

Travel and Fiction

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From that long journey home to Ithaca in Homer's *Odyssey*, to Aeneas on his wanderings from Troy to Italy in Virgil's *Aeneid*, and Dante's ascent to Paradise in *The Divine Comedy*, Western literature has returned repeatedly to tropes of travel. Later on, travel and travelling asserted themselves in new ways and forms, and in a range of texts (many of them variations of the novel) concerned with travellers and their journeys: from Miguel de Cervantes's delusional hidalgo in *Don Quixote* (1605) and the stranded protagonist of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), to Marlow's mission in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) and Rachel Vinrace's sea passage in Virginia Woolf's *The Voyage Out* (1915).

Several of the most prominent texts in the Western literary tradition that deal with travel and travellers, then, are fictional, even though, as with Defoe's sea journey fictions, they may be modelled on works of actual travel, or, as in Jules Verne's adventure novels, inspired by real-life events.¹ In these texts, travel serves not merely as a motif or theme, but is just as important for plot, structure, and character development. As Tzvetan Todorov has argued, 'journey and narrative imply one another', and as such travel and fiction (and writing more generally) seem to be inseparably bound up with each other.²

The persistent tropes of travel and travelling in the Western literary imagination, from antiquity onwards, provide an important backdrop for the overlaps between fictional and documentary modes of travel writing with which this chapter is concerned. In particular, these intersections are made

¹ For more on the sources of Defoe's novels and on the connections between travel writing and the novel more generally, see for example Percy G. Adams, *Travel Literature and the Evolution of the Novel* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1983), pp. 119–43.

² Tzvetan Todorov, 'The Journey and its Narratives', in Chloe Chard and Helen Langdon (eds.), *Transports: Travel, Pleasure, and Imaginative Geography, 1600–1830* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), pp. 278–96 (at p. 287). On the kinship between travel and writing, see also Michel Butor, 'Travel and Writing', in Susan L. Roberson (ed.), *Defining Travel: Diverse Visions* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), pp. 69–87.

manifest in the relationship between travel writing and the novel. As J. Paul Hunter has observed in his study on English fiction in the eighteenth century, travel writing chronicles an emerging attentiveness to cultural difference as well as a 'deterioration of belief in universal truths'. Thus it anticipates the novel by providing readers with certain assumptions and expectations.³ Moreover, Hunter continues, early novelists often sought to exploit the popularity of the genre, adopting many of the conventions of travel writing and 'suggesting the similarity of their wares'.⁴ Just as often, and as the example of Jonathan Swift's satirical take on travel writing in *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) demonstrates, novelists also played with readers' expectations and generic conventions.⁵

Travel writing may have paved the way for and served as an important context for an understanding of the novel. However, the influence between the two genres has been mutual, whether through the episodic structure of the picaresque novel, the plotting of exploration accounts, the fascination with travel and transport in modernist fiction, or the experimentation with form in contemporary travel writing.⁶ Just as novelists have drawn on travel writing, travel writers have borrowed from the novel, and often authors either work in both modes or combine them.⁷ Yet, as several critics have pointed out, what distinguishes the novelist from the travel writer and the novel from travel writing is not self-evident.⁸ When Bruce Chatwin – both a novelist and travel writer – published *In Patagonia* in 1977, he was displeased with the fact that critics called it a travel book.⁹ Ten years later, Carl

³ J. Paul Hunter, *Before Novels: The Cultural Contexts of Eighteenth-Century English Fiction* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991), p. 353.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 353.

⁵ Swift's evocation of the travel-writing genre is clearly underlined in the novel's original title, *Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World. In Four Parts. By Lemuel Gulliver, First a Surgeon, and then a Captain of several Ships*.

⁶ On plotting in exploration accounts, see T. D. MacLulich, 'Canadian Exploration as Literature', *Canadian Literature*, 81 (1979), 72–85. For a discussion of travel and transport in modernist fiction, see for example Paul Fussell, *Abroad: British Literary Traveling Between the Wars* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

⁷ The works by authors such as Lawrence Durrell, Graham Greene, George Sand, Evelyn Waugh, and Rebecca West illustrate this tendency, as do the writings of contemporary authors such as Michel Butor, Jean Rolin, and W. G. Sebald.

