mists, I left him to his rest." (1930: 379) The dramatic weather and solemn tone are far from Bang's matter-of-fact comparisons with Danish settings. Just as Bang feels the discomfort of the cold merits a detailed description in a polar narrative, she also writes openly about other inconveniences related to the human body, deriving

27 "en fremmed Klodes Mysterier"

28 "mærkelige, renvaskede Liliputkyst"

29 "legetøjshuse"

30 "en Tunge saa stor som et moderne Pigekammer"

31 "som om hundrede Cigaretrygere samtidig pustede Røgen fra sig i et langt Drag."

32 "det forheksede hus i Tivoli"

33 "munter Tivolifart", "Bjørnerutschebane"

34 "en Sommerdag paa Jyllands Hede"

humour from embarrassment: "The best story is from the time when I did not yet know that on long journeys you do not see each other's more intimate toilet acts at all, no matter how openly they take place"[35] (1941: 72). She describes in detail her battle with partially frozen undergarments comprising "a silk petticoat over my Jutland men's underwear made of re-used wool"[36]and her lengthy absence from the tent leading her travelling companions to fear for her life in an area where there might be bears (1941: 73).

Both writers convey their Greenland impressions through a personal voice and aesthetics which result in two rather different styles, in line with the concept of a borealistic co-creation of the North[37]. Wylie Hutchison derives a form of creative power from the landscape which contributes to the sense that she is a "true artist", as Rasmussen states in the preface. Bang's style at times involves a downplaying of the drama, which serves to domesticate the setting and bring it closer to her Danish readers, but also to set her apart as a writer, with blunt humour as an alternative to sublime, romanticising visual effects.

Photography, painting and reciprocal vision

As texts by multifaceted artists, both accounts contain reflections on their choice of the written form. They include technical considerations regarding their professional missions: Bang describes her photography equipment while Wylie Hutchison mentions specific plants, ending the book with an index of plant samples. Both texts also confront the limitations of the various artistic forms they use. At the top of the mountain, Wylie Hutchison cannot take photographs: "my camera moved slowly, its oils half-frozen" (1930: 366). On her final expedition to visit the grave of a Scottish harpooner, "a thick haze of Scotch mist" makes a "photograph difficult, if not impossible, even had I had my camera." Frozen landscapes are a tempting setting for a plein air painting:

> *A sight so strange, so beautiful, so picturesque as to drive an artist to despair, for should he sit down upon the ice to attempt to paint it, his water colours freeze at the first sweep, his oils coagulate to glue, and he himself—at a temperature of minus 12° C. must shortly take root where he sits!* (1930: 275)

Since painting is a physical impossibility, writing becomes the only possible means of recording these sights. Similarly, in presenting the text as "entertainment literature" and dramatic travel situations as "boys' book Romanticism"[38] (1941: 180), Bang's metatextual commentary shows a conscious approach to text construction. During the expedition where she encounters a group of polar bears, Bang considers telling her guide not to shoot until she has had time to take a photograph, but resigns herself to an incomplete picture: "I don't have the right reporter's mind that will stop at nothing to get a picture, so I kept quiet and settled for experiencing the situation for myself, without passing it on to unauthorized people in Europe."[39] (1941: 118) This paralipsis, in claiming not to record the scene she is in fact describing, highlights the artist's own perspective, not as a photographer, but as a writer. Similarly, her burnt diaries remove the precision in the text, making the personal impressions themselves the focus. Because the details have been lost along with the daily accounts, she must develop a narrative technique which makes the gaps between events blend naturally into the text, as if she is editing a film:

> *[…] the same method as in film, where, by means of dissolves, you add related moments to a scene that you cannot follow only to let the characters come back into the picture when so much time has passed that*

35 "Den bedste Historie er fra dengang, jeg endnu ikke vidste, at paa lange Rejser ser man overhovedet ikke hinandens intimere Toilethandlinger, ligegyldigt hvor aabenlyst de foregaar."

36 ("en Silke-Underkjole over mit jydske Kradsulds-Herreundertøj")

37 See Briens, Sylvain, "Boréalisme. Pour un atlas sensible du Nord", *Études Germaniques*, vol. 290, no. 2, 2018 p. 171: "[…] le boréalisme invite à dessiner un atlas dans lequel chaque carte esquisserait de nouvelles frontières, définirait de nouveaux territoires, représenterait de nouvelles topographies, construirait de nouvelles adjacences et relations de voisinages, réelles ou imaginaires. Cet atlas donnerait à lire la cartographie d'un espace sensible inspiré de l'expérience d'un « Nord » et produit par la médiation de celui qui l'éprouve, le pense ou le rêve."

38 "underholdningslitteratur", "Drengebogs-Romantik"

39 "jeg har ikke det rette Reportersind, der intet skyr for at faa et billede, saa jeg tav og nøjedes med at opleve Situationen for mig selv, uden at bringe den videre til uvedkommende Mennesker i Europa."

you can imagine the intermediate section completed.[40] (1941: 66)

The lost diaries become a sort of modernist device, playing with framed narratives and the unreliability of memory. Bang simultaneously announces herself as an unreliable narrator and affirms her ability to construct stories, whether through words or pictures. She makes frequent metatextual comments, and at times notes aspects that failed to make it into her photographs and films: "but I didn't manage to include the most delightful part: the moon over a turquoise sky and violet icebergs"[41] (1941: 104)

The written account is a means of filling in these gaps. Commenting on *Grønland*, the book of photographs Bang published the previous year, Illeris highlights a "fragmented", "polyphonic" (2003: 403) style which offers more than one version of the Greenland story Bang brought back from these journeys. She connects this with a wider ambivalence in the Danish attitude to Greenland, vacillating between a desire to see traditional culture and modern industry:

> *The alternating and simultaneous experience of closeness and distance, and the alternately empathetic and critically distanced attitude towards Greenland represented by Jette Bang's photographs and texts reflect the ambiguity of contemporary Danish attitudes towards modernisation.*[42] (2003: 402)

Both Bang's and Wylie Hutchison's texts are examples of Eurocentric perspectives, and Denmark's position in Greenland is largely unquestioned. This is in line with the views of the time, as exemplified by Rasmussen's remarks in the preface to Wylie Hutchison's text, describing other nations' ("Icelanders[43], Norwegians, Swedes, Englishmen, Americans, Germans and Dutchmen") sense of "responsibility for the aboriginal population—the Eskimos": "That race we have tried to civilise, our aim always being to enable it to meet and absorb the culture of the white man under the sign of progress, without risk to body or soul." (vii) In both accounts, the colonial environment is described in positive terms. Wylie Hutchison describes a visit to a "cosy 'Praestebolig'" (1930: 141), using the Danish term for a vicarage, and almost the exact same concept, "Præstegaardshygge" appears in Bang's text:

> *It was with one of Greenland's oldest ladies, who had lived in the country for almost a lifetime and kept rather a large household. Besides me, one of the colony's wives was visiting her, and the two ladies were each sitting with their embroidery and talking about this and that from Danish colony life. There was an old-fashioned parsonage cosiness about the conversation, which I sat and enjoyed in silence…"* (135)[44]

The Danish colony is a pleasant, homely setting for both writers. In Bang's account, the two women who represent colonised and coloniser mirror one another perfectly, it is Bang who is intruding upon an established social order. Unlike her intrusion in the hunt as a white woman, here she is an intruder because she lacks traditionally feminine skills, announcing that she remains silent and "made myself small in the chair, I can neither bake nor sew French seams"[45] (1941: 137).

While the colonial setting remains unquestioned, both writers can see that their own perspectives are limited, making use of what Pratt calls "reciprocal vision" (2007: 96) to highlight this. Wylie Hutchison engages her housekeeper, Dorthe, in a conversation about their differences, and wonders, referring to herself as "Tuluk" or "English speaker"[46], "what […] does 'Tuluk' look like to Dorthe?" (1930: 229) She shows her a picture in a magazine of a Scottish landscape and concludes that her own land is "beautiful and obscure" for Dorthe, reversing the sense of exoticism. The reversal of vision also includes her accounts of showing people the portraits she has painted of them. Judita, a character introduced as the carpenter's housekeeper, is unimpressed with her attempts, both at painting, "bursting into fits of laughter at the result of my labours", and at speaking Greenlandic, "bursting into fresh fits of laughter at my efforts" (1930: 190). Judita regains agency in the text by discreetly destroying the resulting artwork: "Some months later, after many further attempts, I achieved what I considered a fairly successful likeness of Judita's elusive personality, and presented it to the carpenter for his birthday. This picture Judita somehow got hold of and burnt." (1930: 195) Regina, another Greenlandic model, also finds her portrayal ridiculous, and "would come over to inspect progress and burst out laughing" (1930: 104). These scenes are portrayed with lightness, and a sense that Wylie Hutchison does not wish for her artworks to be taken too seriously, but they also raise questions about the ethics of capturing images of Greenland on paper. In laughing at her pictures, and refusing to see themselves in them, Wylie Hutchison's local models also refuse objectification.

Reflecting on how her representations of Greenland compare with Greenlandic self-images, Bang relates a conversation at her 1937 exhibition in Copenhagen, when she asks a young man from Greenland:

> *what he and his countrymen down here thought of the pictures. 'The Greenlanders are sorry that you only show earth huts,' he replied. It made me think about the fact that most travelogues and Greenland exhibitions give a rather one-sided picture of the country. It is natural to be captivated by the primitive and exotic at home and abroad, as modern progress is too similar to our own conditions to be of interest.*[47] (1941: 147)

This reaction mirrors the view of the funding body: "the director of the Royal Greenlandic Trade Company who had sponsored the film […] stated with disappointment that the film did not demonstrate the technological and cultural progress achieved by the Danish colonial administration (Johnsen 2003:38)." Elsewhere, Bang notes that Danes know little of the "new Greenland": "no one knows so much about it in Denmark, where the original Greenland is so firmly fixed in the consciousness, with a veneer of patented Romanticism, that it takes the place of all other images."[48] (1941: 148)

The aesthetics of an old, untouched Greenland is so dominant that other versions are unexpected and unwelcome. A newer Greenland might also appear boringly familiar: as Arnfred and Bransholm Pedersen point out, using Bang's photos displaying Danish elements of Greenlandic domestic life as an example, "modernization was Danification" (2015). Bang's interrogation is about the type of Greenland representation that might interest different audiences, but she also indicates some doubts about the modernisation itself. She finds the town of Ivigtut "strange" as a "piece of hypermodern Europe with American comforts"[49] (1941: 186). This apparent discord with the body making her work possible might indicate a more critical view of Denmark's activities in Greenland and, as Jørgensen points out, this stance was later suggested in her 1961 book *Grønland igen*. (2014: 242). By letting conflicting views of Greenland appear in the text, both her own and those of the public, Bang reflects the tendency towards fragmentation noted by Illeris. In both accounts, the dialogue between text and image hints at broader questions of the ethics of representation and reciprocity, while remaining anchored in a Eurocentric perception of Greenland.

Conclusion

In these two texts, written roughly a decade apart, Jette Bang and Isobel Wylie Hutchison offer markedly different Greenland narratives, yet they share a desire to discover the setting for themselves and portray

40 "den same Fremgangsmetode som i Film, hvor man ved Overblændinger føjer beslægtede Momenter ind i en Scene, man ikke kan følge, for først at lade personerne komme tilbage i Billedet, naar der er gaaet saapas Tid at man kan tænke sig det mellemliggende Afsnit fuldført."

41 "men det dejligste: Maanen over en turkisfarvet Himmel og violette Isfjelde fik jeg ikke med."

42 "Den vekslende og samtidige oplevelse af nærhed og afstand, og den skiftevis indlevende og kritisk distancerede holdning til Grønland, som repræsenteres af Jette Bangs fotografier og tekster, spejler samtidens tvetydige danske holdninger til moderniseringen."

43 Iceland had begun to move towards independence at the end of the 19th century, and gained recognition as a sovereign state in personal union with Denmark in 1918.

44 "Det var hos en af Grønlands ældste Damer, der i næsten en Menneskealder havde boet i Landet og ført et ret stort Hus. Foruden mig var en af Koloniens Fruer paa Besøg hos hende, og de to Damer sad hver mit sit Broderevæk og snakkede om løst og fast fra det danske Koloniliv. Der var en egen gammeldags Præstegaardshygge over Samtalen, som jeg sad og nød i Tavshed…"

45 "Jeg gjorde mig lille i stolen, jeg kan hverken bage eller sy Fransk."

46 Ordbog.gl, "tuluk," accessed 30 July 2025, https://ordbog.gl/?st=tuluk&pm=on#results

47 "hvad han og hans Landsmænd hernede syntes om Billederne. "Grønlænderne er kede af, at du kun viser Jordhytter," svarede han. Det fik mig til at tænke over, at de fleste Rejsebeskrivelser og Grønlandsudstillinger giver et ret ensidigt Billede af Landet. Det er naturligt at man herhjemme og ude i Verden kun fængsles af det primitive og fremmedartede, da de moderne Fremskridt minder for meget om vore egne Forhold til at kunne interessere."

48 "…ingen kender saa meget til det herhjemme, hvor det oprindelige Grønland er slaaet saa godt fast i bevidstheden, med et skær af Patentromantik, at det stjæler Billedet fra det andet."

49 "Stykke hypermoderne Europa med amerikanske Bekvemmeligheder"

it in their own way. Each reflects on the constructed nature of travel narratives, Wylie Hutchison through theatrical metaphors that frame Greenland as a kind of décor, and Bang by highlighting what is left out of her written and photographic accounts. While Wylie Hutchison's writing interacts with the illustrations in her book, forming a harmonious intermedial whole, Bang's authorial pose relies on the sense that she is saying it like it is, revealing the unglamorous realities of Arctic travel to her reader, rather than offering the sublime visions they might be expecting.

The text-image interactions in each work frame their differing colonial perspectives: while Bang records scenes requested by the Danish state, Wylie Hutchison includes works by Indigenous artists. As elite travellers whose journeys were nationally recognised (and sponsored in Bang's case) both women approach the setting through their respective crafts, giving their accounts both a personal atmosphere and a sense of authority. Rather than striving for documentary realism, their authority comes from the subjective perspectives they use to shape the Arctic and contribute to an intermedial dialogue around the representation of Greenland.

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THE AIRSHIP ITALIA *DISASTER IN THE SCANDINAVIAN PRESS (1928)*

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Introduction

The polar expedition of the airship *Italia* was organized between the winter of 1927 and spring of 1928 with the aim of resuming "the exploration of the Arctic" after the success of the Amundsen-Ellsworth-Nobile transpolar flight. The expedition, formally organized by the Royal Italian Geographical Society, "needed the approval of the Head of Government [Mussolini] and the cooperation of some Ministries" (Tomaselli 1929: 8, transl.). The expedition, in addition to the eighteen crew members of the airship[1], involved almost two hundred military personnel of the Italian Air force, Navy and Army. Unlike the polar flight of the airship *Norge*, the *Italia*'s expedition included extensive scientific research in the Arctic entrusted to Aldo Pontremoli, Finn Malmgren and František Běhounek. The mission, in brief, consisted in three flights, which took place on 11, 15-18 and 23-25 May 1928 respectively: during the first flight, the *Italia* reached the east coast of Greenland; during the second one, the airship coasted Severnaja Zemlja; on the third and final flight, the *Italia*, with sixteen people on board, after reaching the North Pole, crashed north-east of Svalbard on the way back[2]. Of the crew members, only eight of them were rescued between 23 June and 12 July 1928[3]. The airship *Italia* disaster irrevocably marked the end of any further Italian fascist project in the Arctic region. Over two years, the Italian celebration of the first transpolar flight was followed by oblivion, as exemplified by a letter sent by Italo Balbo to the Minister of Education Balbino Giuliano focusing on the book published by Umberto Nobile concerning the history of the airship *Italia* expedition: "I consider the book's presence in school libraries to be totally inappropriate and *harmful*; the exploits of the commander of that disgraceful expedition were certainly not edifying and our pupils have nothing to learn from his example"[4]. The regime's intent to shelve any further fascist project in the Arctic after the airship *Italia* disaster should also be read in the light of the serious controversy that mounted in the global press during 1928, and which targeted Benito Mussolini and Umberto Nobile. In fact, the airship's crash on the pack ice was considered by many at the time as one of the fascist regime's most serious defeats. In this regard, it is signifcant to note the observation of one of the leaders of Italian American anti-fascism, Vincenzo Vacirca, according to whom the *Italia*'s polar disaster was even more serious in terms of its consequences for the fascist regime than the assassination (in 1924) of the socialist deputy Giacomo Matteotti[5]. As can be seen from the great amount of archival documentation kept in Rome, Oslo and Stockholm which I will analyze below, the Italian authorities were particularly concerned by the negative echo that the disaster had in Scandinavia[6]: in particular, they feared that the tragedy would have a negative effect on Italian diplomatic relations in the region[7]. In this article, I will examine the controversy by sequentially focusing on Norway, Sweden and Denmark, the first three countries crossed by the Italian survivors during the return journey by train to Rome (26-31 July 1928). At the forefront of the attacks against the expedition, Mussolini, Nobile and the other Italian survivors, were liberal, socialist and communist Scandinavian newspapers. From a methodological point of view, the transnational study of several correspondences kept in Rome, Oslo and Stockholm is useful to bring out the *proactive* role of Italian diplomatic authorities – often conducted behind the scenes – in the journalistic controversy in Norway, Sweden and Denmark.

