

rigid in a final posture of convulsive movement. They could be anywhere in the Arctic Ocean for the ice flows hundreds of kilometres a year; long separated now, perhaps at intervals the ice opens and one or the other is revealed for a moment or a year, a mast stump or a bowsprit reaching like a hand, briefly, up into the light somewhere off the coast of Ellesmere or Axel Heiberg islands.

In these essays, Wiebe is concerned as well with not only presenting the "story" from the perspective of the white European but from the native point of view. The first page of the text is a map that is an inverted version of the official map of the Arctic, presenting the "Inuit View to the South." The oral and mythological realities of the Inuit themselves are included, not only through non-native records, as the Copper Inuit myth "The Origin of Ice," which introduces the essays, but through passages where Inuit storytellers tell their own stories and sing their own songs. Wiebe includes, for example, passages from Tony Thrasher's well-known book *Thrasher . . . Skid Row Eskimo* and a "moving oral elegy" told by Felix Nuyviak of Tuktoyaktuk and recorded in 1976 about "gathering at Kittigazuit, or Christmas in old days."

What is most interesting about this book is not only the author's attempt to release the shape of the Arctic but his definition of the "all encumbering" material it issues from. For Wiebe, the arctic land and its geography is the true mystery, one he tries to unravel or "map" through the Inuit comprehension of the "necessary arctic distinctions between linear and areal space," a lack of understanding that Wiebe suggests doomed European explorers who came to the Arctic. Although the author's speculations about these visual and space perceptions are fascinating, he does not entirely make the linear/areal distinction clear to this reader. In his attempt to capture the spirit of this landscape, however, what Wiebe does convey clearly is the "restless line between land and sea" and the overwhelming difference of a landscape that is essentially water: a world that is one of relentless motion, or frozen as ice, renders one motionless. In the Arctic there is no sure ground — only "green icy land bordered everywhere by water." Wiebe poetically captures this terrain and indeed validates it, not as a passage to another place as it existed in the imagination of the European explorer, but as a landscape or nordicity, and desirable as such, as "true North not Passage to anywhere." In this sense, the essays are inspiring and an invitation for the reader who has not yet done so to visit the Arctic.

On one level, this book is good bedside reading for the intelligent layperson who is willing to be captured by the spirit of the Arctic and who has some knowledge of the history of exploration there, a knowledge that Wiebe to some extent assumes, and who is also prepared to entertain a style that shifts between ideas and sources in an impressionistic — even fractured — way. On quite another level, it is a must for the senior student of Canadian literature who is intrigued by the contemporary blurring of literary genres in a postmodern culture and who is interested in the issues of historiographic metafiction, which are sure to be found, even peripherally, embedded in this text. *Playing Dead*, however, will probably not satisfy a determinedly facts-minded reader. This collection of essays is very much a speculative, poetic and loosely woven literary contemplation of one man's academic knowledge, historical interests and personal experiences of the North.

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GREENLAND SEEN THROUGH 50 YEARS OF STAMPS: 1938-1988. By ROLF GILBERG and MADLS LIDEGAARD. Copenhagen: The Greenland Post Office (Wilders Plads P.O. Box 100, DK-1004 Copenhagen K, Denmark), 1989. Originally published in Danish, 1988. 122 p., 6 maps, illustrated throughout, index, no bib. Softbound. Cdn\$27.50 plus \$2.50 mailing.

The 50th anniversary of Greenland's postal service has been celebrated by the release of an exceptionally fine commemorative catalogue that will be of interest to philatelists, historians and anthropologists. Written by ethnologist Rolf Gilberg and teacher-writer Mads Lidegaard, the book is generously illustrated by Jens Rosing, former director of the Greenland Museum, who was also responsible for many of the original stamp designs. His chapter explaining how the designs were arrived at and carried out is an interesting bonus. Most of the stamps have been reproduced in black and white alongside their individualized and complementary cancellations.

The subject matter covered in the stamps is elaborated in the catalogue and covers Greenland's natural history, prehistory and history, traditional culture, art and legends, and several special topics. As in many commemorative publications of this kind, the illustrations have been given pride of place over the text, which is nevertheless both well researched and lively reading. The line drawings, most on ethnological themes, are particularly charming and extremely detailed. Considering its small, softcover catalogue format, the book is crammed with information, presented attractively in a straightforward manner.

There are one or two problems with accuracy in the text in sections written by Lidegaard, who does not appear to have the depth of expertise equal to that of her co-author. For example, she begins her description of the narwhal (p. 40) with the statement that it is found only in Greenland waters. In fact, this mammal is distributed throughout the Atlantic sector of the Arctic Ocean, including Lancaster Sound and the Barents Sea. It might be mentioned here that a useful notation throughout the book is the use of authors' initials following each item, which is helpful in assessing the research.

Rolf Gilberg's descriptions of traditional material history and his renderings of Greenland versions of four Inuit myths are succinct and readable. Finally, though, it is the stamps themselves, along with their accompanying explanatory illustrations, that make the book a unique addition to the existing literature.

The small (18.5 x 26 cm) format of the book makes it easy to handle but constrains the reproduction of some of the detailed line drawings and photographs. The excellent quality of the reproduction and the printing compensates in large part for this, however, and may account for the rather steep price. Sometimes the translation is a little rough: "The kayak was tailor-made to the whaler who was to use it as whaling tackle" (p. 88). The lack of a bibliography is an inconvenience.

This enjoyable reference will be of special interest to anthropologists, who will find the catalogue of illustrations invaluable, but also to anyone concerned with Greenland's history, natural history — or stamps. The initial 1988 Danish edition was translated and published in English in 1989 with only 2000 copies. It will undoubtedly demand further printing.

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