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Locations of North in Canadian Literature and Culture

Zusammenfassung

Der kanadische Norden stellt nicht nur eine geographische Region dar, sondern hat als symbolischer Raum schon immer eine Schlüsselrolle in der kanadischen Politik, Kunst und Kultur gespielt. Seit den Anfängen kanadischer Literatur hat der Norden dem Rest Kanadas als Projektionsfläche für Träume und Fantasien gedient; er hat Legenden sowie mythische Figuren und Landschaften heraufbeschworen, die aus der Divergenz zwischen der physischen Realität des Nordens und seiner literarischen Repräsentation erwachsen. Die visuellen Darstellungen, Mythen und Geschichten der Inuit unterscheiden sich hiervon signifikant und lassen eine andere Wahrnehmung und Definition des Nordens erkennen, die mit der Erschaffung des Territoriums Nunavut zunehmend auch das nationale Narrativ Kanadas verändert. Der folgende Aufsatz analysiert unterschiedliche Vorstellungen und Verortungen des Nordens in der kanadischen Kultur und geht darauf ein, wie neuere Entwicklungen in der nationalen Verfasstheit Kanadas – etwa die fortschreitende Anerkennung indigener Rechte oder die sich wandelnde Politik des Multikulturalismus – und Herausforderungen in der Arktis – wie etwa Fragen nach Hoheitsrechten und Probleme der globalen Erwärmung – Dichotomien wie Heimat versus Grenze und realer versus imaginer Norden unterminieren könnten.

Résumé

Le Nord canadien n'est pas seulement une région géographique, mais aussi un espace symbolique qui a toujours joué un rôle fondamental dans la politique, les arts et la culture du Canada. Depuis les débuts de la littérature canadienne, le Sud a projeté ses rêves et ses fantasmes sur le Nord. Le décalage entre la réalité physique du Nord et sa représentation dans la littérature a produit des mythes, des personnages légendaires et des paysages obsédants. Les définitions et les images du Nord dans les mythes, les histoires et les objets d'art visuel des Inuits diffèrent notamment de ces représentations et, avec la création du Nunavut, ont modifié le discours national du Canada. En distinguant les représentations du Nord des Inuits de celles du Sud, cet article explore les différentes conceptions et localisations du Nord dans la culture canadienne. En outre, il examine l'évolution récente de l'identité nationale – comme la poursuite de la reconnaissance des droits des autochtones et la politique du multiculturalisme – ainsi que les défis en Arcti-

que – comme les questions de souveraineté ou le réchauffement climatique – pour voir comment ceux-ci pourraient contribuer à la déconstruction de certains dualismes comme celui de la patrie et de la frontière ou celui du Nord imaginé et du Nord réel.

1. Introduction

The idea of North is as elusive as it is omnipresent in Canadian literature and culture. Elusive because even as a real space the North has evaded clear definitions and is hard to grasp. Geographers, historians, anthropologists, and ecologists cannot agree on where and what is North. Is North defined by climate, by temperature and weather, by latitude, or by how the land is used by indigenous peoples? What do we mean when we talk about the North and where is such a place located? The Canadian geographer Louis-Edmond Hamelin in the introduction to his book *Canadian Nordicity* claims that “the North is more than an area, it is a passion” (Hamelin 1979, 9), and the historian William Morrison opens his study *True North* by saying that “the Canadian north is in some ways not a physical region at all, but a place of dreams, of imagination and fantasy. [...] Even those who have traveled to the north *have read into it* what they needed to see” (Morrison 1998, 1; emphasis added). As these statements illustrate, Canadians in the past have not been concerned with the North as much as with the idea of North, an idea that is omnipresent because it is the most powerful spatial concept Canada has had as a nation. Although ideas of North and ways that Canadians have instrumentalized and appropriated the North for political and creative purposes have changed considerably over time, the North up to the present day has served as an important space for imagining the Canadian community, to speak with Benedict Anderson (1991). The North is a symbolic space for Canada because it is here that the nation sees its uniqueness, those characteristics that make it different from other nations, most accurately represented, preserved, and reproduced. The real North is not important for the idea of North, but how this space has been semiotized, narrativized, mythologized, and how it has been used as a spatial meta-narrative for the self-conceptualization of the Canadian nation.

