Contents / Sommaire / Inhalt

Editors & Editorial board ................................................................. 5
Contributors ............................................................................... 7

Articles / Aufsätze
Lotta M. Omma, Lars E. Holmgren & Lars H. Jacobsson, Being a Young Sami in Sweden. Living Conditions, Identity and Life Satisfaction ................................................................. 9
Jan Ragnar Hagland, Literacy and Trade in Late Medieval Norway ................................................................. 29
Annegret Heitmann, „[A]lles öde und kahl, und somit echt isländisch.” Ein Reisebericht aus dem Jahr 1846 oder die Anfänge des Island-Tourismus ................................................................. 39
Stephen Pax Leonard, Ethnolinguistic Identities and Language Revitalisation in a Small Society. The Case of the Faroe Islands ............................................................................... 57

Miscellanea: Notes / Notizen
Researching the North at Aberdeen (Neil Price) ................................................................................. 75

Reviews/ Comptes rendus / Besprechungen
Gunnar D. Hansson, Lomonosovryggen, Gråbo: Anthropos Förlag 2009 (Aant Elzinga) ................................................................. 84
Giuseppe Nencioni, The Italians in the Arctic Explorations. A Critique of the Reinterpretation of Nationalism. With an appendix containing Finn Malmgren’s diary (Northern Studies Monographs 2), Umeå: Umeå University & the Royal Skyeetean Society 2010 (Aant Elzinga) ................................................................................. 90

Instructions to Authors ................................................................................. 100

This is a collection of poems the author wrote during his participation in the late summer of 2009 in the expedition of the Swedish icebreaker *Oden II*. It took place under the auspices of the Swedish Arctic Research Program (SWEDARCTIC) coordinated by the Polar Research Secretariat in Stockholm. The expedition, taking place between 31 July and 10 September, was a cooperative venture among the Danish Continental Shelf Project, the Polar Secretariat and the Swedish Maritime Administration. The chief mission of the *Oden II* was to gather data for the Danish Government along the massive undersea Lomonosov Ridge that divides the Arctic Ocean in two. Called LOMROG II this expedition was a follow-up to the Swedish-Danish LOMROG expedition that took place in 2007 (cf. Marcussen *et al.* 2009; Breum 2011). During LOMROG II, a group of marine geologists from Stockholm University participated within the Danish programme. In addition, Swedish scientists worked onboard with projects on zoo-ecology and marine geology.

The area north of Greenland is one of three areas off Greenland where an extension of the continental shelf beyond 200 nautical miles may be substantiated, according to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) article 76. However, it is tricky to obtain the technical data required for a submission to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS) that decides if and how far a country may extend its jurisdiction over the seabed along a continental protrusion. Information that includes geodetic, bathymetric, geophysical and geological data has to be translated and visualised in convincing charts.

The very first step in the chain of evidence to be amassed poses substantial logistical problems due to the severe ice conditions. Note that Russia has submitted an application to the CLCS and is also in the process of acquiring further geoscientific data for a scientific evidence base to backup a jurisdictional claim that might see the Lomonosov Ridge as contiguous with the appurtenance of the continental shelf extending from its own coast. This is being done to the tune of an equivalent of 80 million US dollars worth of R&D investments for the purpose. The Danes for their part have hitherto spent about 70 million US dollars; they too have until 2014 to strengthen their case for an extension of the continental shelf off Greenland towards the North Pole (Breum 2011). At the same time Russia and Denmark have a common interest at heart, which is to come to an agreement with the other Arctic coastal nations to firm up a governance regime for the unclaimed open seas area around the Pole, the so-called “doughnut hole.” This is among other things with an eye to keeping a new strong actor (China) at bay when it comes to future resource exploitation; China has already been knocking on the door of the Arctic Council to try and gain observer status there but until now unsuccessfully. For China, as well as South Korea and Japan, the Arctic is much nearer than the Antarctic while oil and gas resources below the seabed in the Arctic Ocean are more readily accessible in a foreseeable future than those below the Southern Ocean.

