

North to North: The New Discourse

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*For Geoffrey Weller
who contributed so much
to the study of the North,
at home and abroad*

1.

When I am asked, as I sometimes am, how often *The Northern Review* publishes, I like to say, "Two issues a year, except when we publish one or three." As its many readers and contributors know, the *Review* is a lot like the Northern Lights, a stylized rendition of which fittingly appears on the cover of each issue: you know it is going to appear, you're just never sure when.

As irregular as its appearance has sometimes been, the *Review* is now something of a northern institution and, as such, a statistical anomaly. Although it is just twelve years old, it is already one of the oldest continuously published scholarly journals about the North published in Canada. Given the challenges of publishing in Canada, given the particular challenges of academic publishing in Canada, and, given the very particular challenges of publishing in the Canadian North, this is no mean accomplishment.

It seems fitting, then, that this the twenty-first issue of *The Northern Review*, includes the cumulative indices—by author, title and subject—to the first twenty issues of the journal. Prepared by the *Review's* Managing Editor, Amanda Graham, the indices provide a useful overview of the many peer-reviewed articles, speeches, poems, paintings, photographs, short stories, and book reviews that the *Review* has published since its inception in 1988. Taken together, this considerable body of work suggests that the journey undertaken in the first issue has been a fruitful one. It also affords an excellent vantage point from which to look back over the past twelve years, take stock, and speculate a little about what might lie ahead for the *Review* as it begins publishing in the new century.

2.

Those who study the North know that the last twelve years have been momentous ones. The political and economic landscapes have changed significantly. We've seen dramatic change in Russia and gleaned what we could about how its "democratization" and move to a free market economy have affected the peoples of the Russian Far North. We've watched too as Russia's northern military and industrial apparatus has rusted to point of collapse. We've also seen the downsizing of the US's military complex in Alaska. The American military base on Adak, which once bragged that it was big enough to support its own Macdonald's, is now almost empty. We've seen diamonds extracted from kimberlite pipes found under lakes in the Northwest Territories. We've seen the pressure in the Trans-Alaska Pipeline drop and pressure to open the Alaska National Wildlife Refuge to oil exploration rise. We've watched as the "old" Northwest Territories voted for division and a new territory, an Inuit homeland, emerge. And we've also watched the opening scenes of a new drama unfold in northern Quebec, the growing affirmation of a place called Nunavik. We've also seen the establishment of the Arctic Council and, in Canada, the creation of a Polar Commission and a Circumpolar Ambassadorship. And, in both Europe and Canada we have heard announcements of "northern dimensions" to domestic and foreign policy.

Change has also swept across the northern academic landscape. During the past twelve years, in many northern countries there has been a pronounced tendency to consolidate and, in some cases, expand *northern capacity in the North*. In Northern Finland we've seen the establishment of the Arctic Centre in Rovaniemi and the emergence of the University of Lapland as a major centre for northern scholarship. In Iceland we've seen the establishment of the country's second university and the Stefansson Arctic Institute, both in Akureyri. In Norway, we've seen the government move much of its northern research capacity north to Tromsø as well as efforts to establish Svalbard as a major international site for northern research and education. In Alaska, we've seen sizable investments in the Northern Forum and its research arm: the Northern Forum Academy, as well as the establishment of the University of Alaska's highly successful Master of Northern Studies and the emergence of Ilisagvik College, an institution created and funded by Alaska's North Slope Borough. In Canada we've seen Arctic College and the Science Institute of the Northwest Territories, anticipating the division of the Northwest Territories, separate into Aurora College and Au-

rorra Research Institute in the west and Nunavut Arctic College and the Nunavut Research Institute in the east. We've watched a similar maturation at Yukon College: the creation of the Northern Research Institute and its Northern Research Endowment Fund, the founding of the Northern Studies Program and the College's efforts to form partnerships with institutions to its east and west. As well, we've seen the establishment of the University of Northern British Columbia, possibly the first university in Canada that has viewed its northernness not as disability to be overcome but a strength to be embraced.

Indeed, there is some evidence that the North is, academically, coming into its own. While some events suggest that the North continues to be, like Hamlet, more acted upon than acting, others show a new confidence and a quiet insistence to act independently.

3.

Parallelling, perhaps proceeding from, these largely regional and national efforts to develop northern capacity in the North is what may arguably be the single most important academic development in the North in many years: the emergence of what Outi Snellman of the University of Lapland and others have called the new "North to North" paradigm—a new discourse amongst northern institutions—and the emergence of a circumpolar scholarly community.

If I were to pick one event that, more than any other, signalled the beginning of this new movement it would be the conference hosted by Lakehead University in November 1989 to celebrate the opening of the University's new Centre for Northern Studies. Entitled "The Role of Circumpolar Universities in Northern Development," the conference attracted over 150 scholars, teachers and administrators from the world's most northerly institutions. As Geoffrey Weller, then Vice-President Academic at Lakehead University, noted in his introduction to the conference proceedings,* the conference theme had two elements. The first was "the denotation of a set of universities as being 'circumpolar.'"

