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In *Enduring Dreams: An Exploration of Arctic Landscape*, I gave one section of the book the subtitle, "Landscape Writing Landscape." Ambiguity is the poet's crucible, the scholar's refuge, the pedant's scourge. By using this phrase as the entry to an open-form discussion about the tyrannies of the historical text I was inviting my reader to read creatively, confessing that scholarship would not resolve the anomalies of Arctic narrative, and challenging academics to enjoy the discomfiture of knowing more questions than answers. Teaching a postgraduate seminar on Arctic texts in 1997 to people who, for the most part, had never been north of Sixty, I came quickly to recognize the pedagogical value of such ambiguity. It seemed reasonable if we could keep pedantry and poetics, scholarship and imagination, in harmony, the course would go well. And so it did.

We gathered at the University of Ottawa as a seminar group on Wednesday evenings throughout the winter to examine certain texts in a critical fashion and to share our responses to the Arctic revealed by these considerations. What we brought in common to our sessions was natural curiosity and a critical set of mind. As much as possible, I avoided imposing a predetermined rhetorical agenda. While I have travelled often to the Arctic and written quite extensively on my own experience there in pursuit of knowledge and adventure, as a critic and poet, and since two of my own books were on the course, it seemed essential to maintain as much as possible a passive presence in the seminars and to encourage students to run with their own interests and aptitudes. The results of what might be called Socratic ambiguity in the face of a subject so enormously enigmatic, so generously diverse, is shared here with the readers of *The Northern Review*. The essays to follow case directly out of this course, as does my prose poem, "Meta Incognita," which is also included.

While course materials were selected and arranged to avoid the ethnocentric assumptions of an anthropological approach to the Arctic and, rather, to deal with texts as texts, with the Arctic as a textual creation, the students, who are working on Masters and Doctorates in literary studies, were exceedingly attracted to Inuit orature and culture. My own knowledge in regard to the people of the North is limited to random first-hand observations and

fairly extensive reading. I am wary of trying to understand anything worthwhile too quickly, especially anything Arctic. To understand lives and language, histories, memories, customs, habits, and attitudes, of people in a world continuous with our own yet so utterly different in anything less than a lifetime seems presumptuous. Yet the projects on the Inuit developed here are done with humility, never confusing the authority of scholarly discipline with unwarranted expertise in the subject of enquiry. These are essays of discovery, accounts of encounters with exciting new worlds no less resonant for not echoing our own.

About half the students ultimately avoided problems of cultural appropriation or academic imperialism by pursuing projects dealing with journals of discovery and creative writing, works that implicitly acknowledge their outsider status. The Arctic as a field of textual interrogation offers fresh new possibilities for critical analysis, possibilities fully capitalized upon in the brief diversity of the essays here on contemporary Canadian and Québécois literature and on the intertextual implications of *The Strange and Dangerous Voyage of Capitaine Thomas James*. Milton in the Arctic, the Arctic as metaphor, as paradox, as emblem and paradigm of national identity, these motifs, together with strong Inuit themes, create a vision, here, that seems both strange and familiar, haunting and comforting, exotic and inevitable.

The lovely ambivalence in discovering new territories that is evident among these essays tempts me to describe them all as “explorations,” but that word has unfortunately become nearly emptied of meaning in an Arctic context. Every writer who ventures into the Arctic is now deemed an explorer. Tales of backpacking across the Barrens or skiing solo to the Pole, these are accounts of adventure, not exploration. Writing poetry on the shores of the Arctic Ocean, journalling fantasied exploits among the Ihalmiut or humbling episodes among the Inuit of Baffin, these are not explorations—except in the metaphysical sense that all human endeavour is an exploring. And as we necessarily reconsider the notion of explorer in the present, we must also interrogate our use of the word in relation to the past. The men, and they were almost exclusively males who travelled to the Arctic in earlier times, the men we think of as explorers were discovering known territory, imposing their own history, their own notion of geography, on lands and landscape, waterways and open seas, known to the people of those places for hundreds of generations. They were exploring, then, the limits of their own ignorance.

