

## PREFACE

This special issue of *Nordlit* is dedicated to Fredrik Chr. Brøgger, Professor Emeritus of American Literature and Culture, on his 70th birthday on 23 April 2015. With one exception, all the contributors – like Fredrik himself – are members of the international research project *Arctic Modernities*, funded by the Polar Research Programme of the Research Council of Norway, with additional funding from the Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education at UiT The Arctic University of Norway. Some of the contributors, including one of the editors, have also been Fredrik's colleagues at UiT for many years. Others have been his students. Others again have collaborated with him in various capacities. All are happy to consider themselves his friends.

The three-year *Arctic Modernities* research project, which was launched in 2013, is in many respects a continuation of an earlier research project, *Arctic Discourses* that afterwards continued as a collaborative researchers' network. Some of its members are now participants in *Arctic Modernities*. The scope of this new project is – at least in terms of the time span – narrower than the former. While *Arctic Discourses* investigated the development of representations of the Arctic and its people in the post-romantic period, that is, from about 1840 until the present, the new project deals mainly with Arctic discourses after the end of the so-called heroic era of exploration. But as several articles in this issue of *Nordlit* show, we are also interested in the origins of modern discourses of the Arctic and in Arctic modernity as a continuation of historical discursive formations. In other words, we investigate to what extent the processes of modernisation have changed the discursive signification of the Arctic, and to what extent the traditions of heroic Arctic images – whether these traditions are affirmed, contested or repudiated – have shaped, influenced and informed modern discourses of the Arctic. While the studies in the *Arctic Discourses* project were primarily textual, however, *Arctic Modernities* includes studies of visual media such film and photography.

The *Arctic Modernities* project, like the contributions in this issue of *Nordlit*, examines *instances* of Arctic modernity, often in light of the past. As a whole the articles seem to bear out what we emphasised in our grant application to the Research Council, namely that the modern Arctic seems to have a double discursive signification. On the one hand – for those of us who live and work in the North – it signifies something accessible, everyday and prosaic; on the other, it is a never-never land of romance and adventure. While many nineteenth and early twentieth-century exploration narratives may be read as quests for sanctuary from modernity, much recent writing on the Arctic has made it synonymous with modernity itself. In Soviet writing of the 1930s, as Susi Frank has shown, the Arctic is promoted as an exemplary region where technological innovations, social warmth and imagination will eradicate the hardships of remoteness and a cold climate. Related utopian images are also found in representations of the Nordic North as exemplary of progressive gender politics. As a utopian space the Arctic points to a different future – recently

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manifested most clearly in various exercises in futurology, such as the American geographer Laurence Smith's book *The New North: The World in 2050*, in which he argues that climate change and its consequences will cause a huge economic and population boom in the Arctic. With the melting of the polar icecap, the incorporation of the Arctic in the processes of modernity has begun to become more obvious to the world at large. The Arctic is not only affected by but also – in dramatic ways – affects global modernity. Yet the stark image of the Arctic as the “other” of the civilised, urbanised world – a cold, empty, silent and dangerous region imbued with notions of adventure, heroic masculinity and expeditionary conquest – still persists. This image reminds us of the continued survival – within modernity – of the past as nostalgia, longing and myth. In other words, while the Arctic remains thoroughly imbricated in modernity, and while it encompasses a variety of local modernities, it surprisingly often appears as a counter-modernity existing beyond the modern everyday world.

One hypothesis linking many of the contributions to the *Arctic Modernities* project is that discourses of the Arctic embody the *paradoxes* of modernity. For this reason we believe that a study of the discursive significations of the modern Arctic may also throw light on general processes of modernisation. When the project group discussed our research proposal, we agreed to foreground three interlinked nodal points that are central to discourses of Arctic modernity: gender, indigeneity and ecology. The contributions to this issue of *Nordlit* reflect this division, but with a great degree of thematic overlap. It opens with six articles dealing less with ecology as such than with discourses on Arctic landscapes in general – from widely different perspectives. The following four articles focus on issues of indigeneity in terms of a range of materials spanning from early twentieth-century photographs to recent fiction and drama. The final four articles highlight some implications of investigating gender in an Arctic context.

Fredrik Brøgger's main research interests are in representations of landscape and ecology, although issues of gender and masculinity are also central in much of his work related to the *Arctic Discourses* and *Arctic Modernities* projects. His doctoral dissertation dealt with American literary modernism and the culture of consumption in the United States, and he is also the author of *Culture, Language, Text*, a book on the theory of cultural studies addressed to students with English as a second language. As a teacher of American literature and culture in Norway he has unavoidably been a generalist. As an emeritus professor, however, Fredrik has had more time than previously to indulge his passion for “nature writing”. This has recently resulted in research on the Arctic narratives of contemporary North-American writers like Barry Lopez, Aritha Van Herk and John Moss, but he has also devoted himself to the study of Nordic nature writers like Knud Rasmussen and Helge Ingstad.

Born in Oslo and educated at the Universities of Oslo, California and Bergen, Fredrik has lived and taught in Northern Norway since 1973. It has been said that when he first came to Tromsø in June and saw snow still on the mountains, he knew that this was where he wanted to live. Though the story is apocryphal, and he did, in fact, arrive in January, it has the ring of truth. Throughout the years here he has skied from home to the university whenever possible, which is often, and recently

confessed that in contrast to those who look forward to the arrival of spring, he weeps when the last snow disappears. But he also enjoys the brief and intense Arctic summers, and for at least thirty years has spent sacred summer vacations hiking in the wilderness of Finnmarksvidda with camera, notebook, fishing rod and tent – undaunted by its infamous mosquitoes. The intimate knowledge of the northern environment that he has gained through patient observations on his long hikes clearly informs his insightful readings of Arctic nature narratives. No doubt based on his own experience, he is adverse to the masculinist ethos of domination, prowess and competitiveness that distorts so much writing about Arctic landscapes. Instead he applauds attempts at approaching the life-world of the Arctic in an open, responsive, self-reflexive and dialogic frame of mind. As a person, colleague and fellow project member he himself embodies the positive openness that he looks for in nature writing. In discussions his comments are always constructive, his critical feedback to colleagues and students is always encouraging, and his great enthusiasm for writing, reading, teaching and conversation is always infectious.

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