Journal of Northern Studies

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The *Journal of Northern Studies* is a peer-reviewed academic publication issued twice a year. The journal has a specific focus on human activities in northern spaces, and articles concentrate on people as cultural beings, people in society and the interaction between people and the northern environment. In many cases, the contributions represent exciting interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches. Apart from scholarly articles, the journal contains a review section, and a section with reports and information on issues relevant for Northern Studies.

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preparations, obtaining a "good memory" and (as far as her descendants are concerned) unproblematic afterlife. Hrappr, in the same saga, also prepares for death but, consistent with his character while alive, his living corpse causes problems after his death, killing the servants and laying waste to his farm. Þórólfr in *Eyrbyggja saga* makes no such provisions, but his son anticipates trouble and tries, unsuccessfully, to pre-empt it (cf. *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar* Ch. 58). I was surprised by the absence from this chapter of one Christian character in *Eyrbyggja saga*—the Hebridean Þorgunna—who not only makes preparations for her death and burial at a future Christian site, but revives afterwards to see to the restoration of social equilibrium (as defined in the thirteenth century) in the form of the expectation that parties taking a corpse for burial would receive proper hospitality during their journey. It is interesting to note that she, like Unnr (who however remains passive after her death), contributes to the well-being of the living, as opposed to the two male revenants who cause death and destruction.

In a volume like the present one, with contributors whose native languages are not English, it is more than usually the publisher's duty to provide careful proofreading. This could have been done more thoroughly in the present volume. There are numerous misplaced adverbs such as "confession takes normally place" (p. 144), odd vocabulary such as *stung* for *stab* (pp. 73, 75), *rest* for *bury* or *put to rest* (p. 120), which should have given a native speaker pause, as should the "camera complex scholastic apparatus" (p. 120) or the preparations made "in front of" a violent death (p. 133). *Reformatory* instead of *Reform* or *Reformation* (p. 191) will make North American readers think of detention centers for juvenile criminals.

The contributors are, however, to be praised for their detailed research, as are the editors for allowing footnotes rather than end-notes. These notes are full of valuable information and will repay readers' attention, the more so since the Bibliography is "select" and numerous references found in the notes are not included in it. The volume as a whole makes a significant contribution to the field.

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Shane McCorristine, *The Spectral Arctic. A History of Dreams and Ghosts in Polar Exploration*, London: University College London Press 2018, ISBN 9781787352476, 275 pp.

In Westminster Abbey in London there is an epitaph written by Lord Alfred Tennyson: "Not here! The white North has thy Bones; and thou Heroic Sailor-Soul art passing on thine happier Voyage now toward no earthly Pole." The hero Tennyson refers to is Sir John Franklin, perhaps the most famous polar explorer of them all. He and his 133 companions manning the ships *Erebus* and *Terror* went missing in the Baffin Bay area in the High Arctic in 1845. They all perished and it was not until 1854 that the Hudson Bay Company employee John Ray was informed by Inuit witnesses of the fate of the expedition. There was clear evidence of cannibalism among the British sailors according to the Inuit. This was of course contested in Britain and the Inuit were even accused

by the author Charles Dickens of having killed the noble mariners. The failed Franklin expedition was a major event in the history of British polar exploration that still haunts the Canadian Arctic as the historian Shane McCorristine tells us in his well-written narrative. The Arctic is in his opinion spectral or haunted and ghostlike creatures accompany everyone that attempts to conquer its vast vistas. The ghosts the author refers to is actually History itself or the wider Historical Context that polar exploration was and still is an integral part of. The events that took place in the salons in Britain in the 1850s and what happens today in the political institutions in Canada are as important as the expeditions themselves for understanding the significance of the High Arctic in Western imagination and culture.

In his book McCorristine questions the heroic tales of the "Barrow's boys" or the naval officers commissioned to Polar travel by the Second Secretary of the Admiralty John Barrow: men such as John Ross, William Edward Parry and John Franklin, daring British mariners on the quest for the elusive North-West Passage. The book describes the intricate details of the search for Franklin's lost expedition that took place in the 1840s and 1850s. As a result of the many search expeditions for Franklin the North West Passage was eventually found by Robert McClure. But because of the harsh ice conditions, despite of the effects of the current climate change, the North-West Passage is still of little practical value for shipping. If the climate changes further the Passage will become of vital interest for the nations concerned, especially Canada. This book also tells us a story about British imperialistic ambitions in the High Arctic in the nineteenth century. Britain's geopolitical interest in the Arctic was inherited by the new Canadian state that claimed ownership of both the British Arctic regions and its dramatic history wherein British polar exploration was the key factor. Franklin thus soon became a tragic and heroic figure also in Canadian history and folklore.

