Postprint AAM – Author's accepted manuscript

Published as Schimanski, Johan. 'Playing the Arctic: Arthur Ransome's *Winter Holiday*.' *The Arctic in Literature for Children and Young Adults*. Eds. Hansson, Heidi, Maria Lindgren Leavensworth and Anka Ryall. New York: Routledge, 2020. 189-202. ISBN 9780367360801.

Playing the Arctic: Arthur Ransome's *Winter Holiday*

Johan Schimanski

In Arthur Ransome's classic text of English children's fiction, *Winter Holiday* (1933), three groups of siblings act out a fantasy in which a lake in the English Lake District has become the Arctic. The children in the book mobilize various Arcticities in mimicry of the "heroic" age of Arctic exploration that began in the early nineteenth century and ended in the early twentieth century. *Winter Holiday* addresses central themes of adventure and newness that were to develop in modern perceptions of the Arctic. However, the fact that the book involves three boys and five girls raises questions about the trajectory of polar modernity.

Kimberley Reynolds (2011b, 1) and others have argued that children's literature can be used to understand the dominant values of a historical period, and here I further develop the idea that Ransome's children's books are producers of ambiguity and ambivalence in late imperial modernity. The novel was part of Ransome's popular "Swallows and Amazons" series, named after the first book, *Swallows and Amazons* (1930), and two sets of siblings (dubbed by themselves the "Swallows" and the "Amazons") who reappear in many of the books. Set in rural and maritime settings, the books have been discussed widely by academics and are often seen as an influential example of several genres of children's literature, including holiday adventure fiction (Shelley 1968, 10; Hunt 1994, 177; Montgomery 2009, 2) and "camping and tramping" fiction (Watson 2000, 76; Sheeky Bird 2014). The latter form is informed by expedition narratives and, in the "Swallows and Amazons" series, Ransome develops a consciously intertextual approach to earlier expedition texts and related works of nineteenth-century adventure fiction. *Winter Holiday* is the fourth novel in the series. It involves the four Swallows and two Amazons, but also introduces a third set of siblings, the "Ds". These two new characters provide new perspectives with which to negotiate modern identities, that of the scientist (Dick) and the novelist (Dorothea).

Winter Holiday is the only "Swallows and Amazons" book to have a polar intertext, derived from the expeditions of Fridtjof Nansen. Ransome had met Nansen during his travels

in the Baltic in 1921, and he had been for Ransome “a hero since [his] childhood” (Ransome 1976, 303). Historically situated in an in-between period – between two world wars, between first and second, or solid and fluid, modernity (Bauman 2000, 4–6), between before and after the influx of literary and artistic modernism – it brings previous discourses of the Arctic into juxtaposition with transformations in modernity itself. As such, it partakes in the ambivalences of the period, in which modernity faced an (often gendered) alienation within itself, framed variously as a disorienting horror, as gaps in the system or as a general entropy. Entropy dissolves structure into “flat” disorder and randomness, implying a sense of fragmented and empty space typical of the literary modernism that expressed the self-alienation of the early 1900s.

Confirming this sense of transition after the First World War, in which aspects of both earlier and later forms of modernity co-exist, Ransome has often been represented as an ambivalent figure (e.g. Pearson 1988, 455; Phillips and Wojcik-Andrews 1990, 63). Ideologically, he appeared to be safely glued to the countrified values of the English middle class, in his case focused on fishing and sailing. At the same time, in his role as the Russian correspondent for the *Daily News*, he was a metaphorical friend of the revolution and a personal friend of Lenin and Trotsky (he married Trotsky’s secretary Evgenia Petrovna Shelepina and was at one point suspected of being a Bolshevik spy, see Chambers 2012). The literary style of his children’s books is variously characterized as displaying, on the one hand, a conventional realism typical of British children’s literature between the wars, and even as a dialectical reaction to modernism (Thacker and Webb 2002, 102, 108–109); and, on the other, as a more imaginative mode (Phillips 1997, 7, 149; Watson 2000). Indeed, Jerry Phillips and Ian Wojcik-Andrews make a cogent argument for understanding the novel *Swallows and Amazons* as “one of Modernism’s canonical children’s texts” (1990, 55).