⁸ Consider, for example, the inclusive definition of travel writing suggested by Jan Borm, 'Defining Travel: On the Travel Book, Travel Writing and Terminology', in Glenn Hooper and Tim Youngs (eds.), *Perspectives on Travel Writing* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 13–26, or Michel de Certeau's statement that 'every story is a travel story' in 'Spatial Stories', in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven F. Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 115–30 (at p. 115).

⁹ Nicholas Shakespeare, *Bruce Chatwin* (London: Harvill Press/Jonathan Cape, 1999), pp. 310–11.

Thompson remarks, 'he fought a long and ultimately unsuccessful battle with his publishers to have *The Songlines* [1987] classified as fiction rather than travel writing'.¹⁰

As Tim Youngs notes with reference to Chatwin, 'the denials from prominent authors of travel books that they are in fact travel writers' signal a certain valuing of the fictional over the documentary function.¹¹ Equally important, the examples of *In Patagonia* and *The Songlines* pose the question of whether and how one may distinguish between travel writing and the novel. Just as the novel is characterised by its extraordinary flexibility in content and form, so travel writing is, as Jonathan Raban has famously remarked, 'a notoriously raffish open house where very different genres are likely to end up in the same bed'.¹² In a similar vein, Jan Borm doubts whether travel writing should be regarded as a genre at all, and suggests instead that we think of it as 'a useful heading under which to consider and to compare the multiple crossings from one form of writing into another and, given the case, from one genre into another'.¹³

Nonetheless, travel writing and the novel share far more than just generic pliability. Both genres engage with many of the same questions, and as Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs have observed, 'travel writing and the novel, especially in its first-person form, have often shared a focus on the centrality of the self, a concern with empirical detail, and a movement through time and place which is simply sequential'.¹⁴ What is more, Casey Blanton's notion of travel writing as typically staging 'an engagement between self and world' could be a valid description of what characterises the novel.¹⁵ Importantly, there are also several overlaps in the two genres' use of literary devices. Just as the novel draws on travel-writing conventions, travel writing draws on techniques associated with fiction in order to evoke and maintain the readers' interest, selecting and reconstructing events or crafting a first person narrator. The use of similar techniques does not mean that there are no differences

¹⁰ Carl Thompson, *Travel Writing* (London: Routledge, 2011), p. 31.

¹¹ Tim Youngs, *The Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 7.

¹² Jonathan Raban, *For Love & Money: Writing, Reading, Travelling 1969–1987* (London: Collins Harvill, 1987), p. 253.

¹³ Borm, 'Defining Travel', p. 26.

¹⁴ Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs, 'Introduction', in Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 1–13 (at p. 6). The movement through time and place, to which Hulme and Youngs refer, is of course also a fundamental aspect of novelistic structure as discussed by, for example, M. M. Bakhtin in his work on the chronotope.

¹⁵ Casey Blanton, *Travel Writing: The Self and the World* (1995; New York: Routledge, 2002), p. xi.

between fictional accounts of travel and accounts of journeys that have actually been undertaken by the author-narrator. Even so, such differences point to extratextual matters. As Barbara Korte has argued, the assumption that the travel experience and the described events have taken place has to be validated and verified by circumstances that lie 'beyond the text itself', not by the use of literary devices.¹⁶

Moreover, fictional and documentary texts on travel have often been oriented towards the same aesthetic ideals. The categories of the picturesque and the sublime, for example, were prominent in both the novel and travel writing, and demonstrate the aesthetic and historical correspondences between the genres. French Romantic authors such as Chateaubriand and Nerval strove for subjectivity and drew on Orientalist ideas in both their fictional work and their travel writing. British Romanticism, as we shall see below, was heavily influenced by, and influenced in turn, the writings of contemporary scientists and explorers.¹⁷ Furthermore, modernist travel writing responded not merely to historical conditions such as war, imperialism, or the growth of modern tourism, but was shaped by modernism's innovative attempts to depict the subjective experience of these circumstances in literary form.¹⁸ There are, then, several connections between travel writing and the novel. Some of these will be explored in this chapter, with emphasis on a selection of travel texts written about the Arctic, a place that in particular allows for a comparison of travel writing with fictional imaginings.¹⁹

