



# *The Idea of North*

*Myth-Making and Identities*





*Finnish perspectives on the long nineteenth century*

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**Editors:** Frances Fowle and Marja Lahelma

**Designer:** Vilja Achté

**Cover illustration:** Vilja Achté

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# Contents

<b>Preface</b>	
Frances Fowle and Marja Lahelma .....	4
<b>Introduction: Conceptualising the North at the Fin de Siècle</b>	
Frances Fowle and Marja Lahelma .....	5
<b>Sámi, Indigeneity, and the Boundaries of Nordic National Romanticism</b>	
Bart Pushaw .....	21
<b>Photojournalism and the Canadian North: Rosemary Gilliat Eaton's 1960 Photographs of the Eastern Canadian Arctic</b>	
Danielle Siemens .....	34
<b>Quaint Highlanders and the Mythic North: The Representation of Scotland in Nineteenth Century Painting</b>	
John Morrison .....	48
<b>The North, National Romanticism, and the Gothic</b>	
Charlotte Ashby .....	58
<b>Feminine Androgyny and Diagrammatic Abstraction: Science, Myth and Gender in Hilma af Klint's Paintings</b>	
Jadranka Ryle .....	70
<b>Contributors</b> .....	88

# Preface

Frances Fowle and  
Marja Lahelma

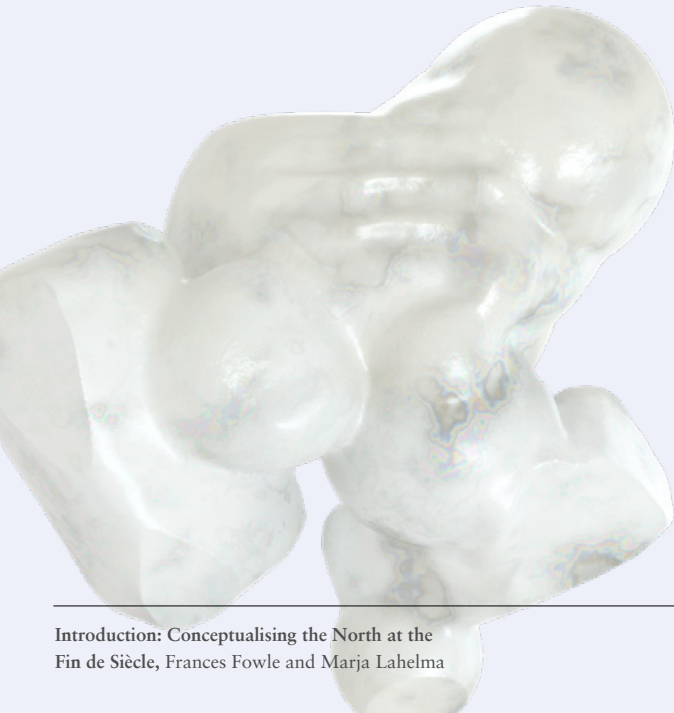


This publication has its origins in a conference session convened by Frances Fowle and Marja Lahelma at the Association for Art History's Annual Conference, which took place at the University of Edinburgh, 7–9 April 2016. The vibrant exchange of ideas and fascinating discussions during and after the conference gave us the impetus to continue the project in the form of a publication. Building on Peter Davidson's influential publication *The Idea of North* (2004), our aim has been to investigate the mythical associations and cultural appropriations of the North and northernness in nineteenth- and twentieth-century European visual culture. Mythical notions of the north have existed in European culture since antiquity, fuelled at various times by archaeological discoveries, Arctic expeditions and cultural revivals. Romanticism brought on a veritable “cult of the north,” which gained in strength throughout the nineteenth century, riding on the back of the nationalist wave that swept across Europe at the fin-de-siècle. Northernness is not a simple concept; inhabitants of Nordic regions have been described as pure and spiritual, but also as feckless and irrational; the northern terrain could be portrayed as idyllic and enchanting, but also as remote, barren, and inhospitable. The articles in this volume shed light on mythical conceptualisations of the North and northern identities from various perspectives relating to art and visual culture in the Nordic countries, Scotland, and Canada. The idea of North emerges here as a complex notion that can be employed as a tool for idealisation as well as abuse. The authors examine revivals

and assimilations of the North, taking into consideration issues such as mythical origins, spiritual agendas, and notions of race and nationalism, tackling also those aspects of northernness that attach themselves to politically sensitive issues. We wish to extend our warmest thanks to the authors for their thought-provoking contributions, and to the Birch and the Star for their financial support and for providing a platform for this publication.

# Introduction: Conceptualising the North at the Fin de Siècle

Frances Fowle and  
Marja Lahelma



Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the idea of North was becoming worryingly enmeshed with issues of race and national character, and these ideological debates affected the art world on many levels. The surge of cultural revivals that swept across Europe in the 1890s brought questions of national identity to the foreground, while in the field of social anthropology debates were raging about the superiority of one ethnic group over another. This phenomenon, which was fuelled at least in part by the publication of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859), is reflected in Joseph Deniker's 1899 map of the races of Europe showing a patchwork of "principal" and "secondary" racial groups (fig. 1). The French anthropologist and naturalist was one among many fin-de-siècle scientists who attempted to create a system of racial classification based on physical characteristics. By 1916 social ethnologists such as Madison Grant would identify a northern, specifically "Nordic" type that encompassed much of Scandinavia, the Balkans, the Netherlands, Britain, Ireland and northern France.<sup>1</sup> However, in the mid- to late nineteenth-century, the Nordic and Germanic or "Teutonic" races were regarded as quite distinct from another northern race, the Celts. The "mysterious Finns," considered to be partly Nordic and partly Oriental, represent a further case that can be examined in comparison with the Celts. As an introduction to this volume on the idea of North in art and culture of the fin-de-siècle and beyond, we focus on these two examples in order to shed light on the complexity of the notion of northernness in this context. The analysis that is presented here sets the tone for the whole publication, revealing that there existed several parallel and sometimes even contradictory conceptualisations of the North and

its inhabitants, and that the art world of the period was deeply affected by these debates. The remaining essays in this special volume expand and develop this analysis of northernness from a multitude of perspectives, focusing in particular on Nordic, Scottish, and Canadian visual culture.

## RE-INSTATING THE CELTS

In 1858 the Reverend Duncan McCallum observed: "That the ancient Scots were of Celtic origin is past all doubt," adding that "the Celtae, the great and mighty people [were] altogether distinct from the Goths and Teutones."<sup>2</sup> Celticism was associated with specific parts of Britain, Ireland and northern France. The Irish ethnologist Augustus Henry Keane (1833–1912), for example, defined the "Keltic fringe" as "the strips of territory on the skirts of the Teutonic and neo-Latin domains in the extreme west – Brittany, Wales, parts of Ireland, the Scotch Highlands and the Isle of Man," as well as Cornwall and Cumberland.<sup>3</sup> However, it was the Highlands of Scotland, the area north of the Highland fault, that was said to be most purely Celtic. In the nineteenth century religious difference, as much as racial prejudice, complicated the issue and led British historians to cast the Celts in a dubious light. The predominantly Catholic north was invariably contrasted unfavourably with the Teutonic, Protestant Lowlands of Scotland. Antiquarians such as John Pinkerton (1758–1826) went so far as to observe that "Scotland was held back by its degenerate Celtic population,"<sup>4</sup> and the Jacobite Risings were interpreted by some as "Celtic intrusions into the Germanic lowlands."<sup>5</sup>

In *The Origin of Aryans* (1889) the Reverend Isaac Taylor boasted that the Lowland Scot was intellectually superior to

his northern neighbour, being “more purely Teutonic than the English”.<sup>6</sup> The “Gothic” Anglo-Saxon was portrayed as the natural master to his Celtic neighbour: “what a lion is to an ass, a Goth is to a Celt,” wrote Pinkerton.<sup>7</sup> The “Kelts” were occasionally portrayed as instinctive and creative – but also feckless, irrational and ill-tempered – as opposed to the more rational and disciplined Teutons. This perception endured well into the nineteenth century: in 1870 Scottish historian John Hill Burton (1809–1881) asserted that that the Teutonic or Germanic races were more noble, rational and in every way superior to their Celtic neighbours. In his seven-volume *History of Scotland*, Hill Burton described the Celts (whether Gauls, Welsh, Irish or Scottish Gaels) as a degenerate race, lazy and improvident.<sup>8</sup> The Celts were also associated with pagan rather than Christian practices, and this contributed further to the anxiety and suspicion expressed by certain nineteenth-century historians.

The Celts were frequently dismissed as socially inferior by the English press. As Thomas Huxley noted in an address to the Anthropological Society in 1870:

*If the writer means to be civil, the Celt is taken to be a charming person, full of wit and vivacity and kindness, but [also] ... thoughtless, impetuous and unstable, and having standards of right and wrong so different from the Anglo-Saxon that it would be absurd, not to say cruel, to treat him in the same way; or if the instructor of the public is angry he talks of the Celt as if he were a kind of savage, out of whom no good ever has come or ever will come, and whose proper fate is to be kept as a hewer of wood and a drawer of water for his Anglo-Saxon master.*<sup>9</sup>

In 1870 Huxley – biologist, evolutionist and Darwin’s “bulldog” – published several articles in *Nature* and the *Pall Mall Gazette* objecting to the narrow and bigoted attitudes towards the Celtic race that were then prevalent.<sup>10</sup> As

Huxley and others pointed out such divisiveness was too simplistic and limiting, since parts of England and Lowland Scotland (the so-called “Teutonic” areas) were colonized by Celtic tribes and the Celts themselves were ethnically diverse, originating from different parts of Europe and Asia.

The Celtic Revival saw the gradual reinstatement of the Celt as instinctive, creative, heroic and even intellectual.<sup>11</sup> Sir Walter Scott in his Waverley novels encouraged the notion of the Celt as representing the emotional side of the Scottish temperament, as opposed to the rational, Teutonic side. McCallum insisted on their wisdom, writing: “We must not ... imagine the Celtae to have been altogether a gross and rude nation ... The Druids [for example] lived together in colleges and societies ... philosophising upon the highest subjects.”<sup>12</sup> Meanwhile, Ernest Renan in his 1854 *La Poésie des Races Celtiques* and Matthew Arnold in his 1867 *On the Study of Celtic Literature* defined the Celts as a sensitive and imaginative race.<sup>13</sup> By 1907 they were perceived as an antidote to the materialism of the previous century: “In a prosaic and utilitarian age,” wrote one commentator, “the idealism of the Celt is an ennobling and uplifting influence both on literature and life.”<sup>14</sup>

#### THE EVERGREEN – A NORTHERN SEASONAL: A CASE OF SPLIT IDENTITY?

The high point of this Celtic revival was Patrick Geddes’s four-volume journal the *Evergreen – a Northern Seasonal*, published in Spring and Autumn 1895 and Summer and Winter 1896.<sup>15</sup> Geddes spearheaded a veritable northern renaissance in Edinburgh – or as he termed it, a Celtic “renascence,” with the *Evergreen* as its main voice piece. On the face of it the *Evergreen* was a profoundly Celtic publication, edited by two ardent Revivalists, the writer William Sharp, and the artist John Duncan.<sup>16</sup> Its aims were blatantly propagandist, designed to promote Celticism in particular – and northernness more generally – as health-giving, regenerative and anti-decadent, associated with

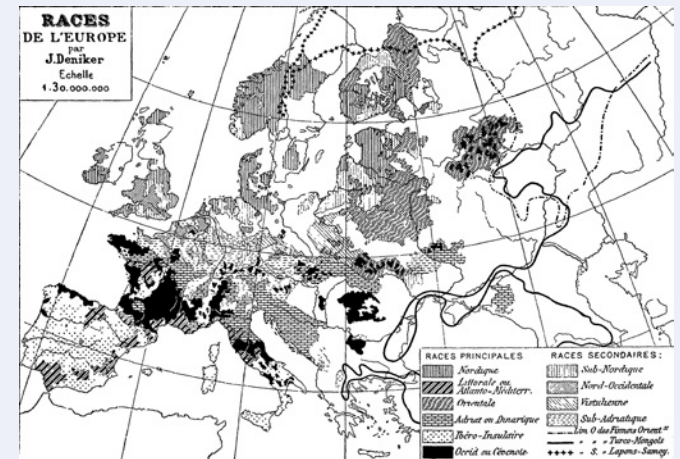


Fig 1. Map of the races of Europe, Joseph Deniker, *The Races of Man: An Outline of Anthropology and Ethnography*, London: Walter Scott, 1900.

cultural revival and evolution; for Geddes, like Huxley, was a biologist and evolutionist.<sup>17</sup>

As Robin Nicholson has argued the journal was established in opposition to the decadent London-based *Yellow Book*.<sup>18</sup> The opening essay or “Proem” by W. Macdonald and J. Arthur Thomson demanded a return to the purity of nature “from urban to rural, from fever to fresh air.” Everything about the design of the Northern Seasonal was supposedly inspired by purer northern and apparently Celtic sources and a large number of the illustrations, including the frontispieces and some of the head- and tailpieces in the *Evergreen*, draw on Celtic designs loosely inspired by insular manuscripts such as the *Book of Kells*. However, the choice of woodcut as a technique undoubtedly finds its source in German Renaissance woodcuts and, much to Sharp’s consternation, the journal that materialised was a hybrid, combining not only Celtic but also Germanic and even more decadent influences. In this way, as this essay will argue, it reflected the contradictory forces at play within the Scottish Celtic revival.

