

the literary use of Saami ended as abruptly as it had begun — within five years, the newly emerged Saami-minded intelligentsia of the area was fully silenced and destroyed.

In the last article of the book — apparently the only one written exclusively for this collection — the editor tells one more sad story from the lives of the Soviet Saami: a fragmentary biography of Maxim Antonov, who was born on the Kola Peninsula in 1919, was captured as a prisoner-of-war by the Finns, then served as a soldier in the Finnish army and as an informant for Finnish linguists, and died in exile in Sweden in 1983, without having had any contacts with his relatives since 1941. Finally, the book is concluded by a bibliography of the non-Russian literature on the Russian Saami.

Books such as this are not very suitable for critical review in the normal sense of the word, as the authors have not written their contributions to be published in the present collection. In fact, a significant part of the content was not meant to be published anywhere, especially not in a foreign language in a foreign culture — and least of all after the fall of the Communist regime. Nevertheless, the specific value of the book is that the editor has carefully translated and made this unique and otherwise inaccessible material available anew in its original form. True, the content of the book is thoroughly depressing, but it is precisely this kind of candid documentation of the lives of individuals that enables us to understand more deeply the traumatic past of the indigenous peoples of the Soviet north. (Jussi Ylikoski, Giellagas Institute for Saami Studies, PO Box 1000, 90014 University of Oulu, Finland.)

**SCOTT'S LAST BISCUIT: THE LITERATURE OF POLAR EXPLORATION.** Sarah Moss. 2006. Oxford: Signal Books. xii + 251 p, illustrated, softcover. ISBN 1-902669-87-8.

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Literary and cultural critics have been relatively slow to engage with narratives of polar exploration. Particular regions (such as Canada's far north) have certainly attracted attention within national contexts, but broader attempts to trace the ways in which Arctic and Antarctic travel has been imagined and represented have been few. The last decade has seen increased interest in this area — publications such as Francis Spufford's *I may be some time: ice and the English imagination* (1996), Bill Manhire's anthology *The wide white page: writers imagine Antarctica* (2004), and Peter Davidson's *The idea of north* (2005) testify to this; but much remains to be done. Sarah Moss' *Scott's last biscuit* is a timely addition to the field.

*Scott's last biscuit* is a book 'about the literature of polar travel, about why polar travellers continue to write as the last candle gutters and the frost-bitten hands jerk the pencil stub, and about why and how we consume their writing' (page x). 'Literature' here is defined broadly; the

analysis moves fluidly between medieval sagas, travellers' tales, official exploration accounts, poems, and novels (all written, as Moss acknowledges, from a Western, largely European, perspective), with the emphasis mainly on non-fiction writing. While it had its origins in a doctoral dissertation, *Scott's last biscuit*, like Spufford's book, is aimed primarily at a popular readership; lists of sources are provided, but no footnotes or detailed citations. And like Spufford, Moss oscillates between north and south polar travel tales without making much distinction between the two, although she gives the Arctic the lion's share of the book. Her historical sweep, however, is broader than Spufford's, ranging from tenth-century Norse texts through well-known explorers' accounts such as those by William Edward Parry, Robert Falcon Scott and Richard E. Byrd, to a 1960s Mills and Boon's novel, *Arctic nurse*. Her approach is also catholic, combining examinations of famous exploration narratives with micro-histories of more obscure adventures and close textual analyses of relevant documents.

These broad parameters mean that comprehensiveness is impossible, and Moss does not aim at it. She structures her book thematically, dividing it into six parts, each of which consists of a series of vignettes drawing from a variety of historical and national contexts. Little attempt is made to synthesize these six parts into a broader whole, although they overlap with and inform each other in productive ways. Moss begins her analysis not with the typical heroic polar journey but rather with an attempt by Europeans to live permanently in remote Arctic regions. She relates the establishment and mysterious decline of Norse colonies in Greenland, arguing that their stories offer 'a compelling mixture of homeliness and strangeness' (page 56). Part two moves on to more recent, temporary attempts to inhabit the polar regions: Parry's and Fridtjof Nansen's very different shipboard winters in the Arctic, and Byrd's famous season alone in the Antarctic. Part three looks at explorers who narrate their own grim conclusions. The meaning of any expedition, Moss observes, lies in its story returning to those back home, even if many or all of its participants do not. This is followed by a section focused on the Franklin expedition and its aftermath. Moss reflects on the ongoing urge to exhume dead bodies that has characterized responses to the disaster, conveying both the surreality and the cultural relevance of its various episodes very effectively. She pays particular attention to the intimate relationship between text and body: the corpse of John Hartnell, twice exhumed and twice autopsied, is 'a book by many hands... a palimpsest' (page 159). The fifth part of *Scott's last biscuit* looks at female polar travellers. Given that most previous cultural histories — even those, such as Lisa Bloom's *Gender on ice*, that take the gendered nature of polar narratives as their topic — have concentrated on men and masculinity, Moss' sensitive attempts to trace individual women's experiences of high-latitude life are a welcome contribution. The final section gives brief but often illuminating analyses of imaginative responses

to the Poles, including poetry by John Donne, James Thomson, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, as well as Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* and several children's stories.