Interpretations of Ransome’s fiction for children diverge, uncovering two different ideologies, the one staunchly democratic (Hunt 1992, 20, 49, 165; 1994, 177–178) and the other basically imperialist (Kutzer 2000, 107–128), or democratic in a way that glosses over class conflict in real life (Sheeky Bird 2014, 8–11). As is typical of children’s literature of the period (Reynolds 2011a, 19, 87), Ransome’s protagonists are generally white, middle class and belong to heteronormative families (cf. Dixon 1977, 58; Hunt 1991, 72), although people of other classes and ethnicities play active roles in some of his novels. Hazel Sheeky Bird (2014) points to the modernity of the specific form of middle-class figuring in Ransome and other “camping and tramping” literature: an ascetic, professional, democratic middle class, whose members see themselves as public servants (11–12). While Ransome builds on boys’

adventure stories, many of his protagonists are girls. As a children's author, although he has been called an "intrinsic feminist" (Pettigrew 2009) for his handling of female protagonists, he might also be suspected of being a literary domesticator of tomboys.

Mapping and unmapping imperialism

If we first approach *Winter Holiday* with a focus on spatial modernity, the map at the beginning of the book takes on extra significance. Maps are central to the plots of Ransome's novels, with the protagonists actively drawing maps as part of their refiguring of landscapes into spaces for adventure (Hunt 1994, 182). Mapping, along with other panoptical techniques, has often been seen as a way in which modernity, and especially imperialist modernity, may control space, through an uncanny form of fragmentation and emptying. Mapping conquers, creating empires, but it relies on the flat, entropic topology of Cartesian space. Maps are an integral part of exploration, and M. Daphne Kutzer (2000, 114–123) argues that the polar exploration motif in *Winter Holiday* must be read as imperialist, especially when seen as part of the continued focus on exploration as a form of adventure throughout the series. Her argument fits well with the common observation that Arctic discourse often overlaps with imperialist discourse (e.g. Ryall, Schimanski and Wærp 2010, x).

My reading of *Winter Holiday*, however, confirms a more ambiguous and ambivalent attitude to imperialism. In his book *Mapping Men and Empire* (1997), geographer Richard Phillips traces the connections between imperial mapping practices, the allure of empty spaces and adventure fiction. He argues that, while such values are dominant in British adventure fiction, they are also subjected to an ambivalent process of *unmapping*, seen especially in lesser-known girls' adventure novels such as those written by Bessie Marchant (1862–1941), and part of the resistant reading practices of girls who read boys' adventure fiction (see also Mitchell 1995, 15). Here, I explore the possibility that Ransome's books both map and unmap empire. As (Jerry) Phillips and Wojcik-Andrews argue, the fact that *Swallows and Amazons* "mimics or repeats the colonial topos of adventure" (1990, 55) in a new historical context, allows for play, irony, travesty and ambiguity to enter into that relationship. Ransome's modernism, they suggest, is a way of making visible the ideology of imperial realism (64, 68). Sheeky Bird writes that the maps in children's books such as Ransome's "not only rehearse, but problematise imperial exploration" (2014, 14), and provides close readings supporting this point (87–112). Ransome "present[s] a sustained critique of the imperial geographic imagination" (100). How does he do this within the context of Arctic exploration?

The map of the lake in winter, the drawing of which is credited to the female character Nancy Blackett (of the Amazons), reconfirms these apprehensions of ambivalence. Inscribed in it are central imperial values, but whether they are written as pedagogical signs, training children for Empire, or as traces of an imperial unease, is open to question. In the map in *Winter Holiday*, we see the English Lake District – or, to be precise, a fictional lake combining two different lakes in the Lake District, Coniston Water and Windermere – as the Arctic. The scheme is at first glance an example of one-to-one mapping, allowing for little disjunction. Reading the names on the map, we find the “North Pole”, “Greenland”, “Spitsbergen” and “Eskimos” (in capitals in original). Combining reality and fantasy, as maps in children’s books often do (Ranson 1996), this map creates a form of conceptual mapping played out in physical cartography, a trope central to the “Swallows and Amazons” series. Adults, and indeed all people outside of the socially bonded world of the child protagonists, dubbed “natives” in the previous books, have now been Arcticized into “Eskimos”.

Cultural historian Johan Huizinga emphasizes the role of games in creating group identities (1949, 11–13). The collective identity that the children create by playing at being Arctic explorers allows a sense of estrangement and defamiliarization, the children providing an outside gaze on society. This is a carnivalistic game of reversed power relations in which adults are stupid and children are in control. The game makes it seem, as Anna Bogen suggests in her analysis of *Swallows and Amazons*, as though the children are writing their own story (2006, 56). Juliet Dusinberre, in her book arguing for the importance of children’s literature in the development of modernism, sees Ransome as consolidating the tradition of the “child unhampered by parents” (1987, 90), which by implication allows for this kind of reversal and defamiliarization. Historically, an emancipation from parental control is the end result of a Rousseauian, “natural” conception of childhood, and part of the formation of modernity and indeed of modernism. Modernism privileged childhood through its focus on play and its aspects of “imagination, fantasy, creativity – all vital to the modernist project of re-visioning the world” (Reynolds 2011c, 152). The question is whether images of childhood can provide counter-mappings that resist adult conceptions, or whether, as Perry Nodelman (1992) argues, they share with orientalism in its most egregious forms a discursive colonialization of the other (in this case children) and, more specifically, according to Kutzer, do this through projections of nostalgic idylls (2000, xvi).