The journal had obvious contemporary German links, since Duncan trained in Düsseldorf alongside artists such as Robert Engels and Thomas Heine, both of whom went on to produce illustrations for the avant-garde journal *Pan*, published in Berlin between 1895 and 1900, and *Jugend*, the Munich-based journal which was launched in 1896.<sup>19</sup> Just as Duncan produced images of Celtic heroes such as Arthur and Cuchulain for Geddes, Heine and Engels illustrated Germanic legends popularised by Wagnerian opera. Here of course is where Celtic and Germanic legend overlap, for Lohengrin is a character in German Arthurian literature. The son of Parzival (Percival), he is a knight of the Holy Grail sent in a boat pulled by swans to rescue a maiden who can never ask his identity. Perhaps more importantly, Heine and Engels were among those artists at the forefront of the German print revival of the late nineteenth century.

In particular they embraced the “primitive” forms and rough finish of the woodcut, a technique associated with late Medieval Germany. This was also the technique that Duncan, Mackie and others adopted for *The Evergreen*, ensuring a deliberately unsophisticated and hand-crafted appearance in contrast to the mechanically reproduced illustrations of the London-based *Yellow Book*.<sup>20</sup>

Many of the *Evergreen* illustrations for the first volume (the *Book of Spring*) have a naïve quality, evident in works such as Paul Sérusier’s *Pastorale Bretonne* (fig. 2) which, although partly indebted to Breton popular prints, the *images d’Epinal*, also shares some of the characteristics of Northern Renaissance woodcuts. Other illustrations appear to have been loosely inspired by Germanic or at least Flemish originals; an example is the somewhat austere illustration *Maria Regina Scotorum* by Pittendrigh Macgillivray.<sup>21</sup> However, the *Evergreen* draws on a diverse range of sources and some of the more avant-garde illustrations are closer to the art nouveau illustrations in *Pan* and *Jugend*. This was a source of huge chagrin to Sharp, who objected to works such as Duncan’s apparently Celtic-inspired headpiece for his own poem “The Norland Wind” (fig. 3) and Robert Burns’s Beardsey-esque *Natura Naturans* (fig. 4). Burns’s illustration is dated 1891 and yet was not published until 1895, contemporaneously with closely comparable works by Heine and the Finnish artist Akseli Gallen-Kallela, reproduced that year in *Pan*,<sup>22</sup> and Lovis Corinth’s 1896 illustration of a nude for *Jugend*.

The cover chosen for all four volumes of the *Evergreen* was also, arguably, Celto-Teutonic. Consciously different from the *Yellow Book* and other avant-garde journals of the period, it appears to have been Celtic-inspired, possibly finding its source in early psalters such as the seventh-century Stoneyhurst Gospel. In fact there are more numerous Germanic sources for this type of embossed leather cover, including sixteenth-century Flemish calf



Fig 2. Paul Sérusier, *Pastorale Bretonne*, *Evergreen*, *Book of Spring*, 1895, National Galleries of Scotland.

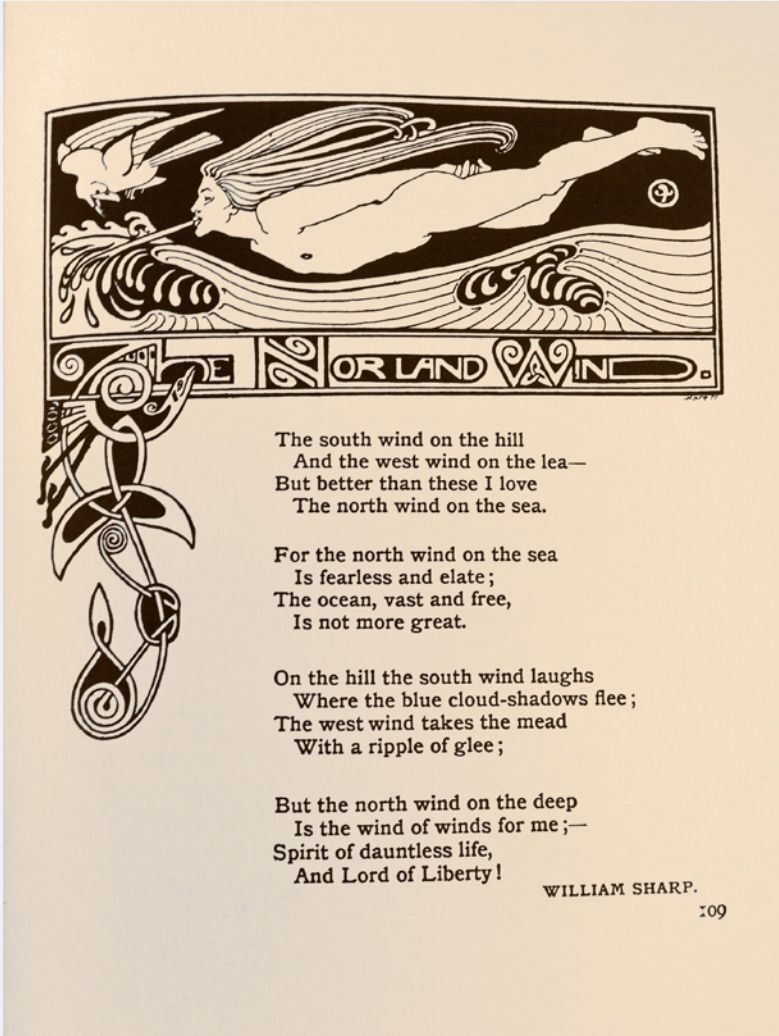


Fig 3. John Duncan, Illustration to William Sharpe "The Norland Wind," Evergreen, Book of Spring, 1895, National Galleries of Scotland.



Fig 4. Robert Burns, *Natura Naturans*, Evergreen, Book of Spring, 1895, National Galleries of Scotland.



binding for early psalters and German cameo binding, which includes embossed painted vellum cameos, rather like the coloured design on the *Evergreen*.

All four *Evergreen* covers are illustrated with a Celtic Tree of Life motif, designed by Charles Hodge Mackie (fig. 5). The tree has spreading roots and branches: it draws energy from the earth and reaches up to the spiritual realm in a continuous cycle of birth and rebirth. Again the source of this strange palmate tree can be found in German Renaissance woodcuts of the Arbor Scientiae, the tree of Knowledge, connecting heaven and the underworld; but it is also the world tree or cosmic tree, portrayed in various religions and mythologies, from the ancient Assyrian tree of life (the Celts were said to have journeyed from Assyria) to the Nordic Yggdrasil, an immense mythical tree that connects the nine worlds in Norse cosmology.<sup>23</sup>

To Geddes the tree of life was also the evolutionary tree, a metaphor for Darwin's phylogenetic tree of common descent. Within the pages of the *Evergreen* Duncan illustrated Geddes's Arbor Saeculorum (fig. 6), the Tree of the centuries, where the Renaissance is symbolised by the blazons of noblemen and the hat of the Puritan movement.<sup>24</sup> On the other hand the tree's strange palmate forms appear to have originated in Egypt; both Duncan and Sharp were theosophists and, while the *Evergreen* was profoundly anti-decadent, it also possessed a strong spiritual and esoteric dimension, which reveals itself in other Duncan illustrations such as *Anima Celtica* (fig. 7) also in the *Book of Spring*. In this much-debated image, Duncan visualizes the Celtic spirit or "soul" as a female sorceress or psychic medium, conjuring up scenes from Celtic mythology, inspired by James Macpherson's *Poems of Ossian*.<sup>25</sup> These include the "Birth of Ossian," the "Awakening of Cucchulain," "Blind Ossian and Malvina" and a reference to the swine of the Celtic Tuath[a] de Danaan who continually renew themselves. In keeping with Geddes's plea for cultural

creativity and national revival, Duncan chose pan-Celtic tales on universal themes involving metamorphosis and reincarnation or regeneration.

In addition to Celtic mythology, however, Duncan was inspired by other, more decadent sources, notably the esoteric writings of Sâr Péladan, creator of the Salon de La Rose + Croix. In his artistic doctrine *L'art idéaliste et mystique* (1894) Péladan stated that "Art has never been able to translate beauty beheld by the eye because beauty derives from dreams, desires and visions."<sup>26</sup> The images in *Anima Celtica* exist in the Celtic woman's imagination or, I would suggest, have been summoned up through her psychic powers. The legends emerge from a curious incense burner, the smoke from which divides the various elements of the picture and ends in a swirl of Celtic interlace. The woman's psychic episode has been prompted by the smell and intoxication of the incense. The sense of smell was promoted by theosophists such as Cristoph Cranch as early as 1856 but, after the publication of Huysmans's *A Rebours* in 1884, was denounced by the likes of Max Nordau as profoundly decadent. Since they ran contrary to the *Evergreen's* anti-decadent agenda, such sources were downplayed at the time and have been subsequently overlooked by modern art historians.

Nevertheless, as follower and later friend of the Irish writer on mysticism George William Russell (1867-1935), or "Æ," William Sharp was steeped in theosophy and was interested in psychic phenomena.<sup>27</sup> He believed in the deeply mystical aspects of Celticism and even evoked a spiritualist source for the poems of Fiona Macleod. In 1898 he claimed that, when writing *Muisme Chríosa* or *Mary of the Gael*, published in the second volume of the *Evergreen*, he had "in some measure become interpretative of the spirit of 'Colum the White.'"<sup>28</sup> In other words, by taking on the female persona of Fiona Macleod he was able to act as a



Fig 5. Charles Hodge Mackie, Cover design with Celtic Tree of Life motif, *Evergreen*, Book of Autumn, 1895, National Galleries of Scotland.



Fig 6. John Duncan, *Arbor Saeculorum*, Evergreen, Book of Spring, 1895, National Galleries of Scotland.



Fig 7. John Duncan, *Anima Celtica*, Book of Spring, 1895, National Galleries of Scotland.

“medium” through which the spirit of Saint Columba was able to communicate.

Murray Pittock has observed that Sharp’s personal notion of Celtic Revival, as illustrated by the poems and novels of Fiona Macleod, involved a lethal “fin de siècle cocktail of tragic gloom and old romance,” rather than a firm conviction of what constituted Celtic identity. Sharp was unconcerned with archaeological accuracy and was later attacked by Russell for his unsound ideas and pseudo-Celticism.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, Sharp was highly critical of what he deemed the crude and decadent images in the *Evergreen*. In particular, he delivered a scathing attack on Duncan’s *Anima Celtica*:

*With the exception of Duncan’s “Apollo’s School Days” & some of the head-pieces, there is not a drawing [...] which is not crude in draughtsmanship and in design — or in one or two instances frankly meaningless! [...] in particular, a really deplorable plate, “Anima Celtica,” by Duncan. It is weakly imitative to start with, & in my judgment has not a redeeming quality. Aubrey Beardsley may be a depraved & decadent artist — but at least he is an artist & original: but work of this kind is the mere dross and débris of the “fin-de Siècle” ebb. I am afraid that even the most casual critic will notice the bad drawing throughout [...]*<sup>30</sup>

Despite his own theosophical leanings, Sharp was at pains to distance himself from the decadence of fin-de-siècle art, and to emphasise the purity of the Celtic revival. His only nod to European symbolism in the *Evergreen* was his translation of *Les Fleureurs (The Nightcomers)* by the Belgian friend and contemporary of Maurice Maeterlinck, Charles van Leerberghé. The design used to illustrate this particular piece was a curious hybrid of heraldic grotesques with suggestions of Celtic interlace. Indeed, many of the

head- and tailpieces in the first edition are hybrids, rather than straightforward Celtic designs; while the designs for Fiona Macleod’s own poems could well be described as “un-Celtic” – above all James Cadenhead’s somewhat flimsy head- and tailpieces for *Day and Night*. And while some of the Celtic content in the first edition of the *Evergreen* has decidedly un-Celtic imagery associated with it, the opposite can be said of some of the material supplied by French intellectuals in the second volume. Both Abbé Félix Klein’s *Le Dilettantisme* and Elisée Reclus’s *La Cité du Bon Accord* (in the *Book of Autumn*), for example, are accompanied by Celtic ornament.