The airship Italia *disaster in the Norwegian press*

After the airship crash, the Italian authorities tightened the grip of censorship[8] on what appeared to the world as one of the fascist regime's most serious defeats. Two very significant testimonies in this regard were provided by Maffio Maffii, publisher of the Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera*. In a telespresso sent to Giuseppe Sirianni, Undersecretary of State at the Ministry of the Navy, Maffii pointed out that Giuseppe Romagna Manoja (commander of the ship *Città di Milano*) implemented in Ny-Ålesund "a strict and thorough censorship of the articles written by the envoys to Svalbard"[9]. Furthermore, in a slightly later letter addressed to Mario Cambri, the editor of *Corriere della Sera* confided that at the Navy headquarters in Rome they hoped in vain that "by gagging" Italian correspondents they could have "silence[d] the whole world"[10]. As the Italian castaways were rescued on 12 July 1928, the fascist censorship orchestrated by Rome took the form of prohibiting the survivors of having any contact with the international press: by order of Sirianni, in particular, the castaways were forbidden "for any reason and in any form to give interviews or give news of the events that occurred to them"[11]. Among the foreign journalists, especially the Norwegian ones would then have noted the obstacles placed between them and the Italian survivors. Critical judgments on the fascist censorship imposed in Svalbard were later expressed by Odd Arnesen, a correspondent for *Aftenposten* (Arnesen & Lundborg 1928; Ytreberg 2021). The obstacles placed by fascist censorship to foreign correspondents (primarily Norwegian and Swedish) provoked even more criticism in response. According to General Umberto Nobile's brother, Amedeo, who was in Svalbard at the time to conduct scientific research at Ny-Ålesund, Romagna Manoja allegedly behaved in such a way as to "induce" foreign journalists "to start a campaign against the polar expedition and the Italians' rescue operations"[12]. After this necessary premise centered on the fascist censorship imposed in Svalbard around the disaster, we may provide an overall analysis of the attacks on the polar expedition and the regime which appeared in the Norwegian press[13].

Since the beginning of July 1928, tirades against the Italian polar expedition were published on several occasions mainly in five Norwegian

1 Renato Alessandrini, Ettore Arduino, František Běhounek, Giuseppe Biagi, Attilio Caratti, Natale Cecioni, Calisto Ciocca, Ugo Lago, Finn Malmgren, Adalberto Mariano, Umberto Nobile, Ettore Pedretti, Vincenzo Pomella, Aldo Pontremoli, Francesco Tomaselli, Felice Trojani, Alfredo Viglieri and Filippo Zappi.

2 During the third flight Tomaselli and Pedretti stayed at Ny-Ålesund.

3 Nobile was rescued on 23 June 1928; Mariano, Zappi, Viglieri, Trojani, Běhounek, Cecioni and Biagi on 12 July 1928.

4 CDUN, Italia [ITA], b.22, I. Balbo to B. Giuliano, March 1, 1930, transl., my emphasis.

5 ACS, Ministry of the Interior (MI), General Directorate of Public Security, General and Reserved Affairs Directorate, b.63, f.4, sf.2, Prefecture of Ragusa to MI, August 23, 1928.

6 The great echo in Scandinavian countries should be read also in the light of the fact that, as the editor-in-chief of the Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera* pointed out, most of the journalists working between Ny-Ålesund and Virgohamna at the time of the disaster and the international rescue operations were conducted by "Swedes and Norwegians". ASCS, b.1249c, M. Maffii to G. Sirianni, July 7, 1928, transl.

7 On the diplomatic, scientific and cultural relations between Italy and Nordic countries, see: Beretta & Grandin, 2001; Madelli, 2014; Nencioni, 2015; Miscali, 2021; Ferrarini, 2021; Miscali, 2023; Ferrarini, 2023.

8 On the fascist censorship of the press, see: Tiozzo, 2011.

9 ASCS, b.1249c, M. Maffii to G. Sirianni, July 7, 1928, transl.

10 ASCS, b.1249c, M. Maffii a M. Cambri, July 9, 1928, transl.

11 AUSMM, Base, b.2442, G. Sirianni to G. Romagna Manoja, July 18, 1928, transl.

12 CDUN, ITA, b.3, f.1, A. Nobile, Rapporto, transl.

13 For an overview of contemporary Norwegian newspapers, see: Ottesen, 2002; Dahl, 2018.

newspapers: *Dagbladet* (liberal), *Arbeidet* (socialist), *Arbeiderbladet* (social-democratic), *Friheten* and *Norges Kommunistblad* (communist). As regards *Arbeidet*, the Minister Plenipotentiary in Oslo, Carlo Senni, pointed out to the Italian Foreign Ministry an article in which Nobile was described as "a fascist buffoon" and "a worm" about to be proclaimed "national hero of the new Rome" by the "scoundrel Mussolini"[14]. Similar dispatches by Senni concerned what the Minister Plenipotentiary in Oslo called "malicious and vulgar publications" which appeared in the first half of July in *Arbeiderbladet*[15]. Similarly to the socialist *Arbeidet* and social-democratic *Arbeiderbladet*, the communist newspaper *Friheten* raged against Nobile, who was stamped as a fascist spokesman, and against the airship *Italia* expedition, which was accused of having no scientific purpose and conducted out of sheer vainglory[16]. Like *Friheten*, also the liberal *Dagbladet* criticized the futility of the expedition[17]. Furthermore, *Dagbladet* also called for a Norwegian investigation to shed light on the circumstances of Finn Malmgren's death on the ice pack. The jurist Albert Gjerdrum argued for the possible application of the Norwegian Penal Code against the two Italian officers Filippo Zappi and Adalberto Mariano for their alleged abandonment of Malmgren during the march on the ice pack[18]. The *Dagbladet* controversy was not only reported by the Italian authorities but also by foreign ones: the Swedish Minister Plenipotentiary in Oslo, Torvald Magnusson Höjer, on 20 July 1928, referring to the articles which had appeared the day before in the Norwegian newspaper, described the position taken by the *Dagbladet* on the issue of the Italian polar expedition disaster as "markedly anti-fascist and *even anti-Italian*"[19]. The articles published in *Arbeidet*, *Arbeiderbladet*, *Friheten* and *Dagbladet*, were in fact only the tip of the iceberg of an even more widespread malaise than that emerges from the press: Rolf Thommessen, editor of *Tidens Tegn*, confided to Senni that he had been continuously receiving at the office "notes and writings" which were "not benevolent at all on the General [Nobile]"[20]. It was in response to *Dagbladet*'s attacks and Thommessen's confidences, that Senni decided to give an interview to the Norwegian newspaper. From the Italian legation in *Inkognitogaden*, Senni, on the one hand, *unhooked* the Fascist regime of the airship *Italia* disaster: he emphasized that the expedition was "of a completely private nature", or of the sole responsibility of the Italian Geographic Society. On the other hand, Senni praised the Norwegian contribution to the rescue operations, from the attempts of Hjalmar Riiser-Larsen and Finn Lützow-Holm to the "sacrifice" of Roald Amundsen[21]. In particular, the celebration by Senni of Amundsen, one of the polar heroes who played a key role in consolidating a Norwegian (polar) identity[22], was an extremely sensitive issue from the Italian perspective, especially considering the well-known controversy that since 1926 had pitted him against Nobile over the responsibility for the success of the *Norge* expedition (Aas, 2022).

The controversy about the disaster of the airship *Italia* was rekindled concurrently to the arrival of the Italian survivors in Narvik, where they began a long train journey to Rome (26-31 July 1928). In the Norwegian harbour the Italians found two wagons ready (Nobile, 1970). The Italian survivors had received specific orders from Rome that well exemplify the fascist censorship just analyzed. Nobile would recall years later: "the order given was that no one should approach me and that under no circumstances could I leave the train" (Nobile, 1978: 43, transl.). The controversy was reignited in Narvik by the local labour newspaper, *Fremover* (Aas, 2010). On 25 July 1928, the day before the survivors arrived, an article was published in the Norwegian newspaper in which the anonymous author declared in an accusatory tone that he wanted to see the one [Nobile] who had "abandoned" the wounded comrades and those ones [Mariano and Zappi] who had "abandoned" the Malmgren leaving him to die on the ice without food[23]. Despite *Fremover's* attacks, while there were no "hostile" demonstrations mentioned in some contemporary chronicles[24], nevertheless the arrival of the survivors was not a moment without tension. Leaving aside the incident according to which none of the bystanders at the dock stretched the mooring lines to the ship (Lundborg, 1929; Aas, 1998)[25], a direct testimony of the Italian Naval Attaché Franco Quentin is at least worthy of consideration, which clashes with a recent sweetened version praising "affectionate courtesies" (Leva, 1994: 215): "The landing of the survivors in Narvik was attended by a large crowd, which, however, remained *absolutely silent*"[26].

The departure of the survivors to Krylbo, Sweden, did not stop the controversy in the newspapers belonging to the anti-fascist area in the following days. In the *Fremover*, attacks continued against Nobile and Zappi, who was portrayed as a criminal[27], while in *Friheten*, the Italian General was called an instrument of fascist propaganda[28]. A *double* narrative was then consolidated: on the one hand, attacks against the fascist regime; on the other, praises of the heroism and sacrifice of the Norwegian, Swedish, French, Russian and Finnish rescuers. In brief, the anti-fascist invective was thus mixed with the epitaph. The most glaring example of this double narrative is an article published in *Norges Kommunistblad* on 3 September 1928 in which the celebration of Roald Amundsen's sacrifice and memory goes hand in hand with a harsh criticism of Nobile and Mussolini. In fact, the moral exaltation of the "polar hero" was matched by Nobile's alleged cowardice and the airship *Italia* expedition, considered a mere expression of fascist "imperialism"[29]. Similar press criticism following the arrival of the survivors in Narvik was also conducted through cartoons. Particularly noteworthy are those created by the cartoonist Ragnvald Blix for *Dagbladet*: one of the most famous depicts a (fascist) legionnaire prostrate and desperate on the ice pack trusting in the (Soviet) help of the icebreaker *Krassin*[30]. In this regard, it should be remembered that "the rescue of the survivors by the soviet icebreaker Krassin was turned into a symbolic triumph of communism over fascism in the political propaganda of interwar Europe" (Wråkberg, 2001: 200).

Ultimately, although the Norwegian contribution to the rescue operation was praised by Senni as a further demonstration of the good relations between Italy and Norway, criticism after the polar disaster in newspapers such as *Arbeidet, Arbeiderbladet, Friheten, Dagbladet, Fremover* and *Norges Kommunistblad*, caused some concern in diplomatic circles. Torvald Magnusson Höjer, for example, wrote that the discontent generated in Italy by such press attacks *could* have negatively affected relations between the two countries[31]. As is well known, this did not happen. In this regard, a telespresso sent by Augusto De Marsanich, shortly after taking office as Italian Minister Plenipotentiary in Oslo in 1930, is illuminating: "Towards Italy, in general, the sympathies here [in Norway] seem to be rather lively, despite the unfortunate backlash of the events originating from the 'Italia' expedition"[32].

The airship Italia *disaster in the Swedish press*

The airship *Italia* disaster also had a wide echo in Sweden in 1928. From the beginning

14 *Arbeidet* quoted in: AUSMM, Base, b.2660, C. Senni to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs [MFA], July 1928, Date not specified, transl.

15 C. Senni quoted in: AUSMM, Base, b.2659, f.10, D. Grandi to the Ministry of Navy [MN], July 20, 1928, transl.

16 NB, *Friheten*, July 13, 1928. On the criticism of *Friheten* against the Italian polar expedition, see also: Aas, 2005; Aas, 2010. Umberto Nobile was targeted by the global anti-fascist press as early as spring 1926 (after the Amundsen-Ellsworth-Nobile transpolar flight) with various epithets such as "spokesman" and "ambassador" of Mussolini's regime (Alfei, 2022).

17 NB, *Dagbladet*, July 2, 1928.

18 NB, *Dagbladet*, July 19, 1928. For a history of the controversy on Finn Malmgren's death, see: Alfei, 2024.

19 RAS, Utrikesdepartementet [UD], b.3252, f. "Undsättning till Nobile-expeditionen 1928", T. M. Höjer to E. C. Boheman, July 20, 1928, transl., emphasis mine.

20 C. Senni quoted in: AUSMM, Base, b.2659, f.10, D. Grandi to MN, July 20, 1928, transl.

21 NB, *Dagbladet*, July 20, 1928, transl.

22 On the importance of polar heroes and polar history in consolidating Norwegian identity, see: Eriksen, 2006; Fulsås, 2006; Aronsson, P., Fulsås, N., Haapala, P., Jensen, 2008; Aas, 2021; Aas, 2022.

23 NB, *Fremover*, July 25, 1928, transl.

24 *Heraldo de Madrid*, July 27, 1928, transl.; *The Evening Star*, July 27, 1928.

25 See also: NB, *Ofotens Tidende*, July 27, 1928; NB, *Fremover*, July 28, 1928.

26 AUSMM, Base, b.2442, f.12, F. Quentin to the Office of the Chief of Staff of the Italian Royal Navy [UCSMM], August 6, 1928, transl., my emphasis.

27 NB, *Fremover*, July 28, 1928.

28 NB, *Friheten*, July 31, 1928.

29 NB, *Norges Kommunistblad,* September 3, 1928, transl.

30 NB, *Dagbladet*, August 11, 1928.

31 RA, UD, b. "Undsättning till Nobile expeditionen, 1928", T. M. Höjer to J. Lagerberg, July 21, 1928.

32 ASMAE, Political Affairs [AP], s.1919-1930, Norway, b.1452, f. "Rapporti politici 1928", A. De Marsanich to MFA, 1930, Date not specified, 2, transl.

of July, criticism and attacks on Nobile and the expedition are documented in the Swedish press of *all* political leanings: conservative (*Stockholms Dagblad, Nya Dagligt Allehanda, Svenska Dagbladet, Aftonbladet*), liberal (*Dagens Nyheter, Stockholmstidningen* and S*venska Morgonbladet*), social-democratic (*Arbetet* and *Social-Demokraten*), trade unionist (*Arbetaren*) and communist (*Folkets Dagblad* e *Norrskensflamman*)[33]. Among the most critical Swedish newspapers was, for example, the conservative *Stockholms Dagblad*, which since 2 July emerged with its "very violent campaign against General Nobile"[34]. The Italian authorities, who considered this paper the "most authoritative" in Sweden[35], were particularly concerned by its harsh attacks. The trade unionist *Arbetaren* pointed out that in Sweden not only the radicals but also the "bourgeois" criticized the fascist Italian expedition and the regime's management of the rescue operations[36]. The social-democratic *Arbetet* denounced the presence of fascist censorship behind every public statement expressed by General Nobile concerning the polar disaster[37]. The liberal *Svenska Morgonbladet* marked Nobile's expedition as a "theatre of chauvinist Catholicism, or Catholic chauvinism", pointing out that the holy cross donated by Pope Pius XI and thrown on the Pole by the Italians had been "exposed to disgusting desecration"[38]. The rescue of Mariano and Zappi by the Soviet icebreaker *Krassin* on 12 July 1928 and the spread of the news of the death of Malmgren exacerbated in Sweden the already vehement criticism towards the Italians which had appeared in the previous days (Sicolo, 2020). The judgement of the Italian Minister Plenipotentiary in Stockholm, Ascanio Colonna, is remarkable in this regard: "When it became known with certainty that Malmgren was dead, not a few of the critics became *hysterical*"[39]. From 13 July, in particular, the tirades of the more markedly anti-fascist press intensified: from the *Arbetetet*, which hurled strides against the pointless sacrifice "on the altar of fascist vanity"[40] to the *Norrskensflamman*[41], which accused Mariano and Zappi of abandoning Malmgren[42]. Four days later, the Swedish communist newspaper portrayed the Italian polar expedition as a mission animated by "imperialistic megalomania" and – with pointed references to Nobile, Mariano and Zappi – by cowardice, lies and cruelty[43]. The sensationalist accounts of the airship *Italia* disaster in newspapers such as *Arbetet* and *Norrskensflamman* were part of a broader anti-fascist political struggle: as it was soon to be written in *Lunds Dagblad*, a part of the Swedish press was taking "advantage of the circumstance to turn the misfortune of Nobile's expedition into a weapon in the fight against Mussolini's regime"[44]. Starting 13 July in Sweden, it was not only the press belonging to the progressive and anti-fascist area that escalated the controversy. One of the most notable cases is represented by the conservative *Nya Dagligt Allehanda*: the initial uncertainties – concerning, for example, the Italian government's procrastination in involving other countries in the rescue operations[45] – were replaced

33 For a broader overview of the history of Swedish press, see: Lundström, G., Rydén, P., Sandlund, E., 2001; Gustafsson, 2001; Gustafsson and Rydén, 2010.