The term “continental shelf” is defined in UNCLOS article 76. But, one has to distinguish between term and concept, and, indeed, the concept of “continental shelf” has two meanings, a scientific and a juridical one, where the latter (but not the former) has to do with the line drawn along the top of the sea, also called
the “continental margin.” CLCS decision-makers must, on the basis of the evidence put before them, translate scientific findings relating to the outline and character of the seabed far below the surface of the sea into legal pronouncements concerning a country’s jurisdiction. Technically the test of appurtenance implies the following: if either the line delineated at a distance of 60 nautical miles from the foot of the continental slope, or the line delineated at a distance where the thickness of sedimentary rocks is at least 1 per cent of the shortest distance from such point to the foot of the slope, or both, extends beyond 200 nautical miles from the baseline, then a coastal State is entitled to delineate the outer limits of the continental shelf as prescribed by the provisions contained in article 76, paragraphs 4 to 10. In other words, moving from bottom sediments to proxy data regarding seabed features, to models, to maps or visualisations and on to realities, the stronger your science and the better your lawyers, the better probably will be your case as a coastal state.

Thus it was fortunate for the Danes that they could lease the impressive Swedish icebreaker. It also means that it was ultimately a scientific monitoring task that has a geopolitical dimension. In addition to probing the Lomonosov Ridge in a number of places, the vessel’s permanently mounted Kongsberg multibeam echo sounder as well as a Kongsberg chirp sonar (sub bottom profiler) was used to acquire bathymetric data on both flanks of the Ridge; in addition scientists gathered seismic data in the Amundsen and Markov Basins, and gravity data along the entire track of the cruise to gain an understanding of the bottom profile and other characteristics. This will help Denmark make its case before the CLCS and perhaps also gain a better idea of possible hydrocarbon resources that are locked away below the seabed in that part of the Arctic, all with an eye to future exploitation.

Altogether the *Oden* travelled a total of 3,402 nautical miles and also served as a research platform for a number of other projects along the way. On 22 August 2009 the 60 participants in the cruise set foot on the geographic North Pole. For the *Oden* it was her sixth visit there.

Gunnar D. Hansson is a highly acclaimed Swedish poet who has received many prestigious awards. He is also an essayist and translator, as well as an associate professor of literature at the University of Gothenburg. The present collection of poems, his eleventh, has been very well received, and for good reason. It provides us with a unique view on the Arctic icescape and reflections on what lies below, current hot topics like ice melting, the plight of the polar bear, marine ecology, the constitution of drift ice, and possible futures. All this in an idiom that differs from the digests of facts, figures, curves, charts and arguments on the same subject that may be found in the relevant scientific literature.

The handsomely designed book has on its covers a striking image taken at the North Pole showing soft contours of snow and ice spliced here and there by dark bluish lines of water beneath. The text, sometimes very short, sometimes long, disperses itself across the pages of the collection, interconnecting a variety of thematic nodes as the author reflects on intricate topics: the treatment of the Arctic by classical poets and writers, exploits of polar explorers and scientists in the past, differences between the arts and the sciences in how their practitioners encounter, investigate and report things polar, but we are also treated with autobiographical vignettes and a discussion of the possibility of Arctic poetry as a specific genre.
Epistemology: the author in a reflexive mode/mood asks playfully, is there one Arctic or are there multiple Arctics?—as many as there are epistemic representations, the oceanographers’ Arctic, the geologists’, the seismologists’, the paleo-ornithologists’, and I can add, in science too one may find controversies, paradigmatic bifurcations as happened when Tuzo Wilson’s plate tectonic theory took off in the early 1960s and Wegener’s minority hypothesis of continental drift successively became a majority view. The number of Arctics proliferates.

Ontology: and then he reminds us too: what about representations embedded in practical money-making endeavours—an oil-Arctic, to which I add, a tourist Arctic, etcetera? And then there is the metaphysical world, a moral Arctic, the Kantian Arctic of pure reason, or why not—I ask—the world of environmental NGOs and First Nation Inuit, an Arctic in which the ethics of the precautionary principle is observed. A lot of background research and learning lies behind (and between) prudent expressions in lines that resonate with historical, literary and contemporary allusions.

An example (p. 27):

Från augusti 1896, Franz Josefs Land
På en dimhöljd ö utan namn
stiger den f.d. eldaren och fångvaktaren
Hjalmar Johansen iland från sin sälskinnskajak,
strax efter Frithiof Nansen, den i andras närvaro
obstridde, deras villkor identiska,
den tre år långa ivandring är över. Tills vidare.
Långt senare: den stora råken öppnar sig.
Självmord. Nobelpris.

Worth remembering these heady days when Norwegians Anno 2011 are celebrating two anniversaries commemorating the exploits of two outstanding sons of their nation, Nansen and Amundsen. Nansen’s birth 150 years ago on 10 October; Roald Amundsen and four companions’ physical feat of criss-crossing an abstract mathematical point, a human construct, the geographic South Pole, 14 December 1911.