Most Canadians know the North as a text only, not as a real space or landscape, but as a cultural text rewritten by generations of Canadian politicians and artists. Few Canadians have ever been “up North” much less lived there, so the North could turn into a projection space for southern dreams, fantasies, and nightmares, a space either pictured as a vast, hostile, and strange northland, or as a pristine wilderness, or as a resource-rich frontier, but always as a land void of people. National narratives include as much as they exclude. What the national idea of North excluded for the

longest time was at first the presence of indigenous peoples at all and later their specific cultural perspective on and relationship with the land. The Canadian North, as the human geographer Rob Shields puts it in his book *Places on the Margin*, “forms the mythic ‘heartland’ of Canada but remains a zone of Otherness in the spatial system of Canadian culture” (Shields 1991, 4). North, in other words, is seen by Shields as the discursive formation of a Southern Ontario elite, which uses the North to define a national self via the exclusion of the other.

The following essay will highlight a few themes, topoi, and strategies in southern renditions of North, on the one hand, and, on the other, look at Inuit notions of a northern homeland. The conclusion tries to bring together these two different cultural locations of North and hypothesizes how current developments in the national make-up of Canada and challenges in the Arctic may result in overcoming dichotomies such as homeland versus frontier and real versus imagined North. While the first part of the essay is a survey of how the North has been configured, used, and sometimes instrumentalized in Canadian art and politics, the second part is based on empirical research undertaken in the territory of Nunavut.

2. Southern Ideas of North

An early attempt to define Canada’s uniqueness via the North was made by the so-called Canada First Movement, which arose shortly after Confederation. In 1869 Robert Grant Haliburton, the movement’s most prominent representative, stated that the physically as well as morally strong Anglo-Saxon race was predestined to populate the North, because only they would be able to thrive in the rough climatic and geographical conditions. Although Haliburton’s thesis never gained wide currency, the underlying assumption that the North is one of the last frontiers to test Man’s abilities is characteristic for political and artistic appropriations of North until the 1970s. This spatiality, the social practice of using space, not only erased the histories and presence of indigenous people, but it reinforced gender codes through spatial divisions. The North – as Margaret Atwood (1995), Aritha van Herk (1990, 1991), Sherrill Grace (1997), and Petra Wittke-Rüdiger (2005) have shown – was represented as a *femme fatale* with an alluring yet often destructive and fatal charm for the southern male adventurer.

The fascination with the strange North is forever preserved in the paintings of *The Group of Seven*, who defined themselves at their formation in 1920 as Canada’s national school of painters who wanted to capture the country’s national spirit, and they predominantly painted unpopulated northern landscapes. Another noteworthy example of how the North penetrated the Canadian imagination is Glenn Gould’s 1967 radio documentary “The Idea of North.” The one-hour piece is the first in a collection of three which later became published as *Glenn Gould’s Solitude Trilogy*. For his radio documentary “The Idea of North,” Gould interviewed five white southern Canadians who had lived up North, but he undercut the form of the

documentary by separately interviewing each participant and later, in a technique he termed “contrapuntal radio,” arranging the material in a musical and drama-like quality – one interviewee later said that he felt as if Gould were playing him like an instrument. Although he is absent in the actual documentary and although Gould himself never made it further North than Churchill, Manitoba, what we as listeners get is Gould’s idea of North as a space of “staggering creative possibility” (Gould 1967). Gould, like many later postmodern Canadian writers, combined the national idea of North with a private search for identity and used the North as an empty space for the imagination.¹