34 AUSMM, Base, b.2660, *Stampa svedese del 2 luglio 1928*, transl.

35 ASMAE, AP, s.1919-1930, Sweden, b.1615, f. "Bolscevismo", A. Martin-Franklin to B. Mussolini, June 20, 1924, transl.

36 KB, *Arbetaren*, July 4, 1928, transl.

37 KB, *Arbetetet*, July 3, 1928. For an overview of the political struggle of *Arbetet* until the Thirties, see: Uhlén, 1937.

38 KB, *Svenska Morgonbladet,* July 11, 1928, transl.

39 A. Colonna quoted in: AUSMM, Base, b.2660, A. Colonna to MFA, November 22, 1928, transl., my emphasis.

40 KB, *Arbetetet*, July 13, 1928, transl.

41 The *Norrskensflamman* together with the *Stormklockan* was "the extremely violent" press organ of a "Bolshevik minority" led by Karl Gustaf Johansson and Edvin E. Persson which distinguished itself from 1928 "by singular combativeness, mainly in northern Sweden and the province of Kalmar". ASMAE, AP, s.1919-1930, Sweden, b.1615, f. "Bolscevismo", F. Quentin to MFA, September 16, 1929, transl. For a political analysis of the *Norrskensflamman*, see: Lampa, 2000.

42 KB, *Norrskensflamman*, July 13, 1928.

43 KB, *Norrskensflamman*, July 17, 1928, transl.

44 KB, *Lunds Dagblad*, July 17, 1928, transl.

45 See for example: RAO, UD, NAR, b. "Nobileekspedisionen 1928", J. Wollebæk to Utenriksdepartementet, May 31, 1928.

by open criticism, often in racial tones, when the news of Malmgren's death spread: "in his blood he [Nobile] has not a little of that vaniloquence that is such a common disease among southern Italians"[46]. The conservative newspaper's polemics were subject of concern by the Italian diplomatic authorities: "The newspaper 'Nya Dagligt Allehanda' has particularly distinguished itself in the hateful campaign of slander against the castaways of the 'Italia'"[47]. A resurgence of hostile rhetoric against the Italian expedition can also be documented in *Svenska Dagbladet* when the news concerning Malmgren's death spread[48]. After 13 July, false rumours circulated indeed more frequently: for example, according to one of the Swedish journalists operating at Ny-Ålesund, Nobile, despite adverse weather conditions, chose to leave for the North Pole *only* to throw the Italian flag on the anniversary of the declaration of war on Germany [24 May 1915][49].

During the same period, the attacks of the Swedish press became an increasing subject of discussion between the Italian and Swedish diplomatic authorities both in Rome and in Stockholm. As can be seen from many Italian newspaper clippings sent by the Swedish Ambassador in Rome, Erik Sjöborg, the Foreign Ministry in Stockholm was continuously updated on the regime's reactions to the press controversy in Scandinavian countries[50]. The fact that similar criticism also referred to the Swedish press is further supported by a letter from Sjöborg in which the Ambassador told Jakob Pettersson, Minister for Social Affairs, about a conversation after 13 July in which Colonna had deplored the attacks launched by the "Swedish press" against the two Italian officers Mariano and Zappi. Sjöborg's response on that occasion was inspired by caution and a condemnation of such newspaper articles[51]. Following the comments received from Rome, Pettersson then reported to the Foreign Minister, Eliel Löfgren, an overall critical opinion from Italy of the attitude adopted by the Swedish press towards Nobile, Mariano and Zappi. Noting, therefore, the publication of articles characterized by harsh tones against the fascist disaster, Petterson pointed out a "dangerous lack of restraint" in Swedish journalists in reporting on an expedition led by "a country [Italy] with which Sweden wished to maintain good relations"[52]. To deal with the complaints of the Italian authorities, Löfgren called a press conference with some of Sweden's leading newspapers for 18 July 1928: the aim of the meeting was to urge them to adopt a more conciliatory stance towards the Italian polar tragedy[53]. According to a note from the secretariat of the Swedish Foreign Ministry, the press conference called by Löfgren was attended by journalists affiliated with periodicals that, for the most part, had published harsh attacks against the Italian polar expedition up to then[54]. The initiative aimed in short to *defuse* the Italian Swedish diplomatic tension created around the polar catastrophe, and particularly around the death of Malmgren. In some cases, Löfgren's move achieved the desired result. On 19 July, *Stockholms Dagblad*, after having distinguished itself for the campaign against Nobile, urged its readers to be milder about the same events: "Rushed conclusions and unfair suspicions, arising from insufficient or inaccurate information, must not disturb the good relations between countries [Sweden and Italy] united in the feeling of common misfortunes and in selfless rescue operations"[55].

Despite the press conference on 18 July, the attacks by the Swedish press belonging to the anti-fascist

46 KB, *Nya Dagligt Allehanda*, July 13, 1928, transl.

47 AUSMM, Base, b.2660, MFA to MN, August 30, 1928, transl.

48 For a more in-depth overview on *Svenska Dagbladet* during the interwar period, see: Anderson, 1960; Lagerstedt, 1984.

49 KB, *Svenska Dagbladet*, July 18, 1928. On the falsity of this statement, see: CDUN, ITA, b.2, f.10, U. Nobile to G. Sirianni, July 26, 1928.

50 See the press clippers in: RAS, UD, b. "Undsättning till Nobile-expeditionen 1928".

51 RAS, UD, b. "Undsättning till Nobile-expeditionen 1928", E. Sjöborg to J. Pettersson, July 16, 1928.

52 RAS, UD, b. "Undsättning till Nobile-expeditionen 1928", J. Pettersson to E. Löfgren, July 17, 1928, transl.

53 RAS, UD, b. "Undsättning till Nobile-expeditionen 1928", E. Löfgren, Press conference, July 18, 1928.

54 "Berntsson (Aftonbladet)", "Ljunglung (Nya Dagligt Allehanda)", "Fogelqvist (Dagens Nyheter", "Johansson (Folkets Dagblad)", "Ericsson (Stockholms Dagblad)", "Holmberg (Stockholmstidningen)", "Greitz (Socialdemokraten)", "Key (Svenska Dagbladet)", "Jönsson (Svenska Morgonbladet)", "Linde (Tidningarnas Telegrambyrå)", "Reimers (Göteborgs Handelstidning)" and "Thylin (Socialdemokratiska landsortspressen)". RAS, UD, b. "Undsättning till Nobile-expeditionen 1928", *Note*, July 18, 1928.

55 KB, *Stockholms Dagblad,* July 19, 1928, transl.

faction did not cease, even influencing the choice of the itinerary of the Italian survivors' across Sweden (26-27 July 1928). The latter headed from Narvik to Krylbo, then south to Mjölby and finally to Malmö, without passing through Stockholm[56]. The reasons behind this choice were later explained in a report by the Naval Attaché Franco Quentin: "instead of following the Narvik-Stockholm-Copenhagen line like the other passenger wagons", the Italian survivors' ones were "shunted to Krylbo station on the direct domestic line so as not to stop in Stockholm"; in this way, according to Quentin, it was possible to "move away the survivors from public curiosity and perhaps some *journalistic incidents*"[57]. It is in the light of the controversy that mounted throughout July that the description by a correspondent of the arrival of the survivors at Kiruna station must be read: "The Swedes left the train first, and the Italians followed them rather nervously, *as if fearing a hostile reception*"[58]. Despite fears of remonstrances, the stops at Kiruna, Gällivare and Vindeln were characterized by an overall friendly welcome[59] due to the presence alongside the Italians of the aviators involved in the Swedish rescue mission (Alfei, 2025): first and foremost, Einar Lundborg, Egmont Tornberg and Birger Schyberg[60]. The "cold" reception about which Aeronautics Attaché Giulio Fier later testified to the Commission of Inquiry into the Polar Expedition[61] referred to the Krylbo-Malmö route. It was in fact at the station of Malmö that on the evening of 27 July "an attempt at a hostile demonstration" took place, which was then foiled by the Swedish police deployed at the request of the Italian authorities[62]. Originating from the press campaign launched by *Arbetet* (which was printed in Malmö), the protest at the station involved about two thousand people, who, blocked by the police, booed the Italians led by Nobile[63]. The departure of the Italian survivors from Malmö towards Copenaghen did not correspond to a cessation of the controversy. On 28 July, for example, *Norrskensflamman* returned to attack Mariano and Zappi and their "false" testimonies on the fate of Malmgren: "the fascists have lied!"[64].

The airship Italia *disaster in the Danish press*

The arrival on 28 July 1928 and the stay of the Italian survivors in Copenhagen for eighteen hours took place in a friendly atmosphere[65] also thanks to the work, analyzed below, of Ambassador Guido Viola di Campalto. Only the week before, as reported by the Italian diplomat himself, "the violent wave of inaccurate, tendentious or sensational news, by which even these Danish newspapers have allowed themselves to be carried away with regard to the Nobile expedition" began "to recede into its banks"[66]. After the airship *Italia* disaster, it was not so much the anti-fascist newspapers in Denmark which worried the Italian authorities: among these, mention may be made of *Social-Demokraten*, and in particular of a cartoon – which was also echoed in Norway – created by Anton Hansen depicting Umberto Nobile in uniform with a peacock's tail ironizing on the General's vanity[67]. The newspapers that in the eyes of the Italian as well as the Norwegian authorities[68] stood out in their attacks on Nobile and the expedition were *Ekstra Bladet* and *Politiken*, both

56 Ever since the arrival of the survivors in Narvik, the choice of the Italian survivors' return route through Sweden was criticized. Egmont Tornberg, head of the Swedish rescue mission, said in fact that "he had heard the Italians criticized for avoiding passing through Stockholm on their return journey". KB, *Stockholms Dagblad,* July 27, 1928, transl.

57 AUSMM, Base, b.2442, f.12, F. Quentin to UCSMM, August 6, 1928, transl., my emphasis.

58 *Daily News*, July 28, 1928, my emphasis.

59 KB, *Ny Tyd Sweden*, November 14, 1929.

60 RAS, UD, b. "Undsättning till Nobile-expeditionen 1928", E. Sjöborg to J. Pettersson, July 26, 1928.

61 ACS, Special Secretariat of the Duce, Confidential correspondence, b.59, Commissione d'indagini per la spedizione polare dell'aeronave "Italia", f.3, sf.11, G. Fier, Interrogation session, December 13, 1928, 12-13, transl.

62 AUSMM, Base, b.2442, f.12, F. Quentin to UCSMM, August 6, 1928.

63 *The Inverell Times*, July 30, 1928. See also: RAS, UD, b. "Undsättning till Nobile-expeditionen 1928", E. Sjöborg to J. Pettersson, July 26, 1928.

64 KB, *Norrskensflamman*, July 28, 1928.

65 *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, July 29, 1928.

66 AUSMM, Base, b.2660, G. Viola di Campalto to MFA, July 20, 1928, transl.

67 NB, *Social-Demokraten*, July 1, 1928; *Arbeiderbladet*, July 2, 1928.

68 RAO, UD, Norsk Ambassaden i London, b. "Nobileekspedisionen 1928", *Hetsig attack på Nobile.*

"liberal-left"[69] (Roslyng-Jensen, 2012)[70]. As far as the former is concerned, one of the most vehement articles, which was also widely echoed in Sweden[71] and therefore came under the attention of the Italian authorities, was Frejlif Olsen's "The Scandalous Tragedy of Nobile's Expedition"[72]. A telespresso sent by the Italian Legation in Bern summarized Olsen's article as follows: "this is a violent attack on Nobile and the exaltation, *by contrast*, of Amundsen"[73]. The article by the editor of the *Ekstra Bladet* thus is a Danish case of the double narrative (like the one later proposed in *Norges Kommunistblad*, Norway) centered, on the one hand, on anti-Nobile and anti-Mussolini accusations and, on the other, on a celebration of the international rescuers. Olsen's article focused his scorn on Nobile and especially on the airship *Italia* expedition: "this mixture of scientific intentions and nationalist advertisement, which ended in a failure that, because of the circumstances surrounding it, takes the form of an enormous scandal"[74].

Politiken's attacks against the Italian polar expedition were mainly associated with the explorer Peter Freuchen. Since 29 June Freuchen made highly critical statements against the Italian expedition to the international press: in Tromsø Freuchen "expressed himself in terms of harsh criticism of the Nobile expedition", emphasizing how the General was defeated "in both technical and *moral* terms"[75]. Back in Copenhagen, the Danish explorer continued to give interviews in which he targeted not only the polar expedition itself – even described as "the darkest point in the history of Arctic exploration"[76] – but also Mussolini's regime. Particularly significant in this respect is Freuchen's interview published in *Dagbladet* on 6 July 1928. To the correspondent (who two weeks later interviewed Minister Senni, as indicated above), Freuchen, after declaring that the Italian polar expedition was merely an attempt at reconciliation between Mussolini and Pope Pio XI, gave the following definition: "a tragicomic mixture of Mediterranean politics, Catholicism and polar flight"[77]. Like what happened in Norway and Sweden, the news of Malmgren's death also represented in Denmark a *caesura* which was followed by an intensification of the controversy. Thus, Freuchen launched in a letter to the *Politiken* (published on 16 July 1928) a proposal to set up "an international tribunal" to shed light on the controversial affair involving the death of Finn Malmgren. The Danish explorer, after suggesting that members of such a tribunal should be chaired by Fridtjof Nansen and composed of explorers with previous "experience of Arctic conditions", listed three questions on which the polar experts would have to pronounce themselves:

> *[1] was Nobile's airship technically flawless? [2] Were Nobile's arrangements after the catastrophe blameless[?]; […] [3] With his erroneous indications and contradictory information did he contribute to increasing the risk and expense of rescue expeditions?*[78]

Freuchen's proposal was widely echoed globally and considered extremely harmful by the Italian authorities who were then easing the tensions of the controversy which had escalated abroad about the Malmgren issue. In this regard one may recall – in the Swedish case –the conversation between Sjöborg and Colonna, the correspondence of the Swedish Ambassador in Rome with Pettersson, and, finally, Löfgren's press conference aimed at defusing the anti-Italian attacks in Swedish press. Viola di Campalto, in fact, in a dispatch of 17 July, after pointing out "an unsympathetic attitude towards Nobile" by the "Danish press in general", focused on the case of Freuchen's letter published the day before: "*Particularly fierce* was the newspaper 'Politiken' which yesterday published a deceitful and tendentious article by the explorer Freuchen in which he even called for an international tribunal to judge

69 For a broader overview of the history of the Danish press, see: Søllinge, 1999.

70 For a in depth-look on *Ekstra Bladet,* see: Dirckinck-Holmfeld, 2003.

71 KB, *Arbetaren*, July 4, 1928.

72 *Ekstra Bladet*, July 1, 1928, transl.

73 AUSMM, Base, b.2659, f.17, Italian Legation in Bern to MFA, July 2, 1928, transl., my emphasis.

74 *Ekstra Bladet,* July 1, 1928, transl.

75 *Stockholms Tidningen* quoted in: AUSMM, Base, b.2660, MFA to MN, July 18, 1928, transl., my emphasis.

76 *Der Montag*, July 2, 1928, transl.

77 NB, *Dagbladet*, July 6, 1928, transl.

78 *Politiken*, July 16, 1928, transl., my emphasis.

Nobile's responsibility". To counter Freuchen's attacks, Viola di Campalto proposed a response which could have sounded "a warning against the bad faith of the Danish press in general" and which could "be of more practical use to the *Scandinavian* public than any local protest"[79]. Viola di Campalto's counter-offensive against Freuchen's letter took the form of an article (commissioned by the Italian diplomat himself) written by the Danish First Lieutenant Godfred Hansen and later published in the conservative *Berlingske Tidende* on 19 July 1928. According to Viola di Campalto, Hansen had all the credentials to stand against Freuchen's stature in polar matters: the Danish First Lieutenant, in fact, had been "second-in-command in the 'Gjøa' expedition, as well as leader of the Norwegian expedition supplies for Roald Amundsen in 1919-1920". The result of the counter-offensive was one of the most celebratory articles on the Italian polar expedition that appeared abroad at the height of global polemics:

> *We are faced with a daring undertaking, a well-conceived plan that could have yielded invaluable results. And many of these results have already been achieved during the flights successfully carried out by the 'Italia', which was able to assemble and collect scientific material that was certainly not inferior to that which other expeditions were able to accumulate for the benefit of science and humanity*[80].

Hansen's article, which in the intentions of the Italian Ambassador in Copenhagen was meant to act as a "warning against the bad faith of the Danish press in general" and to "be of more practical use to the Scandinavian public than any local protest", had the desired effects, as demonstrated by the previously mentioned dispatch of 20 July in which Viola di Campalto announced that the "violent wave of inaccurate, tendentious or sensational news" had been subsided. It was therefore due to this press operation that the welcome of the Italian survivors in Copenhagen was characterized by a friendly atmosphere, quite different from the one in Malmö: as a correspondent pointed out, Nobile himself appeared calmer and happier after the whistles and shouts at the ferry station in the Swedish city[81]. The stop in Copenhagen was undoubtedly one of the most serene moments of the Italian survivors' return journey and least worrying for the regime: from the welcome, which was attended by Italian *blackshirts*[82], to the moment of departure by ferry to Germany, when about a hundred Italians of Denmark delivered bouquets of flowers and gave the fascist salute to Nobile and the other survivors[83]. The press operation carried out by Viola di Campalto in defense of the Italian polar expedition continued in the following month – three weeks after Hansen's apologetic piece – with the publication of a further celebratory article by Helge Rode in the *Berlingske Tidende*[84].