My attempt at translation:

‘From August 1986, Franz Joseph Land
On a fog shrouded island without a name
treads the former Stoker and Prison Guard
Hjalmar Johansen when he lands his sealskin kayak
soon after Frithiof Nansen, the man in others’ company
incontestable, their conditions identical,
the three year trek over the ice is over. Until further
Much later: the great chasm opens
Suicide. Nobel Prize.’

In a few lines Hansson here captures the two historic figures’ initial communality and the asymmetry of their later lifelines. In 1911 former Norwegian gymnastics
champion and polar veteran Johansen challenged the wisdom of Amundsen’s premature takeoff from the Bay of Whales into interior Antarctica. He found himself brutally castigated, excommunicated from the inner circle of polar friends and after the venture had to find his own way back the following year from Buenos Aires to Oslo, where he ended up committing suicide in a shabby hotel room, in 1913. Shame and fame. Nansen’s life trajectory was brilliant after the success of the Fram’s north polar drift, renowned scientist, statesman and diplomat whose career was crowned in the cause of European unity, peace and human rights.

On the next page (p. 28) a twist of irony jumps out at us. Amundsen vanished on a flight out of Tromsø in 1928 when his plane went down during a search and rescue mission to find his rival, the Italian explorer and airship designer Umberto Nobile, who had crashed in the Arctic in a dirigible airship, the Italia.

In August 2009 Gunnar D. Hansson is carried along by Oden II. He is musing about life and what it takes to write Arctic poetry with three thousand five hundred meters of black water “under his shoe soles (just here) and with an ice drift of ⅙ of a knot.” At the same time elsewhere in the Arctic—the Barents Sea—a hunt is going on for Amundsen’s plane. A HUGIN 1000 state-of-the-art Autonomous Underwater Vehicle (AUV) is used to probe the depths; the vehicle has a depth capacity down to 1,000 metres, an operational speed of 4 knots and the ability to stay deployed at sea for 18 hours non-stop with all sensors operating.

The search was unsuccessful, no truth, no triumph. Hansson captures the moment brilliantly.

Here and there the lonely figure of Finn Malmgren, the Uppsala trained meteorologist of the Italia, also keeps spooking in Hansson’s consciousness in the comfort of his own cabin on the Oden. Malmgren was one who survived the crash of the airship only to perish out on the ice a month later. Still, it does not seem that the Oden’s stock of films shown in the saloon included Peter Finchley’s production in 1969 of “The Red Tent” featuring Sean Connery, Claudia Cardinale and Hardy Krüger wherein Peter Finch as Nobile is portrayed as reflecting on his life and the deaths of those who died to rescue him.

A few pages onward, drawing on the knowledge of his geology colleagues on board the Oden, Hansson succinctly explains the origins of the Lomonsov Ridge blanket of sediment in a Siberian glacial dam break-up fifty thousand years ago. Time-scales alternate between human and geological time, as on the way to 90° N latitude, “soon everything is South. Disturbing lack of compass points” (p. 25).

In the meantime another reflection, “Poetry in both summer and winter, the only possible genre at the 90th parallel North” (p. 16).

One section in the book has the heading “Lomonosov.” Here we are briefed on the life and work of the remarkable Russian natural scientist (1711–1765), who also was a poet and reformed his nation’s language. It was he whose name is borne by the Ridge at the bottom of the sea.

On the basis of empirical observations of the extent of the Arctic sea ice, Lomonosov early on deduced that there could be no land in the very high latitudes, a view that fifty years later gained acceptance after Fridtjof Nansen, Otto Sverdrup and Hjalmar Johansen’s polar drift experiment 1893–1896. This section of the book also contains an intriguing, hilarious detective story involving Oden (the god and icebreaker both), a beer-brewing racket (the Swedish word for beer, öl, is close to the English oil), the UN, clandestine criminal organisations, Swed-
ish secret security forces, and much more. It is an allegory replete with interpretative flexibility but with an unmistakable critical barb directed against unbridled exploitation of natural resources locked below the Arctic seabed.