The Real and the Imagined in the Literature of the Arctic

Ever since Pytheas reported on his travels to the far-northern lands of Thule, the Arctic regions have been surrounded by myth and fictionalisation.²⁰

¹⁶ Barbara Korte, *English Travel Writing from Pilgrimages to Postcolonial Explorations*, trans. Catherine Matthias (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), p. 10.

¹⁷ See Tim Fulford, Debbie Lee, and Peter J. Kitson, *Literature, Science and Exploration in the Romantic Era: Bodies of Knowledge* (Cambridge University Press, 2004).

¹⁸ See for example Stacy Burton, *Travel Narrative and the Ends of Modernity* (Cambridge University Press, 2014); and Alexandra Peat, *Travel and Modernist Literature: Sacred and Ethical Journeys* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

¹⁹ See also Chapter 23 above.

²⁰ Janice Cavell, 'The Polar Regions', in Carl Thompson (ed.), *The Routledge Companion to Travel Writing* (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 425–34. On the Thule myths in contemporary British travel writing, see Graham Huggan, 'Ultima Thule/The North', in Thompson (ed.), *Routledge Companion to Travel Writing*, pp. 331–40.

As such, the area cannot be understood merely as a geographical referent; it is also very much an imagined space. Francis Spufford has remarked that it is a cultural concept as much as a geographical and political one, and our understanding of the Arctic is based not only in the empirical, scientific, or technical, but in a range of assumptions, responses, cultural fascinations, and aesthetic attractions.²¹ The Arctic is of course a real place but it is also a written place, a place we read about, a literary place.

The notion of an imaginary space does not apply to the Arctic regions alone. Several geographical locations have been invested with symbolic meaning in comparable ways, and referred to in terms that project ideas and values from without. 'The North', 'the South', 'the desert', 'the jungle' all serve as such imaginary spaces, as does 'the Orient' in Edward W. Said's pivotal study of Western ideas of the East.²² Often, such spaces are made representative of an earlier stage in historical time, partly due to their geographical distance. In the same way, the distance and frozenness of the area have facilitated the notion of the Arctic as a place where time has stood still.

Although an actual location, the very remoteness and extremities of the Arctic, together with the fact that the geographical and political demarcations of the region remain flexible and uncertain, make it particularly apt as an imagined space.²³ The same applies, of course, to its geographic opposite, the Antarctic, and as Janice Cavell has pointed out, both 'the far north and then the far south gradually evolved into powerful symbolic spaces'.²⁴ What is more, the history of both regions is marked by doubt and make-believe. Tim Fulford, Debbie Lee, and Peter J. Kitson observe how it was a widespread assumption among both scientists and the public in the early 1800s that the magnetic and geographic poles of the Arctic and the Antarctic were fictitious, 'surrounded by figure and fantasy'.²⁵

Moreover, like the Arctic, the Antarctic has inspired a long history of travel and a large number of texts, both fictional and factual, such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge's 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' (1798), Edgar Allan Poe's

²¹ Francis Spufford, *I May Be Some Time: Ice and the English Imagination* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996).

²² Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978). Said's term has also made its way into Arctic studies. See Anka Ryall, Johan Schimanski, and Henning Howlid Wærp's coining of the term 'arcticism' in *Arctic Discourses* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2010), p. x.

²³ The most widespread definition, though, locates the Arctic north of the Arctic Circle at approximately the 66th parallel north.

²⁴ Cavell, 'The Polar Regions', p. 425.

²⁵ Fulford, Lee, and Kitson, *Literature, Science and Exploration in the Romantic Era*, p. 175.