Such contradictions arise throughout the *Evergreen*, for, as the first half of this essay has shown, many of the Celtic revival artists associated with the journal drew not only on Celtic design, but also on early Germanic sources, suggestive of a broader, pan-Northern identity than has previously been acknowledged. Nevertheless, these “Teutonic” sources, as well as art nouveau and more esoteric influences were underplayed by Geddes or disapproved of by Sharp, in order to place the Celts at the forefront of the Scottish cultural revival of the 1890s, and in the process to align the Scottish north with notions of purity, regeneration and creativity.

#### THE GERMANIC SCANDINAVIANS AND THE MYSTERIOUS FINNS

The ambiguous ethnic status of the Celts and the multiplicity of sources for the Celtic Revival reveals the complexity of the notion of northernness. The Finns seem to hold a similarly ambivalent position within the racial and cultural maps of Europe. Geographically Finland is situated between Scandinavian to the west and Russia to the east. After a long period of Swedish rule, the area had been lost to Russia in the Napoleonic wars, and between 1809 and 1917 it constituted an autonomous Grand Duchy of the Russian Empire. In Deniker’s attempt to construct a racial map of Europe, the Scandinavian peninsula is home to the “Nordic

race,” but the situation with Finland is more complicated; it is considered to be partly Nordic and partly Oriental.

Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century racial theories had established the conception that the Finnish people belonged to the Oriental or “Mongoloid” race.<sup>31</sup> It was promoted by such prominent figures as the French anthropologists A. de Quatrefages and the elitist and aristocratic novelist Arthur de Gobineau. In his influential book *Essai sur l’inégalité des races humaines* (1853–55), Gobineau described the mysterious Finns as ugly, lazy, completely primitive, and belonging to the “yellow race.” For Gobineau, “les finnois” were among the original and primitive groups of people that had once populated large parts of the world but had in many places been superseded by more developed racial groups.<sup>32</sup> Gobineau’s theory was highly imaginary, based on myths and legends, and had very little scientific foundation. His interest in racial classifications was motivated by a pessimistic view of human civilisations, and he employed racial mixing as an explanation for cultural degeneration.<sup>33</sup> Yet, the idea of the eastern origin of Finnish people entered nineteenth-century textbooks, encyclopaedias, and reference books, which described the physical and mental characteristics of the Finns in a manner that corresponded to the assumed features typical for “Mongolians.”<sup>34</sup>

The notion that the Finns as a racial group originated from Asia became so well established that it was reiterated also in Finnish publications well into the twentieth-century, even though it was also often disputed. For instance, in 1924, Professor J. J. Karvonen, in an article discussing the racial question, felt it necessary to contest this longstanding belief. He argued on the basis of common physical characteristics that the Finns had to be classified among the Europeans, referring to the by then well-established view that the “Mongoloid” features that were occasionally encountered among Finns resulted from being mixed with the Sámi.<sup>35</sup> Karvonen’s reasoning reflects a broader shift in racial

ideologies that had started to take place towards the end of the nineteenth century. Certain ethnic groups were increasingly being perceived as superior to others, and these arguments were gaining amplified political significance. It hence became more urgent for Finns to establish that they did not belong to a racially inferior group. At the same time, with the rise of nationalism and the hopes of establishing an independent nation state, which in Finland became a reality in 1917 after the outbreak of the Russian Revolution, came the need to emphasise the originality of Finnish culture as distinct from both its eastern and western neighbours.

These ideological debates also entered the Finnish art world that around the year 1900 was going through a particularly vibrant period, later to be branded by art historians as the “Golden Age” of Finnish art. Like the Scots who were looking forward to a Celtic Renaissance, the Finns believed in the coming of a Finnish Renaissance. It could be perceived as part of a broader Nordic revival or as something that was specifically to do with the presumed ancient origins of Finnish culture. Akseli Gallen-Kallela, who was among the major artists of the period, has become an iconic figure in Finnish art history and an embodiment of artistic nationalism. Already in his own lifetime Finnish art historians and critics were starting to pigeonhole him as a “national” artist – a role that he was himself somewhat reluctant to take on. In reality, Gallen-Kallela was an internationally minded artist and a cosmopolitan who had studied in the small academies of Paris in the 1880s and from the 1890s onwards established strong contacts with the German art world. In Berlin, he was among the Nordic artists and critics who gathered around the avant-garde publication *Pan*, which was one of the main organs of the new generation of German artists. The aim of this publication was to promote the very best contemporary art, but it also played a significant role in the establishment of a Germanic tradition around historical and contemporary

figures, such as Albrecht Dürer, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Arnold Böcklin.<sup>36</sup>

Yet, the art historian, German lecturer, and cultural mediator between Finland and the Germanic world, Johannes Öhquist, who wrote the first broad presentation of Finnish art history (1912), saw in Gallen-Kallela’s art a manifestation of the archaic, primal vigour of the Finnish “race” and its eastern roots. Unlike the other leading Finnish artist of the period, Albert Edelfelt, whom Öhquist described as a pure-blooded “German” steeped in European sophistication, Gallen-Kallela retained the ability to plumb the raw depths of the Finnish soul that remained untouched by civilisation.<sup>37</sup> From the 1890s onwards, Öhquist had been actively involved in the Finnish art world and he was a personal friend of Gallen-Kallela and Edelfelt. However, he has gained a notorious reputation due to his connections with the National Socialists in Germany in the 1930 and 40s.<sup>38</sup> As we can see, even his earlier art criticism sometimes contained hints of racial theorisations, but these were very different from the Nazi ideologies that he was later to adopt and promote.

How, then, are we to understand Öhquist’s comments regarding Gallen-Kallela and Edelfelt belonging to different racial groups? At least partly these kinds of ideas stem from the division between the Swedish and Finnish speaking Finns. Edelfelt was a member of the Swedish speaking upper class while Gallen-Kallela came from a more modest background and learned to speak both languages at an early age. Öhquist grouped him with the Finnish speaking population not only in the linguistic sense but also racially. These two aspects were commonly confused in racial debates of the day. Yet, for Öhquist, Gallen-Kallela was the more original and authentic artist than the over-civilised “Germanic” Edelfelt. Here the idea of North seems to extend towards east in order to construct a more archaic and primitive northerness separated from the Germanic/Nordic north.

In a way, these kinds of theorisations took the pejorative views presented by Gobineau and other earlier theorists and reversed them. The archaic origin of the Finns and their culture now appeared as a positive thing in comparison with Central European decadence and degeneration.

## KALEVALIAN MYTHOLOGIES

For late nineteenth-century Finns, *The Kalevala* (1835/1849) became an important national symbol and also a crucial component in racial and cultural debates of the period. *The Kalevala* is an epic poem composed by Elias Lönnrot, based on oral traditions but modelled after the great European epics such as the *Iliad*, *Beowulf*, and the *Nibelungenlied*, as well as James Macpherson’s *Ossian*. For Gallen-Kallela and many other artists of his generation, *The Kalevala* was a “holy book” that contained ancient wisdom.<sup>39</sup> This conception was fuelled by theosophical interpretations of *The Kalevala* that were attached to the conception that a new renaissance of the human spirit would originate in Finland and Scandinavia. Helena Petrovna Blavatsky referred to the Finnish epic in *The Secret Doctrine* and wrote a praising review of the English translation in 1888, while William Butler Yeats thought the poems to reflect a tradition that was even more ancient – and less occupied with the material world – than Scandinavian or Celtic mythology.<sup>40</sup> These kinds of claims also contributed towards the view of the Finnish culture as highly spiritual, and this idea became integrated into the theosophical formulation of different world periods, according to which it was now time for the “northern race” to lead the advancement of humanity. Some theosophists were of the opinion that their views were decidedly anti-nationalist and anti-racists, but there were others who believed in a kind of “spiritual racism.” They considered race to be an embodiment of spirit and thought that different races and peoples reflected different degrees of spiritual development.<sup>41</sup>

Väinö Blomstedt, one of the many Finnish artists who in

the 1890s developed an interest in both theosophy and *The Kalevala*, wrote in 1894 in a letter from Paris about a new movement that was being born: “Those who cannot follow will be led to a period of decadence, which has already begun. According to the cyclical law, it is now the Nordic region’s turn to have their say.”<sup>42</sup> A similar sense of Nordic superiority had been expressed by his close friend, the artist Pekka Halonen, already a couple of years earlier when he complained about the poor quality of the Paris salons of 1892:

*There is no point for us Nordics to send anything here; we are too good for that [...] You would not believe how badly the Frenchmen are starting to paint. They are going backwards with a rumble. They are so tired already that one feels sleepy just looking at their paintings.*<sup>43</sup>

The views expressed by Blomstedt and Halonen speak of a common Nordic identity – “us Nordics.” This feeling of superiority was to a great extent a result of the increased internationality of the art world at the end of the nineteenth century. The generation of Nordic artists that emerged in the 1880s and 1890s was the first for whom their “northern” heritage was no longer a burden to be shaken off through education but rather something to be cherished. When artist from the Nordic countries went to study and work in the artistic centres of continental Europe, it was natural for them to seek each other’s company. In the foreign environment, the similarities in their shared Nordic background were emphasized rather than the differences. It is important to bear in mind that although the Finnish language is not related to Nordic languages, majority of Finnish artist at the end of the nineteenth-century came from Swedish speaking bourgeois or upper-class families. Halonen, who came from a Finnish-speaking peasant background, is an exception but he learned to speak Swedish during his student years in Helsinki.

While in the 1880s Paris had been the unquestionable “Mecca” of the art world, towards the end of the century, Nordic artists were increasingly beginning to see it as decadent and degenerate. This was a direct consequence of their newly found Nordic (or northern) pride. In Halonen’s words Paris was “fit only for animals, the bourgeoisie, and bureaucrats; not for anyone who has even a slightly higher understanding of art.”<sup>44</sup> The northern background had the potential to give Nordic artists and their works a certain outsider quality that they could integrate as part of their artistic identities. In the European environment that valued all things that were considered “primitive” and “exotic,” it was possible to turn the stereotypical role that was enforced on them into an advantage.

However, alongside this Nordic identification among Finnish artists, there also existed the notion that was reflected in Öhquist’s comments, according to which the Finns – and particularly those coming from Finnish speaking backgrounds – were both racially and culturally different from the Nordics. One central figure in support of this line of thought was the artist, poet, linguist, inventor, and social activist Sigurd Asp (1870–1946), who later adopted the name Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspa. Although, he in fact rejected the notion of “race” in favour of a belief in the shared ancestry of all existing groups of people. He further argued that a culture and language that were closest to the ancient origin had been preserved in the depths of Finnish forests.<sup>45</sup> In 1915, Wettenhovi-Aspa gave out a publication titled “The Golden Book of Finland” (*Finland’s Gyllene Bok I / Suomen kultainen kirja I*), which appeared at once in the original Swedish and in Finnish translation. Despite being a fierce defender of the language, Wettenhovi-Aspa’s own knowledge of Finnish was meagre.<sup>46</sup> The book had been in the making for a few years, and already in 1911 it had been discussed at an artist’ gathering in a restaurant in Helsinki. On this occasion pre-orders had been placed by Gallen-Kallela, Blomstedt, and Öhquist, among others.<sup>47</sup>

However, the subject gained more immediate urgency in 1914 when the University of Helsinki’s Swedish-speaking students’ party delegation had published a collection of essays defending the privilege of the Swedish-speaking minority and arguing for their racial superiority in a Pan-Germanic spirit.<sup>48</sup> Wettenhovi-Aspa’s book appeared as an aggressive and polemic reaction against this publication.