For postmodern Canadian writers, the North became an experimental space, a blank page for playful investigations of identity, language, and gender but also for rewriting earlier inscriptions of North, and for questioning concepts such as historiography, truth, or authenticity. Sherrill Grace, in her comprehensive 2002 book *Canada and the Idea of North*, has called these texts “counter-narratives” (Grace 2002) within the discursive formation of North in Canadian culture because they challenge and re-represent earlier northern representations such as maps or exploration accounts, but it is important to stress that those texts nonetheless stay within the discursive formation of North with its gendered and racialized demarcations. I can only briefly sketch three examples here. The first one is Aritha van Herk’s 1995 text *Places Far from Ellesmere*. As the book’s subtitle, *a Geografictione*, indicates, the author wants to blur the boundaries between disciplines by blending geography – the act of mapping, naming, and categorizing the land – with the act of writing and reading, and, as the silent e at the end of the word indicates, with feminist theory on subject formation. The text is divided into four sections, all entitled with geographical place names. The narrator moves from three Western places which have all had an impact on her identity, to the polar island of Ellesmere and there rereads herself, the North, and Leo Tolstoy’s 19th-century novel *Anna Karenina*. Tolstoy’s text was canonized for its psychological realism. In her un-reading of the text van Herk wants to show that rather than being a realistic representation of a woman’s psyche, Tolstoy’s text is emblematic for how women have been misread and misrepresented by male authors. By taking the text North, van Herk correlates the appropriation of women and the female body with the conquest of the North by explorers. Just like Tolstoy, 19th-century British explorers seemed to realistically describe the North while they in fact *inscribed* themselves, their names and stories into the landscape, the argument of van Herk’s text runs. *Places Far from Ellesmere* explores the interdependencies of subjects and places, and places must be understood as both real and discursive in this context. Stories, like the one of Anna Karenina, invite people through the act of reading to recognize or misrecognize themselves.² The North, in

1 On the national idea of North and on how it differs from notions of the West in US-American literature and culture see Rosenthal 2005.

2 On how van Herk plays with conventions of realistic writing see Manera 1995; on how she uses the North for the re-invention of female subjectivity see Mott 1998 and Rosenthal 2004b.

van Herk's reading, is not a space for truer narratives or representations but a space outside of familiar discourses. Van Herk's highly experimental text nonetheless stays within the established discursive field of representing North and, maybe without intending to, repeats some of the earlier male adventurers' gestures. For one thing, she again represents woman as landscape and secondly, she depicts the North as a blank page, an empty space, a frontier-land beyond human civilization and void of people.

Rudy Wiebe's historiographic metafiction *A Discovery of Strangers* (1994) also uses the North to tell a different version of a story. He retells the Franklin expedition from various points of view, both British and Native, and also from the perspective of the land itself. Wiebe tries to replace a Eurocentric with an indigenous perspective, a paradigm shift that already shows in the title *A Discovery of Strangers* because the strange explorers are discovered by the land and by its inhabitants, the Yellowknives. *A Discovery of Strangers* is no longer set in an empty land but in the contact zone of two peoples who meet and grapple with each other for the first time, the Europeans who have come to map the land and the indigenous Yellowknives, nomads who live off the land. At the heart of the novel is a love story between twenty-two-year-old midshipman Robert Hood, who did the drawings for the Franklin expedition, and a fifteen-year-old Dene girl, whom the British call Greenstockings. John Franklin's first expedition did not end as disastrously as his third expedition, in which he and his whole crew perished, but it was disastrous nonetheless as more than half his men died and some probably stooped to cannibalism in order to survive. They died, as so many before them, in part because they ignored the advice of the Natives. Wiebe probably concentrated on this Franklin expedition because the long winter stopovers meant intense cultural contact and exchange between the Europeans and the Yellowknives, which is the focus of his story. Wiebe bases his story on Franklin's diary, which mentions the beautiful Greenstockings, on letters and on early exploration accounts, for instance by Samuel Hearne, as well as on oral stories and mythology told by the Dene elders. He takes these narrative documents and fills the gaps between them by imagining the truth from various points of view, thus reminding us that any story, even historiography, can be told in various ways, depending on the cultural standpoint and the personal interest of the teller of the tale.

