

ARCTICNESS: POWER AND VOICE FROM THE NORTH. Edited by ILAN KELMAN. London: UCL Press, 2017. ISBN 978-1-787350-14-4. xix + 184 p., b&w and colour illus., 28 contributors, notes with references, index. Hardbound, £35.00; Softbound, £17.99. Also available in epub, PDF, mobi, and html formats.

I was worried that the Arctic Institute asked me to review this book because its title, “Arcticness,” lends itself well to my penchant for making up words by adding “-ness” to the end (more on that later). I admit I was skeptical that a book with such a title could adequately capture, as its title suggests, the “Power and Voice from the North.” I was happy to find that I was wrong.

Living in the North, and a Northerner by inclination as well as habitation, I tend to be somewhat protective of the place that I love and annoyed by the academic tendency to overanalyze, overthink, and often overlook the very qualities that make this place so special—not to mention the frustrating habit of making remarkable research unintelligible to the average person through jargon and overly technical writing. Thankfully, Ilan Kelman has provided an antidote to inaccessible Arctic scholarship via this text.

Kelman’s objective was to create a sense of the forces inventing and reinventing the Arctic, as defined both by Arctic people and by outsiders, while inviting the reader to rethink the Arctic and learn new ways to consider the North and its people. While we all know of the many physical ways in which the Arctic is defined (e.g., the tree line, latitude) and understand the cultural complexity within these boundaries, this is the first text I have seen which seeks to define its very “... state or quality—in this case, the quality of being Arctic” (p. v). A new concept was needed to capture the depth and width and breadth of the experience of being Arctic.

So why “Arcticness”? I suppose that traditional definitions of the Arctic work well for academics who need a solid, quantitative means of delineating their study areas, or for politicians disputing resources and rights-of-ways, but somehow they do not work for people of the North: we don’t look out our windows and identify ourselves by these boundaries. Kelman recognizes the need for a new kind of definition that crosses these natural and artificial lines in the same way that ice, migratory birds, and winds cross these landscapes; and most importantly, a definition that includes the people within the place and includes us Northerners in defining ourselves within our world.

What opportunities does this text offer to allow us to consider the “state or quality of being Arctic”? Rather than focusing on one discipline, Kelman has deliberately chosen to collect the knowledge and wisdom of both insiders and outsiders across the disciplines. As he states, “The Arctic breathes diversity and Arcticness embodies variety” (p. 4). As I traveled through this compilation, I saw that the genius of this book lies in its ability to stitch together the wonderful randomness of research and art in order

to understand the wonderful randomness of the North. Where else would you see a graphic comic on the impact of Canada’s residential school system, and an Arctic haiku butted up against an article entitled “Radar Observations of Arctic Ice”? To continue with the travel analogy, in many ways, turning the pages from one subject to another reminded me very much of Arctic air travel. On any given flight northward, you are likely to sit next to a person with a fascinating life, a thought-provoking story, or a wonderful passion for his or her work. The contributors to *Arcticness* are very much those Arctic seatmates—Indigenous people, scientists, academic researchers, and poets each take their turn educating and enlightening you and ultimately broaden your view of what the Arctic is.

If you want to abide by the spirit of “Arcticness,” remember this: Northerners have a gift of creating fun and finding humour in everyday situations. Make sure you have some fun with this book. One of the ways that I really enjoyed this compilation is by randomly opening to a page and finding gems of brilliance and unexpected ways of thinking. Two examples follow:

The environment in the Arctic is often described in international literature as fragile, vulnerable and sensitive, but as a Northerner you tend, rather, to perceive the surrounding area as great, strong and potentially dangerous, fostering respect and continuous adaptation. (p. 52)

Injustice—rather than justice—should be the focal point for energy justice research through a more explicit understanding of master frames of “injustice” in the pursuit of understanding Arcticness. (p. 85)

Isn’t this the true measure of a great book—the ability to open to any given page and find yourself immediately drawn in? I would have loved to throw in a few more quotes to whet your appetite, but I’d rather that you pick up the book and find your own epiphanies.

Shortcomings? The only thing that I feel may be lacking is a contribution by Arctic youth. Given that youth are so culturally and demographically important to the region, I would have loved to see their perspectives on what currently constitutes “Arcticness” and their predictions on the future of this state of being. Had the final chapter “Arctic Futures” contained the perspectives of circumpolar youth (or dare I suggest artwork by Arctic children?), I don’t think I would have been left wanting more. As it is, I do want more: I want another volume with the same mix of technology, humanity, art, uncertainty and possibilities, with the addition of the voices of the next generation, who will play a major role in defining Arcticness.