The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket (1838), Roald Amundsen's account of the Norwegian South Pole expedition of 1910–12, and Apsley Cherry-Garrard's memoir *The Worst Journey in the World: Antarctic 1910–1913* (1922) on Robert Falcon Scott's Terra Nova expedition. The Antarctic regions, then, have fuelled the Western imagination in important ways, and, uninhabited, they serve perhaps even better than the Arctic the function of an imagined space. As Sara Wheeler writes in the beginning of her travel book *Terra Incognita: Travels in Antarctica* (1996), 'Antarctica was always a space of the imagination – before, during and after my own journey.'²⁶ Still, the Arctic holds an especially prominent position in Western thought due to its long history of exploration and the wide range of texts written about the region. As such, the literature of the Arctic is especially fitting to illustrate the processes at play in the imagination and representation of geographical places, and may be a point of entry into questions concerning the connections between fictional and documentary travel writing.

Despite the imaginary aspect of the region, the literature of the Arctic seems first and foremost to signify non-fiction writing, and exploration writing in particular. This consists of texts such as Sir William Edward Parry's account of his attempt to reach the North Pole in 1827, the works by Frederick Cook or Robert Peary who went north in the early 1900s, or Fridtjof Nansen's writing of his crossing of Greenland in 1888–9. Of course, the literature of the Arctic cannot be limited to non-fiction genres such as exploration writing. Nor can it be restricted to literature written about the Arctic by authors who are not from (or have never been to) the Arctic. It also encompasses texts by authors indigenous to the region whose writings complement, challenge, and revise established ideas projected from without and whose voices have become an increasingly important aspect of the literature of the region. Overall, the area serves as a setting, motif, and theme in a range of literary genres, spanning poetry, librettos, comics, and children's literature: indeed, even Winnie the Pooh ventures out searching for the Pole.²⁷ Nonetheless, there can be no doubt that exploration writing is a prominent genre in Arctic literature, not merely because it constitutes such a large part of the works written about the region, but also because of its effect on other texts and genres.

Perhaps the best-known example is Coleridge's previously mentioned poem: although set in Antarctic waters, 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner'

²⁶ Sara Wheeler, *Terra Incognita: Travels in Antarctica* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1996), p. 1.

²⁷ A. A. Milne, 'In Which Christopher Robin Leads an Expedition [*sic*] to the North Pole', in *Winnie-the-Pooh* (London: Methuen, 1926), chapter 8.

was heavily influenced by polar exploration in the north, and testifies to the poet's engagement with contemporary ideas in science and exploration. The poem, in turn, famously inspired another Romantic masterpiece, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), in which the frame narrative of Captain Robert Walton's meeting with Victor Frankenstein is set in the vast, icy landscape of the Arctic. Numerous critics have stressed the presence of the discourses of scientific progress and exploration on Shelley's gothic novel.²⁸ Yet, and as Fulford, Lee, and Kitson remark, the fact that Shelley lets Walton allude to Coleridge's poem illustrates the equally important role of fiction in the character's idea of the Arctic – and in the representation of the area more generally.²⁹

Coleridge's poem and Shelley's novel demonstrate the ongoing interaction between literary and scientific discourses in the literature of the Arctic. The later example of Verne's *The Adventures of Captain Hatteras* (1864) indicates a similar correspondence, and suggests also how fictional representations had an impact on the real events in the history of Arctic exploration. Verne's novel, drawing upon Sir John Franklin's ill-fated search for the Northwest Passage, tells the story of Captain John Hatteras's frantic attempt to reach the North Pole by letting his custom-built ship *Forward* freeze into the pack ice. Some thirty years later, Nansen's Norwegian polar expedition of 1893–6 brought with it a copy of Verne's novel as part of the library on board the ship *Fram*. The differences between these two expeditions, one fictional the other real, are many. Nansen, for example, never reached the North Pole, nor did he encounter Hatteras's northern Arcadia. Even so, there are some striking similarities. 'Fram' means 'forward' in Norwegian, and like Hatteras's ship in Verne's novel, *Fram* was customised to resist the pressure from the pack ice so that the ship would freeze into the ice and drift towards the North Pole.³⁰ Discourses of literature, science, and exploration interact, and the fictional and the documentary weave into each other: the fictional may be based in the factual, but also anticipates it, indicating an interesting circularity in travel texts on places such as the Arctic.