An example of a recent, decisively past-postmodern Northern novel is Elizabeth Hay's Giller Prize winning novel *Late Nights on Air*, published in 2007. I choose the term past-postmodern because it is entirely free of language games, of playing with subjectivity, narrative, or historiography and instead returns to a more coherent, somehow more realistic mode of representation. The novel is set in the town of Yellowknife in the Northwest Territories in 1975 and mostly deals with the crew of the small public radio station there. At the heart of the novel again is a love story, or maybe various ones, as the complicated lives of the people at the radio station, all of them social misfits of some kind, intersect and intertwine. But one main protagonist

of the novel is the North itself. Hay, on the one hand, peoples the North and turns it from a vast empty space into a small town community, where rumors, gossip, and the news of new arrivals travel fast. On the other hand, Hay portrays a fascinating yet unforgiving, impenetrable and yet alluring northland which reverberates with many earlier representations of North in Canadian culture. Events in the novel culminate in a canoe trip up the Thelon River through the Barrenlands which some of the radio station employees conduct together. They follow in the footsteps of the British explorer John Hornby, whose fascination with the Arctic brought him there again and again until in 1926 he and his two companions, like so many before them, starved to death. And the North takes its toll on the party in Hay's novel as well, as one of them dies in a canoe accident. He does not die dramatically but simply by misjudging the calmness of a lake. The others find him floating close to his canoe, just as Tom Thomson, the well-known Canadian painter of the North who heavily influenced *The Group of Seven* painters, had been found in 1917. Hay's novel is a very sensitive and sensual novel. It thrives on sound, not only because it deals with people's voices or because it is about a radio station that carries news and companionship out to the community, and radio as Valerie Alia (1990) has shown us, is a very important means of communication in the North, but because Hay captures the sounds of the North.³ One of the canoeists takes a recorder on the trip to document the noise a footstep makes in the snow, the sound of snow falling, the noises of animals, the silence. The book is, as one reviewer put it, an elegy to the North, which is in grave danger of being destroyed. It does stay within the traditional discursive field of representing North but it also shows that there are many different perspectives and voices up North, and Hay manages to make them heard without speaking for them.

Late Nights on Air is set at the time of Thomas Berger's epoch-making report on the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry, *Northern Frontier – Northern Homeland*, which forced the Canadian government to listen to and acknowledge the concerns of indigenous peoples in the Arctic, a development that eventually led to the creation of Nunavut in 1999. The pipeline was intended to carry gas and oil from the Arctic Ocean to the Northern American Network in Alberta, and in stretching 3,800 kilometers would have become the longest pipeline in the world. Since 2004 oil companies have been trying to resurrect the project. Twenty years earlier the project, without doubt, would have passed through without any resistance. In the 1970s, however, it encountered severe opposition by environmentalist groups and by the burgeoning force of Aboriginal organizations.⁴ So in 1973, the government ap-

3 The term "un/covering" is adapted from her book *Un/Covering the North: News, Media, and Aboriginal People*, in which Valerie Alia investigates the role that media, especially the radio, has played in (mis)representing aboriginal people but also how the radio has contributed to community building in the North.

4 The Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK), formerly called the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada – the Inuit brotherhood – was founded in 1971. It promotes the interests of the Inuit in Canada, representing

pointed Thomas Berger, justice of the Supreme Court of British Columbia, to set up a royal commission to conduct hearings on the feared effects of the pipeline. What was revolutionary about these hearings was Berger's method. Rather than holding them in a big city, Berger took his commission North, visiting 35 communities and listening to a thousand witnesses. In her novel, *Hay* impressively illustrates how these recordings transported the worries, concerns, and living conditions of the Native people South for the first time on a large scale, and how they rattled the community in the North. Indigenous groups expressed their concerns about the destruction of their trap lines, of migrations routes, or the poisoning of their waters, but maybe even more importantly, for the first time they had a public forum in which to talk about social matters, about racism, about lacking health care. Berger's report did in fact put a stop to the pipeline project, and for southern environmentalists signaled a halt to all major development in the far North. But this new understanding of Natives' concerns also spawned new misunderstandings, as many well-meaning environmentalists failed to see that their concept of 'wilderness' and of preserving the land did not coincide with a Native understanding of preserving the land and its resources at all.⁵

