

expedition to the North Pole, as well as on Henson's importance in a contemporary context, as described in Stam's introduction.

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***The Nordic Model: Scandinavia Since 1945.* By Mary Hilson. London, Reaktion Books Ltd., 2008. 234 pp.**

The Nordic Model has long been a defining element of the Nordic region, both internally and externally, in truth and in myth. But the Nordic region is one in transition—and it is the apparent ever-changing definition of the Nordic region, or its defiance of definition, and the subsequent effect of this on the realities and myths of the Nordic model, that serve as a catalyst for Mary Hilson's book, *The Nordic Model: Scandinavia Since 1945* (2008). However, the book is much more than just an appraisal of the Nordic model; it charts the historical factors that led to the creation of such a model and discusses the problems that arise in defining it in regional rather than national terms, the latter of which is so often the case in Nordic discourses on the subject. For, although the title suggests that this is a book that focuses on the Nordic model, in so doing it ambitiously—and successfully—"attempts to explore the meaning of 'Scandinavia'" (13) itself. In appraising the Nordic region in terms of a *geschichtsregion* (historic region), Hilson examines the region as a collective whole, but not uncritically. Indeed, Hilson takes up the question of whether or not examination of the region as a collective framework is even suitable—and the book justifies Hilson's approach. It highlights the similarities and differences that become apparent through a comparative analysis of the Nordic model.

In the introduction, Hilson offers what can be regarded as an apologia, not only of the subject but of the sources used. It is an apologia that is unnecessary: first, because the question of what Scandinavia or the Nordic region are is an essential one, and the Nordic model is key to understanding the Nordic region in the modern period; and, second, the sources are first-rate. The bibliography, carefully divided into helpful subject headings, contains a wealth of extra reading material with the English reader in mind, and the Swedish bias that Hilson hoped to avoid is, in fact, not avoided but nevertheless justified. The introduction can give the reader the impression that this is a book where clichés and generalizations will abound, referring as it does to Scandinavia as "a small, sparsely populated region on the margins of Europe [... that] seems to have generated an interest out of all proportion to its size" (11). While Hilson seems here to perpetuate the myth

of Scandinavia as a “small” region, the book avoids generalizations and instead questions those presumptions generated internally and externally, and does so with success.

The book is divided into five chapters, with an introduction and conclusion. Chapters one to five cover the Nordic political model, economic development, the welfare state, international relations, and Scandinavian society, charting the development and changes to the Nordic model. It would not come as any surprise if Hilson’s introduction, *The Historical Meanings of Scandinavia*, proves to become essential reading for all students embarking on a study of the region; it covers the subject in such a way as to enthuse the reader to read on. Chapter 5 is especially pertinent in light of current developments in the region, dealing as it does with the current issues facing the Nordic countries in terms of immigration and the cultural, political, linguistic, and international problems that these have created. The conclusion (referred to in the introduction as chapter 6) looks toward the future for the region and the model, and provides an eloquent summary of Hilson’s aims and observations.

While Hilson does touch on material covered before (Arter/Derry), her approach is both unique and refreshing and does not suffer from the turgid style of some of her predecessors. However, it should come as little surprise that the book reads somewhat as an educational text, based as it is on a course Hilson taught at University College London as senior lecturer in Scandinavian Studies, and as such lends itself to undergraduate and master students from various disciplines concerned with the Nordic region. And while this element of the text does not detract from its potential appeal to the student as much as the general reader, it does suffer from the look of a secondary school textbook—a fact making it hard to imagine that it would appeal to anyone who wasn’t specifically seeking it out, which is a great shame for the text has appeal in abundance.

This book is informative without being dry, and the style is accessible without pandering to popularity. In questioning the homogeneity of the Nordic model (and the changing political, geographical, cultural, and historical nature of the Nordic region) without defining the answer, Hilson cleverly allows her reader the opportunity not only to follow these considerations, but to be part of the conclusion. And with Hilson as guide, our conclusion as to what the past, present, and future of the Nordic model is—and indeed of what is Scandinavian or Nordic—can be nothing if not informed.

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