The conceptual mapping between the English countryside and the Arctic in *Winter Holiday* is dominant, but not total. Distant fireworks are read as aurorae, sheep become polar bears, and a houseboat serves as the expedition ship, renamed *Fram* after Nansen’s ship. Such

coding has direct parallels in imperial and colonialist practices in which (re-)naming is used to magically appropriate territory (Phillips and Wojcik-Andrews 1990, 58). But shifts and disjunctions in the system give rise to emergent discourses of what Homi K. Bhabha calls ambivalent and ironic colonial mimicry, rather than imperial mimesis (1994, 86). The “blend of the real and the imaginary” (Bogen 2006, 53) creates an ambivalent network of shifting signifiers in which mimicry dislodges mimesis, and the performative dislodges the pedagogic.

In *Winter Holiday*, such mimicry is manifested in the form of slippage. Calling Others “Eskimos” allows for resistance to adult hegemony. However, when the child protagonists set about building a ramshackle igloo, they appropriate Eskimo identity and the signifier “Eskimo” shifts from one signified to another. The seemingly highly structured coding of the game is revealed to be as much a bricolage as the igloo. Transporting a piece of iron sheeting needed to secure the igloo roof against melting snow, the children switch from being Arctic explorers to being dogs in a dog-sled team. The younger two Swallows, Titty and Roger, explain: “[...] we harnessed a team of dogs to it.’ ‘Titty and I weren’t the only dogs,’ said Roger. ‘Even John and Susan and Captain Nancy harnessed themselves and pulled like anything’” (Ransome 1933, 55). The dog game remains within the same Arctic discourse, but shifts its hierarchies across various levels, as the explorer “we” harnessing the dogs suddenly become the dogs themselves. Other subtle shifts appear elsewhere in the story; for example, when, unlike historical polar explorers, they do not kill polar bears, but save one (a sheep) from a cliff in “High Greenland” (155). This unmapping of Arctic exploration history extends to the novel’s intertext: as Dulcie Pettigrew reminds us, Nansen, the Arctic explorer chosen by Ransome to serve as inspiration to the children, is not exactly a British imperialist (2009, 13).

Motifs such as fantasies and games draw attention to the fictions and codes of literature (Hutcheon 1984, 76–85), and thus complicate simple forms of mimetic or pedagogic mapping. Much of the narrative is seen through the eyes of Dorothea, who is initially a stranger to the game, but who plays her own game, making up stories about the people she sees in the landscape. In her role as an author, she continually imagines titles and opening sentences based on imaginative reinterpretations of what she sees around her. Ransome’s biographer, Hugh Brogan, has made the argument that the Ds are a composite representation of Arthur Ransome himself as a child (1985, 332–333). One of the fictional children, Nancy Blackett, takes on the role of assistant to the real author, Arthur Ransome, helping him out as he draws the illustrations for the book and indeed the map itself (Ransome 1933, 15). The game motif and structure of *Winter Holiday* are supplemented by a focus on coded messages

– Morse code, geometrical shapes hung on walls, semaphore, raised flags – by which the children communicate with one another (cf. Watson 2000, 24). Finally, the two books that constitute Ransome’s main sources concerning Arctic life, Nansen’s *The First Crossing of Greenland* (1890) and *Farthest North* (1897), are read by the children in the novel, and are thus not only intertextual precedents, but also part of the plot.

When children’s books reuse earlier material, they can rewrite the values in those intertextual precedents. The mapping between the English countryside and the Arctic in *Winter Holiday*, as in A. A. Milne’s story of Christopher Robin and Winnie-the-Pooh’s “Expotition to the North Pole” (1926), is a travesty of the Arctic sublime in which Arctic space becomes domesticated (cf. Hansson 2011). Marked on the map at the northern end of the lake is a blob with a line pointing upwards. Labelled “North Pole” and designated as the planned goal of the children’s expedition, it represents a house with panoramic windows and a central flagpole leading out of a semi-conical roof. Whereas in *Winnie-the-Pooh* the actual nature and location of the pole is kept a mystery by being placed outside the margins of the map, in much the same way as it has been positioned historically as belonging to an unknown space, the drawing on the map in *Winter Holiday* makes the expedition to the North Pole even more ironic. A narrative of reaching the North Pole cannot simply be read as a conquering of *terra nullius* when somebody has been there before – whether it be to the Lake District North Pole of the fiction or the real North Pole. Ransome uses the trope of coming second in order to reflect upon (rather than just perform) imperial and adult/child hierarchies (McInnes 2016). Naming a house the “North Pole” de-domesticizes and estranges everyday reality, without reintroducing the Arctic sublime or its travelling companion, the imperial hero.