Conclusions

The polar disaster of the airship *Italia*, one of the most serious defeats of the fascist regime, was widely commented on in Scandinavia. Conservative, liberal, socialist and communist newspapers in Norway, Sweden and Denmark published harsh attacks against the regime, Mussolini, Nobile, Mariano and Zappi. In Norway, criticism rained down from the liberal *Dagbladet* to the communist *Norges Kommunistblad*. In Sweden, the polemic created the conditions for an unheard-of convergence between the conservative, liberal, socialist and communist press: *Stockholms Dagblad, Nya Dagligt Allehanda, Svenska Dagbladet, Svenska Morgonbladet, Arbetet, Arbetaren* and *Norrskensflamman* found themselves for the first time on the same side in the attacks against the airship *Italia* expedition. In Denmark, the two liberal-left newspapers *Ekstra bladet* and *Politiken* as well as personalities such as Peter Freuchen stood out in the polemic about the polar disaster and against the fascist regime in Italy. The criticism of the Swedish, Norwegian and Danish newspapers was not only of a technical nature but often had a moral dimension: from the accusations of "cowardice" levelled at Umberto Nobile to those of "falsity" ascribed to Zappi and Mariano. From the Norwegian *Norges Kommunistblad* to the Danish *Ekstra Bladet*, in contrast to the invectives against the Italian polar expedition, there corresponded an

79 AUSMM, Base, b.2659, f.5, G. Viola di Campalto to MFA, July 7, 1928, transl., my emphasis.

80 *Berlingske Tidende,* July 19, 1928, transl.

81 NB, *Smaalenenes Social-Demokrat*, July 31, 1928.

82 *Corriere della Sera,* July 30, 1928.

83 *The Atlanta Journal,* July 30, 1928.

84 *Berlingske Tidende*, August 6, 1928. AUSMM, Base, b.2659, f.5, G. Viola di Campalto to B. Mussolini, August 9, 1928, 4-5.

exaltation of the international rescue operations and the "sacrifice" of Roald Amundsen. Further research in Norwegian, Swedish and Danish primary and secondary sources will allow for deeper exploration of other key issues: among others, whether there was a specific tendency in different papers depending on their political or ideological leanings, or if they all promoted some kind of common antagonistic attitude towards the other because of the nationalist approaches of the period; or again, the role of protests against the disaster of the airship *Italia* (as well as against other controversial episodes of the fascist regime) in the broader context of the anti-fascist political struggle conducted in Scandinavian countries[85].

As it emerges from archival documentation kept in Rome, Oslo and Stockholm, the reception of the polar disaster in Norway, Sweden and Denmark, aroused particular concern in Italian diplomatic authorities. As a result, Plenipotentiary Ministers Carlo Senni and Ascanio Colonna as well as Ambassador Guido Viola di Campalto, did not merely record the progress of the controversy but played a proactive role in stemming it. In some ways this was also necessary in view of the problematic passage through Norway, Sweden and Denmark of the Italian survivors on their return journey from the Arctic to Rome (26-31 July 1928): in this regard, mention should be made of the *Fremover* attacks the day before the arrival in Narvik and the Malmö protest linked to the *Arbetet* campaign. The response of the Italian authorities to stem the spread of controversy in the Scandinavian press was varied. In Norway, Carlo Senni – in response to the attacks published in the Norwegian press and to the unpublished ones confided in by Rolf Thommessen – gave an interview to *Dagbladet* in which he unhooked the regime from the airship *Italia* disaster, while praising the Norwegian contribution to the rescue operations. The strategy adopted by Viola di Campalto in Denmark was more articulated: in response to Peter Freuchen's attacks that appeared in *Politiken*, he commissioned another Danish explorer, Gofred Hansen, to write a celebratory article in defense of the Italian polar expedition that later appeared in the conservative *Berlingske Tidende*. Nevertheless, it seems simplistic to provide a reading centered on an exclusive polarization between attacks by Scandinavian newspapers and defense by the Italian authorities. An example of a more complex picture is the case of Sweden: it was in fact the Swedish authorities themselves (both in Stockholm and Rome), such as the Foreign Minister Eliel Löfgren and the Swedish Ambassador in Rome Erik Sjöborg, who ensured that the controversy in the national newspapers was contained so as not to upset Italian-Swedish diplomatic relations. This was successful in the case of *Stockholms Dagblad*, a newspaper that appeared to the Italian authorities as the most "authoritative" in Sweden at the time. More generally, attacks against the Italian polar expedition in 1928 are documented in all Nordic countries. One may think, for example, of those in the Finnish press against the airship *Italia* disaster which appeared in *Pohjolan Työmies* (social-democratic)[86], contesting not only the scientific irrelevance of the mission[87] but also the integrity of General Umberto Nobile, defined as "Mussolini's clown"[88]. However, between spring and summer 1928, it was above all the Norwegian, Swedish and Danish polemics that concerned Italian and Swedish authorities and led them to adopt different forms of response aimed at not disturbing diplomatic relations between the fascist regime and the three Scandinavian countries.

85 On the anti-fascist political struggle in Nordic countries with a focus on the interwar period, see: Egge and Rybner, 2015; Lundberg and Lundin, 2017; Braskén, Copsey, and Lundin, 2020.

86 For a broader analysis of the Finnish press refer to: Tommila and Salokangas, 2000.

87 *Pohjolan Työmies*, July 14, 1928.

88 *Pohjolan Työmies,* July 27, 1928.

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CLIMATE, SEASONS AND CHANGE IN C. RANSMAYR'S *THE TERRORS OF ICE AND DARKNESS*

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Introduction

The Arctic in the 21st century is considered to be "a critical ecological habitat, a key modulator of Earth's climate system, and a sensitive indicator of climate variability/change" (Stammerjohn et al. 2012: 1).

The rapid decline in sea ice is not only caused by "internal climate variability alone and can be attributed to anthropogenic effects" (Barnhart et al. 2015: 1). According to Robert Markley's article "Literature, Climate, and Time: Between History and Story" (2019), climate change plays such a prevalent role in cultural and literary studies nowadays "because it forces us to reassess the relationships among three different registers of time: experiential or embodied time, historical time, and climatological time." (2019: 16)

In his previous works he explains, that "the ways in which time remains embedded in history, culture, and technology [are] not an abstract and objective measurement of duration, but a dynamic set of relations mediated by technoscientific understandings of climatic variability and climatic change." (Markley 2012: 45)

The contemporary Arctic illustrates the confluence of these three registers. Following Markley, I re-read Christoph Ransmayr's *The Terrors of Ice and Darkness*[1] (1984) through the light of climate, seasons and change in the Arctic.[2] Ransmayr's novel originates in "the emergence of global warming as an issue of public concern since the late 1980s" (Goodbody 2013: 92), though it is not a climate change story in particular. However, throughout the narrative and its structural organisation, the novel plays with Markley's modalities.

By unfolding two narrative strands, separated by about 100 years, the novel juxtaposes different levels of knowledge about the Arctic, thus providing detailed insights into its seasonal, small-scale alterations and ongoing major changes since the 19th century.

The first narrative strand leads back to 1872, where the real and the fictional *Admiral Tegetthoff*,

[1] Following English translation: Ransmayr, C., 1991, *The Terrors of Ice and Darkness*, trans. by Woods, J., New York: Grove Press. "TID" is used as abbreviation. The original quotes follow this edition: Ransmayr, C., 2007, D*ie Schrecken des Eises und der Finsternis*, spec. edition, Frankfurt am Main, Fischer. The original quotes in the footnotes are abbreviated with "SEF".

[2] So far, *The Terrors* have been well analysed from a literature theory and spatial perspective, for example in Reinhard Nethersole's article "Marginal Topologies: Space in Christoph Ransmayr's 'Die Schrecken des Eises und der Finsternis'"(1990) or in: Schuchmann, K., 2022, *Entleerte Räume. Zur literarischen Ästhetik der Absenz bei Thomas Bernhard und Christoph Ransmayr*, Berlin, Metzler. Next to it there is also a long postcolonial research tradition (see Honold 2009; Frömel 2013) as well as works on the intellectual history of scientific polar explorations (see Munz-Krines 2009). In the emerging context of environmentalism, I will follow Gundolf Grams' (2021) analytical line of climate and the concept of the Anthropocene.

– "a three-masted, 220-ton bark equipped with an auxiliary steam engine and every safeguard against the ice" (TID 5)[3] – began its voyage to the Arctic. Led by the Austro-Hungarian polar explorers Julius Payer and Carl Weyprecht, they aimed to locate "a gaping crack between where the Old World ended and the New began, a cold strait, a waterway to the Pacific" (TID 40)[4], the so-called Northeast-Passage.

The second strand is designed by a genealogical but fictional link between a crew member of the expedition and their descendent, Joseph Mazzini who finds one of Payer's diaries in the bookstore he works in. Mazzini tries to reconstruct the expedition by visiting various archives and follows the expedition's route to Spitsbergen, where he then disappears. Formally presented as a synoptic montage made of texts, such as fragments from the actual Payer and Weyprecht diaries, quotes from other literary artworks, photos of the expedition members, paintings of Payer, charts etc., the novel builds up variously situated, interwoven layers of narrative. All these elements are formed into a collage by Mazzini. The third, storytelling layer is represented by a fictional publisher and auctorial narrator who reconstructs Mazzini's remains after his disappearance in "Spitzbergen's glacier landscape during the arctic winter of 1981." (TID 3)[5]

The narration is also linked to climatological units such as 'climate' and 'season'. While 'season' refers to a short-term period in a year with distinct weather conditions, 'climate' describes the average weather over a long-term period in a specific region, here situated in the Arctic (see Dodds & Woodward 2021).

The structural specificity of the text allows the examination of both: short-term weather patterns and its physical effects on the crew members, as the *Tegetthoff* lays stuck in the Arctic Sea for over two years, and long-term changes in the Arctic, as comparatively told through Mazzini's story a hundred years later. In its historical make-up the novel also becomes inevitably historical itself while the polar caps are rapidly melting away in the 21st century. This is evidence of Markley's third register, as the disruption of anthropocentric knowledge causes new forms of thinking about time in literature (see 2019: 16).

In the following, three forms of seasonality will be examined as structural frame, which are especially linked to the Arctic's non-/transitioning: *Arctic Seasons, Textual Seasonality* and *Open Water Season*. The connection between the first elements is not only a climatological, temporal one, but also a cultural one that understands 'season' in a broader meaning of structural device. In addition to the narrated perception and transition of the Arctic in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the article intends to address environmental aspects from a contemporary standpoint in the twenty-first century within the concept of the 'Anthropocene'. This leads to the third aspect, 'Open Water Season', which highlights the increasing accessibility of the Arctic due to climatic and anthropogenic effects, to which the novel subtly alludes. The novel explores historical and textual forms of knowledge about the Arctic, while also pointing to a 'melting form' of knowledge about the Arctic in the present day.

Arctic Seasons

The terms 'climate', 'season' and 'weather' are all related to each other in specific ways. 'Climate' is evident over long periods of time and across large areas; its meteorological phenomena are static and regular. Its timeline is slow and steady and therefore usually not directly experienced by humans. This is quite the opposite to 'weather', which emerges dynamically and suddenly. 'Seasons' occur in a cyclical timeframe similar to 'climate', but they are neither as predictable as climate nor are they as unpredictable as weather (see Horn 2024: 335–339).

'Seasons' are not only natural phenomena, but, as literary scholar Tess Somervell points out, also "cultural constructs" (2019: 45). In her contribution to *Climate and Literature* (2019) she further explains that "the seasons are one of the most

[3] "Die *Admiral Tegetthoff* [italics in the original] ein dreimastiger Barkschoner, 220 Tonnen groß, ausgestattet mit einer Auxiliardampfmaschine und allem Schutz gegen das Eis."

[4] "Aber irgendwo, und sei es im dichtesten Treibeis, mußte selbst dieser Kontinent enden und sein letztes, nördliches Kap zu umschiffen sein, mußte ein Riß zwischen dem Ende der Neuen und dem Ende der Alten Welt klaffen, ein kalter Sund, eine Wasserstraße in den Pazifik."

[5] "Mazzini, ein zweiundreißigjähriger Wanderer, ging im arktischen Winter des Jahres 1981 in den Gletscherlandschaften Spitzbergens verloren." (SEF 11)

prevalent means by which literary texts and other artworks engage with and represent climate, and have been consistently used as motif, metaphor, and structuring device." (ibid.) Considering how deeply seasons determine human, and non-human lifeforms, literature is also heavily influenced by seasons and climate.

In her latest publication, literary scholar Eva Horn, who specialises in literature and climate, explains how the seasons are interwoven with specific weather phenomena and how humans adapt to them. Seasons are both natural and cultural timeframes. They contain overlapping forms of time, appearing as an aggregation of individual linear times that exist alongside cyclical timelines within a year, as well as meteorological time and a time of the elements. For example, in his works, Hesiod describes how the seasons were used as a rhythm for work, as they determined the time for agriculture or seafaring (see Horn, 2024: 344). This makes human history deeply embedded in the history of the Earth or nature (see ibid.: 349).

When it comes to literary works engaging with the seasons, literature employs motifs and metaphors that are individually generated and culturally specific. Horn highlights examples from various European works, such as Goethe's poem 'Maifest' (1771) or John Keats's poem 'The Human Season' (1818), showing how the authors use 'seasons' as an aesthetic device in their poetry. In doing so, Horn also points out that there has been a central shift over the centuries. Seasons are less an illustration of fixed topoi and symbols nowadays but an expression of the characters' emotional landscapes (ibid.: 362).

Furthermore, in the modern age, literary seasons have become highly subjective and are no longer determined by natural time frames. Horn states that, although this notion of 'season' is productive for literary works, it only conveys emotions and moments and loses its structuring potential — a quality literature has possessed from Antiquity to the Enlightenment (see ibid.: 363–364).

Theorizing about the relationship between literature and the seasons reveals a broad range of potential analysis, particularly for postmodern literature. Ransmayr does not employ seasons in a direct way as Goethe did in his poem. However, *The Terrors* are set in an environment that often contradicts the typical understanding of seasons for people who do not live in the Arctic themselves. By layering how the members of the Payer-Weyprecht expedition experience the Arctic climate and weather phenomena individually with Mazzini's perception of major changes in the Arctic due to anthropogenic impacts a century later, Ransmayr makes the overlapping timelines visible through their literary representations.

The editor's reconstruction of Mazzini's collage indicates that the success of Payer and Weyprecht's journey through the ice was based on their knowledge of the regularity and stability of the Arctic seasons, documented by previous expeditions. While the *Tegetthoff*s transit relies on the annual cycle and the open water gate during the Arctic summer, this is ultimately undermined by regional climatic conditions. Shortly after leaving Tromsø, in summer 1872, the crew of the *Tegetthoff* notices that "last year at this time, on the preliminary expedition of the *Isbjørn*, the drift ice lay considerably farther north." (TID 62)[6]

The passage highlights the seasons' climatic variability within their stable recurrence and how the Arctic remains unpredictable. As a result, the channels through the ice become increasingly frozen and "on July 30 the *Tegetthoff* is held prisoner by the ice for the first time; it is frozen fast." (TID 62).[7] As the novel suggests, the miscalculation is also caused by several climatic phenomena including clouds blurring the light or the wind working against the ship's sails. Later, the cold transforms the ship's equipment into "a work of art and ice" (TIP 61).[8]

All these climatic components sharpen the crew's awareness of the existential threat they face.

The physical experience of the northern conditions affects not only the crew but also the non-human world when "the jiggling clatter drives the dogs wild" (TIP 61).[9] The animals equally react to their environment. Although the dogs are accustomed to the Arctic, they are still forced to be part of the expedition and also experience 'embodied time' through their own exposure to extreme weather.

In the narrative, the seasons and their effects on humans and non-human beings are strategically

6 "Letztes Jahr, auf der Vorexpedition der *Isbörn* [italics in the original], war die Treibeisgrenze um diese Jahreszeit bedeutend höher im Norden verlaufen." (SEF 96)

7 "Am 30. Juli wird die *Tegetthoff* [italics in the original] zum ersten Mal vom Eis *besetzt* [italics in the original]; sie friert fest." (SEF 97)

8 "Ein Kunstwerk aus Eis" (SEF 95).

9 "Das Klirren macht die Hunde toll." (SEF 96)

juxtaposed with the picturesque appearance of the ice formations. By transforming them into an aesthetic of danger, the complex relationship between the Arctic environment and the explorers becomes evident. The text confronts the reader with a notion of the Arctic that is beautiful and scary, a complex environment with multiple facets.

The description of ice as captor, taking the *Tegetthoff* as a prisoner, also emphasises two dialectically related processes, when it comes to the often-portrayed binary difference between culture and nature.