²⁸ See for example Christa Knellwolf and Jane Goodall (eds.), *Frankenstein's Science: Experimentation and Discovery in Romantic Culture, 1780–1830* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008).

²⁹ Fulford, Lee and Kitson, *Literature, Science and Exploration in the Romantic Era*, p. 171.

³⁰ Per Johan Moe considers the possible impact of Verne's fiction on Nansen in his thorough epilogue to the Norwegian translation, *Kaptein Hatteras' eventyrlige ferd til Nordpolen*, trans. Tom Lotherington (Oslo: Vidarforlaget, 2014), pp. 533–53.

Facts as Fiction in the Novel of the Arctic

The literature of the Arctic, then, provides a useful illustration of the close relationship between fact and fiction in travel accounts. This closeness is also evident in the number of references to fictional and even lyrical works that one finds mentioned in travel writing. For example, in her travel book *This Cold Heaven: Seven Seasons in Greenland* (2001), Gretel Ehrlich alludes to the ethnographic writings of Knud Rasmussen, which remain the principal point of reference throughout her text, as well as to works by Jorge Luis Borges, Robert Lowell, John Milton, and Octavio Paz. Connections may also be found in less overt ways and in examples of travel writing that seem to be more purely factual, such as exploration accounts. As John Tallmadge has argued, the notion of exploration narratives as mere 'reports of discoveries' is inadequate if we are to understand their lasting popularity. To entertain the reader, authors of exploration writing draw on techniques associated with fiction, crafting narrative personae, and selecting and arranging the events of the exploration into plots.³¹ A successful exploration narrative, Tallmadge contends, 'must be both an accurate report and a good story', and should thus be considered a hybrid form of writing that combines characteristics of reportage with those of fiction.³²

Likewise, the fictions of the Arctic may mimic the authorising strategies of exploration writing by providing technical details, appealing to the writings and experiences of earlier travellers (real or imagined), or choosing a first person narrator.³³ Or, they may draw directly on the real events and persons of Arctic history. These facts often serve as an authenticating backdrop, but not always. For example, renowned Danish author Klaus Rifbjerg's novel *Nansen and Johansen: A Winter's Tale* (2002) caused controversy in Norway because of its portrayal of homosexual relations between Fridtjof Nansen and Hjalmar Johansen.³⁴ Reading the novel against the backdrop of the *Fram* expedition in 1893–6 (and that of the myth of the masculine polar hero), Norwegian critics disapproved of what they considered to be the author's carelessness with the facts.³⁵ Rifbjerg, on the other hand, denied any wish to

³¹ John Tallmadge, 'Voyaging and the Literary Imagination', *Exploration: Journal of the MLA Special Session on the Literature of Exploration & Travel*, 7 (1979), 1–16 (at p. 2).

³² *Ibid.*, p. 6.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Rifbjerg's novel, entitled in Danish *Nansen og Johansen: Et vinterventyr* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 2002), has not been translated into English.

³⁵ For a study of masculine myths and ideals in the polar exploration discourse, see Lisa Bloom, *Gender on Ice: American Ideologies of Polar Expeditions* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

authenticate or validate his novel through the use of historical material. Referring to its subtitle, he remarked: ‘This is a novel. Fiction. Not a biography. Indeed, I write about real persons, but the moment one releases real persons within the framework of a novel, they change character. This is fiction.’³⁶ Although it is based on historical people and events, Rifbjerg insisted on his text’s detachment from actual circumstances.

An earlier example of the use of Scandinavian polar history in fiction is Swedish author Per Olof Sundman’s bestselling novel, *The Flight of the Eagle* (1967), which narrates the story of Salomon August Andrée’s effort to reach the North Pole by hydrogen balloon from Svalbard in 1897.³⁷ The Swedish expedition is a fascinating example of fatal audacity and decadence: Andrée and the two other expedition members, Nils Strindberg and Knut Fränkel, were so certain of success and of the balloon’s abilities in cold weather that they did not bring appropriate equipment to land on the ice before they reached their destination. (They did, however, bring silk scarves, champagne, tablecloths, and thirty carrier pigeons.) The men would never return from the expedition alive, and their remains were not found until three decades later on Kvitøya in the northeast of the Svalbard archipelago in 1930.