The adventure of modernity

Having addressed the space of adventure created by the map, I now turn to its temporal structure. There are two adventures in *Winter Holiday*. First the children play at being explorers and planning an expedition to the north end of the lake, which they call the North Pole. Afterwards, a combination of a signalling mistake and a winter storm turns game into reality. This double adventure reproduces a repeated structure in Ransome’s “Swallows and Amazons” novels, in which the first part of the story focuses on the learning of skills to be used later (Hunt 1994, 123) and simulacrum transitions into reality (Thomas 1987). The child protagonists create a pretend danger and then have to face real danger. The initial plan to control their surroundings is overturned in an entropic crisis, which in *Winter Holiday* can be associated with an Arctic modernity of speed and disorientation. The snowstorm removes all

points of reference, but is also experienced as rupture. The storm empties the frozen lake, the ice is made smooth and fluid by the winds pushing the sledge with its Nansen-style sail faster and faster and Dick is blinded by the snow. Ransome's illustrations, especially the one captioned "CAPSIZED AND DISMASTED" (Ransome 1933, 317), mimic avant-garde and modernist art practices in their portrayal of blank and fragmented spaces depicting the white-out of the storm and dislocated pieces of the wrecked sledge and the children's partially veiled bodies.

The story reaches a climax in a typical image of modernity and risk: the crash. Dick, in his role as a bespectacled, absent-minded professor (Pettigrew 2009, 16), "becomes so fascinated by low-friction physics that he is unaware of the danger that he is in as his ice-yacht speeds across a frozen lake" (McAdam 1990, 104). Symbolically, he almost loses his glasses in the snow, but it is his willingness to think things through in a scientific and abstract fashion which helps the two children find their way through the snow to the North Pole. Dick and Dorothea's journey across the ice is also caused by a confusion about signals, a fault in the infrastructure of modernity caused partly by modernity's entropic tendency to reduce information into codes. The decoding mistake shifts and "uncodes" mimesis. Solid modernity causes the crash, and fluid modernity takes over, allowing Dick to save the situation with Dorothea's help. It is the Ds' journey which ultimately makes the expedition into a real adventure.

Examining maps in retellings of Nansen's Arctic narratives, Nina Goga (2015) focuses on lines showing not only the actual route of Nansen's journey across Greenland, but also his planned route. Only one of the routes on the map in *Winter Holiday* is the planned route, that of the Ds. While their journey ends in the wreck of their sledge, as traced on the map it is nonetheless the route of modernity, the straight line towards the pole through an entropic Cartesian space emptied and made abstract by a snowstorm, and understood by Dick within a scientific framework (Ransome 1933, 314). Nancy also follows a straight line, but her journey is based on a premodern form of navigation, directed as it is by the now lighted house of the North Pole, visibly marking a place in the clear night weather after the storm (312). The rescue party made up of the Swallows and the other Amazon, Peggy, follows the eastern coast of the lake, searching for the Ds and at the same time using the even more primordial navigation technique of hugging a coastline, travelling from place to place rather than directly through space.

The planned adventure in *Winter Holiday* is made possible by the freezing-over of a Lake District lake – an event which takes place very rarely, although Ransome could remember it

happening in his lifetime, in 1895 (Brogan 1985, 19) – and the accident of one of the Amazon sisters, Nancy, contracting mumps, causing all the children to go into “quarantine” and extending their winter holidays. The strange extension of the in-between, liminal time of traditional holidays finds its counterpart in the modern newness of the frozen landscape, allowing other routes through the Lake District landscape. The unplanned, real adventure transforms the solidity of the ice into a smooth fluidity, the lake becoming a disorienting surface in the white-out of the storm. Place – mapped out with the fictitious names on the children’s imaginary map of their surroundings – has been replaced by empty, entropic Cartesian space.

Temporally limited adventure is commonly seen as central to modernity and in particular to modern imperialism (Green 1979). Just as Huizinga sees the game as temporally limited (1949, 9–10), Georg Simmel, in his essay “Das Abenteuer” (“The Adventure”, [1910] 1919, 8), sees adventure as a temporary excursion outside everyday reality. Simmel does not explicitly identify adventure with modernity, saying only that the adventurer is a person of the present, concerned neither with the past nor the future (10). However, his view of adventure as the possibility of access to something outside the normal (7–9) may allow us to think of adventure as forming a constitutive outside for modernity. Modernity is dependent on reaching outside its own normality. Dorothea, appearing in the series for the first time, brings together several of the figures that Simmel sees as being key to adventure: the child or youth, the author and, in his or her aspect as a player, the gambler. Adventure is also integral to Dick’s interest in science, a modern field of knowledge that involves the adventure of hypothesis and experiment. However, the repetition of adventure in modernity makes it subject to an ambiguous entropy: iterated adventure either domesticates it or makes it endless.