On the one hand, the crew faces a hostile environment, in which they try to survive at a very basic level. This experience reveals their willingness not only to survive physically, but also their desire to keep their culture and rituals alive through lectures and readings. This is also marked spatially as 'culture' that is located inside the ship while the hostile icescape surrounds it. On the other hand, the personification of ice as acting instance[10] also dissolves the dichotomy just portrayed, which gets descriptively dense by the metaphor of "the polar cap a pulsating amoeba and the and the *Tegetthoff* an annoying splinter in its plasma." (TID 90)[11] The Arctic no longer appears as separate ice formations but as an integral, organic, almost fluid being, in which the *Tegetthoff* is no longer an object of culture, but a basic wooden material. The ship and the ice become "co-participants within active biospheric systems" (Dürbeck 2015: 119). This organic depiction also takes place while the crew "drift[s] along their ice floe, an island of ice, shrinking, growing larger again, and its wooden heart is their ship" (TID 68f.).[12] The human world and the non-human world become one being as the shrinking and growing of the ice operates as the Arctic's heartbeat. Everything becomes part of the Arctic environment, and the Arctic environment permeates everything.

This image works against the often-emphasised binary characteristics attributed to the Arctic, such as ice and water, darkness and light, summer and winter. When Weyprecht "describes a remote world and a cold summer sun that circled above the navigators for months never setting" (TID 4), he first refers to the typical binary seasonal perception of the Arctic, but then explains, that "in autumn its light dimmed and those regions once again fell under the darkness of polar night – and nameless cold – for months on end." (TID 4)[13] As Weyprecht observes precisely, the Arctic follows a quarterly cycle as well but with longer and shorter periods between them due to its extreme climate (see Somervell 2019: 45). Nine months of winter and a short summer are complemented with spring and autumn, that last only a couple of weeks (see Stammerjohn 2012; Screen & Simmonds 2010).

For two years, the *Tegetthoff* remains stuck in the pack ice, where the crew witnesses the changing seasons and all climate phenomena affecting their physical condition. The narration follows Markley's concept of embodied time, by relating the compounding effect of individual experiences of weather to "the thousand climatic shocks that flesh is heir to" (2012: 45)." The editor reports that "for every man who rises again from his sickbed, another lies down. And so things continue." (TID 112)[14] The Arctic transforms the single experience of time into a collective, constant experience by sickness that now structures the crew members' daily routine.

Staging the Arctic as an extreme environment sharpens the use of seasonality to "[…]represent[s] imbalance, disorder, and uncomfortable extremes" (2019: 47f.). The entangled seasonal effects on human psychology become especially apparent by the crew member and hunter Alexander Klotz, who gets "ill with melancholy and consumption" (TID 112)[15] due to the dark months of winter. In December 1873 his psychological constitution deteriorates increasingly. He leaves the ship only wearing his summer clothes to 'return home'. Narratively linked to Klotz's desolate inner life are the long periods of darkness that perpetually cause disorder by the

10 Following the concept of Donna Haraway (see 2016).

11 "Die Polkappe eine pulsierende Amöbe und die *Tegetthoff* [italics in the original] ein störender, verschwindender Splitter im Plasma." (SEF 141)

12 "So treiben sie von nun an dahin auf ihrer Scholle, einer Eisinsel, die kleiner wird und wieder wächst und deren hölzernes Herz ihr Schiff ist." (SEF 107)

13 "Weyprecht beschrieb eine ferne Welt, in der eine kalte Sommersonne den Seefahrer monatelang umkreise, ohne jemals unterzugehen; im Herbst aber beginne es, zu dunkeln, und schließlich senke sich, wiederum für Monate, die Finsternis der Polarnacht über jene Gegenden, und eine namenlose Kälte." (SEF 12)

14 "Für jeden der vom Krankenlager wieder aufsteht, legt sich ein anderer hin. Und so geht es fort." (SEF 175)

15 "Jäger Klotz leidet an Melanchonie und *Lungenschwindsucht* [italics in the original]" (SEF 175).

everchanging ice formations restructuring the environment at every moment. Klotz's aversion to discovering new lands unearths the collective fraud of unheroic heroism, at which the novel's title hints right from the beginning. As Klotz is unwilling to return to the ship, for the other crew members "time races now as never before. Now, when a minute dare be lost, time suddenly flies." (TID 160)[16]

While 'climatological time' structures longer periods of time and becomes more visible through Mazzini's storyline, the crew witnesses 'embodied time' now as a process of dynamization, also affecting the tempo of storytelling. Against cold winds and dark icescapes, they manage to find Klotz and to bring him back to the ship. Physically mostly unharmed, Klotz remains lost in his inner life and disconnected from the outer world surrounding him.

While the Arctic seasons seem to provide a stable structure for climatic phenomena, the story of the Payer-Weyprecht expedition also reflects the micro changes that are part of the Arctic environment and how they affect the characters' physical and psychological condition. Since the seasons function not only as a natural structure, but are also linked to culture, the subject of the next section underlines the novel's complex layers of text organisation and interpretation within a cyclic structure.

Textual Seasonality

In the chapter "Fragments of Myth and Enlightenment", the novel synthesises different voices and notions of 'nordicity' from the 12th to the late 20th century. Those fragments are textual pieces Mazzini has collected for his collage that the editor then converts into his narration about Mazzini and the Payer-Weyprecht-expedition.

Images of the North as a remote, empty and mostly inaccessible place are exchanged in the 18th century for ideas of an ice-free Arctic summer with an unfrozen North Pole. Sceptical and visionary voices alternate in the overall arrangement of the fragments and later merge into a geographical definition and demystification of what the essence of the North Pole is: "the mathematical point" (TIP 158)[17]. This structural make-up works not only as storage for polar texts and images in literary representations – it also underlines a movement from a textual and historical knowledge of the Arctic to empiric knowledge that becomes dominant later on.

In her article "Die Polargebiete der Bibliothek: Über eine metapoetische Metapher" (2016), Bettine Menke uses *The Terrors* as an example of how literary polar expeditions function as 'metatextual metaphors'. Rewritings and references to pre- and intertexts of the Arctic as a space without traces constitute the polar region as a textual archive which Menke conceptionally links to Foucault's 'bibliothèque fantastique' (2016: 554). In the context of seasons, the echo effect and repetitive dynamics of the fragments therefore also appear as seasonal by constantly referring to reproductions of factual and fictional North Pole expeditions.

The novel uses the cyclic structure also to reveal the absurdity of the numerous failed attempts to cross the Arctic Ocean previously, which the narrator comments on thus: "The ships sank. The chroniclers wrote. The arctic world was indifferent." (TIP 37) Again, the Arctic is presented as a constant, as a part of the Earth that is independent from humanity. This is underlined by the quote's repetitive grammatical structure. There are no cultural artefacts or human beings left; only a seemingly empty and hostile landscape with which the reader is also confronted. The fascination of travelling to one of the most extreme places on Earth is no longer just Mazzini's but becomes part of the reader's experience as well.

What is narrated as a dangerous, uncontrollable natural force, namely the ice, evolves into an endangered environment we fear losing. While the melting ice in *The Terrors* is not yet being narrated as part of a globally affected environmental crisis, the self-image of postmodern literature does address the feeling of a (post-) modern – and now ecological – fragility (see Herrmann 2017; Honold 2009).

When Joseph Mazzini ultimately disappears in Spitsbergen, he breaks his own genealogical cycle. Still, the text maintains the narrational link between previous Arctic explorers and their

16 "Jetzt läuft die Zeit schnell wie noch nie. Jetzt, wo keine Minute mehr verlorengehen darf, fliegt die Zeit plötzlich dahin." (SEF 254)

17 "Der geographische Nordpol ist der mathematische Punkt [...], wo die Zentrifugalkraft der Erde aufhört und die Gestirne nicht mehr auf- und untergehen." (SEF 250f.)

'descendants' since "the violet sky above the ice floes must be the same one beneath which the crew of the Admiral *Tegetthoff* had despaired more than a century before. Mazzini hiked across glaciers. Mazzini disappeared." (TIP 14)[18] The narrative itself deciphers Mazzini's disappearance as symbolic of "a transition from reality into probability." (TIP 48)[19] The text compilation that is later published by the intradiegetic editor presents textuality as a space of possibilities. While the probability for another adventurer visiting the exact same place as Payer and Weyprecht and Mazzini is not made explicit, it is at least given by the text.

Menke concludes that, "polar expeditions in literature may not encounter traces of earlier travellers but invariably encounter those of their pretexts and reproduce such traces in their own textual structure." (2016: 545) Therefore, the readers do not just follow the narrated routes but must themselves also navigate across the pre-existing textual traces. In the beginning the narrator asks, "who wouldn't want to find a way through all the chaos and riddles, ACROSS THE ARCTIC OCEAN [emphasis in orig.] to paradise"[20] (TED 42). In its montaged form, the novel also leaves open spaces in between the text passages, fragments, images, etc., drawing a non-linear path through the textual space. The narrative zigzag drift the readers are confronted with also works as riddles that need to be solved to understand the plot.

Among all these fragments, one is taken from the factual diary of Julius Payer, which the novel quotes directly from as its textual basis. Payer, the factual one, declares in his diary that he no longer sees any value in discovering unknown places, which seems ironic nowadays, given that every inch of the Earth's lithosphere is mapped by satellites.

In the end, the narrator who uses Mazzini's material collection also finds his "walls covered with maps, of nations, coasts, seas, paper in every shade of blue […]. The same lands repeat themselves on my walls" (TIP 225).[21] By reconstructing Mazzini's path into the Arctic, he has wandered through the Arctic himself textually. It appears that each century follows the footsteps of another explorer, as Mazzini has wandered through archives and the narrator through his dairies. "This is my land" the narrator declares: "But the notations on my maps say: "'Restricted area'" (TIP 226).[22]

Once again, accessing the Arctic or at least parts of it appears impossible. For the editor it has become "a forbidden land: it is as impenetrable a wilderness as ever, impenetrable even in mild summers when the ice has been nicely divided up." (TIP 226)[23] The story combines natural barriers caused by climatic conditions with political obstacles and transforms them into a literary act of land reclamation, "Landnahme" (see Eglinger & Heitmann 2010). While the novel ends there, with "a chronicler who lacks the comfort of an ending" (TIP 226)[24] , melting sea ice will in the future challenge new forms of transit in the Arctic. But transiting the Arctic will go on by other people following their predecessors' traces into the northern ocean.

Open Water Season

According to biologist Katherine Barnhart and her team, the "open water season […] is a metric that represents the duration of open water over a year at an individual location." (2015: 1) Using this method, she and others mapped ongoing changes in the Arctic's open-water season at four locations since pre-industrial times. As a result, they were able to show that the open water season has lengthened in the 1990s, which led to earlier break-up and later freeze of the ice sheets. One of the places they used for their measurements is Svalbard (see ibid.).

18 "Der violette Himmel über den Treibeisfeldern mußte der gleiche sein, unter dem vor mehr als einem Jahrhundert die Mannschaft der Admiral *Tegetthoff* [italics in the original] verzweifelt war. Mazzini wanderte über die Gletscher. Mazzini verschwand." (SEF 28)

19 "Mazzinis Abreise erscheint mir dann als ein Hinüberwechseln aus der Wirklichkeit in die Wahrscheinlichkeit." (SEF 77)

20 "Wer wollte nicht durch alles Chaos und alle Rätsel hindurch ÜBER DAS EISMEER [italics in the original] ins Paradies" (SEF 69f.).

21 "Meine Wände habe ich mit Landkarten, Küstenkarten, Meereskarten ausgeschlagen, gefalztem Papier in allen Blautönen [...]. An diesen Wänden wiederholen sich die Länder" (SEF 358).

22 "Das ist mein Land, sage ich. Aber die Zeichen auf meinen Karten bedeuten *Sperrgebiet*, bedeuten *darf nicht betreten werden, nicht bereist, nicht überflogen* [italics in the original]." (SEF 359)

23 "Ein verbotenes Land; es ist wüst und unzugänglich wie je, unzugänglich auch in milden Sommern, in denen das Eis gut verteilt liegt." (SEF 359)

24 "Ein Chronist, dem der Trost des Endes fehlt." (SEF 360)

Phenomena such as melting ice glaciers are now situated under the umbrella term 'Anthropocene'. Although the concept or descriptive tool of the Anthropocene had not yet been invented in the 1980s, the effects of anthropogenic impacts on the Arctic become evident in contrasting the two storylines. Because the novel explores various perspectives on the ever-changing Arctic due to its montaged structure, readers are still confronted with not knowing the whole truth about the Arctic and Mazzini's disappearance. On a theoretical basis the drift through the Arctic Sea ice can be seen as resemblance of how the readers have to move through the editor's narration.

The expeditioners "drift in a blinding void, in darkness, to the north, northeast, northwest, and north again – fully at the mercy of unknown ocean currents and the tortures of the ice." (TIP 68f.)[25] This movement refers both materially and semiotically to a nonlinear itinerary trough the ice. Despite constant technological progress at the end of the 19th century, the explorers still have no control over their route through the ice. The main character of the novel, which thus also determines the narrative route, is the ice.

The novel suggests an increasing ability to overcome the icy barriers and to channel the Arctic in a more linear way. Still a hundred years after the Payer-Weyprecht expedition, Mazzini cannot visit Franz-Josef-Land due to the drift ice, which leads him to Spitsbergen in the end. Arriving on Svalbard's main island, Mazzini lands at a place that is "remote, but no longer one enchanted by myth" (TID 54)[26] in the 20th century. Juxtaposing modern empirical and textual knowledge may seem to be a misleading approach to re-reading *The Terrors*. However, I argue that the novel emphasises a diametrical shift in our understanding of the Arctic: while the Arctic has become increasingly quantifiable, expressed in terminology of mostly Western scientific research since the 1980s, *The Terrors*' representation still leaves room for the mythological. Mazzini does not fulfil his desire to visit Franz-Josef-Land; his 'end of the story' remains covered in mystery, engaging with the reader's imagination. Mazzini follows the scientific and technical progress in the 1980s but also represents other ways of thinking about the Arctic.

While the *Tegetthoff* cannot cross the ice shelves directly, Mazzini reports in his diary that the *Cradle*, a scientific research vessel he is travelling with, "breaks through with a roll of thunder and has open water under its keel again. This is how you travel the Arctic Ocean in 1981." (TID 132)[27] While the *Tegetthoff* relied on open water, the *Cradle* now reverses the dynamics by breaking through the ice intentionally. The cost of the *Cradle*'s rapid passage through the Arctic Sea ice is the burning of twelve tonnes of diesel oil per day, which points to the massive use of fossil fuels one century after the original expedition. Considering the long time to create fossil fuels relative to the rapid time of its exploitation, these overlapping timelines are an exemplary literary technique for narrating the 'Anthropocene' (see Dürbeck 2014; 2022).

On his journey to Spitsbergen, Mazzini also witnesses a shift towards technologically supported systems and scientific methods related to the sea ice extent as well as an increasing biologic research interest: "Zoologists shoot seals and birds to prove that industrial toxins from the south have travelled long food chains to enter the blood of polar fauna." (TID 134)[28]

In this sense, the story describes a specific, vulnerable ecological order of the polar fauna, that also functions in seasons and cyclic water streams but is affected by anthropogenic interference. The narrated relationship between space and movement appears paradoxical: the scientists' concern about the contaminated food chain implies, according to the narrator, the origin of the threat in the global South. However, it is the global North that is mainly the source and to be held responsible for all kinds of environmental pollution (see Dodds/Woodward 2021: 95).

The novel's main characters are central European male scientists and explorers. By using irony as a stylistic device, the novel indirectly raises questions about responsibility and causes, at least in ecological terms. At the end of the 'social chain', so to say, the pollution caused by the steamship affects the local Arctic environment and all its nonhuman and human inhabitants. (see Dodds/Woodward 2021: 95)

Heading north, the research team of the *Cradle* also observes, "what radioed satellite pictures have long since confirmed: The ice is growing." (TED 134).[29] The growth of sea ice documented in Mazzini's diary, is factually still occurring by reaching higher latitudes. However, considering Mazzini's observation next to modern results, the fragility of the Arctic Sea ice nowadays becomes even more obvious.

Crossing the mark of the 21st century, Dodds and Woodward state that "Arctic Sea ice is now younger, thinner, and more mobile than at any time in the satellite era." (2021: 25). of a 'satellite era' makes two aspects apparent: first, that Mazzini is participating in a changing methodology for observing northern sea ice coverage and second that within cultural studies the focus now lies on a planetary perspective (see Yuk 2024), which makes the north and south poles part of a whole planet and not separated, empty and remote places of the Earth anymore.