And that is what we were doing in our postgraduate seminar: exploring the limits of our ignorance. What better thing for scholars to be doing? What better context in which to do it, to extend ourselves and refine the procedures for learning, than the Arctic as given from a variety of perspectives—ranging

from the terrible emptiness encountered by early visitors to the mesmerizing alternative of neo-romantic aesthetes and adventurers, all against a background of stifled utterance by people who have been at home there longer than memory. The nature of our "explorations" in the seminar ran counter to conventional definitions of the term, past or present. We were searchers, in a decidedly anti-heroic, anti-romantic mode. With the healthy cynicism that is the greatest gift one garners from academic pursuits at the graduate level, we were looking for truth by eliminating the untrue, the distortions of texts, whatever their source. In the end, I think most of us came to an unconditional affection for the enigma of Arctic reality that irresolvably informs the responses of those who experience it, whether for generations or passing through or, like us, gathered around a seminar table once a week over an Ottawa winter.

A new book that was on the course but actually appeared too late to be of value, *Echoing Silence: Essays on Arctic Narrative*, draws together an eclectic cluster of essays by scholars and creative writers, a journalist, a politician, Farley Mowat in a category of his own, adventurers and literary critics, and creates from their collectivity an Arctic narrative in its own right. Most of the contributors had been to the Arctic, some extensively, three were Inuit, and only a few were on from familiar ground in a world of texts than in the Arctic itself. As the book's editor, I found the various essays in evanescent conversation with each other. They arranged themselves within the text in what seemed an inevitable pattern of discourse.

Selecting and arranging the essays for this *Northern Review* collection has been challenging in a very different way. These essays are more esoteric and academic, conceived as separate projects for university credit. Rather than imposing an order that would yield shape, thematic coherence, or rhetorical elegance, I have simply grouped them in a sequence of overlapping interest. In a different pattern, a quite different effect might have been achieved. What I liked about the present arrangement is a certain sense of inevitability as you move from one essay to another. Linda Morra's passionately articulated response to Rudy Wiebe's national vision provides an engaging context against which the rest of the essays may be read, and my prose poem, at the end, draws the reader back, I hope, to her opening. Tina Pylvainen's discussion of naming and language in Inuit culture anticipates Wendy Roger's essay with the appropriately paradoxical subtitle, "Inuit Writing Orature." These essays are followed by Maureen van Dreumel's consideration of narrative strategies in work by the most celebrated Inuk artist of all, Kenojuak, all of which in turn are rounded to a sort of completion by Karen Selesky's expansive study of the traditional and the contemporary in Inuit arts. Having

yielded precedence of place to native subjects, Colleen Franklin's essay on the remarkable influences of early exploration literature turns us away from Inuit materials to the more familiar ground of literary texts. This is followed by Jean-François Leroux's exposition on the profoundly enigmatic visions of the Arctic by Québécois writers and Jonathan Meakin's critical examination of cartographic discourse in contemporary Anglophone texts. A lengthy excerpt from Michael Krans' Master's thesis on Heidegger, Franklin, and recent creative responses to the Arctic draws the reader full circle, back to the ambiguous relationships between languages and place in an Arctic context.

Perhaps in opening this Preface with the aphoristic evasion of "Landscape Writing Landscape," I was acknowledging that our perceptions of the Arctic as outsiders are based on historical experiences, that is, on the texts we have read. It was a way of placing the statement, writing writes writing, in an Arctic context. While innumerable books and articles were consulted by us all in the course of our academic deliberations, our often vociferous discussions in seminar rose directly in response to the following selected texts:

Hugh Body. *Living Arctic: Hunters of the Canadian North*. Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre. 1987.

James Houston. *White Dawn*. Holt, Rinehart, Winston. 1989.

Alooktook Ipellie. *Arctic Dreams and Nightmares*. Vancouver: Theytus Books. 1993.