To support his rather fanciful linguistic theorisations, Wettenhovi-Aspa referred to European scholars, such as the Viennese professor Heinrich Winkler, who had argued that Finnish and Japanese languages belonged to the same linguistic group, and Jules Martha, professor of Latin at Sorbonne, who had recently claimed that the Etruscans had spoken a Fenno-Ugrian language.<sup>49</sup> Wettenhovi-Aspa argued that *The Kalevala* was the product of a culture that was more advanced and civilised than that of the Germanic people. Although he did not specifically mention theosophy in his argumentation, his readings that emphasised the spiritual and non-violent essence of Kalevalian poetry were very similar to theosophical interpretations of the Finnish epic.<sup>50</sup> Within the context of the present article, it is particularly interesting to note that according to Wettenhovi-Aspa, the original people of northern Europe had been “Fenno-Celtic.” From the name of the Celtic hero Fingal he derived the name for a Fenno-Celtic language and people, “Finngallian” (*fingalliska*).<sup>51</sup>

Wettenhovi-Aspa developed his theories even further in part two of “Finland’s Golden Book” that appeared in 1935 and was titled “The Kalevala and Egypt.” Once again, in a manner that reflects the theosophical readings of the “national epic,” he set about to establish linguistic and cultural connections from the Kalevalian myths to Egypt and other ancient civilisations.<sup>52</sup> Wettenhovi-Aspa himself noted that his interest in Egypt was first awakened during his early years as an artist in Paris where he socialised with August Strindberg and exhibited at the Salon de la

Rose+Croix, and was very likely to have been exposed to theosophical ideas.<sup>53</sup> For the theosophist, Egypt held a central place as the home of ancient mystery schools that preserved and passed on to the initiates secret traditions believed to be as old as humanity itself. Hence, Wettenhovi-Aspa's theories can shed light on the Finnish artists' interest in Egyptian themes that was awakened with the Symbolist movement in the 1890s. Particularly interesting, from this perspective, are those art works in which an apparently "national" content is combined with Egyptian elements. Perhaps the most intriguing example of this is *The Elias Lönnrot Memorial* (1902; fig. 8) – a public monument in Helsinki steeped in esoteric content.

*The Elias Lönnrot Memorial*, sculpted by Emil Wikström, presents Lönnrot, the collector of Kalevalian poetry, sitting next to the mythical hero Väinämöinen, both appearing equally corporeal and tangible. There seems to be no distinction between the worlds of myth and reality. On the left-hand side of the monument, carved upside-down in the granite base, is a hidden image of Antero Vipunen with a pentagram on his forehead (fig. 9). In Kalevalian mythology, Vipunen – a giant who lies buried under ground – is the only character who is more powerful than Väinämöinen. Väinämöinen goes to him to uncover words that he has lost and is swallowed by the giant, who in the end reluctantly spits him out and, in the process, Väinämöinen manages to capture the lost words.<sup>54</sup> The granite base together with the triangular composition of the bronze sculpture gives the monument a pyramidal shape. As a whole it embodies the idea of secret knowledge being passed on from generation to generation, and the Egyptian pyramid shape frames the composition, connecting Finnish mythology with ancient Egypt. To underline this message, the base contains a sentence from the 17<sup>th</sup> poem of *The Kalevala* "Sain sanat salasta ilmi," which roughly translates to "I retrieved the words from secrecy."



Fig 8. Emil Wikström, *The Lönnrot Memorial*, 1902, public monument in Helsinki.



Fig 9. Emil Wikström, *The Lönnrot Memorial*, 1902, public monument in Helsinki.

Egyptian themes and motifs also started to appear in Gallen-Kallela's art in the 1890s, around the same time when he was developing a new, more Symbolist style for his *Kalevala* imagery. His first *Kalevala* paintings were executed in a French naturalist manner, but he soon came to the conclusion that this "foreign" style was not suitable for representing Finnish mythology. Synthetist stylisation and eclectic combination of cultural impulses from a variety of sources, including Egyptian, Japanese, and Christian components as well as Finnish Folk traditions, resulted in a pictorial language that appeared more "authentic" and has come to be viewed by Finnish audiences as the "true" image of the Kalevalian world. Of course, this new style was deeply affected by international artistic currents, and the *Kalevala* paintings should not be perceived as something completely detached from the artist's other production. Paintings like *Conceptio artis* (1894–95, later cut into pieces) in which the mystery of art chased by the virile male artist is embodied by an Egyptian sphinx, and the *Kalevala*-themed painting *Lemminkäinen's Mother* (1896; fig. 10) both belong to the same mythical universe. The dead Lemminkäinen laying defeated on the ground is the artist who had gone too far in his search for the mystery – the sphinx – here embodied in the swan swimming in the dark water of the river of death. The swan has a more northern association than the Egyptian sphinx, but both appear as symbols of the mysterious, elusive ideal that remains forever out of reach. Moreover, as a mythical hero who can defeat death, Lemminkäinen is both Christ and Orpheus. Like Orpheus, he is cut into pieces, and in the painting's composition that follows the model of a Christian pietà, his dead body bears a close resemblance to the body of dead Christ – particularly the famous one painted by Hans Holbein the Younger (*The Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb*, 1520–1522, Öffentliche Kunstsammlung, Basel).<sup>55</sup>

Another *Kalevala*-themed painting by Gallen-Kallela that is particularly interesting to consider within the context of

this article, is *The Defence of the Sampo* from 1896 (fig. 11). The painting presents a scene in which Väinämöinen defends the mysterious Sampo, a symbol of prosperity, from Louhi, the evil witch who rules over the northern realm. The artist has taken quite a few liberties in relation to the original story. For instance, in the painting, Väinämöinen has several men in the boat with him, whereas in the poem he is accompanied by only two men, Lemminkäinen and the smith Ilmarinen, the divine creator of the Sampo. This image is clearly not to be seen as a straightforward illustration of the poem. Väinämöinen's men are depicted as Nordic blondes, whereas the men lurking behind Louhi's back have darker skin and more "Oriental" characteristics. Hence, the North represented by Louhi seems to be associated with the East as something foreign and dangerous, and racially inferior. According to the standard interpretation, which has a strong nationalistic emphasis relating to the political situation of the period, the defence of the Sampo is perceived as a symbolic defence of the Finnish soul and the Finnish nation. Louhi becomes a personification of the foreign ruler, the usurper of power, and her ugliness is that of the enemy. However, these kinds of interpretations did not really emerge until a couple of years after the painting was made, when a period of intense Russification began in the Grand Duchy of Finland.

Ville Lukkarinen, who has analysed the rich network of intertextual references in *The Defence of the Sampo*, has noted that Väinämöinen's blazing fury appears simultaneously as a shamanistic trance state and the ecstatic rage of a Berserk warrior. The raised arm holding a sword, a detail that does not appear in the original text, brings to mind King Arthur's Excalibur rising from the lake. These multiple allusions connect Väinämöinen's heroic struggle with a range of legendary material: he is a Japanese samurai, a Viking warrior, Odysseus, Jason, and a knight in pursuit of the Holy Grail.<sup>56</sup> Gallen-Kallela's interpretation of the Kalevalian episode can hence be seen to emphasize



Fig 10. Akseli Gallen-Kallela, *Lemminkäinen's Mother*, 1897, oil on canvas, 85 x 108.5 cm, Ateneum Art Museum / Finnish National Gallery, Helsinki (Photo: Finnish National Gallery / Pirje Mykkänen)

the universal level of meaning that is carried within this mythological material.

*The Defence of the Sampo* with its flattened composition and clearly defined colour fields was obviously inspired by Japanese woodcuts, and the figure of Väinämöinen closely resembles an image of a Japanese samurai. In fact, Gallen-Kallela also executed this work as a woodcut – one of his first attempts in this technique. At the same time, the painting also has a decidedly “Gothic” appearance. The figure of Louhi was probably modelled after a witch in a Medieval German woodcut.<sup>57</sup> She is a hybrid creature, between human and animal. The healthy masculinity and racial “purity” of Väinämöinen’s troops is opposed with the monstrous woman with the cowardly “Mongoloids” lurking behind her back. This juxtaposition can be examined in terms of the system of abjection and nationalism presented by Robert Miles. Abjection, as Miles points out, is interconnected with projection: what has become culturally abject is projected onto a convenient other. Only through this process of ideological forgery does it become possible to construct an authentic – or pure – national identity. The effort to construct a usable past is haunted by what has been abjected in the process.<sup>58</sup>



Fig 11. Akseli Gallen-Kallela, *The Defence of the Sampo*, 1896, tempera on canvas, 122 x 125cm, Turku Art Museum (Photo: Turku Art Museum).

However, if we look more closely at the figure of Väinämöinen, his features seem to have a slightly oriental appearance and his skin is not Nordic pale but slightly darker. This is also something that is repeated in other representations of Väinämöinen by the artist, such as in the much later painting *The Departure of Väinämöinen* (1906). This fact can perhaps partly be explained by the visual connection of the figure to a Japanese samurai. But I also believe that Gallen-Kallela may indeed have been inspired by similar theories that were reflected in Wettenhovi-Aspa’s writings about the ancient eastern origins of Finnish culture. After all, the two men moved in the same circles already in the 1890s and later established a life-long friendship.

Gallen-Kallela, as was noted above, was among those who pre-ordered Wettenhovi-Aspa’s “Golden Book of Finland,” published in 1914, in which his theories were expressed in a pseudo-scientific format. But as Wettenhovi-Aspa himself claimed, he had been developing these ideas since the 1890s. In 1895 he had exhibited a sculptural work representing Lönnrot and Väinämöinen that was intended as a proposal for Lönnrot’s monument – a task that was a few years later given to Wikström. Wettenhovi-Aspa’s sculpture was praised by many critics for its ideal content but criticised for the clumsy execution. One critic specifically noted the appearance of Väinämöinen, describing the figure as resembling a “Chinese Mandarin” rather than a Finnish sage.<sup>59</sup> However, based on what has been presented above, this was probably not a mistake made by the artist due to a lack of proper skill but rather a conscious choice. Väinämöinen appeared as an embodiment of the ancient eastern roots of the Finnish nation.

The examples discussed here demonstrate that the racial issues reflected in Finnish fin-de-siècle art and culture are far more complex than what the standard interpretations have acknowledged. The notion that Finns belonged to the Nordic race did not become fully established until the mid-twentieth century. This is an issue that needs to be taken into consideration when analysing artworks that seem to take part in debates about race and northernness. Moreover, it becomes clear in the light of this discussion that conceptualisations of the Finnish North were sometimes leaning towards the East in search of more ancient origins that would prove that the Finnish people were separate from their Scandinavian neighbours, and also that their eastern roots had nothing to do with the Russians.

#### APPROACHING THE IDEA OF NORTH

In this introductory essay we have explored various conceptualisations of the North that existed in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century culture, juxtaposing



the dominant Germanic north with Celtic and Finnish norths. As a cultural concept, the North is related to the notion of the “Orient” as it was famously analysed by Edward Said. Yet, while Orientalism establishes a strange and exotic “other” as opposed to what is familiar, the conceptualisations of Celtic and Finnish norths are also modes of self-understanding. Inevitably these perspectives were created in interaction with an outsider view. It was precisely the encounters with mythologised and stereotypical views of the North developed in Central European contexts that created the need for the kind of self-reflection that is examined here. This in no way indicates that these conceptualisations of the North were less artificial than concepts like the Orient that are more directly connected with issues of power and based on an “us-them” binary relation. As the articles collected in this volume clearly demonstrate, the idea of North is always ideologically charged, oppressive towards certain groups of people, and selective about the phenomena that is included. It is not to be understood as some kind of “natural” feature of northern culture or an innate characteristic of the northern people; it is an imaginary and mythical construction that reflects an interplay of various artistic, scientific, political, religious, and esoteric ideologies. Moreover, as Peter Davidson has pointed out, North is always relative, always a shifting idea that “moves [...] out of reach, receding towards the polar night, which is equally the midnight dawn in the summer sky.”<sup>60</sup> Yet, despite its unstable and largely fictional character, the different interpretations of North unquestionably had a very real impact on how artists were received both at home and abroad, and on the choices that they made.

The essays that follow approach the idea of North from different perspectives, critically examining the ways in which artists have both taken advantage of and been subjected to various mythological and stereotypical constructs. They examine different interpretations of the North in conjunction

with such rubrics as primitivism, authenticity, myth, identity politics, colonialism, and esotericism, reflecting on the fluctuations between insider and outsider perspectives, and revealing hidden ideological structures that have supported stereotypical notions of northernness. The idea of North emerges here as an ambiguous and politically sensitive issue that encapsulates complex Romantic assumptions about nature and society. While northernness could be associated with racial inferiority and lack of civilisation, the increasing discontent with modernity also fuelled an interest in origins and primitivism, vernacular traditions, folklore and myth. From this perspective, the North could appear as a source of revival and invigoration – it could provide an antidote to decadence and degeneration.

