

COMPASS. By MURRAY LEE. Portland, Maine: Publerati, 2022. ISBN 978-1-735027383. 342 p., b&w illus., notes, glossary. Softbound. Cdn\$22.65. Also available in e-book format.

It is hardly a coincidence that Murray Lee's survival story is entitled *Compass*. The title places the story in the tradition of Arctic literary fiction from Margaret Cavendish's 1668 *The Blazing World* to present-day speculative fiction where the adventure is almost invariably set in motion by malfunctioning equipment, most often a compass. The loss of control leads to cognitive estrangement and a re-evaluation of the protagonists' value systems and worldviews. Apart from this fictional tradition, Lee explicitly invokes exploration literature and explorer journals, particularly accounts of the last days of explorers driven mad by hardships and starvation, demonstrating a different kind of cognitive estrangement.

The anonymous narrator, called Guy by his Inuit guide Simeonie, travels to Nunavut to see the floe edge. The unspecific name makes him everyman, but also marks him as an outsider and Simeonie's equal or even inferior. Starting out as a marine archaeologist, Guy has become a cruise ship lecturer, relating the stories of famous adventurers to vacationing audiences in need of a thrill. In his lectures, Guy refers to these adventurers by their first names only: Ernest (Shackleton), Edmund (Hillary), Amelia (Earhart), Roald (Amundsen), and Lee peppers the text with others like Sir John Franklin, George Vancouver, and James Cook. By using the first names of historical European explorers, Lee and his character Guy are assuming their audience is part of an exclusive community that recognizes these names. It is not necessary for the reader to be able to identify these "middle-aged White poseurs" (p. 163) however. While it might add to the reading experience as a kind of bonding exercise, the narrator's detached, ironic attitude to the dead explorers whose journals he has studied means that as readers, we already know how to interpret their accomplishments. Rather than expressing his admiration and wishing to emulate their exploits, Guy shows his lack of belief in the stories about Arctic heroism he has told and questions the myth of the gallant explorer who sacrifices himself for his comrades. The dry narrative voice sets the tone of the book and indicates that even though much of the story that follows adheres to the familiar man-against-nature pattern, the heroic outcome will be absent.

The novel is witty and well-written, its humour as much in the language as in the incidents. It is remarkably well-crafted, with interlocking themes that return with a twist throughout the text. Guy is taken off a coveted speaking tour to Hawaii because he has shown insensitivity to Indigenous concerns. He is also forced to admit to himself that his so-called first-hand descriptions of the Arctic environment are nothing of the kind. In fact, he has never seen the boundary where the ice turns into water and thinks about it as a geographical place, the "Edge." As a

lecturer and a writer who has neglected to acknowledge the contributions of his colleagues, he has lost his ethical compass. The visit to Nunavut is intended to rectify these falsehoods and give him a new start.

The importance of mythical beliefs is made clear at an early stage when the one thing Guy feels impelled to buy in the local store is a soapstone statuette of the Inuit sea goddess Sedna. The story moves from dirty realism, enumerating the brand names of various pieces of equipment, snow mobiles, and Coke cans, to magic realism through the appearance of a talking caribou. Lee depicts Guy as the alien, the hapless outsider whose expensive Gore-Tex gear is miserably insufficient in comparison with Inuit seal skin kamiks. Yet, there is no romanticized valorization of Inuit tradition, and Simeonie's matter-of-fact relationship to spirituality effectively deflates any sense of Arctic mystique. Practical needs come first, with high-tech snow mobiles used alongside traditional qamutik sledges:

"How do you keep your hands warm, Sim?"

"I dunno," he said. "I'm Inuit. I drink the blood of seals."

"That keeps you warm?"

"Sometimes."

"Huh," I said. "I'm White. I eat granola bars and spend way too much money on gloves."

Simeonie took a drag. The end of his cigarette sparked.

"Also, my machine has heated handlebars," he said.

(p.150)

The journeys of discovery that form the basis of Guy's cruise ship talks often resulted in names on maps: Vancouver, Cook Islands, Franklin Strait, and numerous others. Guy, in contrast, intends to visit a place that, to all intents and purposes, does not exist. The edge is a literal threshold space that does not cover land but water, which means that its position constantly shifts. In her study of uncontrollable regions in British thought, Siobhan Carroll (2015:20) uses the term "atopia," describing both the ocean and the Arctic as resisting enclosure and permanent settlement. The edge is such an atopia, a place that explodes the explorer trope of the feminine land conquered by the male gaze. For a territorial person it is nowhere, a place where known boundaries do not exist, and recognisable logic does not apply. In the tradition of hollow earth fiction, this nowhere place is frequently the North Pole itself, as the access point to an alternative world where the protagonist experiences a loss of self that leads to revitalization and rebirth. For Guy, the cognitive estrangement is the result of an accident that leaves him stranded on an ice floe beyond the edge, where, as Simeonie's mother tells him, spirits "pass freely between the worlds" (p. 85).