3. Inuit Notions of a Northern Homeland

The ensuing part of this essay is based on results from a research project and a set of interviews I conducted in Nunavut (Iqaluit and Pangnirtung) in 2002 on a Canadian Government grant with a research project aimed at investigating an indigenous idea of North.⁶ This field study gave me the unique opportunity to reassess my own knowledge and notions about the Canadian idea of North, a knowledge that had been produced along the parameters of the discursive field of knowledge production outlined in the first part of this essay. My project arose from an interest in how Canada's national idea of North had changed with the creation of Nunavut. I

four Inuit regions – Nunatsiavut (Labrador), Nunavik (northern Quebec), Nunavut, and the Inuvialuit Settlement Region in the Northwest Territories. In 1977 the Inuit Circumpolar Conference came into being uniting Inuit leaders from Alaska, Canada, and Greenland in order to protect Inuit culture and Arctic resources. Both organizations have turned into very powerful and influential voices over the last decades.

- 5 On how the western idea of 'wilderness' – after all a socially and symbolically constructed space that has served as the Other to civilization – jars with an Inuit perception and use of the land, see Grant 1998.
- 6 I interviewed eleven people, four Inuit men, four Inuit women, two white men and one Cree man in Iqaluit and Pangnirtung. The interviews covered various societal groups – hunters, elders, artists, teachers, unemployed, politicians, businessmen – and three main areas of interest: "Building Nunavut," "Nunavut in Relation to Canada," "Inuit Culture." The quotations in this essay are transcribed from the recorded interviews. For the full results of my research and for the methods induced in the interviews, see Rosenthal 2004a. The article also contains an appendix with the full interview questions as well as information on the institutes and facilities that helped me to set up my research.

had done extensive research on the Canadian North and Nunavut and I had painstakingly prepared my interviews which, often with the help of a translator, I conducted with politicians, artists, and community members. Yet, within days I realized that I was asking the wrong questions, simply because I am inevitably and inescapably framed in my own cultural predicaments. What I did learn in Nunavut was that the Inuit have completely different notions of space, of direction, of nature, and of wilderness. Moreover, every interviewee, in some variation, said that North to them is neither defined by climate nor by geographical location but solely by how indigenous peoples live on, off, and with the land. As a French Canadian anthropologist put it in one of my interviews: "What is North?" "It's the Inuit. They know the land, they know how to survive, have their stories. Canadians are not there, they are transient, even us. We gonna leave."⁷ North is determined by cultural practices, by a respect for the land and its animals, by traditional hunting and by community. This is an ethnic and cultural notion of understanding the land, one that does not regard it as wild but as imbued with mythology and spirituality as well as with resources to live from (Grant 1998; Nuttall).

The Inuit I interviewed could not familiarize themselves with the Canadian idea of North; as Alexina Kupflu, a college teacher, put it:

I do not see Canada as a northern country. The southern part of Canada is not northern. Even when you are in any of the provinces and they are talking the north, their north only goes as far as the 60th parallel. [...] Southern Canada is not a northern country.

[When I asked her how 'North' is defined for her, she replied:]

It's not just climate because Ottawa can be so cold because of the humidity when you are not accustomed to the humidity. So I think it is just the people. This is not just Nunavut or the Northwest Territories, it also includes the northern parts of the Provinces, whether it's northern Manitoba or northern Saskatchewan, northern Alberta, and B.C., Quebec. [...] So it's not at the 60th parallel, it's just where the predominant population are the people who are indigenous to the area.

Two things become very clear in these statements: First, that spaces do not simply exist but are made into such in social and symbolic practices, and the North is turned into a distinct space by the special relationship between the indigenous inhabitants and the land. Second, the North is not a wilderness in a Western sense of the word, but it is permeated by traditions and history, with names that, as the social scientist Mark Nuttall explains,

7 Louis McComber, French Canadian anthropologist in an interview with Rosenthal 2002.

are not merely geographically descriptive. The names that indigenous peoples have given to the Arctic landscape are multidimensional, in that they contain information about physical features, community history and mythological events. [...] This differs sharply from the practice of naming places by explorers, colonialists and settlers in order to control, own and dominate the landscape. (Nuttall 2000, 394)

These Inuit traditions of living with the land are as flexible as they need to be in order to survive; they are dictated by the necessities of the land and by the techniques available. An Inuk hunter, Jacoposie Peters, said to me:

I look at tradition as being dynamic and I know that my father looked at tradition in the same way, where he grew up using a kayak and dog teams and at a later age when snowmobiles came and the outboard motors came, to him, they were just tools. And I asked him 'why don't you start a dog team again?' 'Been there, done that, keep it there in the past' [he said]. Actually that is a very Inuit way of looking at things. Your tradition lives on, for example, using at one time a harpoon to kill a bear and then fire arms came and it was just as manly to kill a bear with a rifle. Anything that makes your life easier, you adopt, and that is what we have done, we have adopted things.