Bart Pushaw, Charlotte Ashby and Jadranka Ryle connect the idea of North with debates about National Romanticism; a central notion within histories of Nordic art. Discussing artistic representations of Sámi people, Pushaw’s essay examines the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion that have served to erase colonialism and indigeneity from these narratives. The period between 1880 and 1920 has generally been understood as an era of social harmony and “shared values” in the Nordic region, but the process of unification never extended to certain marginalised groups, such as the indigenous Sámi. Well-known artists like Carl Larsson created exoticising imagery of Sámi people and Sápmi landscapes, while also taking part in the organisation of exhibitions showcasing “racial types” and popularising hierarchical constructions of race. Larsson’s painting *Breakfast in the Open* (1913) “creates a ‘false idyll’ of communal joy among Sweden’s haves and have-nots,” revealing “not only a divide between social classes but also between who is and who is not Swedish.” Yet, Pushaw reminds us that there were also artists like Johan Tirén, who employed their works to advocate for indigenous rights. Nevertheless, Tirén’s paintings that presented Sámi people in a sympathetic and dignified manner resisted the emerging

avant-garde idiom and have hence been marginalised in the established histories of Swedish art.

In Charlotte Ashby’s essay that discusses Nordic landscape painting, the notion of National Romanticism is contested through a critical reading of images that are incompatible with the established national visions: “landscapes in which the lurking threat of the untamed North remains too strong.” Ashby’s analysis centres on the concept of the Gothic as a cultural turn towards North, and as an alternative approach to northern nature that can also give voice to unwelcome and uncomfortable truths about life in the North. Ashby describes Johan Christian Dahl’s *View from Stalheim* (1842) as a work that “fuses the modern, Gothic appetite for the terrible drama of wild places with a rugged, northern arcadia.”

Jadranka Ryle tackles the inherent masculinity of National Romanticism in her essay that analyses Hilma af Klint’s subversive and androgynous use of Nordic mythology. Like National Romanticism, af Klint’s art has a utopian element that is founded in myth – but hers is a “feminine androgynous utopia.” The esoteric and scientific elements in af Klint’s oeuvre have been discussed relatively widely in recent scholarship but much less attention has been paid to the manner in which she drew on Nordic mythical traditions. Her series of swan paintings, which Ryle analyses at length, presents a particularly interesting case since its mythical content is rendered in the form of diagrammatic abstraction, reconfiguring the swans as balanced cuboid forms. Ryle maintains that these abstractions of the swan figure “make a radical and politically charged feminine intervention into the gender inequalities obscured and naturalised by the National Romantic Norse revivals of her day.”

Danielle Siemens addresses the role of photography in constructing and disseminating ideas of North, continuing

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the colonial perspective that was introduced in Pushaw's essay. Her essay looks at the Canadian North through Rosemary Gilliat Eaton's photojournalism of the eastern Canadian arctic. She discusses the narrative agency of photographs in colonial discourses, revealing how late nineteenth-century formulas of using photography as "an extension of the colonizer's gaze" continued on into the twentieth century but were also transformed in the process. Siemens notes that, while in her published work Gilliat appears to follow the established primitivist discourse that defined Inuit as part of Canadian identity but maintained a cultural and geographical distance, archival research reveals a more multivalent picture. Gilliat was aware of the potential violence of the camera and the imbalance of power in her encounters with the indigenous subjects. She felt an ethical responsibility to avoid stereotypical representations of the North and strove to represent it as she saw and experienced it. The next step, as Siemens suggest, would be to return the photographs to their source communities to be recognised and described.

John Morrison examines nationalism and northernness within the Scottish context, analysing the role of myth as a "highly selective memory of the past used to stimulate collective purpose in the present." Scottish nationalism drew from mythical Highlandism as a paradigm that presented Scotland as an ancient land with continuing traditions. Morrison argues that the northern identity of the Scots was consciously manufactured outside of the North for the benefit of the majority lowland culture. Echoing the Canadian situation described by Siemens, in Scotland visual representations of northern culture were largely based on stereotypical, often entirely false presuppositions and hence this kind of imagery did nothing to empower the inhabitants of these exoticized regions.

Our aim with this publication has been to reveal and analyse hidden ideological structures within cultural

debates circulating around the idea of North. The different approaches to the question of northernness that are presented here all, in their own ways, reach beyond the traditional disciplinary field of art history, taking into account social and political debates, spiritual and religious aspects, and scientific advances, unravelling mythical constructions and questioning dominant narratives. Moreover, they demonstrate that the North can be employed as a highly useful conceptual tool for challenging established canons and contributing towards more multifaceted and inclusive approaches in art historical research.

Unless otherwise indicated, translations are by the author.

<sup>1</sup> This included a sub-stratum which Grant called “proto-Nordic.” See Madison Grant, *The Passing of the Great Race: Or, The Racial Basis of European History* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1916), 64.

<sup>2</sup> Reverend Duncan McCallum, *The History of the Ancient Scots in Three Parts* (Edinburgh: John Menzies, 1858), 25.

<sup>3</sup> Cited in Colin Kidd, “Race, Empire and the Limits of Nineteenth-Century Scottish Nationhood,” *The Historical Journal*, 46, 4 (Dec 2003), 875.

<sup>4</sup> Cited in Murray G. H. Pittock, *Celtic Identity and the British Image* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 56.

<sup>5</sup> The poet John Davidson, cited in Pittock, *Celtic Identity*, 57.

<sup>6</sup> Isaac Taylor, “The Origin of the Aryans: an account of the prehistoric ethnology and civilization of Europe” (London: W. Schott, 1889), 248.

<sup>7</sup> Cited in Pittock, *Celtic Identity*, 56.

<sup>8</sup> William Fergusson, *The Identity of the Scottish Nation: A Historic Quest* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 287–8.

<sup>9</sup> Cited in *Race, Liberalism and Economics*, ed. D. Colander, Robert E. Prasch and Falguni A. Sheth (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 129. See also “Professor Huxley on Political Ethnology,” *Pall Mall Gazette* (January 1870), <https://mathcs.clarku.edu/huxley/UnColl/PMG/HonPolEthn.html>, accessed on 22 July 2018.

<sup>10</sup> For example, “Professor Huxley on Celts and Teutons,” *Pall Mall Gazette* (21 January 1870); Thomas Huxley, “The Forefathers of the English People,” *Nature* (March 1870).

<sup>11</sup> On the Celtic Revival in Britain see Frances Fowle, “The Celtic Revival in Britain and Ireland: reconstructing the past” in *Celts: Art and Identity*, ed. Julia Farley and Fraser Hunter (London: British Museum Publishing, 2015), 234–59.

<sup>12</sup> McCallum *The History of the Ancient Scots*, 25.

<sup>13</sup> Rachel Bromwich, *Matthew Arnold and Celtic Literature: A Retrospect, 1865–1965* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 6.

<sup>14</sup> Anon, ‘Pan-Celtic Congress’, *The Advertiser* (9 November 1907), 8 (reporting on the Edinburgh Pan-Celtic Congress).

<sup>15</sup> *The Evergreen, A Northern Seasonal*, 4 vols (Spring, Autumn, Summer, Winter), (Edinburgh: Patrick Geddes & Colleagues, 1895–1896).

<sup>16</sup> On John Duncan see Kemplay, *The Paintings of John Duncan, a Scottish Symbolist* (Edinburgh: Pomegranate, 2009); and Matthew

Jarron, *The Artist and the Thinker: John Duncan and Patrick Geddes in Dundee* (Dundee: University of Dundee, 2004).

<sup>17</sup> On Geddes see Elizabeth Cumming, “Patrick Geddes: cultivating the garden of life” in *Patrick Geddes: the French Connection*, ed. Frances Fowle and Belinda Thomson (Oxford: White Cockade, 2004), 13–26.

<sup>18</sup> Robin Nicholson, “‘From Fever to Fresh Air’: The Evergreen, the Yellow Book and the Threat of Decadence,” *Journal of the Scottish Society for Art History*, 9, 2004, 63–68.

<sup>19</sup> Nicholson, “From Fever to Fresh Air,” 66.

<sup>20</sup> This technique was embraced elsewhere in Britain, notably by William Morris from the Kelmscott Press. Morris himself amassed a large personal collection of fifteenth-century German woodcuts, which he published in 1898.

<sup>21</sup> *The Evergreen*, Spring 1895: 141.

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, Gallen-Kallela’s illustration to Paul Scheerbart’s poem *Königslied*, created for *Pan* in 1895.

<sup>23</sup> Yggdrasil is attested in the Poetic Edda, compiled in the thirteenth century from earlier traditional sources, and the Prose Edda, written in the thirteenth century by Snorri Sturluson.

<sup>24</sup> On this see Volker Welter *Biopolis: Patrick Geddes and the City of Life* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003).

<sup>25</sup> Murdo Macdonald previously identified the female figure as Bride. See M. Macdonald “Anima Celtica: embodying the soul of the nation in 1890s Edinburgh” in *Art Nation and Gender: Ethnic Landscapes, Myths and Mother-Figures*, ed. T. Cusack and S. Bhreathnach-Lynch (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 1–10. See also my earlier discussion of this work in Frances Fowle, “The Franco-Scottish Alliance: Artistic Links between Scotland and France in the late 1880s and 1890s,” Fowle and Thomson, *Patrick Geddes*, 40–41.

<sup>26</sup> “Je ne parlerai pas de la beauté de l’œil que l’art n’a jamais pu traduire, car cette beauté se compose de rêve, de désir ou de vision, inconnus aux mondains.” Sâr Péladan, *L’Art idéale et mystique: Doctrine de l’ordre et du Salon annuel des Rose + Croix* (Paris: Chamuel, 1894), 62

<sup>27</sup> Sharp met “AE” in 1897, by which time he was already known to Russell, who had “begun to admire the books this man had published under the name Fiona MacLeod, books about Gaelic mythology, psychic phenomena, and communion with nature.” Henry Summerfield, *That Myriad Minded Man: a Biography of George William Russell “AE,” 1867–1935* (Gerrards Cross: Smythe, 1975), 77–78. “AE” would later remark in a letter to Fiona MacLeod: “your inner nature preserves the memory of old initiations, so I talk to you as a comrade on the same quest.” See Elizabeth A. Sharp, ed., *William Sharp: a Memoir* (London: William Heinemann, 1910), 278.

<sup>28</sup> Letter from Fiona Macleod to Dr John Goodchild, mid-May 1898 from the Outlook Tower, Edinburgh, cited in Sharp, *Memoir*, 316–7.

<sup>29</sup> Pittock, *Celtic Identity*, 72.

<sup>30</sup> Letter from Sharp to Patrick Geddes, 15 May 1895. William Sharp Letters 1895a, 39–40. <https://www.ies.sas.ac.uk/sites/default/files/files/Research%20Projects/Fiona%20McLeod%20Archive/1895a.pdf>, accessed on 25 Feb 2019.

<sup>31</sup> Aira Kemiläinen, *Suomalaiset, outo Pohjolan kansa: Rotuteoriat ja kansallinen identiteetti* (Helsinki: SHS 1993), 68–69, 78–81.

<sup>32</sup> See Kemiläinen, *Suomalaiset*, 139–144; and Aira Kemiläinen, *Finns in the Shadow of the “Aryans:” Race Theories and Racism* (Helsinki: SHS, 1998), 69.

<sup>33</sup> See Arthur Herman, *The Idea of Decline in Western History* (New York: Free Press, 1997), 46–75; and Leo Kramár, *Rasismens ideologer: från Gobineau till Hitler* (Stockholm: Norstedt, 2000), 41–62.

<sup>34</sup> Kemiläinen, *Finns*, 68.

<sup>35</sup> J.J. Karvonen, “Ajatuksia suomalaisten rotukysymyksestä,” *Duodecim* 40 (1924): 550. Karvonen uses the term “Lapps” (lappalaiset) which is nowadays considered derogatory. I have translated it to “Sámi.” See Bart Pushaw’s article in this volume.

<sup>36</sup> Marja Lahelma, *Akseli Gallen-Kallela* (Helsinki: Ateneum Art Museum/Finnish National Gallery, 2018) 9–11 and passim.

<sup>37</sup> Johannes Öhquist, *Suomen taiteen historia* (Helsinki: Kustannusosakeyhtiö Kirja, 1912), 406–407.

<sup>38</sup> Apparently, Öhquist later came to repent his involvement with the Nazis and during his final years was haunted by terrible self-accusations. See Oula Silvennoinen and Marko Tikka, *Suomalaiset fasistit: Mustan sarastuksen airuet* (Helsinki: WSOY, 2016), 403–408; and Manfred Menger: “Öhquist, Johannes” *Kansallisbiografia-verkkojulkaisu*. *Studia Biographica* 4 (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 1997). <https://kansallisbiografia.fi/libproxy.helsinki.fi/kansallisbiografia/henkilö/6553>, accessed on 25 Feb 2019.

