

Henning Howlid Wærp. 2017. *Arktisk litteratur—fra Fridtjof Nansen til Anne B. Ragde*. Stamsund: Orkana. 360 pages. ISBN: 978-82-8104-300-8.

Numerous journal articles and books as well as several edited anthologies have emerged from the work of the multidisciplinary and multilingual Arctic Discourses and Arctic Modernities research groups, both of which have been based at the University of Tromsø—The Arctic University of Norway—and funded by the Research Council of Norway. Henning Howlid Wærp’s *Arktisk litteratur—fra Fridtjof Nansen til Anne B. Ragde* [Arctic Literature—From Fridtjof Nansen to Anne B. Ragde] is one of the latest contributions from the Arctic Modernities initiative, and it provides valuable new perspectives on a broad range of Nordic Arctic texts, covering fiction, non-fiction, and poetry.

*Arktisk litteratur* contains 18 chapters organized into four sections: “What and Where is the Arctic?”; “The Arctic in Expedition and Travel Literature”; “The King of the Arctic”; and “The Arctic in Fiction and Poetry.” The chapters can be read by themselves or as part of larger sections, and each has its own bibliography and, when relevant, references to other parts of the book. Thoroughly documented, every chapter has a clear and original focus, stated in an introduction, and weaves previous literary scholarship and at times historical, political, environmental, social, gender, and other perspectives such as animal studies and ecocriticism into the analyses. Though each chapter has a conclusion, there is no concluding chapter in the book. *Arktisk litteratur* does not have an introduction either, though Wærp provides a brief overview of the Arctic Modernities and Arctic Discourses projects in a three-page preface.

Context for this rich and engaging study is clearly provided in the first section, which discusses various ways the terms and notions of the Arctic and the North have been defined, used, and explored in different eras and by different groups of people. Fridtjof Nansen and his *Nord i tåkeheimen* [In Northern Mists, 1911], American Barry Lopez and Canadians Glen Gould, Louis Edmond Hamelin, Sherill Grace, and Margaret Atwood are among those authors and artists whose ideas surrounding the North receive attention. Wærp concludes that though there are many ways to define the Arctic—depending on time and place—the polar circle, climate, and political and cultural contexts and considerations are factors that played and continue to play an important role in delineating the boundaries of this region.

In section two, Wærp uses a variety of critical lenses to analyze classic Nordic exploration texts and northern, Arctic travel literature—devoting entire chapters to Fridtjof Nansen, Otto Sverdrup, and Roald Amundsen. He looks, for example, at why Sverdrup’s texts are lesser known today than Nansen’s accounts, despite Sverdrup’s wide-ranging accomplishments, and discusses the challenges of writing engaging exploration texts of high literary quality that will resonate after their

authors are gone. As he points out, literary considerations such as plot and character development are critical when writing non-fiction—“selv sannheten må produseres litterært” [even true events have to be written about in a literary fashion] (104). Chapter 7, “Polar Literature as Avant-garde,” and Chapter 8, “Polar Literature as Pastoral – An Ecological Perspective,” which focuses on the pastoral tone in texts written by Fridtjof Nansen, Helge Ingstad, and Knud Rasmussen respectively, are highly original and challenge the reader to think outside the conventional Arctic box. Rounding off this section is a chapter devoted to Swedish engineer Salomon August Andrée’s unsuccessful 1893 attempt to reach the North Pole and Bea Uusma’s book *Expedition: My Love Story* (2013), inspired by the Andrée material. While analyzing *Expedition*, Wærp returns to the genre of “The Second Journey” (Swedish literary critic Maria Lindgren Lavenworth’s term, 185) and *metareiser* [meta-journeys], which he first covers in Chapter 3 while analyzing literary accounts of expeditions inspired by Nansen’s *På ski over Grønland* (1890).

While the section on Arctic exploration analyzes narratives from a wide geographical area, “The King of the Arctic” focuses on the representations of polar bears in personal narratives from Svalbard, as well as in novels, crime fiction, and works for children and youth that are set on this Arctic archipelago. Wærp demonstrates that hunting and documentary accounts generally give a more nuanced picture of the polar bear than crime fiction and novels, and he outlines the centrality of climate and environmental themes in more recent juvenile fiction.

The final section of *Arktisk litteratur* deals exclusively with fiction and poetry by Norwegian authors. In line with current thinking surrounding the term Arctic, Wærp considers the northern parts of Norway to be part of this area, and he devotes a chapter to Petter Dass’ *Nordlands Trompet* (c. 1696), focusing on this poet’s depiction of the northern Norwegian coastal landscape. In another chapter he discusses the picture of “North” in northern Norwegian poetry and also looks at the development of Northern Norway as a term and concept. The final chapter is devoted to depictions of the northern Norwegian trading communities in literary works from Jonas Lie to Herbjørg Wassmo. The discussion of power structures associated with these trading towns is particularly intriguing.

Among Wærp’s areas of expertise are the authorships of Cora Sandel and Knut Hamsun, both of whom set works in Northern Norway. They are, naturally, included in this section. Chapter 16 focuses on the novels of Lars Berg and Knut Hamsun and northern Norwegian narration style, and Chapter 17 on Cora Sandel’s “pictures of the North.” Howlid Wærp convincingly argues that Sandel’s *Alberte og Jakob* is her “Pan novel,” (325) and that northern Norwegian aspects of her authorship are constantly overlooked in literary criticism while these same aspects tend to be emphasized in literature about Knut Hamsun’s authorship. This is but one example of how *Arktisk litteratur* will encourage its readers to revisit and reread texts with new lenses.

The other two chapters in section four cover more conventional Arctic themes. Chapter 13 explores the genre of the Ishavsroman [The Arctic Sea novel] and its connection to Lars Hansen's authorship, and Chapter 14 analyzes Anne B. Ragde's *Zona Frigida* (1995) and the way in which she melds travel literature and crime fiction to create a "polar thriller" (277).

*Arktisk litteratur* will serve as a valuable resource for those who want a general introduction to Nordic Arctic literature or for students and researchers who are working with particular facets of this field. Some readers may miss having an index, though the chapter bibliographies are helpful in locating particular texts, authors, and themes. Due to its broad scope, rich, original critical lenses, as well as its engaging and accessible style, this book is an excellent candidate for translation. Hopefully it will soon be available in English for a wider audience.

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