Another common misconception about the North is that it is a vanishing space with a vanishing culture. Despite the serious threats that global warming is posing to the North and to the culture of the Inuit, they have plenty of experience in adjusting to changes. The Arctic is not an unchanging wilderness or barren land; it has always been prone to drastic transformations and life has flourished there nonetheless. Maybe the Inuit are a lot quicker at recognizing these changes because they are so closely related to the land. As the Inuk hunter explained to me:

The older I get the more conscious I am that the animals are also connected to my thoughts. [...] If I would make sense in a western mind I would say they have the same telepathy and they are all connected. And they know their place in the world. They may not be able to communicate to us in human terms but they do communicate to us in our dreams. One particular dream I had was [...], I was amongst a group of harbor seals surfacing, and I thought a voice deep in my thought told me these are your cousins. And these seals are actually looking at my eyes and basically telling me I have to respect them. [I intervened and asked: How can you shoot them nonetheless?] That's what they want, they want to give themselves, it's their way of giving. The animals to me are givers, we are the takers. Human beings are the ones that take, but

it's the animals that give. And I look at them as equal creatures. [...] I didn't get to respect animals over night. It's a life long process, you continue to learn and the older you get you remember what your grandfather used to say or your father and you start wondering, hm, I think they were quite on to something, they knew something.

The close interaction of people, animals, and the land that Peters describes is found in numerous Inuit poems, legends, and mythology, just as the themes of adapting to change and of being patient and resilient come up in those stories. One can often find stories about abandonment made necessary by the scarcity of provisions or of orphans who are reviled and excluded but who always triumph over their enemies in the end.⁸ These stories are made accessible to us through collections such as Penny Petrone's invaluable *Northern Voices: Inuit Writing in English* (1988) that traces the tradition from its earliest stages to its modern expression or Robin McGrath's *Canadian Inuit Literature: The Development of a Tradition* (1984), which is the most comprehensive account of Inuit literature today. McGrath's anthology *Paper Stays Put: A Collection of Inuit Writing* (1980), which is illustrated with drawings by Alootook Ipellie and which comes with an excellent *Teacher's Handbook* (1981), is also highly recommendable.⁹ These collections illustrate traditions reaching back to pre-contact times as well as show that contemporary Inuit literature in English is a powerful new voice in Canadian literature.

One example is the work of Alootook Ipellie, who died much too young in 2007. Ipellie was a salient figure in Canadian and Inuit culture in many different respects, as editor, translator, writer, and cartoonist for several newsletters such as *Inuit Today*. His comic strips, e.g. "The Ice Box," which tells stories from the life of a traditional Inuit family facing contemporary culture, or the strip "Nuna & Vut" about two Inuit brothers, show that he straddled two cultures. As he himself put it, his comics "concern the conflict between the Inuit and the Qallunaq – the word in Inuktitut for

8 In his introduction to *I Breathe a New Song: Poems of the Eskimo* (in Lewis 1971), Edmund Carpenter points out that abandonment is a salient theme in Inuit writing, as captured, for instance, in the Sedna myth, the Inuit's most popular creation myth. But orphans or abandoned people always triumph over their enemies and become powerful figures. The theme of abandonment is hence always coupled with that of resilience and survival.