This affirmation of a common nordicity, I use the term as Louis-Edmond Hamelin did to denote geographical rather than ethnic features, allowed participants to see that they shared many common interests and faced many similar challenges. They discovered that, generally, northern universities are young institutions. They are small institutions. They are remote

**The Role of Circumpolar Universities in Northern Development: Proceedings of the First Annual Conference of the Association of Circumpolar Universities, Thunder Bay, Ontario, 24-26 November 1989.* Thunder Bay: Lakehead University Centre for Northern Studies, 1991.

institutions. They are under-resourced institutions. And, often, they are, especially when dealing with their older and more established siblings to the south, misunderstood institutions.

In turn, this identification of a common identity — as *circumpolar* — allowed for the identification and discussion of a common purpose, the second major element of the conference's theme, what Weller called "the examination of the role of the circumpolar universities in the social, cultural and political development of the regions in which they are located." Thus, Esko Rieppula, Rector of the University of Lapland, talked about "The Impact of Universities on the Economic and Social Development in Northern Finland." And Per Langgard, a Danish academic working at the then new university in Nuuk, talked about what it meant "To Be a Very Small University in a Very Small Society."

Since that first conference in Thunder Bay, five more "circumpolar universities" conferences have been held: Tyumen in 1991, Rovaniemi in 1992, Prince George in 1994, Luleå in 1997, and Aberdeen in 1999. At each, new opportunities have emerged for circumpolar collaboration. Institutions like the University of Lapland have sought out and signed bilateral agreements with its northern neighbours. At the Rovaniemi conference, the Circumpolar Universities Association was formally created. Not long after the conference in Prince George, the Canada-EU North Consortium was formed and work began on its student mobility program. And at the last two CUA conferences — in Luleå and Aberdeen — the meetings have been used to clarify and consolidate thinking about a new comprehensive partnership, a virtual university, called the University of the Arctic.

4.

What does all this mean for *The Northern Review*? First of all, these events provide considerable evidence that the original mandate of the *Review*, as outlined in "New Bearings on Northern Scholarship," remains both vital and valid. The *Review's* principal preoccupations — with a place and the people who live here — is more relevant than ever. We know that the lands and peoples of the North are inextricably linked. We know that a nuclear disaster in the south can compromise the traditional food supply in the High Arctic. We know that carbon emissions in Los Angeles and Rome, London and New York can erode the atmosphere. We know that some of the peoples of Alaska, the NWT, Nunavut, and Greenland share a common heritage. We know that northerners need to find new, environmentally

friendly livelihoods. We know that northern policy- and decision-makers need good information.

Second, these events suggest that the *Review* needs to continue to encourage the development of the region's own scholarly capacity, particularly in the Canadian North, which so clearly and painfully lags its northern counterparts in this regard. New voices need to be encouraged. New methodologies need to be found. New research ethics need to be discussed and, if found fitting, promulgated.

The *Review* also needs to continue to encourage a scholarly discourse that is populist rather than elitist, inclusive rather than exclusive. First of all, this suggests that the *Review* should continue to seek out and publish *readable* scholarship of interest to the non-specialist or lay reader interested in the North. In this regard, its decision to be multidisciplinary was and continues to be fundamentally sound. At the same time that much traditional academic discourse is becoming increasingly isolated by its highly specialized vocabulary and its disciplinary notions of methodological integrity, we see many northern governments and non-governmental agencies desperately searching for experts willing to explain and work on the big, fundamentally interdisciplinary problems that face the region. Global warming, environmental degradation, cultural preservation, personal and social well-being: these and a host of other problems pay no regard to the boundaries and preoccupations of discipline.

This also suggests that the *Review* should continue to publish special issues that focus on topics of broad interest or of pressing importance. Such issues make good sense. Two of our "best sellers" have been the special constitutional development and social work issues, both of which were adopted as textbooks at institutions in southern Canada. Another recent best-seller was Number 18, the proceedings of the Sustainable Development Conference held in Whitehorse in May 1998. Significantly, the issue is cited by academics and government officials alike who seem to find it a useful compendium of current thinking on an elusive, but important topic.

Indeed, the *Review's* experience suggests that "grey is good," that much that is relevant and valuable doesn't always come packaged in a scholarly article ready for peer review. Thus, the Northern Notes section has been an important part of the *Review*, allowing for the publication of speeches, academic notes, opinion pieces, and scholarly announcements. In the future, its importance is likely to grow.

