

Heidi Hansson and Anka Ryall, eds. 2017. *Arctic Modernities: The Environmental, the Exotic and the Everyday* Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 350 pages. ISBN: 978-1-5275-0290-1.

This edited anthology showcases many of the major contributions from the three-year international interdisciplinary *Arctic Modernities* research project, led by Anka Ryall and based at The Arctic University of Norway (UiT) with major funding support by the Research Council of Norway. The striking image on the book cover—a woman in bright red Sámi attire standing on a trampoline in a seemingly desolate field of snow—provides a fitting invitation to explore this series of fourteen articles, which both challenge traditional and dominant discourses surrounding the Arctic, and provide valuable new perspectives related to gender and indigeneity. The articles challenge both long-held and more recently constructed stereotypes and oversimplified representations of this complex and dynamic region by drawing on historical, literary, cultural, and aesthetic perspectives.

In their engaging introduction, editors Heidi Hansson and Anka Ryall, both well-known literary scholars who work extensively with Arctic texts, unpack the cover image to frame their discussion of the ways in which the Arctic and modernity have been conceptualized and defined in various times, places, and spaces, focusing on the intersection of these notions and some of the seeming paradoxes and contradictions that result. Hansson and Ryall position the articles in this anthology within the following Arctic discourse framework, which is reflected in the book's subtitle: "the Arctic understood as threatened *environment*, the Arctic perceived as the *exotic* opposite of modernity and the Arctic described as the *everyday*, lived reality of its inhabitants" (4, italics mine). The editors also note that a hypothesis common to many of these contributions is "the Arctic may be seen as a stark embodiment of the paradoxes of modernity" (8).

The geographic and thematic foci of the articles span the circumpolar north—from Russia and the former Soviet Union to northern Canada to the northern reaches of the Nordic region, including Sápmi, Greenland, and Svalbard—with Canadian and Norwegian content being particularly well represented. The areas of expertise of the contributors, all of whom are connected to European and North American universities, range from literature and culture (comparative, Nordic, English, Russian, and Slavic) to art history, Arctic history, and cross-cultural, gender, film, and media studies. By presenting such a wide range of perspectives, Hansson and Ryall effectively highlight the broad and timely range of work related to the Arctic and modernity taking place in the field of humanities. *Arctic Modernities* also demonstrates the importance of paying attention to often understudied perspectives and areas such as "the impact of ... air travel, industry, tourism, urgent environmental concerns and changing gender

norms on discourses of Arctic modernity” (6), when political and economic decisions are made in areas ranging from the environment to Indigenous issues.

While a number of the articles use “new” lenses to examine classic texts and authors that have been heavily studied, others introduce the readers to less well-known texts and images that have been marginalized and/or forgotten. Examples of the former are Fredrik Chr. Brøgger’s ecocritical reading of Helge Ingstad’s iconic *The Land of Feast and Famine* from 1933 (originally published in Norwegian as *Pelsjegerliv blant Nord-Canadas indianere* in 1931) and Sigfrid Kjeldaas’ “Icebergs and Light: Modernity and the Arctic Sublime in Barry Lopez’s *Arctic Dreams*.” Henning Howlid Wærp also discusses Ingstad’s *The Land of Feast and Famine*, along with texts by polar explorers Fridtjof Nansen and Knud Rasmussen in his thought-provoking examination of “The Arctic Pastoral.” An example of the latter is Roswitha Skare’s “The Romance of the Far Fur Country: Indigenous Life between Tradition and Modernity” in which she analyzes both a classic silent film—*Nanook of the North* (1922)—and a recently re-discovered film—*The Romance of the Far Fur Country* (1920).

In addition to the aforementioned articles by Brøgger, Kjeldaas, and Wærp, the first section of *Arctic Modernities*—“Environmental Arctic”—contains a look at “Ice as a Literary Motif in Soviet Arctic Modernities” by Susi K. Frank and Renée Hulan’s “The Poetry of the Aeroplane: Arctic Flight in Twentieth-Century Canadian Poetry.” The second section—“Exotic Arctic”—begins with a study of “Early Mass Tourism at the North Cape: Infrastructure, Environment and Social Practices” by Ulrike Spring, followed by Jan Borm’s analysis of “Gender, Primitivism and the Pictorial in Olive Murray Chapman’s Travelogue Across Lapland” (1932), and Skare’s film study. Adriana Craciun’s timely look at the complex political, cultural, and identity issues surrounding the recent discoveries of the Franklin ships—the *Erebus* and the *Terror*—in northern Canada and Audun J. Mørch’s look at Yuri Rytkheu, a Chukchi writer, rounds out this section.

The book’s third section, “Everyday Arctic,” contains two articles that focus on Svalbard—a part of the circumpolar North that has become more well known outside of the Nordic region in recent years. Anka Ryall focuses on two personal narratives in her study “Svalbard in and Beyond European Modernity,” and Elin Haugdal looks at the intersection of identity, gender, and modernity in the Svalbard images of photographer Herta Grøndal from the 1950s to 1970s. These are followed by Cathrine Bjercknes’ article in which she uses a lens of “hybridity” to discuss the representation of the Arctic in Melanie McGrath’s crime fiction novel *White Heat* (2011). The final article, “A Place in the Sun’: Historical Perspectives on the Debate on Development and Modernity,” is by Kirsten Thisted, who has worked extensively with Greenlandic literature and Danish-Greenlandic relations.

Though Indigenous material and perspectives are included in a number of the analyses, including Thisted’s study and Audun J. Mørch’s analysis of the

Chukchi writer Yuri Rytkeu, there do not appear to be any direct contributions by Indigenous scholars. That being said, the range of theoretical, geographical, linguistic, and cultural perspectives in *Arctic Modernities* is broad and the articles offer refreshingly nuanced and original perspectives and readings.

Arctic Modernities: The Environmental, the Exotic and the Everyday will be of interest to students and scholars in literary, cultural, and film studies and beyond. Instructors will find individual chapters or groups of chapters to be of use in courses about northern literature, film, and art, as well as tourism, gender, and cultural studies. The notes and references that accompany the introduction and each chapter are thorough and serve as a valuable resource for further study. The book also contains a helpful index, and the way in which the articles are grouped together is logical and effective.

As with its predecessor “Arctic Discourses” research project, the “Arctic Modernities” project, as evidenced by this anthology, has demonstrated the richness and originality that results from interdisciplinary research initiatives, and it has contributed valuable new perspectives to Arctic Studies by exploring the complex discourses surrounding the Arctic region and modernity.

Ingrid Urberg
University of Alberta-Augustana Campus