By the time of Mazzini's voyage, the extent of the northern sea ice has factually already begun to shrink, which places *The Terrors*, as an example for postmodern, historical travel literature, in fact at the register of historical time. It appears as a gap between the scientific knowledge reconstructing the Arctic's condition decades ago and the local knowledge the characters have at that time in the narration. Facing the possibility of a permanent open water season sometime in the 21st century, a hundred years after Ransmayr's novel was published, reveals, in addition to the historical dimension of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, another layer of time related to the novel. In the process, the loss of Arctic Sea ice also means, according to Andreas Homan, the loss of its "Ewigkeitsnimbus" (2017: 12): the idea of eternal ice is now being historicised by the loss of its supposed stability for hundreds of years.[30]

Another aspect related to the concept of the Anthropocene is the emphasis on Deep-Time processes, which become also evident in Mazzini's diary, where he writes quite poetically: "Time is a murky pond in which bubbles of the past are rising." (TID 134)[31]

The metaphor of a 'pond with bubbles of the past' is also repetitively incorporated in the story. While the crew members of the *Tegetthoff* must endure the ice pressings, the narrator states: "Where yesterday a mountain had lifted, today there is a shimmering, frozen pond, and tomorrow a reef again." (TID 90)[32]

Although melting processes are not thematized as an environmental issue in the novel, it anticipates cyclic Deep Time changes. Prehistoric references to the Arctic come to surface in a dialogue between Mazzini and a member of the Norwegian Polar Institute, Ole Fagerlien. Cultural artefacts, such as oil paintings of the Arctic, as well as natural relics are assembled in Fagerlien's "roomy office, [that] was rich in relics of a much larger past. In the display cases lay fossils – snails, fern fronds, mussels, and the tree bark, proof of how green and paradisiacal the landscape of the Arctic had once been – Spitsbergen, a tropical garden." (TID 57)[33] This scene not only brings nature and cultural history back together on common ground but its oscillation between cold and warm periods of the Arctic ice functions as a paradigmatic indicator for a 'Deep Time Seasonality'. Stored in ice cores, proxy data that has been formed by the incrementally deposited annual cycle of snowfall and melt, can now be used for future climate models – a future of the climate that is not yet narrated and that leaves readers to

25 Sie "driften in eine blendene Leere, dann in die Dämmerung der polaren Nacht, in die Finsternis, nord, nordost, nordwest und wieder nord – ausgeliefert gänzlich unbekannten Meeresströmungen und der Tortur des Eises." (SEF 107)

26 "Es ist ein entlegenes, aber längst kein mythenverzaubertes Land mehr, in das Josef Mazzini aufbricht." (SEF 85)

27 Die *Cradle* "bricht dann donnernd ein und hat wieder offenes Wasser unter dem Kiel. So geht man im Jahr 1981 mit dem Eismeer um." (SEF 210)

28 "Die Zoologen schießen Robben und Vögel, um die über lange Nahrungsketten ins Blut der Polartiere gelangten Industriegifte des Südens nachzuweisen." (SEF 213)

29 "Umgeben vom Lichtspiel der Armaturen, sitzt der *Marsgast* [italics in the original] in einer klimatisierten Glaskanzel und sieht, was die Satellitenfunkbilder längst bestätigt haben: Das Eis nimmt zu." (SEF 213)

30 For contextual reasons, here the full quote: "Als entscheidende Nova müssen zum einen die vertiefte Einsicht in globale Zusammenhänge gesehen werden, in denen den ehedem wenig beachteten Polargebieten eine entscheidende *funktionale* [italics in the original] Rolle zugeteilt wird, und zum anderen der Verlust des Ewigkeitsnimbus des ja eigentlich ›ewigen‹ Eises als durchschlagende Historisierung letzter vermeintlich verlässlicher Stabilitäten verstanden werden." (Homann 2017: 12)

31 "Die Zeit ist ein Tümpel, in dem die Vergangenheit in Blasen nach oben steigt." (SEF 213)

32 "Wo sich gestern ein Berg erhoben hat, schimmert heute ein gefrorener Tümpel und morgen wieder ein Riff." (SEF 141)

33 "In Vitrinen lagen Versteinerungen – Schnecken, Farnwedel, Muscheln und Baumrinden, Beweise, wie grün und paradiesisch die Landschaften der Arktis einmal gewesen waren; Spitzbergen, ein tropischer Garten." (SEF 91)

think about what the future of the Arctic might look like in one hundred years.

Conclusion: the Arctic's changing accessibility

The Arctic has a long history of expeditions attempting to cross its mostly frozen ocean. Adriana Craciun acknowledges that "what we call *the* [emphasis in orig.] Northwest Passage varies geographically, historically and textually; it is mediated through varying discursive formations and environmental factors that have given the Passage its shifting contours over many centuries." (2009: 105). This is also true of the Northeast Passage, which the novel contextualises in different timelines and within a dominant narrative of scientific exploration. Through the lens of climatological, historical and embodied time, the novel unfolds the various disruptions that the Arctic must progressively face in relation to the Anthropocene.

In terms of seasonal patterns, the Payer-Weyprecht story demonstrates the small differences in seasonal changes from one year to the next. Trapped in the 'perpetual ice', the crew witness even small changes in the Arctic that aesthetically confirm overlapping concepts of nature and culture. The effects of the Arctic's uneven seasons on the crew's mental health also emphasise the Arctic's peculiarity as an extreme environment.

Mazzini's story tends to illustrate long-term changes and foreshadows the increasing anthropogenic impact on the Arctic that comes with technological advances in transport. In terms of the accessibility of the Arctic, Ransmayr's novel itself becomes historical by looking beyond the narrative period to the likelihood of an ice-free summer at the end of this century. This circumstance highlights the growing tension between the narrated status quo and contemporary environmental issues.

This close reading of the text reveals that Ransmayr's writing employs highly detailed observation of a landscape that is inaccessible for most people. Although the novel is narrated by a fictional editor, the various lines of narration become a puzzle that can never be finished but forces readers to think about the gaps between the Arctic and its representations.

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TRAVAUX DE TERRAIN /
FIELD WORK

© Bruce Jackson, voyage avec Jean Malaurie à Nome et sa région, 1997
/ field trip with Jean Malaurie to Nome and its region, 1997

ALASKA BEYOND THE CLASSROOM: IMPRESSIONS FROM AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL FIELD SCHOOL IN MAY 2025

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Anthropological field schools (*Feldpraktika* in German) have, for a long time, been part of the master's and, more recently, of the bachelor's program at the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Vienna as well. While the locations of these field schools vary a lot (from close to Vienna to islands in the Indian Ocean), the MA field schools last about three weeks each and are intended to provide graduate students with hands-on research experience. Partial travel support offered by the university makes these courses attractive for students.

In May 2025, we had the pleasure of organizing and leading a field school to Alaska. As common for such endeavours, academic preparations started much earlier, in October 2024. We offered a course on "Cultures of Alaska" – mandatory for those who intended to travel there – during the winter semester 2024. The course consisted primarily of reading and discussing (mostly) anthropological articles, books and online resources about Alaska, and in identifying potential research topics for the field school. The focus of the following spring semester was on transforming the already acquired academic knowledge into manageable small research projects. We offered two more courses – one dedicated to methods and the other to logistics and preparations for the field trip itself. Thus, March and April of 2025 were spent on activities such as identifying relevant organizations and individuals in Alaska and refining research questions and methods. While some students who had participated in the winter semester course had to drop out for various reasons, a group of nine graduate students (lead by us, the instructors) was finally able to head to the land we had read so much about for a bit more than three weeks. Places visited included Anchorage, Fairbanks, Kodiak, Talkeetna, as well as locations in-between.

Every student had a finalized research plan by the time we left Vienna. As you can see below, the range of topics and approaches has been enormous. While we gave students the opportunity to connect their research to our own ongoing projects "Building Arctic Futures: Transport Infrastructures and Sustainable Northern Communities" (InfraNorth, ERC Advanced Grant) and "Biocultural Heritage in Arctic Cities: Resource for Climate Adaptation?" (ARCA, Belmont Forum), everyone could freely explore a topic of their own interest.

Several participants focused on the intersections between art, museums, and climate change. For example, Oliwia Pordzik explored how museums in Alaska approach climate change, while Federica Pescador focused on the role of art in responding to climate change. Julia Elzea was interested in how Indigenous healing practices are being negotiated within the modern Alaskan healthcare system. Other students pursued a variety of different topics. For example, Sara Doppler examined "music in Alaska", that is - she tried to figure out what role Alaska as a place has in influencing the music which is played there. Klara Gmeinbauer engaged with trails in Alaska and their users, a topic which like Gabriel Peterson's "subsistence in Alaska" continues to be of great concern for many people. Finally, Miriam Werther explored "decoloniality" in the Alaskan context with a strong portion of autoethnography, reflecting not only on the researcher's experiences but also on miscommunications between outsiders and Alaskans. Hannah Boesl and Nabila van der Veen investigated the topics of energy security and Alaska's Native art respectively.

The overview of the topics and first impressions of the field school were published in the story map "Approaching Alaska: Reflections from a University of Vienna Field School" created by the field school participants. Below are two extended summaries of the field research projects and preliminary findings written by Hannah Boesl and Nabila van der Veen. These two cases are rather different in topic and style but we believe that this very fact makes them excellent examples of the research diversity of our group and of the many puzzling "paradoxes" Alaska has to offer.

Instead of summarizing the contents of the students' research projects, we want to convey the importance of such applied courses as field schools. Having completed the trip, we can argue that anthropological field practice did not just increase academic knowledge (about Alaska) but also led to a new level of understanding that can only be achieved by "being there" and by engaging with local residents and their natural and social environments. For this experience of Alaska of being much more than a classroom we thank the many interlocutors we met in many places all over the state. And we want to thank the students, who in their openness and willingness to engage with Alaska, provided us, who had been there before, with new insights into Alaskan lifeways, which are as varied as this enormous state.

Example 1: Alaska's Energy Landscape: Historical Legacies, Current Petro-State Paradoxes and Implications for Everyday Life

Hannah Boesl

This contribution is based on research and interviews conducted as part of the field school mentioned above. The fieldwork took place in Alaska, encompassing visits to Anchorage, Kodiak, Talkeetna, and Fairbanks, and was made possible through partial funding from the University of Vienna. This short article represents a reflection, informed by numerous formal and informal conversations with individuals and representatives from a range of organizations, including the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium, the Alaska Public Interest Research Group, Alaska Sea Grant, the Alaska Center for Energy and Power, scholars at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, and other stakeholders involved in energy related matters. The author extends sincere gratitude to all those who generously shared their knowledge, time, and perspectives throughout the research process. Their input was invaluable to the development of this work.

Alaska has long been regarded as a resource frontier,[1] with its strategic significance closely tied to its resource wealth (Silva, 2022). However, debates about the Arctic and Alaska's so-called resource boom often revolve around colonial imaginaries that portray the region as a remote "wilderness" or "empty" land, overlooking the fact that Alaska is foremost home to Alaska Native peoples who have lived of and stewarded the land for millennia (Kollin, 2000: 70).

[1] Frontiers take place where new resources are "discovered" or invented (Rasmussen & Lund, 2018: 388). Some authors differentiate between "commodity frontiers" and "resource frontiers", whereas the former means the production of commodities for the external market and the latter transforms nature into a resource for capitalist profit and exploits it in a destructive way (for example through deforestation) (Kröger & Ngyren, 2020: 366). The scholars explain, however, that this distinction is sometimes not clear cut and that both types of frontiers can exist simultaneously. They also state that "resource frontiers" often precede "commodity frontiers" (ibid.: 369).

Interest in Arctic resources is not a recent development; the region's history has been profoundly shaped by settler colonialism[2] and extraction since the nineteenth century, linked to the industrial revolution and evolving notions of modernity. While commodities such as fur and whale oil once attracted outside interest, the early twenty-first century has seen a renewed resource boom centered on oil, gas, minerals, and increasingly, hydrogen (Southcott et al., 2019; Sörlin, 2023). In this sense, resource exploitation has always connected the Arctic with other parts of the world and today, the Arctic is more than ever part of the contemporary global economic system, with extractive processes reconfiguring and integrating so-called remote areas into new territorial formations and global networks (Cons & Eilenberg, 2019).

As the 49th state of the U.S., situated partially above the Arctic Circle, Alaska holds strategic importance, reinforced by discourses of "national security." It features prominently in U.S. ambitions for "energy dominance" and expanded hydrocarbon exports (Rosen, 2025). Yet, despite its reputation as a Petro-state, energy access and affordability within Alaska are complex and often challenging. While there are commonalities across regions, energy landscapes are shaped by local configurations. Drawing on Müller (2024: 1–2), these may be understood as "socio-technical intertwinements" of resource extractivism,[3] energy infrastructure, institutions, ethics, political power, and beliefs, all embedded in particular environments and planetary conditions.

This contribution seeks to offer a partial perspective on Alaska's energy landscape, focusing on historical trajectories and contemporary challenges related to energy security, sovereignty, and the everyday realities. Rather than exoticizing or generalizing, it aims to illuminate the ways in which energy landscapes are shaped by history, technology, politics, economy, geography, and culture. An anthropological lens draws attention to both global and local dimensions of energy, recognizing it as more than a technical matter, but a lived social reality. A self-reflexive, ethical approach and attentiveness towards the values and moral frameworks shaping this interpretation as well as openness to the "multiple and varied ways that people experience, conceptualize, and evaluate matters of energy" remain important (High & Smith, 2017: 1).

Accordingly, this article traces historical trajectories shaping Alaska's energy landscape; examines contemporary challenges of energy security and cost; and considers how energy is vital not only for survival but also for health and well-being.

Historical Trajectories Shaping Alaska's Energy Landscape

Following the U.S. purchase of Alaska in 1867, American industrial capitalism, rooted in the Second Industrial Revolution, focused on extracting furs, salmon, gold, copper, timber, oil, gas, and critical minerals (Wight, 2024). These industries required extensive infrastructure and labour, shaping electrification and settlement patterns, largely under federal influence (ibid.). The Klondike gold rush of 1896, with gold found in the Yukon territory, brought prospectors to Alaska soon after (Haycox, 2002; Knudsen et al., 2023). Large-scale mining always brings material changes including transportation infrastructure, environmental degradation, pollution, and often the relocation of peoples (Frederiksen, 2024). Especially large-scale extractive industries depend on infrastructures no matter which resources they transport (Schweitzer et al., 2017).

Industrial mining grew in the 1920s and the construction of the Alaska Railroad introduced a new energy geography (Wight, 2024). Unlike most U.S. states dominated by investor-owned utilities, Alaska developed rural electric cooperatives and municipal utilities, intermediaries between private and public ownership (ibid.). These originated in 1930s federal electrification efforts in remote areas and became the primary power providers in post-World War II times.

World War II brought significant change: the Japanese attacks on Pearl Harbor (1941) and the Aleutian Islands (1942-43) accelerated defense-related electrification (Haycox, 2002), which was central to postwar development and

[2] Settler colonialism refers to practices based on access to land and involves permanent settlement. It can therefore be defined as "a structure, not an event", and entails the dispossession of land, aiming at the systematic replacement of the local population (Wolfe, 2006: 388).

[3] Extractivism can be defined as "a complex of self-reinforcing practices, mentalities, and power differentials underwriting and rationalizing socio-ecologically destructive modes of organizing life through subjugation, violence, depletion, and non-reciprocity" (Chagnon et al., 2022: 763).

Alaska becoming the 49th US state in 1959. Cold War tensions left lasting legacies, notably nuclear weapons testing in the Aleutian Islands (1965–1971) and the controversial "Project Chariot" plan to detonate hydrogen bombs to create a harbour (Wight, forthcoming; Kohlhoff, 2011). These projects met public opposition (O'Neill, 2007; Kohlhoff, 2011) and the nuclear weapons testing in the Aleutian Islands (Amchitka) was carried out without local consent, leaving environmental contamination and distrust (ibid.). In 1962, radioactive isotopes were secretly buried near Project Chariot's site. When revealed decades later, officials downplayed health risks, but public outrage led to costly remediation (ibid.).

The 1968 discovery of oil at Prudhoe Bay and the subsequent Trans-Alaska Pipeline project had a long-lasting effect on Alaska's energy landscape and accelerated the settlement of land claims, culminating in the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) of 1971 and the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) of 1980 (Sherval, 2009). Post-statehood efforts expanded rural electricity, developed Cook Inlet methane gas, and hydroelectric power (Wight, 2025). Inspired partly by Nordic countries, renewable energy initiatives emerged during the 1970s oil crisis and again in the late 2000s (ibid.).

While these historical developments laid the foundation, Alaska's current energy landscape is marked by the paradox of abundant fossil fuel resources coexisting with persistent challenges in energy security, that is - the uninterrupted availability of energy sources at an affordable price (IEA, 2022; DeWitt, Stefánsson, & Valfells, 2020). Security, however, is not a natural condition;[4] it emerges from specific material, historical, and socio-economic contexts (Maguire et al., 2014). As a historically contingent concept, it reflects the values and priorities of those with the authority to define what constitutes a security issue at a given moment (Hoogensen Gjørv et al., 2020; Hamilton, 2013). From this perspective, energy security is not merely an objective state but at the same time a socially and politically constructed category, contingent on the framing of particular energy-related challenges as threats, the identification of whose security is at stake, and the policy responses such framings legitimize (Kivimaa, 2024).