<sup>39</sup> Nina Kokkinen, “The Artist as Initiated Master: Themes of Fin-de-Siècle Occulture in the Art of Akseli Gallen-Kallela,” in *Fill Your Soul! Paths of Research into the Art of Akseli Gallen-Kallela* (Espoo: The Gallen-Kallela Museum, 2011), 55.

<sup>40</sup> H. P. Blavatsky, “The Kalevala, the Epic Poem of Finland,” *Lucifer*, Vol. III, No. 14, October, 1888, 149–152; H. P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy*, vol 2 (Pasadena: Theosophical University Press, 2014), 122; William B. Yeats, “The Celtic Element in Literature,” *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats*. Vol. 4: Early Essays, ed. George Bornstein and George Mills Harper (New York: Scribner, 2007), 129–132. See also Salme Sarajas-Korte, *Suomen varhaisymbolismi ja sen lähteet: tutkielma Suomen maalaustaiteesta 1891–1895* (Helsinki: Otava, 1966), 57, 258–260, 331–332,

<sup>41</sup> Peter Staudenmeier, *Between Occultism and Nazism: Anthroposophy and the Politics of Race in the Fascist Era* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 4,11.

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- <sup>42</sup> Väinö Blomstedt to Yrjö Oskar Blomstedt 6 March 1894, cited in Sarajas-Korte *Suomen varhaissymbolismi*, 114.
- <sup>43</sup> Pekka Halonen to Eero Järnefelt 12 May, 1892, cited in Juha Ilvas, *Pekka Halonen sanoin ja kuvin* (Helsinki: Otava, 1990).
- <sup>44</sup> Pekka Halonen to Akseli Gallen-Kallela 23 May 1894, cited in Ilvas, *Pekka Halonen*, 46.
- <sup>45</sup> Pekka Pitkälä, *Pyramidit, pyhät raamit: Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspan (1870–1946) näkemykset suomen kielestä ja suomalaisten historiasta* (MA diss., University of Turku, 2010), 65. Wettenhovi-Aspa has been labelled as an eccentric and therefore very little serious scholarly work has been devoted to him. The best and most reliable source of information is Pekka Pitkälä’s master’s thesis from 2010. Pitkälä is currently carrying out doctoral research on the same subject. Another important work, but one that unfortunately contains quite few references and does not always mention its sources, is Harry Halén and Tauno Tukkinen, *Elämän ja kuoleman kello: Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspan elämä ja teot* (Helsinki: Otava, 1984).
- <sup>46</sup> Wettenhovi-Aspa grew up in a Swedish-speaking family in Helsinki and was at the age of twelve sent to a boarding school in Northern Schleswig, which now belongs to Denmark but was until 1918 a part of the state of Prussia. Halén and Tukkinen, *Elämän ja kuoleman kello*, 20–36.
- <sup>47</sup> Pitkälä *Pyramidit*, 59
- <sup>48</sup> *Svenskt i Finland: Ställning och strävanden* (Helsingfors: Söderström 1914). See also Pitkälä *Pyramidit*, 60.
- <sup>49</sup> Pitkälä *Pyramidit*, 68–69.
- <sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 64–65
- <sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 35–36.
- <sup>52</sup> *Suomen Kultainen kirja II: Kalevala ja Egypti*; also published on German as *Fenno-ägyptischer Kulturursprung der alten Welt: Kommentare zu den vorhistorischen Völkerwanderungen* (1935). See Pitkälä, *Pyramidit*, 89–97.
- <sup>53</sup> Halén and Tukkinen 1984, 37–40; Pitkälä 2010, 28–29, 89–97.
- <sup>54</sup> *Kalevala*, runot 16–17, <http://neba.finlit.fi/kalevala/index.php?m=1&l=1>, accessed on 25 Feb 2019.
- <sup>55</sup> See Sarajas-Korte, *Suomen varhaissymbolismi*, 337; Lahelma Marja, *Ideal and Disintegration: Dynamics of the Self and Art at the Fin-de-Siècle* (PhD dissertation, University of Helsinki, 2014), 115–117.
- <sup>56</sup> Ville Lukkarinen, *Pois mielist’ ei se päivä jää: Albert Edelfelt ja Väinö Stoolin tarinat* (Helsinki: Ateneum 1996), 9–11.
- <sup>57</sup> Lukkarinen, *Albert Edelfelt*, 10.
- <sup>58</sup> Robert Miles, “Nationalism, Abjection, and the Gothic,” in *The Gothic: Essays and Studies*, ed. Fred Botting (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2001), 65.
- <sup>59</sup> Halén and Tukkinen, *Elämän ja kuoleman kello*, 67.
- <sup>60</sup> Peter Davidson, *The Idea of North* (London: Reaktion, 2005), 8.

# Sámi, Indigeneity, and the Boundaries of Nordic National Romanticism

Bart Pushaw



In 1900, the Swedish artist Karl Nordström painted a colossal landscape of a place he had never been.<sup>1</sup> Unlike many of his other landscape paintings, this new work was not supposed to be a “landscape of the soul.” Instead, Nordström was working under the commission of the Luossavaara-Kiirunavaara Aktiebolag (LKAB), a mining company founded in 1890 to extract iron ore from northernmost Sweden. His task was to paint a panoramic view over the pristine, steppe-like landscape of Kiirunavaara for display in Paris at the World’s Fair that same year. At the display, Nordström’s painting was encircled by a wooden frame bearing the names of the sites of the company’s new mining ventures: Gällivare, Luossavaara, and Kiirunavaara (fig. 1). Below the painting were geological samples of local iron and other minerals found in the region. In front of Nordström’s painting was Christian Eriksson’s three-dimensional model of the mining site with a vision of the society which would spring around it. This would be one of the first models of Kiruna, the new town founded around the iron ore mine.

Karl Nordström’s painting, entitled *Kiruna*, presents pulsating sun rays over Sweden’s highest mountain, Kebnekaise, which dominates the canvas. But Nordström had never ventured north of the Arctic Circle where Kiruna was, and instead based his image on a photograph taken by a professor, who had sent it to him. Michelle Facos notes that Nordström’s painting was thus “unhindered by experience,” creating a work “intended to strike a responsive chord in the Swedish viewer.”<sup>2</sup> Facos suggests that *Kiruna* functioned within the context of a renewed urge among Sweden’s bourgeois elite to re-establish their

connection with the natural world, citing the declaration of Swedish poet Verner von Heidenstam that “it is the primitive that we city dwellers seek in the rural areas during the summer, the primitive and its peace.”<sup>3</sup> Large tracts of wilderness and a historically low population density in the Nordic countries had long fostered an intimate connection between humankind and the natural world. Only in the late nineteenth century did Nordic urbanites consider this relationship under threat from rapid industrialization.

Nordic peoples and artists sought to reclaim this connection with nature by tracing the roots of their character, chiselled by their resilience in a harsh climate, specifically to their native land. Art historians have routinely argued that while some European artists cultivated myths of the artist-cum-savage through their encounters with foreign peoples and cultures, Nordic artists cultivated an inner primitivism rooted in their homeland, a notion that encouraged even Karl Nordström to declare he was so moved by the colours of the Swedish landscape that he almost ripped his heart out of his chest.<sup>4</sup> Traces of this connection remained with this generation well into the twentieth century. In a 1932 interview, for instance, Finnish painter Pekka Halonen declared that the greatest works of art in the world were not to be found in the Louvre, but in the snowy wilderness just outside his rural atelier.<sup>5</sup>

Scholars have deployed the term National Romanticism to encapsulate this idea of a pulsating patriotic primitivism informing the works of Nordic artists at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>6</sup> Since the 1980s, National Romanticism has been the dominant mode of interpretation for the



Fig 1. Unknown photographer, Luossavaara-Kiirunavaara Aktiebolag Display at Paris Exposition Universelle, 1900, photograph, dimensions unknown, Kiruna Bildarkiv, Kiruna.

so-called “Golden Age” of Nordic art, with a focus on delineating the cultural specificities of art in each country.<sup>7</sup> But a dark absence and flagrant irony loom over Karl Nordström’s *Kiruna* and the National Romantic ideology behind works of Nordic “primitivism.” To portray Kiirunavaara as “untouched” enacts a dangerous colonialist discourse of indigenous erasure. Sweden’s northern climes might have appeared vast, unending, and powerful, but they were never uninhabited. Sápmi, the northernmost areas of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia’s Kola Peninsula, has been home to the indigenous Sámi for centuries.<sup>8</sup>

Sámi occupied a precarious and fluctuating position in the construction of Nordic regional and cultural identities. They frequently appear in Nordic artworks, but any discussion of their presence in the so-called “Golden Age” of Nordic National Romantic art is remarkably and embarrassingly limited. One reason is that readings of National Romanticism have become so entrenched that they regurgitate one another, leading even well-read scholars to conclude that Sámi simply “failed to show up in golden age canvases.”<sup>9</sup> This statement is manifestly false, but it is indebted to a general and rarely questioned consensus that “the overall impression one gains from the cultural ambiance of the period is one of peace and social harmony, of common devotion to the fatherland, its nature, and the proud heritage of its past, of dedication to venerable, shared moral and cultural values.”<sup>10</sup> The assertion that this period between 1880 and 1920 in the Nordic countries was peaceful and harmonious because of “shared values” never included Sámi people, who witnessed the deterioration of their rights and their classification at the bottom of a nefarious racialized hierarchy of power. If there was a growing sense of equality in the Nordic countries, then the Sámi did not experience it. The main ideas that underwrite Nordic National Romanticism – growing gender equality, a closeness to the natural world, social democracy, the beginnings of a welfare state – are described teleologically, a historical blueprint to understanding the

Nordic countries today. That colonialism and indigeneity are missing from our picture of this period is no mistake. Gunlög Fur presciently notes that the discursive placement of the Nordic countries is beyond the pale of early modern colonialism – in the distant past and with little bearing on the future – and has created a trajectory “from no colonialism to post-colonialism without stopping at the in-between,” which is to say, without self-reflective and decolonial practices.<sup>11</sup> As such, Nordic countries present themselves as bastions of minority rights while ignoring their own historical abuses.

At a time when Sámi people were brutalized, put on display in cages, and sterilized under the banner of protecting the Nordic races from “contamination” with degenerate Sámi blood, National Romantic artists across the Nordic countries urged for a return to nature and the “primitive,” celebrating in themselves the exact same characteristics they demonized in their indigenous neighbours. Some of the most well-known artists in the Nordic countries, including Carl Larsson, depicted Sámi people and Sápmi landscapes, extolling their “exotic” features, while also supporting and contributing to exhibitions which delineated racial hierarchies of power. Yet both Sámi and non-Sámi artists who used their works to champion indigenous rights have been all but forgotten, or highly marginalized, within histories of Nordic art.<sup>12</sup>

This article critically investigates how representations of Sámi in Nordic art intersected with ideologies of race and place in the decades framing 1900. Its aim is to expose the colonial and racialized dimensions teeming under the pristine veneer of Nordic National Romanticism. Rather than assuming a “benign nationalism” devoid of dehumanizing consequences, I wish to explore the ways in which artists and their works contributed to the racialization of Sámi and normalized colonialist understandings of their culture. What becomes of Nordic National Romantic art

when seen through the lens of Sámi history and in the context of nascent Sámi political activism? Johan Turi's path-breaking 1910 *Muitalus sámiiid birra* (*An Account of the Sámi*), the first secular book written in a Sámi language, is a guiding force in elucidating Sámi perspectives regarding the images discussed below. I draw on Turi's text because he had written it "so that people wouldn't misconstrue things, particularly those who want to lie about the Sámi and claim that only the Sámi are at fault when disputes arise between settlers and Sámi in Norway and Sweden."<sup>13</sup> Using Turi as a source is no mere tokenism. Turi's own life was intimately intertwined with other Nordic artists, and he himself was even the subject of the photographs of Borg Mesch, sculptures by Christian Eriksson and paintings by Emilie Demant Hatt, among others.<sup>14</sup> Turi's narrative, then, seems an especially appropriate source regarding Sámi understanding of their representations by outsiders. This essay focuses mostly on Sweden because Swedish artists represented Sámi in their works to a significantly greater extent than their colleagues in Finland or Norway.<sup>15</sup> As Sámi remain mired in what Sámi artist and activist Sofia Jannok has termed a "nineteenth-century level" of indigenous rights and representation in Scandinavia, an investigation of their earlier portrayals retains surprising urgency and relevance today.<sup>16</sup>

### MYSTICAL LIGHTS, MYTHICAL BEINGS

The colonization of Sápmi began in earnest in the sixteenth century, when foreign migrants from the south, encouraged by royal decrees, began settling Sámi land in the hopes of expanding the wealth of the Swedish, Danish, and Russian Empires. Christian missionaries sought to eradicate all traces of indigenous belief systems, with brutal punishment – sometimes even death – for defectors. Between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, Sámi remained oppressed and ostracized for centuries at the behest of dominant powers, and their freedom of movement, necessary for nomadic groups, severely curtailed. Popular ideas ranging from

the Enlightenment-era "noble savage" to the biological determinism of Social Darwinism were fodder for Nordic and Russian colonizers to justify their demonization of the Sámi as the dim-witted, primitive "Other" for their continued nomadic culture and historical refusal to assimilate. By the beginning of the twentieth century, Sámi were a minority in their own land. Many outsiders assumed Sámi were doomed to extinction, and that cultural assimilation into Nordic and Russian cultural spheres was the sole option forward.