Adventures in children’s books are commonly followed by a return to some form of home and to parental control. In Nodelman’s indictment of children’s literature as similar to orientalism, one of the symptoms of the power hierarchy between adults and children which it puts into place is that it “share[s] the message that, despite one’s dislike of the constraints one feels there, home is still the best, the safest place to be” (1992, 30). Phillips and Wojcik-Andrews see Ransome’s adventures as taking place in safe environments, pointing to the political dimension of play, with its inculcation of conflict-laden social values in a risk-free environment. They point to the play in the “Swallows and Amazons” series as being ultimately framed by the Swallows’ father, a usually absent naval officer: “the Colonial Father is the point of origin for all other origins” (1990, 57). For the readers, the “Swallows and Amazons” series is both a space of risk and a space of control. What is left of the

adventure to the North Pole if the North Pole itself is a house with provisions laid out by parents, who later turn up to take care of their children? What does the domestication of the North Pole in *Winter Holiday* imply?

However, the adventure in *Winter Holiday* also contains the possibility of imagining an endless liminality to modern adventure. Ransome uses the “camping and tramping” genre to create homes-away-from-homes, domesticated spaces in the wild (Sheeky Bird 2014, 38). As the “Swallows and Amazons” series progresses, endings are progressively loosened from returns to domesticity, with *Winter Holiday* ending “away from home” (Hunt 1992, 87). Instead of seeing holiday adventure as ultimately domesticated, one can also read the novel as presenting iterated, temporary homes within the game and within the adventure: thus, the Ds take up their abode in the empty houseboat that the children call the *Fram*, and the North Pole is a building equipped with a provisions cache, creating microcosmic heterotopias.

Finally, seeing *Winter Holiday* in the context of Arctic discourses, what is travestied, domesticated and feminized at the North Pole is not primarily adventure, but heroism. Paul Zweig makes this distinction in his book on the adventurer (1974, 34–47), arguing that the hero represents his community, a role the adventurer cannot take on without losing his status as an adventurer. In domesticating the Arctic, the novel builds on tensions already present in the history and literature of Arctic exploration – one thinks of attempts by explorers to recreate domesticity onboard expedition ships, or the house near the North Pole in Jules Verne’s *Voyages et aventures du capitaine Hatteras* (1864). However, while one may argue that the children represent Englishness in various ways, it is difficult to claim that they are the masculine national heroes of the heroic age of Arctic exploration. The flag the Ds raise at the pole is not the Union Jack, but the coded signal of “the tiny quarantine flag flap[ping] yellow” (Ransome 1933, 340).

Gendering modernity

In *Winter Holiday*, the North Pole comes to stand for a form of growing up, attaining control, through a children’s game. My argument is that the novel narrates this process as a specifically modern form of *Bildung*, in which progress is figured as a repeated adventure and in which the figure of the child is a key to the continual reinvention of self. The North Pole scene encapsulates this paradox through a form of ambivalence about power, domesticity and gender.

While children’s literature in the period I am discussing has space for boys’ adventure fiction, its appeal to idyll and fantasy, both present in Ransome’s fiction, can be connected to

values that are perceived as more feminine (Thacker and Webb 2002, 54). By including adventurous girl characters and moving away from the real to imagined spaces of empire, Ransome manifests the end (hinted at in Phillips 1997) of the purely boys' adventure kind of empire fiction, and thus also the end of a hegemonic gendering of children's literature (cf. Reynolds 2011a, 51; Hunt 1992, 15). Feminized versions of adventure stories around the turn of the century, Sally Mitchell argues, already "suggest some of the period's ambiguous shifts in gender roles" (1995, 112). Ransome combines boys' adventure with girls' adventure, writing for a bi-gendered readership. He provides both male and female viewpoint characters (focalizers): in *Winter Holiday* not only Dorothea, but also Nancy and Dick. There has been much discussion about gender stereotyping in Ransome's novels for children, pointing to his representation of girls who follow less restrictive roles, but also his reconfirmation of certain stereotypes (Thomas 1987, 9; Hunt 1992, 15, 165; Pettigrew 2009, 14–16).