The Paradox of a Petro-State: Energy Security, Cost Burden, and the 'Green Transition'

Despite its fossil fuel wealth, Alaska's local refineries cannot meet in-state demand. Much crude oil is exported to the Lower 48 for refining and re-imported as gasoline and diesel, creating dependencies within the state's fuel supply chain. Geographic remoteness, harsh climate, scale, dispersed population, and limited infrastructure mean uninterrupted, affordable energy - energy security - is not always guaranteed (University of Washington Center for Environmental Health Equity et al., 2025). Costs remain consistently above US average, causing persistent insecurity, especially in off-grid rural communities reliant on diesel and exposed to global price fluctuations (ibid.). On the centralized Railbelt grid, aligned with the railroad, electricity mainly comes from natural gas. Though costs are lower than rural areas, they remain significant. In many rural regions, like the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta, Bering Strait, Northwest Arctic Borough, stand-alone microgrids[5] supply electricity, and diesel fuel must be flown or shipped in. The Power Cost Equalization (PCE) program offsets some costs but excludes vital institutions like schools and Tribal governments (ibid.). Independent Power Producers (IPPs) and Tribal utilities represent paths toward long-term energy self-determination, enabling communities to manage energy systems and invest savings locally (ibid.).

To address these high costs, the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC) established the Rural Energy Program, which focuses on identifying energy efficiency and cost-saving opportunities to make water and sewer systems

[4] The term security has been used and contested throughout centuries (Hamilton, 2013). When traced back to Cicero, the word "securitas" (lat. sine cura) describes a state of calm, free from anger, fear and anxiety (Hamilton, 2013). Denoting the removal (se) of "concern" or "care" (cura) the term security implies a condition that is either carefree or careless (ibid.). While this points towards an ideal state, it is important to note "that there is not one version of security", but that security and insecurity are always relative and intertwined as "the security of some is deeply implicated in, and even predicated upon, insecurity for others" (Wibben, 2011: 91).

[5] Microgrids refer to localized energy grids operating independently from the main grid.

more affordable. By improving the efficiency of these systems, ANTHC helps communities maintain reliable access to clean water at lower costs, resulting in more sustainable services and reduced monthly utility bills for residents.

In recent years, also renewable energy projects such as wind, solar, and small-scale hydro, have been introduced to reduce diesel dependence. Energy transitions are never merely technical shifts but are inherently political, forms of politics in themselves (Loloum et al., 2021). Drawing on Foucault's concept of biopower, Boyer (2014) emphasizes that modern regimes of governance could not have consolidated without securing and managing energy provision for the entire population at affordable costs.

In Alaska, the political dimensions of energy become evident in how infrastructure decisions, fuel supply chains, and cost-equalization measures are shaped by state policies and federal intervention. It is important to recognize that energy systems are not neutral; they are embedded in histories of inequality and injustice and must be understood within the broader context of colonialism, whose legacies continue to shape the present. Within this framework, notions of renewable energy and the green transition must be considered in local terms.

Mette High and Jessica Smith (2019) argue that the dominant framing of "energy transitions" has narrowed anthropological engagement with the ethical dilemmas posed by energy. By presuming or advocating a transition toward renewables and casting fossil fuels as inherently immoral, this framing "precludes understanding the ethical logics at play in those distributed assemblages and hinders our ability to engage with and respond to them" (ibid.: 19). It is hence important to explore how people morally evaluate energy systems and the assumptions underlying both carbon-intensive and renewable sources, hence "energy ethics" (High & Smith, 2017).

Unlike many European contexts, where renewable energy transitions are framed around climate commitments or environmental benefits, the discourse in rural Alaska is also shaped by the imperative to reduce energy costs. The high price of imported diesel makes locally generated wind, solar, or hydro power attractive. Equally important are practical concerns such as maintaining existing infrastructure, enhancing grid resilience, and developing solutions suited to local geographic and climatic conditions. Renewable energy adoption here is not always about a complete shift but more about the integration and innovative combination of renewable technologies with existing systems and maintenance of critical infrastructure, such as bulk fuel tank farms, which are often overlooked. This process is driven as much by pragmatic adaptation, technological innovation, and community-led, place-based strategies as by environmental considerations. Analyses of energy transitions must hence carefully consider that environmental goals intersect with material realities and economic constraints, that shape priorities and decision-making processes. These priorities are closely connected to broader discourses of energy sovereignty,[6] which focus on who holds the right and power to define, develop, and control energy resources, production, and consumption (Castan Broto, 2017).

The Significance of Energy in Everyday Life

When debates about energy are confined to technical specifications or policy agendas, they risk obscuring the multiple ways in which energy shapes everyday life. Its significance often becomes most visible in moments of disruption or absence (ibid.). In northern climates, a stable and reliable energy supply is essential. In Alaska, where winter temperatures can fall to –40°C, heating is critical for maintaining habitable housing and preventing infrastructure failures such as burst pipes, while electricity is indispensable for operating freezers that preserve subsistence harvests year-round. In rural areas, where flown- or barged-in food is prohibitively expensive, such freezers are central to food security (Saito et al., 2024).

Climate change has intensified this dependence. The thawing of permafrost is melting traditional ice cellars, long used for the preservation of meat and fish, compelling communities to rely more heavily on electricity-dependent refrigeration. Disruptions to this system can have severe consequences; for example, Typhoon Merbok (2022) caused widespread outages that thawed freezers and destroyed community food stores.

Energy is equally central to mobility and to the maintenance of subsistence practices. The availability and cost of fuel for boats, snowmachines, and all-terrain vehicles directly determine how far people can travel to hunting and fishing grounds, thereby shaping both access to resources and the seasonal rhythm of subsistence. Importantly, subsistence refers to far more than an economic strategy. It is a "way of life" grounded in cultural values such as mutual respect, sharing, resourcefulness, and a conscious, and often spiritual, understanding of the interrelations between humans, animals, and the land (Berger 1985; Schweitzer et al., 2019; Thornton, 2001).

The importance of energy in Alaska extends well beyond basic physical needs; it plays a critical role in supporting mental, emotional, and cultural well-being. Reliable access to heat, lighting, and food preservation is vital not only for health but also for maintaining the cultural practices of peoples and communities drawing on subsistence. Therefore "affordable and reliable energy is essential for public health, economic stability, and cultural preservation in Alaska" (University of Washington Center for Environmental Health Equity et al., 2025: 6). In this context, energy must be understood not solely as a technical or economic matter, but as a cultural and political issue central to well-being.

Conclusion

This contribution seeks to trace selected historical trajectories and examines contemporary challenges related to energy security and cost in Alaska. Acknowledging its limited scope and situated perspective, it aims to highlight the complex entanglements shaping Alaska's energy systems and landscape. Despite the state's abundance of fossil fuels, energy security remains precarious, particularly in rural areas where geographic isolation, infrastructural limitations, and economic burdens persist. In these contexts, renewable energy initiatives and efforts to strengthen grid resilience and maintain critical infrastructure can help reduce dependence on costly imported fuels, but are always to be understood within broader political, economic, and sociocultural frameworks. In Alaska, energy is not merely a technical issue or economic commodity; it affects all aspects of life, for instance subsistence practices, culture, health, mobility, and social relations - all of which are also increasingly shaped by the realities of climate change. Within this context, energy security, the assurance of reliable and affordable access, and energy sovereignty, the capacity to define and control own energy futures, are essential to ensuring the resilience, self-determination, and social, as well as cultural well-being of Indigenous people in Alaska.

6 Sovereignty, as explored by Kēhaulani Kauanui (2017), can be defined in different ways. Rooted in the theories of Foucault and Agamben, sovereignty involves the exercise of power over bodies and populations, often marked by paradoxical exclusions and states of exception. Anthropological perspectives emphasize sovereignty as a historically contingent, socially constructed, and often fragmented form of authority shaped by colonial legacies, globalization, and ongoing struggles over who holds the right to define, control, and exercise power (ibid.).

Example 2: The Paradox of the Arctic Artist: Authenticity, Market, and the Art /Craft Division

Nabila van der Veen

Introduction

The 2024 Venice Biennale's theme "Strangers Everywhere" tackled concepts of otherness and Indigeneity, spotlighting peripheral artists from the margins towards the centre of the western art industry. As the *Financial Times* observed, this shift has made Indigenous artists increasingly visible and in demand by major art institutions (Gerlis, 2025). Yet, the question remains: can greater visibility unsettle the western fetish for authenticity and the politics of representation?

In Alaska, where no major art centres or active collector networks exist, artists primarily rely on tourism and statewide grants. This positions Alaska-based artists within ongoing negotiations around authenticity and the art/craft binary. While Shiner (1994) and Dutton (1994) criticise the Eurocentric origins of these distinctions, more recent studies suggest that these categories are not fixed but adaptable. Pearlstein, McIntyre and Padozy (2018) demonstrate how authenticity can shift through material adaptation, while Härkönen, Huhmarniemi, and Jokela (2018) emphasise handcraft as a practice that balances sustainability with cultural continuity. In line with this discourse, my fieldwork with Alaska Native and non-Native artists reveals that the categories of art/craft and authenticity are not merely imposed, but strategically negotiated according to training, audience, and market. Situating Alaska within this global context reveals how local negotiations utilise, resist, and reframe externally imposed frameworks.

Art and Craft Binary in (Arctic) Art

Exoticisation occurs when an art form or cultural practice is framed as foreign, mystical, or primitive – often reinforcing colonial hierarchies and consumerist desires. In the case of Arctic and Alaskan Native Art, the western art industry positions these works as either nostalgic relics or marketable *curios*, excluding them from the category of 'Fine Art'. This reflects a broader distinction in art discourse between Art and craftmanship.

Shiner (1994) notes that *art* once referred to any skilled handcraft. In modern usage, "art" denotes a realm of elevated status, where the "artist" is defined by innovation, individualism as well as a devotion to art as vocation, and the "aesthetic" implies disinterested appreciation. In this hierarchy, Fine Art is opposed to craft, the artist is distinguished from the artisan, and aesthetic contemplation is valued over practical skill. Under these terms, Arctic and Indigenous art is often classified as craft, rather than as Art.

Härkönen et al. (2018) challenge this binary, by demonstrating that handcraft in the Finnish Arctic is mobilised as a form of material sustainability through cultural practices, hence ecological awareness is balanced with the continuity of tradition. This perspective underlines the flexibility of craft, showing that it is not lesser than art due to its adaptability of new materials and conditions, while simultaneously maintaining cultural meaning. With regard to Alaska, craft practices can be prioritised in order to engage with different markets and audiences.

The externally imposed categories of art/craft are not passively accepted. Many artists I interviewed use the terms "artist" and "craftsperson" strategically, depending on context. Several Alaskan carvers expressed pride in identifying as craftspeople, resisting association with the institutional Art world unless adopting the "artist" label offered reputational or market advantages. In contrast, most of the creatives who consistently identify as artists had formal art school training – an education that, as some acknowledged, equipped them to navigate (and in some cases conform to) the expectations of the institutional Art world.

Authenticity as Intention

In the art industry, artworks are controlled through the verification of *authenticity*. Dutton (1994) distinguishes *nominal authenticity* – the factual identification of an item by origin and authorship – from *deep authenticity*, which verifies work as a *sincere* expression of the artist's cultural identity, values, and beliefs. In the western artworld, "deep authenticity" is idealised as work that is created without market influence, often tied to the myth of an untouched, "pure" Indigenous tradition (Shiner 1994).

This framework is problematic for two reasons. First, it romanticises Indigenous art as static, hence assuming that cultural traditions must remain unchanged in order to be authentic. Second, it dismisses works made for sale – often labelled "tourist art" – as inauthentic, therefore overlooking their role in cultural adaption and exchange. Shiner (1994: 226) notes that these categories ignore the fact that Indigenous artists have long created for both internal and external audiences, aiming to incorporate new materials and techniques as part of cultural evolution. More recent scholarship expands this point: Pearlstein et al. (2018) argue that the notion of authenticity can evolve through material change. Shifts in medium, for example through contemporary adaptation of new tools, require a redefinition of what counts as "authentic" rather than a loss of it.

For many Alaska-based artists, authenticity is less about the absence of market influence, but more about the intention behind artworks. Native artists such as Erin Ggaadimits Ivalu Gingrich (Koyukon Dené and Iñupiaq) emphasised that resource use and cultural continuity guide her creative process: "Survival is the most sacred thing you can do," she said, framing adaptation to new tools as integral to authentic, cultural expression. Linda Infante Lyons (Alutiiq) described her decision to paint Native figures in contemporary clothing as a way of showing that Native culture is "alive and evolving."

While Alaska-based artists recognise the demand of authenticity, many consider it to be unrealistic. The expectation that sincere art exists free from market forces is at odds with the realities of their practice: most rely on the sale of their work, hence they create with audiences and purposes in mind. For example, exhibitions and commissions shape these considerations. Moreover, some artists produce additional pieces for tourist craft markets, both to diversify their income and to make their work more accessible to a wider audience. Notably, the only artists who described creating solely for personal creative expression were retired.

The Paradox of Arctic Artists

Alaska-based artists operate within the art world's categories that both enable and constrain their practices. While these frameworks are rooted in the politics of authenticity and market visibility, they often dictate how work is received rather than how it is

produced. Based on my observations and earlier research on Arctic artists, two recurring profiles emerge:

1. The Contemporary Native Artist: these Alaska-based artists critically engage with their cultural heritage without producing "tourist art." My interviews with Native artists such as Linda Infante Lyons and Erin Ggaadimits Ivalu Gingrich suggest that these practices are deeply intentional, as they reflect on personal identity, resource ethics, and adaptation to modern tools. "You can be inspired by your ancestors, but you can take it forward into the contemporary world and make it relevant," Lyons says regarding the use of modern techniques as a part of cultural continuity. This continues Pearlstein et al.'s (2018) argument that the renewal of cultural methods or material does not necessarily undermine authenticity but rather requires a reassessment of what a community identifies with over time.

2. The Market-Oriented Artist: these artists (Native/non-Native) produce work aimed at Alaska's tourism economy, often depicting widely recognisable motifs such as wildlife, landscapes, and regional symbolism. One artist explained that they feel prompted to make nature-based pieces because "it's what people expect from Alaska," even if their personal interests lie elsewhere. My fieldnotes also include several craftspeople who deliberately use the label "craftsperson" to position themselves in the tourist and local market context. While this work is highly legible to external audiences, it is rarely recognised within the institutional art world. This reflects Dutton's (1994) critique that market-oriented production is perceived as compromising "deep authenticity." For many Alaska-based artists, particularly those without gallery representation, this dual positioning – respected locally, dismissed institutionally – is a pragmatic reality. Considering Alaska's fewer large-scale contemporary art institutions, visibility beyond the state relies on sporadic external exhibitions or national grants and competitions.

It must be noted that these categories are not fixed identities, but rather strategic positions within a constrained system. My fieldwork suggests that this negotiation also occurs through modes of distribution: the Native artists I interviewed, both trained in art schools, positioned themselves in the institutional art world and did not participate in market stalls at the Alaska Native Heritage Center. In contrast, Natives selling directly at these stalls engaged more visibly with tourists, which is a positioning that risks reinforcing the "craft" label. However, the boundaries seem permeable: one of the artists I interviewed sold postcards of her work in the Center's gift shop, hence maintaining accessibility while distancing herself from the market. Such strategies show how artists continue to actively negotiate the art/craft division, not as a reflection of reality, but as a negotiation of externally imposed frameworks.

Conclusion

The experiences of Alaska-based artists reveal that the boundaries between art and craft, authentic and market-driven, are shaped by institutional hierarchies, market forces, and audience expectations. Artists adopt through strategic self-positioning based on economic necessity and cultural continuity; some embrace the label of a "craftsperson," others work through institutional channels as "artists," and many move fluidly between categories. In Alaska's geographically isolated yet close-knit art scene, these negotiations are sharpened by limited access to external networks, a fact that continues to make visibility and recognition particularly challenging. The paradox of Arctic artists therefore does not reveal a failure of authenticity, but rather the limits of an art world that continues to define values according to the Eurocentric assumptions of tradition and Indigeneity. As global art events such as the Venice Biennale increasingly foreground Indigenous and peripheral practices, Alaska's art scene demonstrates how the discourses around authenticity, craft, and representation are not only ongoing but central to reimagining what counts as "art" today.

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LECTURES POLAIRES /
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© Bruce Jackson, voyage avec Jean Malaurie à Nome et sa région, 1997
/ field trip with Jean Malaurie to Nome and its region, 1997

DÉCOUVRIR, DÉCRIRE, DÉVOILER L'ALASKA DE VITUS BÉRING À JEAN MALAURIE

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Terre exceptionnelle, l'Alaska est le sujet de nombreux ouvrages dont certains sont devenus des classiques de la littérature mondiale, tels les romans de Jack London que Jean Malaurie comptait au nombre des lectures fondatrices qui l'ont appelé dans le Grand Nord. Les ouvrages présentés ci-dessous dévoilent les recherches et les découvertes, les aspirations et les projections des auteurs et des protagonistes qui ont parcouru cette région : recherches scientifiques pour le navigateur danois Vitus Jonassen Béring (1681-1741), pour le botaniste allemand Georg Wilhelm Steller (1709-1746) comme pour l'ingénieur aéronautique italien Umberto Nobile (1885-1978) ; dépassement de soi et quête existentielle pour les personnages de *Sukkwan Island* de David Vann et du *Grand marin* de Catherine Poulain, autant d'approches différentes également teintées d'une dimension philosophique et politique.