The book under review here bears witness to the fact that there does exist a genre of modern Arctic poetry and that Gunnar D. Hansson has become one of its prime representatives. Others who contribute to this special genre may be found in New Zealand, Australia, the USA and to some extent in the UK and Canada. France, Chile and Argentina must also be mentioned. Except for the Canadian poets many of these writers have grappled with the play of polar light, katabatic winds, penguin life and pristine wilderness beauty and their own encounters with the same in Antarctica, oftentimes on expeditions similarly facilitated by their national polar research programs. For the most part poets make up a minority. More common is the participation of artists, photographers, underwater photographers, painters, novelists, writers, children’s book authors, and film-makers, historians of science, digital media artists, a few musicians and sculptors, choreographers, and the odd science fiction author.

Historically the genre in which Hansson inscribes himself is very different from the Arctic poetry of olden days, that of the Arctic sublime, or reflections by those at home on the frightful fate of shipwrecked explorers questing the Northwest Passage, honouring death, God and country.

The poetry written by polar explorers of the heroic cut themselves is different again. They put on plays and tended to write light-hearted rhymes to entertain and distract from the daily chores in an extreme environment, that is, when they did not muse on isolation and 24-hour darkness and biting storms. The latter is evident in the little broadsheet run by Ernest Shackleton, the *South Polar Times*, brought out during Robert Scott’s first expedition down there. It contains entries by several of the participants including Shackleton himself. Later the Australian scientist and explorer Douglas Mawson also penned poems in a similar vein.

More to the point is perhaps Lt Nobu Shirase, the Japanese Antarctic explorer who came onto the scene with his ship 1910–1912 at Amundsen’s Bay of the Whales site to explore a rim of the Ross Ice Shelf. He wrote a *waka*, a short Japanese poem, before taking his leave of the continent: “Study the treasures under the Antarctic and make use of them after death.”

From the time of the International Geophysical Year to the Fourth International Polar Year scientists have also continued to write poems, at first sporadically but today in larger numbers. The focus is often on specific scientific exploits and personal experience of the unusual and seemingly otherworldly, for example the Dry Valleys of Antarctica. This differs in character and tonality from that of the heroic age.

At King George Island on 16 October 2009 there was even a Poetry Reading Festival down by Fildes Peninsula with contributions by scientists from several of the great number of national stations located on that easily accessible island as a political statement to manifest each country’s presence. One may wonder if the national scientific flag waving and scientific duplication there may one day be superseded by a couple of multinational stations and if poetry reading festivals can help prepare the way?

Nowadays we also have a couple of other genres. There is the polar poetry of school children in Nunavut, Canada, as probably also amongst other members
of four million Circumpolar Peoples living along the Arctic rim. Then there is
the ecotourist’s enthusiastic digital diary illustrated with photographs and video
bits. “Tourism is now the largest single activity in the Arctic,” notes Gunnar D.
Hansen citing an official report (p. 65). Oh, look here a seal, there a bird… some-
ting on which to pin meaning, but which/what?

The professional artist’s grappling with his/her journey in time and space
navigating the repetitious yet at the same time ever uniquely configured snow,
ice and water, is different again. Poetry sediment. Lyrical poetry in this respect
consists of poems that express thoughts and feelings of the writer in the encoun-
ter. It does not tell a story which expressly portrays characters and actions, but
more, it seems to me, it directly challenges the reader to share the writer’s state
of mind, perceptions, emotions and findings in a double journey, outward in the
seemingness of the unknown while the ship’s depth sounder probes layers of
Lomonosovian sediments, and inwardly, existentially as the poet works his way
through different layers of the soul. The latter reminds me of the Russian spirit
wrestlers who rejected church and state.

Lomonosov would have known the term “spirit wrestlers” (Духоборцы,
Dukhobortsy) still associated with the radical anti-authoritarian pacifist people,
the Doukobhors. Tolstoy in his day helped thousands of them emigrate in several
waves, beginning in 1898, out of Tsarist Russia to Canada where they set up com-
munal agrarian settlements on the prairies, and today many are concentrated in
relatively remote mountain valleys near Castlegar in interior British Columbia.

The readers are exhorted to test for themselves. My sediment-coring sampler
used to recover layers from Gunnar D. Hansson’s Lomonosovryggen, you may have
noticed, has a built in history of science bias. Someone else may be more apt to
fasten on literary figures, associations and allusions that also abound—Samuel
Taylor Coleridge, Mary Shelley, Joseph Conrad, Harry Martinson, Tegnér, but
also Heidegger, Kant, Schopenhauer, or in another category Waldo Emerson and
Rachel Carson.

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