In her book on the "New Girl", a parallel figure to the "New Woman" who came to prominence in British culture during the late nineteenth century, Mitchell shows that tomboys had appeared in adventure fiction by 1892 (1995, 15). Before Ransome, most tomboys were relegated to frontier societies or, if appearing in an English setting, were not English (115). The new fixation on sports during the last half of the nineteenth century led to the introduction of sports for girls in the 1870s (105–108), and the girl guide movement was introduced almost immediately after the boy scout movement was established in 1908 (117–126). In other contexts, the tomboy would be figured as maturing into conformity with conventional feminine roles, but Mitchell argues that tomboys "need not abandon all their boyish ways" on attaining adulthood (137). At the same time, towards the end of the nineteenth century, new ideals of masculinity had made it more difficult for girl readers to identify with male adventure heroes (114).

Perceptions of masculinity underwent a major shift during the heroic period of Arctic exploration (Robinson 2006, 6–7; Hansson 2012, 64–65; Bloom 1993; Lewander 2004, 99), partly in reaction to the perceived emasculating effect of modern society, and thus related to questions of modernity and its projected other, the primitive. In polar exploration history, these large-scale shifts coincide with a transformation which may be located around 1880. Before then, to give a reductive take on a complex history, polar explorers were positivist scientists and dutiful naval officers, for whom civilization was a primary value and women a benign influence in the face of the barbaric horrors of the Arctic. Women not directly connected to Arctic explorers were generally given subject positions of scientific ignorance or consumers of the spectacle of masculine Arctic heroism. After 1880, as explorers such as

Nansen, Amundsen and Peary entered the stage, the role of women and the perceived femininity of civilized, scientific males were actively suppressed. In line with the general discourse of masculinity, male explorers became bulwarks of resistance to the degenerative influence of modern science, civilization and femininity. The question is: what happens to the gender of Arctic modernities *after* the South Pole is reached, *after* the First World War, *after* the end of the heroic age of exploration?

Zweig emphasizes that the adventurer rebels against feminine sociality and domesticity (1974, 61–71). In implying that modernity is a form of tragedy in which it is no longer possible to have adventures, he repeats some of the gender positions of the late nineteenth century, although without explicitly calling for a return to primordial forms of masculinity. Simmel, writing earlier, also posits a strongly dichotomized distribution of gender roles where adventure is concerned, with adventurers being men. In her work on the “gender of modernity”, Rita Felski shows how, for Simmel, woman is essentialized, atemporal, and – in line with the new masculine modernity being formed around 1900 – anti-modern (Felski 1995, 36–49). Reading Ransome, however, we can trace an interwar modernity in which women may also be agents of adventure.

According to the pre-war scheme of Arctic masculinity, Dick mainly acts as an emasculated scientist, handling the crisis on the lake primarily by focusing on his scientific competence. In *Winter Holiday*, the adventurous girls also provide anti-stereotypes, taking on the roles of the primary initiators and agents of play and adventure. Dorothea initiates the first contact between herself and her brother Dick and the other two groups of siblings, and her novelistic imagination helps create the sense of adventure in the novel. *Swallows and Amazons* established Nancy, the dominant Amazon sister, as a sea captain on equal terms with the oldest Swallow, John, and furthermore a pirate, and it is she in *Winter Holiday* who initiates the play of being Arctic explorers. As she explains to Dorothea: “You know what it’s like. Dark at tea-time and sleeping indoors: nothing ever happens in the winter holidays” (Ransome 1933, 46). She is the first to show enthusiasm after the crisis that turns pretence into reality: “‘Well,’ said Nancy, ‘it’s the best thing I ever heard. You couldn’t have made it more real’ (349). It is she who draws the map displayed at the beginning of the novel, appropriating what is often seen as a masculine practice.

Paradoxically put out of action for most of the novel by her case of mumps, Nancy stages the adventure and encourages the other children through coded messages. When she is finally free to leave her house, it is she who realizes that Dorothea and Dick have started their sledge journey to the North Pole a day early due to the signalling mistake, and have now been caught

in the storm on the frozen ice. It is here that she enters into the adventure of Arctic modernity, a belated, post-World War I “New Woman” in Ransome’s 1933 novel (cf. Lynch 1991), in a passage in which the novel’s narrative (excepting the incongruous skates and hills) itself crosses over into the pretence of being in the Arctic. The storm has stilled: “And then, with steady, even strokes she set out over the silent Arctic, her eyes fixed on the darkness under those dim hills and, in that darkness, on the light, the faint, flickering light, that could be nothing but the Pole itself” (Ransome 1933, 312).