The Flight of the Eagle is based on the texts – diaries, letters, almanacs, and notes – found on the island. Sundman’s novel renders the events and circumstances of the expedition chronologically, from the earliest preparations in Stockholm in 1896 to the last days of the expedition in 1897, and mimics the authorising strategies of exploration writing by narrating the events in a linear, objective, and recording style. The novel in its entirety is narrated by and internally focalised through Knut Fränkel. The choice of Fränkel as the novel’s first person narrator is especially interesting because he was the only expedition member who has left no personal writings that have been located. Found on Kvitøya were the personal writings of Andrée and Strindberg. Fränkel, on the other hand, left only impersonal, meteorological observations. Thus, the novel presents itself as that one piece of personal writing missing from the records, supplementing the texts from the expedition.

Most remarkable in Sundman’s text, though, is the use of the documentary material on which it is based. First of all, Sundman’s novel was thoroughly

³⁶ Quoted in an interview with the Norwegian Broadcast Company, www.nrk.no/kultur/rifbjerg-provoserer-1.532373 (my translation).

³⁷ Per Olof Sundman, *The Flight of the Eagle*, trans. Mary Sandbach (New York: Pantheon, 1970), p. 335.

researched, and in 1968 he published a compilation of all the sources that he had collected during his work on it.³⁸ Yet, there is nothing in the novel that calls attention to this research, except for the fact that this was a real event and that the characters were historical people: there are no footnotes, no listing of sources, and – unlike the English translation – the Swedish original is not promoted as a ‘documentary novel’.³⁹ Furthermore, there is only one example in which the author makes direct use of any factual material. Towards the end of the novel, while Andrée is roaming around the ice floe on which the three men have made camp, Fränkel finds Andrée’s diary and reads it aloud to Strindberg.

Fränkel’s reading of the diary becomes representative of the rather unfavourable portrait of the expedition leader throughout the novel, as someone willing to sacrifice his own life and those of others in the frenzied desire to reach the North Pole. Sundman’s predominantly negative portrayal of Andrée had a huge effect on the official image of the explorer, and it contributed significantly to a reconsideration of his status in Swedish public debate.⁴⁰ Whereas Andrée had previously been celebrated as one of the great national heroes, the megalomaniac depicted in *The Flight of the Eagle* marked the starting point for a questioning of the explorer’s motivation and capabilities. As such, the novel is an interesting example of how fiction, or the fictionalisation of facts, impacts on the understanding of historical events and people.

Also, the fact that Sundman lets Fränkel read from Andrée’s diary may be read as an authorising strategy: the genre is perceived as an authenticating mode of writing in the way that it seems to grant direct access to the diarist’s most intimate thoughts and feelings and to be written contemporaneously. This strategy is made use of in documentary travel writing, too, and is a convention in many of the exploration accounts in the literature of the Arctic. In Julius von Payer’s record of the Austro-Hungarian North Pole expedition of 1872–4, for instance, the lengthy insertion of his own diary entry from the expedition brings the roar and danger of the pack ice to life, highlighting his sublime experience of the Arctic landscape.⁴¹ Because of this

³⁸ Per Olof Sundman, *Ingen fruktan, inget hopp. Ett collage kring S. A. Andrée, hans följeslagare och hans polarexpedition* (Stockholm: Bonniers, 1968).

³⁹ Sundman, *Flight of the Eagle*.

⁴⁰ Andrée received much international publicity, both before, during, and after the expedition. See for example Beau Riffenburgh, *The Myth of the Explorer: The Press, Sensationalism, and Geographical Discovery* (Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 158–9.

⁴¹ Julius von Payer, *Die österreichisch-ungarische Nordpol-Expedition in den Jahren 1872–1874, nebst einer Skizze der zweiten deutschen Nordpol-Expedition 1869–1870 und der Polar-Expedition*

intimacy and immediacy, the diary assumes a credibility that is at play also in Sundman's novel: by reading Andrée's diary, Frænkel (together with the reader) gains access to a truth that supposedly cannot be obtained elsewhere.