Being inclusive also means continuing to seek ways to "make room for

other truths," something that in 1988 then editor Norm Easton and I considered of fundamental importance if the *Review* was to contribute to the creation of a truly *northern* academic discourse. A year later we had an opportunity to put theory to the test. At the official opening of Yukon College, a well-known elder, the late Angela Sidney told the *Story of Kaaɣ'achgóok*, a traditional narrative that she considered important to the future of the institution, its students, and its staff. So with her encouragement and permission, Julie Cruikshank transcribed and submitted the story to the *Review* that then published it as the lead piece in the second issue. At the time, it struck some as corny and others as academically unsound. Over the next five or so years, the story received little attention, but three years ago it was "rediscovered" by the College's First Nations staff and its readership has steadily grown. Today, it is available as a separate booklet and it is constantly being read and referred to by college faculty, by students, by governors, and by many, many others.

If the developments of the last twelve years suggest a major change, it would be this: the *Review* needs to develop its circumpolar links and to be a more meaningful and active contributor in the life of the circumpolar community. This means several things. First, it means publishing more scholarship of broad circumpolar significance. As we've seen, these are interesting times in the North. Significant changes are afoot. A few of the topics begging attention are

- Ethos of northern countries and the role of the North in creating national identity, romance, and spirituality;
- Contemporary conditions in the Russian Far North, especially analyses of the social and economic impact(s) of the "democratization" of Russia and its move to a free market economy;
- Traditional knowledge and its "intersection" with science;
- The establishment and development of the Arctic Council and other circumpolar bodies;
- Effects of extreme temperatures and intense periods of light and darkness on individual and community well-being;
- History and cultures of the Indigenous and settler peoples of all parts of the circumpolar North;
- Assessments of (in)security in the North, following the so-called "end of the Cold War";
- The "Northern Dimension" in the Policies of the European Union and Canada;
- The establishment of Nunavut, including analyses of the challenges it faces as well as those confronting the "new" Northwest Territories;

- The “Northern Presence” in Antarctica;
- Contemporary conditions, arts and literature of the circumpolar North;
- New opportunities for economic development in the North; and
- Land claims and constitutional rights in the North.

To help in this important task, the *Review* will seek a fourth senior editor, an academic from northern Europe, and expand its advisory editorial board and its members’ roles in the identification, evaluation, and distribution of northern scholarship. This individual will also be able to provide assistance to Ms. Maureen Long, the book review editor, in identifying and reviewing northern scholarly works published in Greenland, northern Europe and Russia and thus make this important section of the journal more broadly circumpolar.

Increasing the circumpolar significance of the articles, reviews and notes the *Review* publishes should help with another important task: building the *Review’s* readership outside North America. While its subscription list is significant, it is small. Several years ago, Managing Editor Amanda Graham put up a map of the world, noting on it where the *Review’s* readers are. The *Review* has been read or is being read in Murmansk, Tyumen, and Moscow; in Helsinki, Oslo and Stockholm; in Rome, Paris, and London; in Rovaniemi, Luleå and Tromsø; in Iqaluit, Yellowknife and Whitehorse; and in Fairbanks, Anchorage and Juneau. And it is, apparently, even read in Ottawa. This list must expand to include Yakutsk and Barrow, Rankin Inlet (Kangiiniq) and Dawson City, Longyearbyen and Oulu, Reykjavik and Nuuk. Similarly, the list of institutions at which *The Northern Review* articles are adopted for classroom use, a list that is already quite impressive, needs to grow.

Finally, the *Review* intends to stabilize its publication schedule and, that achieved, increase the number of issues it publishes. This will be done, at least initially, by moving towards the publication of two general issues each year and the occasional publication of additional special topics issues, as interest and funding allows.

This will, we believe, allow us to respond to the question, “How often does *The Northern Review* publish?” with a new answer, “Two issues a year, except when it publishes three or four.” In the North, this will be progress.

Conclusion

Twelve years ago, in the *Review’s* inaugural issue, Norm Easton and I concluded “New Bearings on Northern Scholarship” with the following re-

marks:

This then is the fragile beginning of a new expedition of sorts, an attempt to map the bewildering topography of this place here. Quite frankly, we're nervous; as numerous previous expeditions have proven, it's easy for things to go awry, particularly when one must wander so far off the well-established routes. But, perhaps, if we're lucky, and if enough people think our destination worthwhile, they will help us out, especially when we go astray and need to be put kindly back on course.

The expeditionary metaphor now seems more than a little clumsy, but the fundamental idea of a "journey" still feels like an apt description of the task that the *Review* faces. It even speaks to one of the inevitable consequences of undertaking a long journey over unfamiliar terrain—sometimes losing one's way. Indeed, the *Review* has, on occasion, gone astray. But, it has been lucky: far more people than Mr. Easton and I could have ever hoped, have considered the destination worthwhile and have, more than once, kindly put the *Review* back on its course. To all those who have been so committed and generous, particularly my colleagues Ken Coates and Judith Kleinfeld, Amanda Graham and Maureen Long, thank you.

Postscript

Sadly, Geoffrey R. Weller passed away on Saturday, 22 July 2000, in Prince George, British Columbia. A brief tribute to Professor Weller and his work, written by a long-time colleague, follows.