Transformed from pretence into reality, the adventure temporarily leaves the domestic sphere completely, as the original plan would have been to travel to the North Pole house at the head of the lake to be met there by selected adults whom the children have recruited to make the Pole habitable. As it is, Dorothea, Dick and Nancy must make do for themselves at the pole, finding the food which has been cached in the house and ways to keep warm. Alerted to the crisis, adults arrive later. Nancy (whose real name is Ruth but, being a ruth-less pirate in the summer books, she prefers the self-chosen Nancy) is re-united with her mother: “‘Ruth, you dreadful girl,’ said Mrs Blackett. ‘Not Ruth,’ said Nancy indignantly, but giving her mother a hug” (Ransome 33, 357). The agency in this repartee is finely balanced by Mrs Blackett’s heteroglossic “dreadful”, indicating not only motherly worry but also an ironic respect. Nancy’s corresponding combination of indignation and sympathy reinforces this sense of ambiguity.

In the balanced reversals of this scene at the North Pole, we see something of the continuum between child and adult that McInnes (2016) describes as disturbing simple power hierarchies in *Swallows and Amazons*. The respect shown by Mrs Blackett stems from her having once also been an adventurer, as is suggested in the second book of the series, *Swallowdale* (1931), when Nancy discovers, upon the children’s ascent of the Lake District mountain which they have dubbed “Kanchenjunga”, that her parents also climbed this mountain when they were younger – only they called it the “Matterhorn”.

The historical and altitudinal progression from the Alpine “Matterhorn” to Himalayan “Kanchenjunga” in *Swallowdale* helps construct an iterated adventure of modernity, a story continued as altitude switches to latitude in *Winter Holiday*. The irony and repetitive logic of this adventure means that it is still possible to imagine Nancy’s future role as she grows up as being open to many possibilities. The balance between adventure and domesticity at the end of the novel thus expresses the ambivalence of gendered Arctic modernity during the interwar period.

Acknowledgements

My first thanks must go with much love to my parents, Ingrid High, Roger High and Folke Schimanski; Ingrid and Roger for often taking me to the climbers' hut Low House by Coniston Water in the Lake District as a child and as a reader of Ransome's novels, and Folke for giving me the opportunity to enjoy a new, local perspective on Coniston as an adult. Then, for their comments at various workshops, participants of the Arctic Modernities project (Research Council of Norway, project number 226030), which has been the frame for this research. I am also indebted to Nicola Watson for her invaluable advice after reading a draft version and to Anne Birgitte Rønning for guidance concerning gender and modernity.

References

- Bauman, Zygmunt. 2000. *Liquid Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bhabha, Homi K. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Bloom, Lisa. 1993. *Gender on Ice: American Ideologies of Polar Expeditions*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Bogen, Anna. 2006. "The Island Come True: *Peter Pan*, Wild Cat Island and the Lure of the Real." In *Treasure Islands: Studies in Children's Literature*, edited by Mary Shine Thompson and Celia Keenan, 53–61. Dublin: Four Courts Press.
- Brogan, Hugh. (1984) 1985. *The Life of Arthur Ransome*. London: Hamish Hamilton.
- Chambers, Roland. 2012. *The Last Englishman: The Double Life of Arthur Ransome*. Boston: David R. Godine.
- Dixon, Bob. 1977. *Catching Them Young I: Sex, Race and Class in Children's Fiction*. London: Pluto.
- Dusinberre, Juliet. 1987. *Alice to the Lighthouse: Children's Books and Radical Experiments in Art*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Felski, Rita. 1995. *The Gender of Modernity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Goga, Nina. 2015. *Kart i barnelitteraturen* [Maps in Children's Literature]. Kristiansand: Portal.
- Green, Martin. 1979. *Dreams of Adventure, Deeds of Empire*. New York: Basic Books.
- Hansson, Heidi. 2011. "Nordpolen enligt Puh: Alternativa arktiska diskurser i brittiska populära framställningar 1890–1930" [The North Pole According to Pooh: Alternative Arctic Discourses in British Popular Depictions 1890-1930]. In *Reiser og ekspedisjoner i det litterære Arktis* [Travels and Expeditions in the Literary Arctic],