L'Alaska de Vitus Béring et de Georg Wilhelm Steller

Né en 1681 à Horsens, le Danois Vitus Jonassen Béring faisait partie des marins et des scientifiques étrangers que le tsar Pierre Ier avait engagés pour entreprendre une grande modernisation de la Russie qui placerait son pays au rang de grande puissance mondiale. Béring arrive en Russie en 1703, il sert dans la marine russe pendant vingt ans, jusqu'à ce que le tsar lui confie en 1725 la direction d'une grande expédition à travers la Sibérie. Béring n'a pas découvert le détroit qui porte son nom, les Russes Simon Dejnev et Fedot Alekseïevitch Popov l'ayant emprunté avant lui en 1648. Il lui revient cependant de l'avoir exploré et décrit lors de deux grandes expéditions : la première réalisée de 1725 à 1730 à la demande de Pierre Ier, la seconde à partir de 1733 pendant le règne de la tsarine Anna Ivanovna, nièce de Pierre Ier. Ces expéditions avaient plusieurs objectifs, elles devaient explorer la Sibérie, cartographier les côtes de l'Est de la Russie, confirmer ou infirmer l'existence d'un passage maritime entre la Russie et l'Amérique. Navigant en 1741 dans le golfe d'Alaska, Béring voit la terre, il est probablement le premier à apercevoir l'Amérique du Nord. Il meurt sur le chemin du retour.

Dans une biographie qui se lit comme un roman, intitulée *Errances* (Paulsen, 2019), Olivier Remaud retrace la vie de cet homme hors du commun, de son enfance à sa mort, des raisons qui l'ont éloigné de sa famille danoise aux difficultés diverses qu'il rencontra en Russie, sans oublier les découvertes, dangers et péripéties qu'il affronta dans ses expéditions.

Préparée avec le concours de l'Académie des Sciences, la deuxième expédition de 1733-1743, que l'on appela ensuite « La grande expédition du Nord », comptait plusieurs savants, dont le naturaliste Johann Georg Gmelin et l'astronome-géographe Louis Delisle de La Croyère. Gmelin ayant dû abandonner le projet pour des raisons de santé, c'est un jeune naturaliste allemand, Georg Wilhelm Steller (1709-1746), qui le remplaça et accompagna Béring dans sa navigation au nord-ouest de l'Amérique. Steller avait étudié la médecine, les sciences naturelles, et enseigné la botanique à l'université de Halle. Arrivé en Russie, il devint membre de l'Académie des Sciences et fut engagé dans l'expédition car ses connaissances pouvaient rendre de grands services, notamment lors de l'exploration des terres qu'ils rencontreraient. Lorsqu'ils débarquèrent en juillet 1741 sur l'île Kayak, Steller devint le premier

naturaliste européen à fouler la terre d'Alaska. Il observe et inventorie la faune et la flore, découvre et décrit plusieurs espèces de plantes et d'animaux inconnues des scientifiques européens, tels la rhytine et le geai de Steller.

Steller a décrit l'expédition et noté ses observations de naturaliste dans un journal, texte hybride qui est tout à la fois un récit de voyage, un journal de navigation, un compte rendu géographique car Steller décrit les côtes et les reliefs des terres qu'ils aperçoivent, une encyclopédie botanique, zoologique et ethnologique du milieu. Écrit en allemand, publié pour partie à Saint-Pétersbourg en 1793 par le naturaliste allemand Peter Simon Pallas (1741-1811) qui l'édita à sa manière, le manuscrit du journal de Steller fut retrouvé en 1917 par le naturaliste norvégien Leonhard Stejneger (1851-1943), qui put ainsi donner, en 1925, la première édition critique du texte complet de Steller, traduit en anglais : voir *Steller's Journal of the Sea Voyage from Kamchatka to America and Return on the second Expedition 1741-1742*, translated and in part annotated by Leonhard Stejneger (New York, American Geographical Society, 1925). Dotée d'une biographie de Steller, d'une bibliographie, d'un index, de lettres de Steller à Johann Georg Gmelin, de plusieurs illustrations, cartes et gravures, cette édition, quoique centenaire, lisible sur <https://www.americanjourneys.org/AJ_PDF/AJ-099.pdf>, reste un document essentiel pour découvrir la préparation de l'expédition et comprendre ses enjeux, pour saisir l'enchaînement des actes et des découvertes, pour percevoir, par-delà la personnalité de Steller, l'esprit scientifique, philosophique et politique de cette expédition déterminante dans la connaissance de la région.

Cette édition est d'autant plus intéressante que Stejneger, qui était aussi un naturaliste de grande envergure travaillant à la Smithsonian Institution, a lui-même participé dans les années 1880 à plusieurs expéditions dans l'île de Béring. Se passionnant pour les travaux de Steller qui avait exploré l'île avant lui, Stejneger annote largement le *Journal*, vérifiant, corrigeant et complétant les observations de son prédécesseur, auxquelles il ajoute ses propres études, produisant ainsi un document remarquable sur la région et l'état des connaissances au fil des siècles.

Georg Wilhelm Steller est enfin évoqué dans un très beau texte d'un autre genre, intitulé *Nach der Natur : ein Elementargedicht*, publié en 1988 par l'écrivain et essayiste allemand Winfried Georg Sebald (1944-2001). Également disponible en français (*D'après nature : poème élémentaire*, traduit par S. Muller et P. Charbonneau, Actes Sud, 2007), ce triptyque poétique relate trois vies, celle de Matthias Grünewald (v.1475-1528) peintre du célèbre retable d'Issenheim, celle de Georg Wilhelm Steller, celle de Sebald lui-même.

Umberto Nobile, Jean Malaurie et l'art de la préface en forme de manifeste

L'Alaska est une étape essentielle dans la carrière du général italien Umberto Nobile (1885-1978). Ingénieur aéronautique, constructeur de nombreux dirigeables, notamment de l'*Italia* dont on connait la triste fin en mai 1928 et de quelques autres pour le compte de la Russie, Nobile est le premier explorateur à avoir survolé le pôle Nord du Svalbard à l'Alaska en trois jours, du 11 au 14 mai 1926, à bord du dirigeable semi-rigide N-1 ou *Norge* qu'il avait lui-même conçu pour mettre les avantages de l'aérostat au service de l'exploration scientifique, en l'occurrence des régions polaires. Quinze personnes l'accompagnaient, dont le célèbre Norvégien Roald Amundsen. Explorateur du pôle Sud et découvreur du passage du Nord-Ouest canadien, Amundsen était le commanditaire de l'entreprise. Soutenue par les sociétés savantes et les gouvernements italiens et norvégiens, financée par l'Américain Lincoln Ellsworth qui y participa en personne, l'expédition avait plusieurs objectifs. Elle devait explorer ce territoire totalement inconnu et répondre à la grande question géographique depuis longtemps en débat : qu'est-ce qui sépare l'est de la Russie des côtes américaines, un continent ou une mer ? Nobile et ses partenaires quittent le Svalbard le 11 mai 1926, survolent le Pôle, franchissent les 3800 kilomètres de l'océan Glacial où Nobile put constater qu'il « n'existait aucune grande étendue de terre » dans ce secteur. Ils atteignent l'Alaska le 13 mai, survolent Wainwright où ils aperçoivent un groupe d'Inuit, quelques maisons et un élevage de rennes. Nobile écrit qu'il gardera le souvenir « de ces étranges côtes de l'Alaska, plates, blanches, avec leurs rochers noirâtres ». Ils devaient atterrir à Nome. La météo les en empêchant, ils se posent finalement à Teller. Ils y restèrent dix-huit jours. Réalisée en « trois longues journées d'efforts et d'émotions », l'expédition fut un succès. C'était la première entreprise aéronautique de ce genre qui montre, comme le dit fort justement Jean Malaurie, que Nobile tenait de Léonard de Vinci et de Jules Verne.

Des années plus tard, rassemblant ses souvenirs, utilisant ses carnets de route, ses notes techniques et des documents officiels, Nobile décrivit l'expédition de l'*Italia* dans un ouvrage intitulé *La Tenda rossa*, publié en italien en 1969 par Arnoldo Mondadori. Voulant mettre ces mémoires à la portée des francophones, Jean Malaurie, qui a rencontré Nobile à Rome, les publie en 2002 dans la collection « Polaires » des Éditions Economica. Intitulée *Le Pôle, aventure de ma vie*, cette édition française est particulièrement intéressante et instructive. Tout d'abord parce qu'elle donne la traduction intégrale, revue et très largement augmentée du texte italien. Nobile y décrit les préparatifs des expéditions, leurs objectifs, les difficultés techniques et les dangers extrêmes que les explorateurs durent surmonter, découvrant ainsi le courage et la force de caractère, la détermination, l'intelligence et l'enthousiasme scientifique qui animaient ces hommes. Courant de la naissance de Nobile aux dernières années de sa vie, ces mémoires décrivent aussi les séjours de Nobile en Russie puis en Amérique, et ses difficiles relations avec le gouvernement de Mussolini. Nobile consacre plusieurs chapitres à l'expédition de l'*Italia* menée en avril et mai 1928, expédition qui devait explorer le nord du Groenland encore inconnu et qui se termina par un terrible hivernage forcé sur la banquise où quelques membres de l'expédition perdirent la vie. Cette catastrophe fit couler beaucoup d'encre, d'autant plus que le gouvernement italien en imputa, à tort, la responsabilité à Nobile. Nobile s'explique sur le sujet dans ses mémoires, il dévoile la machination ourdie contre lui par Italo Balbo, secrétaire d'État à l'aviation dans le gouvernement de Mussolini.

Traduit de l'italien par Gabrielle Cabrini qui restitue finement les nuances et les inflexions du style de Nobile, cette édition française dévoile l'homme et le savant, dessine son caractère, souligne ses qualités humaines et ses valeurs intellectuelles, laisse percevoir ses émotions, ses espoirs et ses blessures. Plusieurs cahiers de très belles photographies prises pendant les expéditions, notamment celles qui dévoilent l'armature du *Norge*, celles qui le montrent en vol ou sortant du hangar, aident à se représenter les situations extrêmes auxquelles les explorateurs étaient continuellement exposés, donnant ainsi une idée de leurs prouesses scientifiques, techniques et psychologiques.

Enfin, l'édition s'ouvre sur une préface de Jean Malaurie qui ne s'en tient pas aux fonctions traditionnelles de présentation et de recommandation habituellement dévolues à ce genre de préambule. Jean Malaurie se plie aux règles du genre pour élargir le lectorat de *La Tenda rossa* et faire connaître un épisode essentiel de l'exploration polaire, mais il veut surtout donner la parole à Nobile pour dire ce qui s'est réellement passé, et que cette version des événements réhabilite ce scientifique exceptionnel « toujours marqué par la diffamation d'origine mussolinienne ».

Servant l'histoire, la morale et la politique, cette édition, notamment dans sa préface, lance un manifeste technique et éthique susceptible d'améliorer les expéditions futures. N'oublions pas que Jean Malaurie était lui-même un explorateur audacieux et expérimenté. N'oublions pas non plus que c'était un historien de la recherche polaire, qu'il connaissait parfaitement toutes les expéditions réalisées avant les siennes, qu'il les avait étudiées d'un œil critique, tirant toutes les leçons utiles au perfectionnement du domaine. Il suffit de relire son ouvrage *Ultima Thulé*, qui n'est qu'un exemple parmi d'autres, pour découvrir cette volonté de parfaire la recherche polaire. Aussi sa préface du texte de Nobile ne se limite-t-elle pas aux éloges d'usage. Malaurie se permet de souligner quelques erreurs dans la préparation de l'expédition de l'*Italia* qui ont contribué à la catastrophe, erreurs qui n'incombaient pas spécialement à Nobile et découlaient plutôt de la pratique de l'époque. Il incrimine par exemple la présence d'un journaliste à bord de l'*Italia* et le rôle délétère de la presse dans le déroulement et la transmission des événements. Fort de ses longues années d'immersion en milieu polaire, Jean Malaurie s'étonne en outre « que les conseillers polaires choisis par le général Nobile ne lui aient pas recommandé d'avoir à bord un ou deux Esquimaux en permanence, parfaitement équipés en traîneaux et chiens, et capables de faire face, sur la banquise, à des situations de survie imprévisibles ». Dressant la liste des expéditions sauvées par les autochtones et des tragédies qui ont pâti de leur absence, il regrette cette « erreur d'appréciation », « l'aveuglement » des grands techniciens qui méconnaissent les « qualités irremplaçables d'un humble peuple auquel nul n'a songé dans cette puissante entreprise ». Technique et stratégique, apparemment simple remarque de bon sens destinée à assurer le succès des explorations, la critique de cette erreur impose un principe éthique que Jean Malaurie n'a jamais cessé de défendre, à savoir que les autochtones doivent absolument participer aux recherches qui se déroulent sur leurs territoires. Éditant *Le Pôle, aventure de ma vie* d'Umberto Nobile, Jean Malaurie se perpétue en militant des *Derniers rois de Thulé. Avec les Esquimaux polaires, face à leur destin.*

L'Alaska des romanciers contemporains

David Vann, Sukkwan Island, trad. de l'anglais par L. Derajinski, Éditions Gallmeister, 2010. Catherine Poulain, Le Grand marin, Éditions de l'Olivier, 2016.

Né en 1966 sur l'île Adak en Alaska, David Vann gagne sa vie en naviguant avant de rencontrer le succès littéraire et d'enseigner à l'université. Née en 1960 à Barr (en Alsace), Catherine Poulain a été bergère, ouvrière agricole, marin-pêcheur en Alaska pendant dix ans. Leurs textes, qui ont en commun d'être les premiers romans écrits par des aventuriers ayant beaucoup voyagé de par le monde, ayant exercé différents métiers, placent également leurs personnages en Alaska, cadre naturel qui ne leur était pas initialement destiné. Dentiste à Fairbanks, Jim emmène son fils Roy, âgé de treize ans, sur une île déserte peu accessible, située dans le sud de l'Alaska, où la vie se révèle beaucoup plus rude qu'il ne l'avait prévu. David Vann décrit les dangers encourus, les affres de l'isolement, les diverses tentatives de ses personnages pour se conserver dans une nature aussi sauvage. Jeune Française méridionale, Lili quitte sa région, se rend à Kodiak où elle embarque sur un bateau qui pêche la morue, le crabe et le flétan. Montrant le métier de pêcheur en milieu polaire, Catherine Poulain dit le froid, la fatigue, la brutalité, l'humiliation d'être une femme, la peur jusqu'à l'effroi, et de ce point de vue son texte n'est pas sans rappeler les aventures de l'océanographe Anita Conti. Nourris d'éléments autobiographiques, ces deux romans proposent en filigrane des documentaires sur l'Alaska d'autant plus puissants sur le plan dramaturgique qu'ils procèdent d'une solide connaissance du milieu.

Pour les personnages, l'Alaska est tout à la fois un milieu naturel fascinant et repoussant qu'ils idéalisent, une sorte de fantasme, de point focal où convergent leurs aspirations existentielles, une métaphore de la vie où ils peinent à trouver un chemin. Le père de Roy, qui ne s'est « jamais senti à sa place nulle part », surtout pas à Fairbanks où le climat et le paysage ne lui conviennent pas, veut « se détendre », « découvrir un autre monde ». Aussi impose-t-il à son fils, qui n'aspire qu'à quitter cette île inhabitable le plus rapidement possible pour retourner à la ville, le projet de vivre seuls au beau milieu de la nature sauvage, dans « le genre d'endroit qu'il avait toujours idéalisé », loin des folies de l'humanité, dans une forme de pureté. Projet dont Roy, mentionnant la Bible, souligne ironiquement la portée mythique. Décrivant une succession d'événements funestes, David Vann explore la chute physique et morale d'individus prisonniers de la nature sauvage et, plus encore, de leur propre nature : venus pour se ressourcer pendant une période déterminée, le père et le fils, également pris en otage du rêve de Jim, ne se relèveront pas de cette expérience. Le cas de Lili est différent. Lili, qui pense qu'il « faudrait toujours être en route pour l'Alaska » parce que « c'est là qu'elle est la vie », parce que l'Alaska est si loin, si spécifique qu'il représente une rupture, qu'il promet une existence différente, veut « se battre pour quelque chose de puissant et beau, risquer de perdre la vie pour la trouver avant, aller au bout du monde, trouver sa limite, là où ça s'arrête ». Lili trouvera ce qu'elle cherchait en Alaska et ce qu'elle ne cherchait pas en elle-même, un grand amour. S'excluant de leur milieu d'origine, se tournant vers l'Alaska pour donner un sens à leur vie, s'exposant à des éléments naturels qui sont toujours les plus forts, prenant le risque de mourir pour vivre, les protagonistes des deux romans expérimentent plusieurs limites, à commencer par les leurs.

Illustrations en 1ère et 4ème de couverture :

Paysage de Nome et sa région
(voyage avec Jean Malaurie en 1997)
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Trois masques de la collection de la Social d'histoire morave de Nazareth, Pennsylvanie.
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Illustrations on the front and back cover:

Landscape of Nome and its region
(trip with Jean Malaurie in 1997)
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