Barry Lopez. *Arctic Dreams: Imagination and Desire in a Northern Landscape*. New York: Bantam. 1986.

John Moss. *Enduring Dreams: An Exploration of Arctic Landscape*. Concord: House of Anasi. 1994.

-----, Ed. *Echoing Silence: Essays on Arctic Narrative*. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press. 1997.

Farley Mowat. *People of the Deer*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart. 1980.

Penny Petrone. *Northern Voices: Inuit Writings in English*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992.

Peter Pitseolak. *People from Our Side*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press. 1993.

Yves Theriault. *Agaguk: Shadow of the Wolf*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart. 1992.

Aritha van Herk. *Places Far From Ellesmere*. Red Deer: Red Deer College Press. 1991.

Rudy Wiebe. *Playing Dead*. Edmonton: NeWest. 1992.

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The course description suggested that students would read and discuss documentary and creative writings concerned with the Canadian Arctic and pursue independent research projects in principle areas of interest. The objectives were to explore representations of the Arctic landscape, people and culture in a variety of modes and genres, to appreciate what is actually there and to discover what has been done with it; and to develop comparative research abilities and critical precision in the face of generic, cultural, linguistic, and historiographic discontinuities and dislocations. Students were asked to do a brief oral presentation, based on the booklist, and to choose an Arctic motif—traditional orature, myth and the landscape, geography as fiction, the Polar Quest, Franklin, the Northwest Passage, Ultima Thule, or some other topic—in order to develop a project of approximately 3000 words to be handed in at the end of term. A brief interim report on this project was to be given orally in mid-term. The students were encouraged to pursue their own interests for both project content and critical approach. In addition, a journal was to be kept throughout the course, describing responses to the course materials; this was handed in during the final class.

In the winter of 1998 I will be giving a graduate seminar on the Arctic at University College Dublin, where I will be the Craig Dobbin Professor of Canadian Studies. Drawing from what I learned during the course represented here, I have made some modifications to the Ottawa versions. In Dublin I will be lecturing more, and in conjunction with Anne Buttimer, Chair of the Geography Department. The roles of mediating moderator, or moderating mediator, will perhaps give way somewhat to that of visiting scholar. Not too much, I expect, since, while the Arctic in Ireland may be anomalous, the Irish have ancient experience in the Arctic: we should be able to share our adventures and avoid fustian academic rectitude. If I can convince even a few of them that sharing tea and bannock in the lea of a makeshift bivouac while freezing rain sweeps over the contours of a tumultuous landscape is the very essence of well-being, then all will be well. If I can convince them these distinct people, the Inuit, are my countrymen and women, then all indeed will be well.

Below is a brief description of the revamped course, designed to accommodate fewer sessions and more lecturing. It has been called "Dead Reckoning: Travelling the Distance Between Geography and Landscape in the Canadian Arctic":

<i>Session One</i>	
Introduction	..... Brody, Moss 1997
<i>Session Two</i>	
Voices of the Land?	..... Petrone, Pitseolak, Ipellie
<i>Session Three</i>	
The Abuses of Truth	..... Mowat, Theriault
<i>Session Four</i>	
The Uses of Fiction	..... Houston, Wiebe 1995
<i>Session Five</i>	
The New Romantics	..... Lopez, Wiebe 1989
<i>Session Six</i>	
The Arctic Within	..... van Herk, Moss 1994

If the altered presentation works out and the Irish students take their measure from the essays gathered here, essays that represent the range and depth of achievement among Canadian graduate students, if they write about the Arctic with comparable genius of imagination and generosity of intellect, then those of us who share a passionate enthusiasm for all things Arctic will be grateful, and the world implied by languages and texts will be a richer, delightfully less certain, place.

John Moss teaches Canadian literature at the University of Ottawa. He is the author of *Enduring Dreams: An Exploration of Arctic Landscape* (1994) and editor of *Echoing Silence: Essays on Arctic Narrative* (1997).