The understanding of the diary excerpt as an authorising strategy is strengthened by the fact that it is taken verbatim from Andrée's writings found on Kvitøya. However, there is nothing in this passage or in the novel elsewhere to signal this fact to the reader.⁴² Rather, this piece of writing enters into Sundman's fiction seamlessly, which is perhaps why primarily it serves the plot. Closely intertwined into Frænkel's reading, the diary helps to explain Andrée's motivation, marking a turning point in his and Frænkel's relationship. In this way, historical record is turned into fiction without claiming or calling attention to authenticity or to the blending of fact and fiction that is taking place.

Sundman's *The Flight of the Eagle* is an example of the documentary novel that emerged in the 1960s, in which historical facts provided not merely an authenticating backdrop, but were essential to plot and characters. The questioning of conventional boundaries between the fictional and the factual intensifies some twenty years later with the postmodern novel, in which these borders are challenged in more blatant ways. In the literature of the Arctic, one of the most prominent examples of such experimentation is Christoph Ransmayr's *The Terrors of Ice and Darkness* (1984). Based on the events of the previously mentioned Austro-Hungarian North Pole expedition of 1872–4, Ransmayr's text is about a well-known and well-documented event. In addition to material such as diaries, letters, and logbooks, the list of sources informs the reader of how Ransmayr's novel also draws on the accounts written by the expedition members after their return, by which 'the characters in this novel have helped write their own story'.⁴³

The Terrors of Ice and Darkness interweaves the documents of the expedition into the novel's first person narrative about the fictional character Josef Mazzini whose fascination with the events leads to his disappearance in Spitsbergen in 1981. Quotations from the documents are italicised and

von 1871 (Vienna: Alfred Hölder, 1876). For a thorough study of the Austro-Hungarian North Pole expedition, see Johan Schimanski and Ulrike Spring, *Passagiere des Eises: Polarhelden und arktische Diskurse 1874* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2015).

⁴² The diary and the other documents found on Kvitøya were published in *The Andrée diaries; being the diaries and records of S. A. Andrée, Nils Strindberg and Knut Fraenkel written during their balloon expedition to the North Pole in 1897 and discovered on White Island in 1930, together with a complete record of the expedition and discovery [Med Örnen mot polen: Andrées polarexpedition år 1897, 1930]*, trans. Edward Adams-Ray (London: J. Lane, 1931).

⁴³ Christoph Ransmayr, *The Terrors of Ice and Darkness: A Novel [Die Schrecken des Eises und der Finsternis, 1984]*, trans. John E. Woods (New York: Grove Press, 1991), p. 227.

referenced. They draw attention to the historical basis for the text as well as to the distinction between the narrative levels in the novel, and therefore between the fictional and documentary. The constant alternation between the narrative levels, the documented sources, and the first person narrator's story adds to the novel's non-linearity and the lack of a consecutive and coherent narrative that in turn echoes the loss of meaning that the expedition members and Mazzini experience. The fragmentary, non-chronological form questions the notion of history as linear or the possibility of rendering history as linear. Whereas the historical documents in Sundman's novel seemed to lay a foundation from which one could construct a sequential and chronological narrative, *The Terrors of Ice and Darkness* resists such an assumption, both in its subject matter and form. The factual elements interrogate facts rather than taking them for granted, and serve not so much an authenticating as an inquisitive purpose.

Such an awareness of the fictionality of facts is omnipresent in Ransmayr's novel through his play with genres, and towards the end of the novel, when the narrator comments on the inconclusiveness and futility of his search for answers concerning Mazzini's fate: 'I will reach no conclusions . . . I find ways to interpret the facts of Josef Mazzini's disappearance, facts about the ice, find ever new and different ways, and I shift around in them as if in a chair, until every version feels comfortable.'⁴⁴ Facts, then, are just versions in Ransmayr's postmodern travel novel about the Arctic, and the interpretation of these facts in turn brings about nothing but new versions.

