

state as much, it could easily be adopted for use in courses on the Arctic or Circumpolar North.

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*Iceland Imagined: Nature, Culture, and Storytelling in the North Atlantic.*  
By Karen Oslund. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011. Xvi + 260 pp. Illustrations, maps, index, bibliography.

The label on this book is a little misleading. The main title, *Iceland Imagined*, is too narrow, because large portions discuss Greenland and the Faroe and Shetland Islands. The subtitle, *Nature, Culture, and Storytelling in the North Atlantic*, is broad enough to imply something much grander than this trim little history, and may have contributed to the fact that this straightforward work of academic history is here being reviewed by an English professor. However, the author provides in her introduction a very useful summary that would have made a more accurate, if less catchy, subtitle: "This book is ... a cultural history of the North Atlantic as a European periphery" (7). Oslund links the disparate histories of these northern islands together by focusing on the ways in which various explorers, politicians, scientists, and artists have emphasized particular features of landscape, language, and history for their own purposes—all of them, in one way or another, attempts to lay European claim over northwestern borderlands.

The five chapters of this book each address a discrete topic. The first two are focused on Iceland, the next two on Greenland, and the last on the Faroe Islands, although every chapter makes connections across these islands and back to several European countries. Iceland receives pride of place in the book (including in the title) partly because it is currently so evocative for the Western imagination. As Oslund points out, we can hardly think of Iceland without conjuring up dramatic contrasts, including fire and ice, wilderness and the modern city, ancient sagas and modern rock stars. Iceland is the home of some of Northern Europe's foundational stories. But that literature was written about the first generations to settle on an otherwise uninhabited island, making the sagas both very old and very new. As an Alaskan I regularly encounter characterizations of the North as simultaneously old and new, "the last of the lands, and the first," as Robert Service put it; whatever cognitive dissonance might have been created by this paradox is obscured by sentimental nostalgia about "the last frontier" and booming cant about "north to the future." But there is still something sharp and distinct about the paradoxes embodied in our images of Iceland. Oslund's examination in

Chapter 1 of mapping and landscape painting, particularly of the volcanic nature of Iceland, helps me understand how my own “imaginary Iceland” was shaped. I did not find the discussion of flora and fauna in Chapter 2 quite as helpful, although the three-page story of reindeer in Iceland is a juicy tidbit that will be enjoyed by anyone interested in the lurid history of imported species.

Chapters 2 and 3 look at the history of technology and language, respectively, in Greenland and Iceland. More precisely, each chapter addresses the ways in which technology and language were used as public-relations topics for Europeans interested in pursuing their own ends. For instance, a Norwegian Lutheran pastor makes a case for tighter political and religious connections between Greenland and Scandinavia by noting that Greenlanders “during the Middle Ages had practiced European-style husbandry and farming—including using plows—but no longer did so in the eighteenth century” (89), which was proof, to this pastor, that Greenland was degenerating without sufficient European supervision. Oslund moves along very quickly—for instance, a section of Chapter 3 called “Polar Explorers and the Adoption of Inuit Tools” is only three pages long. Her focus throughout is less on the details of lived history than on how life in the North Atlantic was construed for public consumption in Europe.

Chapter 5, subtitled “Language and the Sagas in the Faroe Islands,” is the most tightly focused, and provided me with a wonderful introduction to a corner of the North that I knew nothing about. The chapter actually opens with a long section on the Icelandic sagas, in order to explain their influence on a nineteenth-century debate about Faroese orthography. That debate is just one facet of larger political struggles: “Both sides in the Faroese language debate saw their orthographical system and historical narrative to which it was attached as protection for their country against the dangers of the modern world. ... But they differed radically in how those traditions could best be defended and what exactly those traditions represented—a Pan-Scandinavian heritage or a uniquely Faroese one?” (135).

The Epilogue, “Whales and Men,” is an entertaining account of two very current issues—debates over whaling and human genetic mapping—that illustrate Oslund’s views about the North Atlantic islands’ particular place in the Western imagination. The Epilogue also exemplifies Oslund’s theoretical and stylistic methods. She carefully describes the deCODE controversy over who controls medical information and the recent history of whaling in Iceland (with special attention to poor Keiko of *Free Willy* fame), but does not offer any particular insights or conclusions about the events she describes. She is content to note that “The whaling and deCODE episodes reprise

many of the themes from the earlier chapters of this book: indigenous versus modern, colonialism and post-colonialism, the unique and general laws of nature" (168). Oslund's work is informed by postmodern views regarding the cultural shaping of everyday life, but *Iceland Imagined* is virtually jargon-free, and refrains from making any large claims about its topic. Many readers will appreciate her modesty and clarity; others will wish for a little more daring, humour, and theoretical risk-taking.

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***The Kandik Map.* By Linda Johnson. Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2009. viii + 231 pp.**

In 1880, two men collaborated in the production of an extraordinarily detailed map showing many geographical features of the interior of Alaska and the Yukon, accompanied by their place names in both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal languages. The map was drawn by an Aboriginal man named Paul Kandik, while the French-Canadian fur trader François Mercier added the place names (although some of the names may have been added by Ivan Petroff, a census taker in Alaska). A number of the map's features, such as trails between watersheds, had never been previously charted.

Author Linda Johnson explores the creation and significance of what has come to be known as the Kandik Map, which is held in the Bancroft Library in California. In analyzing the map, she searches out the provenance of the archival document, including the identities of its co-creators, the context in which it was created, its significance in the cartographic history of the North, and its potential multivalent meanings to its creators. Through this effort, Johnson paints a vivid picture of social and cultural life in the Yukon River basin in the decades immediately prior to the Klondike Gold Rush, and of the interactions between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in the changing North.

*The Kandik Map* is divided into six thematically-organized chapters. Following a brief historiography of the Yukon and Alaska, the reader is introduced to the Kandik Map, which Johnson points out is created from two distinct story "camps" consisting of the European and Aboriginal perspectives. Also discussed are the various geographical features on the map, such as the Yukon, Tanana, and Kuskokwim Rivers (possibly the first renderings of the latter two rivers), their tributaries, and trading posts. The next two chapters embark on the search for Paul Kandik's identity. By analyzing the map's geographical features and place names, Johnson surmises