Did this book meet its objectives? Absolutely. Just as living in the Arctic forces you to confront your own limitations and stretch yourself beyond what you know, this book guides you out of your comfort zone to assess the physical, spiritual, cultural, and environmental realities that

make up this vast region. I am reasonably convinced that all examinations of the Arctic should follow this template. Only good things can happen when the natural scientist considers the Indigenous understandings of place, the artist considers the unique views offered by science and technology, and the anthropologist becomes educated by both. This is the true spirit and success of Arcticness.

So, back to my love of adding *-ness* to words: I hereby dub *Arcticness* a work of “awesomeness” and highly recommend it to anyone—professional researcher or not—who is seeking a well-rounded and diverse view of the state of being Arctic.

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A SYMPHONY OF SCENIC BEAUTY – AVANNAARSUA: GREENLAND’S FARTHEST NORTH. By PETER R. DAWES and JAKOB LAUTRUP. Copenhagen, Denmark: De Nationale Geologiske Undersøgelser for Danmark og Grønland (GEUS), 2017. ISBN 978-87-7871-473-2. 390 p., colour illus. Hardbound. 300 Danish kroner incl. VAT, excl. postage.

Peter Dawes and Jakob Laurup have produced a visually stunning book of photographic images from northern Greenland, or *Avannaarsua*, as the land north of 78° is known in Greenlandic. Fieldwork with the Geological Survey of Denmark and Greenland brought them to this uninhabited region on bedrock-mapping expeditions during the latter half of the 20th century. (Disclosure: I participated in five expeditions to East and North-East Greenland with Laurup and am a huge fan of his photography.) Laurup was a staff photographer for the Survey, and many of his photos have been published in support of geological research (e.g., Henriksen, 2008), but this is the first major collection of his work focusing on the artistic elements of the Greenland landscape. Although photographs by others are included in the book (demonstrating that even amateurs can take great pictures in Greenland), the majority of the images are Laurup’s. Dawes composed the text for the volume; as a retired geologist who spent his career with the Survey, including 22 summers in Greenland, he knows the place well.

Rock, ice, and water naturally figure prominently in the book, which is organized around five themes: solid rock, weathered rock, glaciers, rivers and lakes, and the sea. The authors overlay a symphonic structure on these themes, which they call movements. The first movement, Rondo, is dedicated to “Bedrock and its bold landscapes,” the second movement, Pastorale, covers “Surficial deposits and subdued landscapes,” and so on. The musical metaphor is a bit too contrived for my taste, but may appeal to others.

At the very least, the symphonic structure does not detract from the images or the underlying organization of the five main themes. As in a symphony, words are superfluous; it is the music—and here, the images—that imprint on the mind. This is not to say that the book is quiet. Many of the photographs evoke the sounds of the Arctic: the howling wind, rushing water, drip of melting ice, creaking glaciers, exploding icebergs, and the rumble of a rock fall, to name a few.

Readers will find much to enjoy in this book, where rock, ice, and water are arranged in endless geometric patterns and true color. Lines, planes, polygons, and 3-D shapes form single geometric elements that dominate some of the images, such as the linear gullies accented by snow (p. 32), parallel rock planes reminiscent of a layer cake (p. 94), regular polygons of patterned ground (p. 199), and irregular, amoeboid shapes on the surface of melting ice (p. 375). Repetition of patterns, such as the zigzag folds (p. 130), form delightful designs, while combinations of geometric elements—for example, planes, triangles, and polygons in the vista of stratified rock, dissected hills, and patterned ground (p. 158)—are visually stimulating. The images give the reader a tangible sense of the Arctic color palette with all its various hues, lighting, reflections, and shadows. White, blue, brown, and gray are the dominant shades, with splashes that surprise the eye of yellow, orange, pink, and purple from flowers and lichen. Contrast achieved by the juxtaposition of light, material, geometry, and color lends boundless interest to the images. One of my favorites, a ribbon of golden sand next to a still inlet, with a background of bright, white icebergs against dark rock, is perfectly composed (p. 350). Other readers will choose their own favorite photos, for their own reasons, but the experience should bring pleasure to all. From sunlight caught on the wisp of a cloud matched by the heads of cotton grass (p. 204) to something as mundane as shadows cast by a mud-covered boulder (p. 351), the pictures capture the essence of Avannaarsua and carry the reader into the sublime beauty of this place.

The book contains more than 300 large, color images, including 15 spectacular panoramic views that spread over two pages. The photos pull the reader in, simultaneously magnifying the landscape and shrinking the viewer. The few shots with people (e.g., p. 131–132) really emphasize the vastness of the land. Details of native plants and animals come to life in the vignettes, smaller photographs augmenting the larger views. The quality of the reproduction is adequate; however, the more homogenous parts of some images, particularly sky and snow, are pixelated. The publishers have successfully achieved a balance between resolution and price that works. The figure captions are consistently informative; my only quibble is that not all of them provide the location. A useful place name map conveniently occupies the back cover, and maps of the physiography and geology are also included. Explanatory text has been kept to a minimum, with a glossary and just enough information to help the reader