Rereading Facts and Fiction in the Arctic

This chapter has been concerned with the relationship between travel writing and fiction and has focused on examples of Arctic literature, discussing how variants of the novel incorporate the factual into fictionalised accounts about historical events in the history of Arctic exploration. However, fiction, too, may itself be a way to call attention to the blurred lines between documentary and fictional modes of travel texts.

Aritha van Herk's *Places Far from Ellesmere* (1990) draws on elements from the novel, travel writing, autobiography, and feminist literary criticism, and may be read as a piece of fictocriticism, a mode of writing that defies conventions of genre through an experimental blending of fictional and

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 225.

essayistic forms.⁴⁵ The text is divided into four sites of exploration, each tied to the biography of the author-narrator. The fourth section narrates the author-narrator's journey to Ellesmere Island in the Canadian Arctic, to which she brings with her Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*. The novel is itself travelling, and Anna's presence in the Arctic is what van Herk refers to as a paginated presence (although, at times, this paginated presence turns into a perceived actual presence, in which the author-narrator sees Anna floating over the tundra). Anna's paginated presence applies also to van Herk's text in that she includes several excerpts from Tolstoy's novel. Like the insertions of historical material in Ransmayr's novel, these interpolations from fiction are set in italics and alternate with the author-narrator's account of Ellesmere as well as with her reading and interpretation of the island.

The remote and vast Ellesmere Island is the place where it is possible to free Anna from what van Herk considers to be Tolstoy's cruel plot, in which the heroine is destined to throw herself in front of the train, and to 'read Anna through and past this male historiographical fiction'.⁴⁶ Thus, the Arctic offers the possibility of a new story: to read *Anna Karenina* on Ellesmere Island means to read or to reread outside of the generic constraints of the realist novel, and of male historiographical fiction.

Although the Arctic lends itself well to a contesting and challenging of restrictive and predominantly masculine genre conventions, van Herk is aware that the region itself has been represented through these very conventions: reading or rereading *Anna Karenina* in the Arctic also means reading or rereading the Arctic itself, outside of the limiting processes of male writing, mapping, and naming. In this way, van Herk makes use of Tolstoy's fiction to criticise exploration history and writing, albeit in an indirect and subversive manner. Also, Ellesmere Island is constantly referred to as a woman, as if to draw attention to the fact that like Anna, it too has been subject to the cruel plot of male discovery and writing. As such, van Herk's fctocriticism provides a feminist rereading of *Anna Karenina* and of the Arctic that challenges assumptions of genre and form and boundaries between fact and fiction, as well as the masculine values of such fact and fiction.

⁴⁵ Van Herk has labelled her text 'geografictione', referring to the intersections between fiction and geography in her work. On fctocriticism, see for example Tim Youngs, 'Making It Move: The Aboriginal in the Whitefella's Artifact', in Julia Kuehn and Paul Smethurst (eds.), *Travel Writing, Form and Empire: The Poetics and Politics of Mobility* (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 148–66. See also Chapter 34 below.

⁴⁶ Aritha van Herk, *Places Far from Ellesmere: Explorations on Site* (Red Deer, Alberta: Red Deer College Press, 1990), p. 84.

In her article on so-called 'Arctopias', utopian works about the Arctic, Heidi Hansson argues that genre characteristics determine how the region – like all sites represented in writing – can be described and what messages can be conveyed.⁴⁷ This is indeed true, but the ways in which the Arctic may be represented are also determined by the very questioning of such genre characteristics. The overlaps in the literature of the Arctic attest to the blending and circuitousness of the documentary and the fictional in travel writing more generally: although we may very well identify the genre as first person narratives of actual journeys undertaken by the author-narrator, fact and fiction in travel writing have long overlapped, borrowing from and being propelled by each other.

⁴⁷ Heidi Hansson, 'Arctopias: The Arctic as No Place and New Place in Fiction', in Birgitta Evengård, Joan Nymand Larsen, and Øyvind Paasche (eds.), *The New Arctic* (Cham: Springer, 2015), pp. 69–77.