As the rights of Sámi worsened over the course of the nineteenth century, their nomadic lifestyle, colorful costumes, and shamanistic beliefs became profitable as white Europeans and North Americans became obsessed with the display of "exotic types" in the nineteenth century. Continuing as late as 1950, many Sámi, most forced, but some by their own will, were put on display in circus-like travelling caravans with reindeer and sleighs, or in cages at human zoos and world fairs, where many died from malnourishment.<sup>17</sup> Oblivious to the horror of these displays, foreign viewers saw Sámi as exotic emblems of northernness, thus Nordic artists deployed them as visual tokens in their works in order to insert a degree of cultural and regional specificity into representations of the Nordic countries, nowhere more superficially than in Frants Diderik Bøe's canvas *Sámi and Reindeer in the Northern Lights* of 1885 (fig. 2).

Brilliant and ephemeral pink, yellow, and pearl tones of the Aurora Borealis glisten above a herd of reindeer grazing in the shadow of a towering mountain. A man jolts his poles into the frozen ground, arresting his skis, as he turns his head towards us. At least one reindeer turns in the same direction. Both look out at us, the viewers, as if we have disrupted them or encroached upon their territory. When the Norwegian Bøe painted *Sámi and Reindeer in the Northern Lights* in Bergen in 1885, he had sought to capture some of



Fig 2. Frants Diderik Bøe, *Sámi with Reindeer in Northern Lights*, 1885, oil on canvas, 40 x 33 cm, private collection (Photo: Wikimedia Commons).

the most salient visual markers of Norway's distant north: the glimmering Aurora Borealis, rugged mountain ranges and sweeping valleys covered in frozen snow, reindeer, and, of course, a Sámi man.

Frants Bøe (1820–1891) was part of the first generation of Norwegian artists to settle in Norway and make a living as a professional artist. He had built a reputation in the 1850s and 1860s as a still-life painter, and often lavished in the painterly details of his depictions of flowers and animals. Bøe's younger colleagues, including Christian Krohg, Frits Thaulow, and Erik Werenskiöld had championed open-air painting in 1882 when they founded the Autumn Exhibition (*Høstutstillingen*), an alternative venue to the bourgeois Christiania Art Association. The new art at the Autumn Exhibition was not only new in style, but often with distinctively Norwegian subjects. This surge in nationalism emerged to emancipate Norway from its union with Sweden both culturally and politically. Bøe began exhibition at the Autumn Exhibitions in 1884 and would continue to exhibit there at least four more times before his death in 1891.

Bøe's *Sámi and Reindeer* was an unusual foray for the artist, not only in subject but in style. Bøe painted the snow in an array of delicate tones ranging from light pinks to hints of muted lavender and periwinkle. Many passages of the painting, especially the lower right corner, appear rather painterly, suggesting a decisive turn away from the strict confines of Realism to make the work appear as though it was painted outdoors. However this was not the case. As illuminating as the Northern Lights may be, it is their aching elusiveness that makes them so alluring as subject matter, as well as impossible to paint from reality. The light sources in the painting do, however, highlight an intriguing corner. Beneath the male figure we see two granite stones where snow has melted to reveal a glistening mineral, perhaps gold or copper. However, the Sámi man

shows little interest in this precious and valuable resource. With these glimpses of minerals in the granite, Bøe's image implicitly suggests that Sápmi is an area rich in a natural wealth unknown to the region's indigenous inhabitants and thus ripe for exploration and exploitation. In reality, of course, Norwegians had been actively mining copper ore in Sámi areas since it became economically profitable in the 1640s, and sometimes even depended on Sámi labour for metal extraction.<sup>18</sup>

The painterly appearance of the image combined with the implausibility of the scene highlight the utter superficiality of Bøe's painting, finished, as the back of the canvas informs us, in his Bergen studio, where it was very likely conceived. Bøe created no more than an ethnographic pastiche, as if collating a checklist of stereotypes about Norway's most distant region and its least understood populace, in return for profit and acclaim. Under the mystical northern lights stands an equally mystical figure. Exotic, distant and even dim-witted, Bøe's Sámi man would become the norm regarding Sámi representation in the 1880s and 1890s. It is for this reason that the Sámi images of his Swedish colleague Johan Tirén would appear so radical.

#### REINDEER IN THE PARLIAMENT: JOHAN TIRÉN PAINTING SÁMI PATHOS

In 1892, the Swedish painter Johan Tirén (1853–1911) placed dead reindeer in the Swedish parliament. In doing so, he powerfully proclaimed his stance in the “culture wars” ravaging Sweden in the early 1890s and presented himself as a defender of Sámi indigenous rights. Although Tirén did not bring actual dead carcasses into the government's hallowed halls, the lifeless bodies of three reindeer strewn across a muddy clearing were the subjects of his harrowing canvas *Sámi Attend their Shot Reindeer* (fig. 3). Tirén's painting was a direct response to the illegal shooting of reindeer by Swedish and Norwegian farmers in the winter of 1890–91.

In 1886, the Swedish parliament passed the first piece of legislation regulating reindeer herding (*renbeteslagen*) in order to ease the burden of reindeer herders at a time when newly imposed national borders between Norway, Sweden and the Russian Empire had severely curtailed traditional migration zones. It was also the first time in Swedish history that it became necessary to define who was and who was not Sámi in legal terms. The law explicitly connected Sámi identity to nomadic reindeer herding, creating a complicated system for those Sámi who lived in forests or along the coastlines and were not nomadic.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, the law also severed any connection between reindeer husbandry and contemporary ideas of “civilization” by ordering that Sámi collectively live together in certain “Sámi villages.” The law created conflict and confusion in areas where Sámi communities did not live together, as well as among reindeer herders who were not Sámi, but Swedish or Norwegian. This inconsistency resulted in what some perceived as a sudden surge in wild reindeer herds, spiralling out of control to such an extent that one county government wrote a letter of complaint to the King of Sweden. Obstinate and unwilling to wait for a royal response, William Farup, a local Norwegian mill owner, was determined to take the issue into his own hands. He would lead the crusade against the reindeer “invasion” by any means necessary. In the winter of 1890–91, he systematically shot reindeer *en masse* as soon as they entered his property.

The violent mass murder of reindeer prompted great debate across Sweden, not only in the press, but also in the parliament. Farup enlisted lawyers and journalists to promote his cause and make Sámi herders compensate him for the damage. Gustaf af Geijerstam wrote pro-Farup articles in *Dagens Nyheter* and later published his articles as a book on the “culture wars” of Härjedalen. Unabashedly, Farup declared “anyone who shoots reindeer is my greatest friend.”<sup>20</sup> For Farup and his supporters, the reindeer were an invasive nuisance and their wild, destructive behaviour



was indicative of the ignorance of their Sámi herders and their inability to provide proper care. But on the other side of the debate, Farup's violent and brash actions violated Sámi agency over their reindeer newly enshrined in the 1886 law. A reporter in *Lunds Weckoblad* revealed that one Sámi family had found 52 dead reindeer in the span of just one day. The reporter declared that Farup's mass murder violated not only the law, but "a sense of justice," leaving Sámi "so terrified of the landowners and their weapons that they do not even dare to venture forth in fear of collecting the remains of their scattered herds."<sup>21</sup> Tirén's painting would prove pivotal to this debate.

A sober, almost unsettling mood colors Tirén's autumnal canvas. Sunken with grief and incredulity, all eyes in the painting – at least of the living – stare at the body of the fallen reindeer in the center. Even the black dog stares over in seeming disbelief. Tirén painted a bullet hole prominently at the top of the central reindeer's left leg. The artist also painted two clear strokes of red spilling over in different directions, suggesting that, at one point, blood from the gunshot wound had spurting profusely. Equally unsettling is the small stroke of gray paint Tirén painted on the reindeer's eye, an unequivocal signal of his death. Above all, however, it is Tirén's depiction of the reactions of the figures around the reindeer that makes the scene so disturbing. The kneeling woman in the foreground stretches her hand over his fur, as if longing for and mourning a lost family member. The seated man in front of her wears a expression of utter hopelessness on his face. With only three reindeer depicted, one wonders how many other dead reindeer this family has encountered before, or may encounter again in the near future.

Tirén's solemn portrayal of the four distraught Sámi alongside their similarly distressed animal companions brought a radical new pathos to the depiction of Sámi subjects in Nordic art. Tirén was not Sámi, but he dedicated

his art to painting Sámi realities, drawing attention to the violence and injustices of life in Sápmi. Tirén grew up in an impoverished but artistically inclined family in Jämtland, giving him a perspective on social injustices which would follow him throughout his career. His younger brother, Karl, would be a leading musicologist cataloguing Sámi *joiks*. He would spend his life painting Sámi people engaged in everyday pastimes, as well as capturing the more dramatic moments of northern life. Explaining why he painted Sámi so frequently, he declared:

*Anyone with eyes can see that the Sámi, in his right surroundings and living conditions, is just as beautiful as other people. He belongs to and decorates the mountain ranges as naturally as the knotty birch at the foot of the mountain. And many times – and people may call me biased – despite a difficult struggle for existence, he has with his humble, little self, appeared to me with a heroic beauty. This beauty speaks to me more than that of the gods, goddesses, and Madonnas – that is why I paint it.<sup>22</sup>*

Though his opinion here reads as slightly patronizing ("decorating" the mountain, their "little" stature), Tirén knew this beauty intimately. He lived among Sámi and took note of their worries and interests, but never from an ethnographic perspective. He would hunt and fish with Sámi friends, and even stood guard for reindeer overnight outdoors in the bitter winter cold. Tirén's Sámi friends and colleagues would come to him for advice and help, even letting him act as an arbitrator in internal Sámi conflicts. And, most importantly, Sámi people respected and admired his paintings of them. In 1938, twenty-seven years after Tirén's death in 1911, Torkel Tomasson, the editor-in-chief of the Sámi newspaper declared in *Samefolkets Egen Tidning* (*The Sámi People's Own Newspaper*) that "in the memory of the Sámi people lives the name of an artist who devoted his love and most powerful deeds to the Sámi. His name



Fig 3. Johan Tirén, *Sámi Attend their Shot Reindeer*, 1892, oil on canvas, 150 x 241 cm, Nationalmuseum, Stockholm (Photo: Wikimedia Commons).

is Johan Tirén. His name is preserved in memory, but his pictures are still living.”<sup>23</sup> Kajsa Andersson has argued that Tirén’s images were beloved among the Sámi for their “correct detail and important authenticity.”<sup>24</sup> Sámi viewers objected to the authenticity of his scenes only in rare exceptions.<sup>25</sup> Key in Tomasson’s declaration is the idea that Tirén’s paintings are still “living.” For Sámi viewers, they were not historically grounded images of the past, but rather depictions of an ever-present reality, divorced from an externally imposed idea of linear time. One need but look to the recent proliferation of bullet-ridden reindeer skulls in the provocative 2017 installations of Sámi artist and activist Máret Anne Sara to see the chilling relevance of Tirén’s paintings today.<sup>26</sup>

In situations of asymmetrical racialized power relations between artist and subject, it is rare that indigenous persons have been able to voice their own opinions about the way they are depicted in artworks, let alone approve of them. What is especially remarkable about Tirén’s works is that he was able to use the authenticity of his paintings to change political discourse in Sweden about Sámi rights in their favour. To this end, the work of parliament member Claes Adelsköld was pivotal. Adelsköld purchased Tirén’s painting and displayed it in the club room of the Swedish parliament, where it sparked critical debate, eventually leading to the restructuring of the legislation in 1898.<sup>27</sup> Central to the success of the painting was, of course, Tirén’s portrayal of Sámi pathos and sympathy, through depicting the heart-wrenching aftereffects of William Farup’s mass murder of reindeer. Painting Sámi people with dignity and actual relatable human emotions distanced them from the mystical image of Bøe’s innocent noble savage under the northern lights.