This book informs the reader about the story of the British Arctic exploration, with a focus on the glorious period c. 1820–1880, but it tells this often-told story in a very unusual manner. The protagonists are not dashing and brave British naval officers, nor brilliant scientists, not even able seamen. Instead you meet a group of plain, modest, soft-spoken, uneducated and even illiterate young servant women. Such judgements of their character have nothing to do with how they actually were but instead these judgments indicated how their special talents should be appreciated. McCorristine stresses the importance of their lack of education, this was the key factor that made them trustworthy as informants. At the time it was believed that such common servant girls did not have the mental capacities to invent any stories. Enter Emma L., Sarah, Jenny, Ellen, and my special favorite, the three-year old Anglo-Irish ghost Louisa Coppin or Weesy! What special talents could these young women and this child ghost have one may wonder? Wonder is the key word here. And awe.

When Franklin's expedition went missing in 1845 official Britain rallied all its resources in an effort to find it. As McCorristine points out, in contemporary Britain there was a widespread interest in mesmerism and spiritism in polite society. Because of the mysterious disappearance of the expedition far up North and the dearth of any reliable information on what had happened novel means of information gathering had to be tried in the search for Franklin. Jane Franklin, the energetic wife of Sir John Franklin, was one of the protagonists for alternative data gathering methods, in this case seances. Mediums, i.e. the young servant women, were questioned about the location of the expedition and about the condition of the Franklin men. As clairvoyants the women travelled in the manner of the Inuit shamans to the High Arctic, met Sir John Franklin, inter-

viewed him about his health and future plans. Plans that seemed to be quite prosperous considering the dire straits he was in. But where to find Franklin? This was the major concern of the naval officers present at the seances. What was the time of day and what was the position of the sun at the location where the mysterious meeting with Sir John took place? A good navigator could, using that kind of information, get a rather good idea about the geographical whereabouts of the Franklin expedition. But the young uneducated women had great difficulties in reading the professional chronometers adorned with Roman numerals used by Royal Navy officers. The clairvoyants instead had to resort to lofty descriptions of the Arctic landscape and the sun's position at the time of their encounter with Franklin. Scientifically inclined skeptics, that were present at the seances, wondered why the traveling medium did not ask Franklin where they were? The women never did that for some reason.

McCorristine gives ample evidence that the nineteenth century, heralded as the century of reason and logic, of science, technology and industrialization also was a century of alternative beliefs and a strong interest in what sir Isaac Newton might have called "white magic." It is wrong to assume that the scientific polar expertise at the Admiralty were immune to the possible contributions of the mediums. Instead the seances could be understood as a novel and complementary method for gathering information. Another equally contested method as seances was to interview the Inuit about the whereabouts of the Franklin expedition and the information given by the Inuit was seldom trusted. As we know when John Rae was told by the Inuit in 1854 that a hunting party had found evidences of cannibalism among the Franklin men Charles Dickens immediately rebuffed these findings. In the 2008 documentary film *Passage*, by John Walker, Dickens great-great grandson Gerald Dickens apologizes for the hurt caused by his great-great grandfather to the Inuit more than 150 years earlier. Of more practical value for the Inuit was that the wrecks of *Erebus* and *Terror* became a good source of hard-to-find iron that could be used for making knives and other essential tools.

The book concludes with an interesting chapter on how archeological expeditions conducted by the Canadian governmental agency, Parks Canada, undertaken in the 2010s finally managed to find and claim the wrecks of Franklin's expedition vessels, the *Terror* and the *Erebus*. The intriguing story of the Franklin expedition, of the search expeditions and of the crucial Inuit contributions to these search efforts both in the 1840s and 1850s, and also the recent findings of the Franklin ships, all contribute to shape a special Canadian view of the Arctic. As Tennyson writes, Franklin's body is not buried in Westminster Abbey, but his soul is passing on towards no earthly pole. His body has never been found and even if his ship *Erebus* was found in 2014 Franklin has actually ever since he disappeared been a kind of ghost that still haunts the High Arctic. He may have been dead since 1848 but as he lives on in present day memory he is immortal. As the author Shane McCorristine writes in his concluding remark: "The past does not simply vanish—it hangs around in landscapes, bodies, dreams and stories. It is *ongoing*, like an unexploded mine. This should not be forgotten." Franklin and his men are still with us today. Whether we like it or not.

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