The result is a book that is never dull. It skipping between so many different contexts may frustrate readers with an in-depth knowledge of a particular expedition or individual, but it will engage the intelligent non-specialist reader. Moss' style is similarly both a strength and a weakness: her urbane, wryly amusing tone makes for a lively, enjoyable read, but there are times, especially when retrospective judgements are being made of men experiencing horrific conditions, that its knowingness feels misplaced.

Moss' training is in literary rather than polar studies, and the diverse historical and geographical territory she covers in *Scott's last biscuit* means that there are inevitably minor slips that will grate on Arctic and Antarctic specialists (such as the claim that Ernest Shackleton went to the Antarctic 'several times' between the *Discovery* and *Endurance* expeditions [page 21]). However, the main shortcoming of *Scott's last biscuit* is in a sense less to do with the author herself than with the influence of a particular approach that has characterized almost all of the small amount of literary criticism of polar narratives published to date. This is the tendency to take Roland Huntford as the key, if not the sole, authority on Antarctic exploration, and to read polar expeditions more generally through an established, unquestionable binary: English explorers: bad; other explorers (particularly Scandinavian ones): good. Moss is less simplistic than this, but there are times in the section on Scott's last expedition where Huntford's influence is clear, and some of the factual slips mentioned above appear to be a product of her use of this particular lens. Moss claims that Roald Amundsen '(probably) believed Scott's gentlemanly protestations that he was really only there for science and had a merely incidental interest in such vulgarities as the pole' (page 20), when Scott's announcements in British newspapers in 1909 stated quite explicitly that reaching the Pole was his primary aim. Similarly, Moss claims that 'Scott had planned a base camp at the Bay of Whales, but he arrived to find Amundsen already there and decided, to Amundsen's puzzlement, that it would be rude to stay' (page 100). Certainly Scott's Eastern Party met Amundsen and changed their plans (becoming the Northern Party) as a result, but Scott had already established his main camp on Ross Island and was not amongst the party. In both cases, historical precision takes second place to sarcasm aimed at Scott's over-developed sense of social etiquette (something that, along with his general incompetence, is simply taken as read by Moss and most other literary critics). Elsewhere, English explorers are refused the benefit of the doubt offered to others. Moss states that it is 'quite impossible that [Parry's] voyages were really as orderly and cheerful as his published accounts suggests' (page 60), noting that other perspectives are unavailable as they automatically became naval property;

however, she accepts quite readily that Nansen's 'was a happy ship from the beginning' (page 73), although again none but the expedition leader's own account is cited. Scott is criticized for using 'an entirely untested technology for a dangerous journey' (page 102), while the account of the Andrée balloon expedition observes that 'Conventional and established technologies had failed to reach the Pole . . . so it was not obvious that newer ones would be any less reliable' (page 117). Moss' otherwise perceptive and nuanced textual analysis is likewise most tenuous when inflected by a desire to denigrate Parry and Scott. These complaints reflect my own impatience with the one-sidedness of recent cultural analysis of English polar explorers; no doubt a reader sympathetic to Huntford's perspective will find these sections of the book as stimulating as the rest of it.

In the end, Moss' insightful cultural and textual analysis, engaging style, and eye for a good story outweigh the problems identified above. The range of topics and experiences covered mean that those who take exception to some sections will likely be fascinated by others. *Scott's last biscuit* is a book that will inevitably provoke some *Polar Record* readers, but it also has a good deal to recommend it. Like the books by Manhire, Spufford, and Davidson, it enriches understandings of the polar regions, and paves the way for further literary and cultural examinations of Arctic and Antarctic narratives. (Elle Leane, School of English, Journalism and European Languages, University of Tasmania, Private Bag 82, Hobart, Tasmania 7001, Australia.)

**WINTER.** Cornelius Osgood. 2006. Lincoln, Nebraska, and London: University of Nebraska Press. xviii + 242 p, illustrated, soft cover. ISBN 0-8032-8623-6. £11.99. doi:10.1017/S0032247406325995

Cornelius Osgood is well known in northern studies as a superb ethnographer who wrote monographs on several Northern Athabaskan groups, including the Gwich'in, the Han, the Deg Xit'an or Ingalik, and the Dena'ina. Osgood's purpose in writing these ethnographies was to record, in as much detail as possible, a pure aboriginal culture. To achieve this goal he looked for isolated Athabaskan groups hardly touched by EuroAmerican civilization. Osgood did this in 1927 when he traveled to northern British Columbia, but that trip produced no ethnographic data, largely because he could not find such an isolated group. In 1928 Osgood set out again, this time to Great Bear Lake, hoping to find an Athabaskan people unaffected by contact. This attempt ended in failure as well. In the preface to his monograph *Ingalik material culture*, Osgood provided insight into why he failed on this trip. First, he could not speak the language; second, he had no understanding of the values underlying the culture; and finally, he never understood what he was seeing and could not sort out those traits that he thought were aboriginal from those that were supposedly modern (Osgood 1970: 6).