9 Robin McGrath published both of these books under her maiden name Robin Gedalof. In *The Teacher's Handbook to Paper Stays Put*, McGrath claims that despite their variation, the stories and poems she collected in her anthology deal with similar fields and themes: satire, culture shock, abandonment, and the relationship of land and culture. Satire, according to Gedalof is the most salient theme and technique in contemporary Inuit writing. It draws on the tradition of song duels that were "judicial instruments used to settle disputes, they were a means of compelling conformity to social rules, and they provided an outlet for anger and frustration" (1981, 105). Song duels believe in the actual power of the word to deride and harm an opponent. Alootook Ipellie, for instance, used satire in his writing as a way to cope with problems of cultural contact by ridiculing them.

whites – lifestyle.” “I speak for the Inuit,” Ipellie continued, “being an Inuk myself, through my work. I strive to make seen the dilemma my people are facing in the midst of this great transition from a nomadic way to an urban [...] way of life” (in Mavreas 2007, 45). Ipellie’s work keeps traditions and cultural practices of the Inuit alive by blending oral tales and myths with problems of the post-contact period such as substance abuse or television addiction. His hybrid art is a powerful process of transculturation using the forms and media of Western culture to transport issues of Inuit culture, both old and new. His book *Arctic Dreams and Nightmares* is an example of how Ipellie’s work deals with the misunderstandings between northern and southern culture in word and image. For instance, in the story “After Brigitte Bardot” the text deals with Bardot’s media-supported protest against seal hunting in eastern Canada which had severe impacts for the Inuit as European tanneries refused the import of seal pelts after the event. The incident perfectly illustrates how environmentalists’ claims in and about the North often jar with the concerns and necessities of the indigenous people in the area (Shadian 2007; Cooke 2004).

4. Conclusion

As the two different parts of this essay have shown, what is North very much depends on one’s cultural standpoint and interest in the North. In our time, a few factors may make Canadians listen even more closely to an Inuit perception of North so that the frontier and the homeland, the real and the imagined North, can probably finally be seen together as on a stereoscopic viewer. The first factors concern Canada’s need to re-invent itself as a nation. Although the notion of white supremacy still haunts the Canadian nation, Canada since the 1980s has tried to promote its model of cultural diversity. And it comes as no surprise that once more the North has been used as a perfect space to symbolize those efforts. In his speech at the inauguration ceremony in Nunavut on April 1st 1999, Prime Minister Chrétien said: “On the eve of the new millennium, we are showing the world that respect for diversity is an essential and enduring aspect of our history and future together” (qtd. in Salloum 1990, 82). Envisioning the North as a test case for a democracy built on diversity and multiculturalism is a long way from the rhetoric of the Canada First Movement or from seeing the North as “a bastion of freedom and a permanent frontier,” as Hugh Keenleyside, then Commissioner of the Northwest Territories did in 1949 or from “the new Canadian North” that Diefenbaker conjured up in his prime ministerial address in 1958 (Morrison 1998, 8-9). And a few things may ensure that this time it is not going to stay just political rhetoric. The most imminent of them are probably the drastic effects of global warming. Ice shelves are eroding at an alarming rate, caribou – a staple of the Inuit diet – are falling through once solid ice, lichen as a food source for the caribou is reduced by permafrost instability; polar bears and seals are moving further north in search of pack ice, and at the same time new species are moving in such as grizzly bears or salmon. Rising water and soften-

ing permafrost threaten houses, roads, airports, and pipelines. Toxins are spoiling food and contaminate the water. It is high time to act, and the Arctic has turned from an Inuit to a Canadian to an international issue. The Inuit are, as Mary Simon, president of the ITK drastically phrased it, "the canary in the global coal mine," but what is happening in the North is going to affect all of us eventually (qtd. in Griffiths 2007).

From largely ignoring the Inuit until World War II, when Canada discovered its real North as it needed to build defense lines and pipelines, Canada moved to forcefully assimilating the Inuit, trying to turn them from nomads into settled people, often to secure national land claims – the CBC recently ran a report about how in the 1950s the government apparently killed thousands of sled dogs thus depriving the Inuit of their economic as well as cultural basis of survival¹⁰ –, the government then moved on to acknowledging the land and lifestyle of the Inuit, more or less, with the creation of Nunavut. What I find fascinating is that in the last decade, as Jean Chrétien's speech or Paul Martin's Northern strategy show, Canada seems to be rediscovering its Nordicity, hopefully in terms that really include Inuit knowledge and hopefully by finally giving up an idea of North which has done more to obscure the North than to actually explain it.

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