- edited by Johan Schimanski, Cathrine Theodorsen and Henning Howlid Wærp, 239–261. Trondheim: Tapir Akademisk.
- Hansson, Heidi. 2012. “*Punch, Fun, Judy* and the Polar Hero: Comedy, Gender and the British Arctic Expedition 1985–76.” In *North and South: Essays on Gender, Race and Region*, edited by Christine DeVine and Mary Ann Wilson, 61–89. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars.
- Huizinga, J. (1944) 1949. *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Hunt, Peter. 1991. *Arthur Ransome*. Boston: Twayne.
- Hunt, Peter. 1992. *Approaching Arthur Ransome*. London: Jonathan Cape.
- Hunt, Peter. 1994. *An Introduction to Children’s Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hutcheon, Linda. (1980) 1984. *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox*. University Paperbacks. New York: Methuen.
- Kutzer, M. Daphne. 2000. *Empire’s Children: Empire and Imperialism in Classic British Children’s Books*. New York: Garland.
- Lewander, Lisbeth. 2004. “Gender Aspects in the Narratives of Otto Nordenskiöld’s Antarctic Expedition.” In *Antarctic Challenges: Historical and Current Perspectives on Otto Nordenskiöld’s Antarctic Expedition 1901–1903*, edited by Aant Elzinga, David Turner, Torgny Nordin and Urban Wråkberg, 98–119. Göteborg: Royal Society of Arts and Sciences.
- Lynch, Catherine M. 1991. “Bobstays and Billygoats: Arthur Ransome’s Nancy Blackett, the Image of the New Woman.” *Children’s Literature Association Quarterly* 1991 Proceedings (1): 194–199.
- McAdam, Janice Emens. 1990. “The Persistent Stereotype: Children’s Images of Scientists.” *Physics Education* 25 (2): 102–105.
- McInnes, Andrew. 2016. “‘Wild Surmise’: The Pleasures and Pains of Coming Second in Arthur Ransome’s *Swallows and Amazons*.” *Children’s Literature Association Quarterly* 41 (3): 281–294.
- Mitchell, Sally. 1995. *The New Girl: Girls’ Culture in England, 1880–1915*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Montgomery, Heather. 2009. “Introduction.” In *Children’s Literature: Approaches and Territories*, edited by Janet Maybin and Nicola J. Watson, 8–12. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Nodelman, Perry. 1992. "The Other: Orientalism, Colonialism, and Children's Literature." *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 17 (1): 29–35.
- Pearson, Kit. 1988. "Arthur Ransome: 1884–1967." In *Writers for Children: Critical Studies of the Major Authors Since the Seventeenth Century*, edited by Jane M. Bingham, 455–461. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.
- Pettigrew, Dulcie. 2009. "Swallows and Amazons Explored: A Reassessment of Arthur Ransome's Books for Children." *New Review of Children's Literature and Librarianship* 15 (1): 1–20.
- Phillips, Jerry and Ian Wojcik-Andrews. 1990. "History and the Politics of Play in T. S. Eliot's "The Burial of the Dead" and Arthur Ransome's *Swallows and Amazons*." *The Lion and the Unicorn* 14 (1): 53–69.
- Phillips, Richard. 1997. *Mapping Men and Empire: A Geography of Adventure*. London: Routledge.
- Ransome, Arthur. 1933. *Winter Holiday*. London: Jonathan Cape.
- Ransome, Arthur. 1976. *The Autobiography of Arthur Ransome*. Edited by Rupert Hart-Davies. London: Jonathan Cape.
- Ranson, Clare. 1996. "Cartography and Children's Literature." In *Sustaining the Vision: Selected Papers from the Annual Conference of the International Association of School Librarianship (24th, Worcester, England, July 17-21, 1995)*, 164–166. Seattle: International Association of School Librarianship.
- Reynolds, Kimberley. 2011a. *Children's Literature: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Reynolds, Kimberley. 2011b. "Introduction." In *Children's Literature Studies: A Research Handbook*, edited by Kimberley Reynolds and M. O. Grenby, 1–10. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Reynolds, Kimberley. 2011c. "Modernism." In *Keywords for Children's Literature*, edited by Philip Nel and Lissa Paul. New York: New York University Press.
- Robinson, Michael F. 2006. *The Coldest Crucible: Arctic Exploration and American Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Ryall, Anka, Johan Schimanski and Henning Howlid Wærp. 2010. "Arctic Discourses: An Introduction." In *Arctic Discourses*, edited by Anka Ryall, Johan Schimanski and Henning Howlid Wærp, ix–xxii. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars.
- Sheeky Bird, Hazel. 2014. *Class, Leisure and National Identity in British Children's Literature, 1918–1950*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Shelley, Hugh. (1960) 1968. "Arthur Ransome." In *Three Bodley Head Monographs*, 5–65. London: The Bodley Head.
- Simmel, Georg. (1910) 1919. "Das Abenteuer" [The Adventure]. In *Philosophische Kultur*, 7–24. Leipzig: Alfred Kröner.
- Thacker, Deborah Cogan and Jean Webb (eds). 2002. *Introducing Children's Literature: From Romanticism to Postmodernism*. London: Routledge.
- Thomas, Nicholas. 1987. "Narrative as Practice? Accessible Adventure in 'Swallows and Amazons'." *Anthropology Today* 3 (5): 8–11.
- Watson, Victor. 2000. *Reading Series Fiction: From Arthur Ransome to Gene Kemp*. London: Routledge.
- Zweig, Paul. 1974. *The Adventurer*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.