The final section of the novel is a powerful critique of colonial attempts to control the Arctic and a recognition of how Arctic space and conditions resist control. Alone on the ice, Guy struggles to orient himself in time and space by building a compass-cum-sundial from broken off pieces

of the sledge, only to realise that a sundial cannot work on a revolving piece of ice. He treats the ice floe as territory, pacing the perimeter and patrolling the boundaries against the seals, but as Sedna's emissary the walrus informs him, "ice is a gray zone" (p. 282), neither Sedna's dominion nor that of the humans. His hallucinatory conversations with the sea creatures signal his increasing insanity, but also a growing realisation that the floe is a shared habitat where the rights and needs of seals count as much as the survival chances of the human.

Compass is an impressive debut by a writer who knows his material well. The novel is an extraordinary combination of farce, dark comedy, tragedy, and character study, informed by the geography and culture of the traditional Inuit community in Naujaat, Nunavut, where Murray Lee has served as a fly-in doctor for fifteen years. It is exceptionally well-edited, the only flaw a confusion of "lying" with "laying" (p. 207), and attractively typeset and bound. *Compass* wears its philosophical messages lightly and uses humour and absurdity to convey lessons about Arctic history, exploitation, tourism, bumbling overconfidence, and human defeat.

REFERENCES

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THE SECURITY OF ICELAND AND THE ARCTIC 2030: A RECOMMENDATION FOR INCREASED GEOPOLITICAL STABILITY. By ROBERT P. WHEELERSBURG. New York: Springer, 2022. ISBN 978-3-030-89948-6. xx + 149 p., maps, b&w and colour illus., bib. Hardbound. US\$119.99. Also available in pdf and e-book format.

Iceland holds a unique place in the Arctic and in NATO. A small country of less than 400,000 people smack in the middle of the North Atlantic Ocean, it has no military. Instead, it has used its strategic location to entice the United States and the NATO alliance to act as its security guarantors. It has a small coast guard and police force, but otherwise has limited ability to defend itself. For the author Robert Wheelersburg, a retired US Army Captain, this is unacceptable; indeed, it feels personal.

Wheelersburg was a member of the Icelandic Defense Force in the 1990s, serving at the Keflavik base before it was mothballed in 2006. He wrote this book following a Fulbright Arctic Scholar residency at the Centre for Arctic Policy Studies at the University of Iceland, and in the midst of the pandemic. You can sense how invested he is in Iceland's security, and how troubling its vulnerabilities are to him.

Wheelersburg weaves through personal anecdotes, Arctic state security policies, movie quotes, and saga history in building his case. This is not a typical academic book. It is a proposition. He is recommending Iceland develop its own sub-strategic security force.

What is a sub-strategic security force? The term does a lot of work in this book. Wheelersburg describes Arctic sub-strategic security as "the capability of a country in the region to counter threats to maintain its sovereignty to and protect its citizens, whether alone or as part of an alliance" (p. 3). The sub-strategic part entails organized crime, terrorism, smuggling, and human trafficking: things well short of where NATO would have to intervene under Article 5, but of a nature that could overwhelm front line, civilian police agencies. At a practical level, Wheelersburg advocates for the Icelandic Parliament to create a national security force using the country's existing resources: "the security force recommended here consists of its world class search-and-rescue teams, supplemented by trained reserve personnel" (p. 10).

And this is where it gets detailed. The author is an academic but not a typical one; much of his Army career was spent writing exercises that anticipate a worst-case scenario. This positionality becomes apparent. For the average Icelander, life is safe, and the threat of invasion by Russia or China, let alone terrorism and organized crime, is not top of mind. For Wheelersburg, it was literally his job to think about these things and ensure someone was ready to respond to them. In the event of an emergency, he assesses Iceland will be woefully unprepared. And that emergency will occur at some point, as they always do. An entire chapter is dedicated to such scenarios: a cruise ship hijacking; an invasion following a volcano eruption; an occupation of the northernmost Grimsey Island; a human trafficking operation. While not out of the realm of possibility, these scenarios probably don't worry many Icelanders. But as far as Arctic security studies is concerned, they are interesting to contemplate.

Wheelersburg thoroughly outlines the structure of his proposed force: a battalion with two companies, each of which includes a Headquarters Recon Patrol, a Heavy Recon Patrol, a Weapons Recon Patrol, and a Light Recon Patrol (p. 63). If all this is a bit remote for the average reader, I expect it will be appreciated by military, former military, and security studies experts.

There is also the requisite analysis of the Arctic states' security policies, focused on the sub-strategic level, and a chapter on globalism as it relates to the Iceland security environment. But while those are the more traditional