Tirén’s authenticity comes into play here for two specific reasons. By painting a bell on the collar of the large reindeer in the foreground, Tirén reveals it to be the *beallohke*, the

reindeer which knows to lead the flock and keep it together once called by the herder.<sup>28</sup> Therefore it is especially heart-wrenching for the people in the painting to discover that their *beallohke* has been murdered, as it is an ominous sign for the rest of the flock. The decision to paint this scene in the autumn was also carefully calculated. As Sámi herder, hunter, and author Johan Turi explained in his 1910 *An Account of the Sámi*, autumn is “a time of contending weather: the cold battles against the warmth, and each in its turn wins for a while.”<sup>29</sup> As temperatures fluctuate, reindeer must determine whether to continue to graze on grass or to begin the search for lichen. Sámi herders know to follow reindeer in the autumn seasons because the animals instinctively know where to travel in search of better grazing food. Thus it is crucial to let reindeer roam unguided in the autumn. It was precisely this independent grazing that enraged people like William Farup, who assumed it was the result of lazy, ignorant herders. In other words, it was Farup’s complete ignorance of Sámi life and customs and unwillingness to engage with Sámi herders that led to the tragic incident and Sweden’s decisive “culture wars.”

Claes Adelsköld gifted Johan Tirén’s *Sámi Attend their Shot Reindeer* to Sweden’s Nationalmuseum in the mid-1890s, a sign of the painting’s significance both politically and aesthetically. In his time, however, Tirén was often lambasted by his colleagues. A few years earlier in 1889, when the Nationalmuseum bought Tirén’s canvas *After the Snowstorm* – another socially critical painting of Sámi tragedy – the artist Georg Pauli denounced the work as “wretched.”<sup>30</sup> Pauli was a leading figure in the group of Swedish secessionist artists who sought to liberate themselves from the confines of descriptive realism, as taught at Stockholm’s Royal Academy. This group, including Carl Larsson, Karl Nordström, and Anders Zorn, among others, later formed the Artists’ Association (*Konstnärsförbundet*), and would dominate the Swedish art world in the 1890s

and into the early twentieth century. Tirén never belonged to this group because of his involvement with the Academy and his dedication to a detailed and descriptive realism. Aesthetically, Tirén’s style encapsulated everything the Artists’ Association wished to transcend. It is for this reason he has unjustly remained a peripheral figure in the history of Nordic art.

Tirén’s erasure from most narratives of Nordic art partly derives from the celebration and elevation of avant-garde art at the detriment of academic or mainstream art. But it was precisely the artist’s style that enabled him to paint his Sámi subjects and their shared landscape with such conviction and authenticity. Sámi audiences advocated for and celebrated this realist and visually legible authenticity. Tirén’s legacy demonstrates that progressive politics were not always an aspect of those works considered aesthetically modern. Ironically, it would be Tirén’s more famous and celebrated National Romantic colleagues who would create images enacting some of the most damaging and enduring stereotypes about Sámi people, and actively contribute towards Sweden’s nefarious pseudo-science of racial biology.

## SÁMI DEATH AND SWEDISH DEVELOPMENT IN THE “LAND OF THE FUTURE”

Early-twentieth-century Sweden witnessed not only widespread poverty, mass emigration, staggered industrialization, but the dissolution of its union with Norway in 1905. Yet few Swedes framed these issues as the degeneration of their nation. Instead, most cultural figures saw Sweden’s predicament as “a dawning hope that the time will now come when we can vigorously devote ourselves to our internal development.”<sup>31</sup> H. Arnold Barton has named this new period of cultural flourishing, ca. 1905–1920, the “Silver Age” of Swedish National Romanticism.<sup>32</sup> But as Sverker Sörlin has revealed, Sweden’s new vigorous devotion to its internal development relied on a new polarizing of the nation, envisioning itself along a north-south axis, rather

than an expansive east-west axis, during the union with Norway.<sup>33</sup> With this renewed northern focus, Sweden's ambitions for its future development were set (again) on Sápmi, and its landscape, seemingly pristine and yearning for development, would find the industrialist Hjalmar Lundbohm ready to answer its call.

It is difficult to overestimate the importance of Hjalmar Lundbohm in the cultural transformations of Sápmi in the early twentieth century. Beyond his role as the manager of LKAB mining company, Lundbohm had an extensive social network including some of Sweden's most distinctive cultural figures, and they would cross paths in Kiruna, the city Lundbohm himself is credited with founding.<sup>34</sup> Central to Kiruna's social development was cultural enrichment, which Lundbohm found possible through the organization of art exhibitions. He was childhood friends with the painter Karl Nordström and a well-known and respected patron among Sweden's avant-garde. In 1904, Lundbohm wrote to the Artists' Association, asking if they would bring their latest exhibition in Uppsala to a wider community in Kiruna. With Lundbohm covering the costs of the show, the Association agreed, and Swedish artist Eugène Jansson traveled to Kiruna to organize it. The show displayed works of contemporary Association artists, and loans from Lundbohm's own collection and the famous collection of banker Ernst Thiel.<sup>35</sup> At the opening, Lundbohm invited the artists Prince Eugen, Carl Larsson, and Anders Zorn, which, as we will see for Larsson, was a formative encounter seldom acknowledged.

The works displayed in Kiruna in 1904 had no connection to Sápmi, its people, or its landscape, but one critic in *Norrbottens Kuriren* hoped the show would "bring an awakening among our youth, the people of the future, [...] and [...] open their eyes to the rich, never-ending source of artistic inspiration offered by the magnificent nature of Norrland and Sápmi."<sup>36</sup> Lundbohm had similarly hoped

that Kiruna and its surrounding vistas would attract enough artists to form an artists' colony, even sending photographs of the landscape to contemporary artists to stimulate their creative senses.<sup>37</sup> The nearby area of Abisko would indeed attract Swedish artists, including landscape painters Helmer Osslund and Leander Engström.<sup>38</sup> The artists John Bauer, later renowned for his folkish drawings of trolls and mythical creatures in the publication *Bland Tomtar och Troll (Among Trolls and Elves)*, and Folke Hoving also traveled to Abisko, but not in relation to its potential as an artists' colony. In 1908 the geologist Frederik Svenonius and the pastor Olof Bergqvist had commissioned Bauer and Hoving to illustrate their new publication *Lappland: Det stora svenska framtidslandet (Lappland: The Great Swedish Land of the Future)*.

*The Great Swedish Land of the Future* casts Sápmi as Sweden's wild, new frontier, brimming with mineral resources and untapped wealth. But a tempered optimism colours the texts, as Svenonius wonders if Sweden's iron will bring its people joy and triumph, or sorrow and destruction. This dialectic between admiration for the grandiose and unspoiled Swedish landscape and its inevitable destruction to benefit the nation caused immense anxiety not only about the landscape, but its indigenous inhabitants. The sudden mushrooming of Swedish settler towns brought Swedish culture into unprecedented proximity with Sámi culture. Art critic and historian Carl Laurin was blunt about the future, stating "our culture is death to the Sámi."<sup>39</sup> And for many in the early twentieth century, Folke Hoving's painting *Sameättnam, Lappland* (fig. 4) similarly foretold a brutal ending.

Hoving's *Sameättnam, Lappland* is the first image that viewers encounter in *The Great Swedish Land of the Future* and, as Annika Lindskog rightly notes, it sets the tone of the volume.<sup>40</sup> Hoving painted *Sameättnam* as a site of dazzling contrasts. In the foreground, a young Sámi boy in a blue

coat and pants and red collar sits on a jagged rocky outcrop. At the very bottom of the canvas, stylized, sinuous plants dance onto the rocky edge. As viewers, we seem to share this stony surface with the young boy and Hoving's tight cropping of the image reinforces that sense of intimacy. But with the vertical orientation of the painting and its high horizon line at the top of the canvas, Hoving also inverts the typical format of grandiose Nordic landscape painting, eliding the more common panoramic view. Instead, with the high horizon point hidden in the endless mountain ranges, we delight in the brilliant colours in the sky, blazing oranges interrupting and interweaving with streams of muted lavender, and their crystalline reflection on the top of the lake below. A depiction of the actual "land of the midnight sun," Hoving's summer landscape is mysteriously dark around the mountain ranges, emphasizing the vast imposing structure of these geological giants, while also promoting them as resources to be extracted.

When the composer Wilhelm Peterson-Berger saw the reproduction of this painting in *The Great Swedish Land of the Future*, he became enraptured by the Sámi boy, who seemed to be "mourning in the face of all this melancholy and radiant beauty."<sup>41</sup> Since the boy is turned away from us and we cannot read his expression, his body becomes a visual marker for the expression of the viewer. For Peterson-Berger, the idea of seeing the boy as "mourning" or "melancholic" because he is overwhelmed by the beauty of the landscape places him within the realm of Swedish and European romantic philosophy about the transcendent power of sublime nature. From a Sámi perspective, however, it bears to keep in mind what writers such as Johan Turi declared:

*When a Sámi is closed up in a room, then he does not understand much of anything, because he cannot put his nose to the wind. His thoughts don't flow because there are walls and his mind is enclosed. And it is*

*also not good at all for him to live in dense forest when the air is warm. But when a Sámi is on the high mountains, then he has a perfectly clear mind.*<sup>42</sup>

For Turi, isolation was conducive to critical thinking. Mountains were also beneficial to Sámi people because they fostered a sensitivity that fuelled their desire “to live in places where no one else is living besides [themselves]. The Sámi would live permanently up in the high mountains if it were possible to keep warm up there and provide for their animals, the reindeer.”<sup>43</sup> While it is self-evident that one should adopt Sámi perspectives and ideas on anything related to Sámi, especially their portrayal by outsiders, it is especially pertinent to do so here because Hoving deliberately titled his painting *Sameättnam, Lappland*, arguably the first time a Swedish artist gave their painting a bilingual title in a Sámi language and in Swedish. In the overwhelming majority of Sámi history, however, Sámi perspectives were never taken into consideration, and thus for many viewers of the painting and readers of *Land of the Future*, a melancholic or mournful Sámi seemed appropriate. *Sameättnam* thus becomes particularly distressing when read against Carl Laurin’s discussion of the Sámi in Swedish art in his 1911 book *Sweden through the Eyes of Artists*:

*Our culture is death to the Sámi. When one gazes out from Abisko over Torneträsk and sees the grey reindeer herds grazing on wide open spaces on the shore, and glimpses dark blue Sámi clothing among the mountain birches, one thinks with a certain sadness that soon the last Sámi will stride along with his peculiar rolling gait over the dwarf birches, as stunted as he is, and vanish under the blazing Northern Lights in his sledge, leaving the last Swedish Sámi tent, where he once so contentedly and cheerfully cut reindeer meat with his decorated bone-knife, driven out by forces he cannot grasp, much less resist.*<sup>44</sup>

Laurin might have cast *Sameättnam* as a grim vision of the future and as a reinforcement of his biases, and indeed, by referencing the boy’s blue clothing, isolation, and blazing northern colours, the paragraph could well describe Hoving’s painting. But the idea that the Sámi were doomed to extinction, overwhelmed, melancholic, and ignorant derived from a situation common to settler societies across the Americas, Australia, New Zealand, as well as within Europe.<sup>45</sup> White European settlers fused indigeneity with the idea of being “one with nature,” and writings on Sámi in the Nordic languages routinely referred to them as *naturfolk* or “nature people.” The precise connection between Sámi and the natural world was never elaborated. Rather, as Tore Andersson Hjulman has argued, the concept of being “at one with nature” worked merely to cleave the Sámi from settler-colonialist ideas of civilization.<sup>46</sup> As such, Swedish industrial expansionists saw their ravenous consumption of natural resources as incompatible with Sámi survival since the Sámi *were* nature in the Nordic colonialist imagination. The connection between Swedish industry and Sámi thus needs clarification.

Hjalmar Lundbohm followed the norms of his time and supported the strict segregation of Sámi from Swedish life, but he was also endlessly fascinated by Sámi culture. He even took part in the “discovery” of Sámi sacrificial sites (*seitar*). Although Sámi people accompanied Lundbohm on these excursions, including Johan Turi, someone called “Polis Nikki,” another unnamed participant (it is exceedingly rare to find Sámi people to be dignified with names in most settler accounts), and the Danish ethnographer Emilie Demant-Hatt, we must be sceptical of his practices.<sup>47</sup> Lundbohm often took remnants from the sites, branded in popular colonialist archaeology of the times as “hedonistic deity icons,” and kept pieces for his collection. One piece was so beloved by Lundbohm that the illustrator Albert Engström reimagined it into Lundbohm’s ex-libris (fig. 5), with a Sámi man in ceremonial costuming raising his

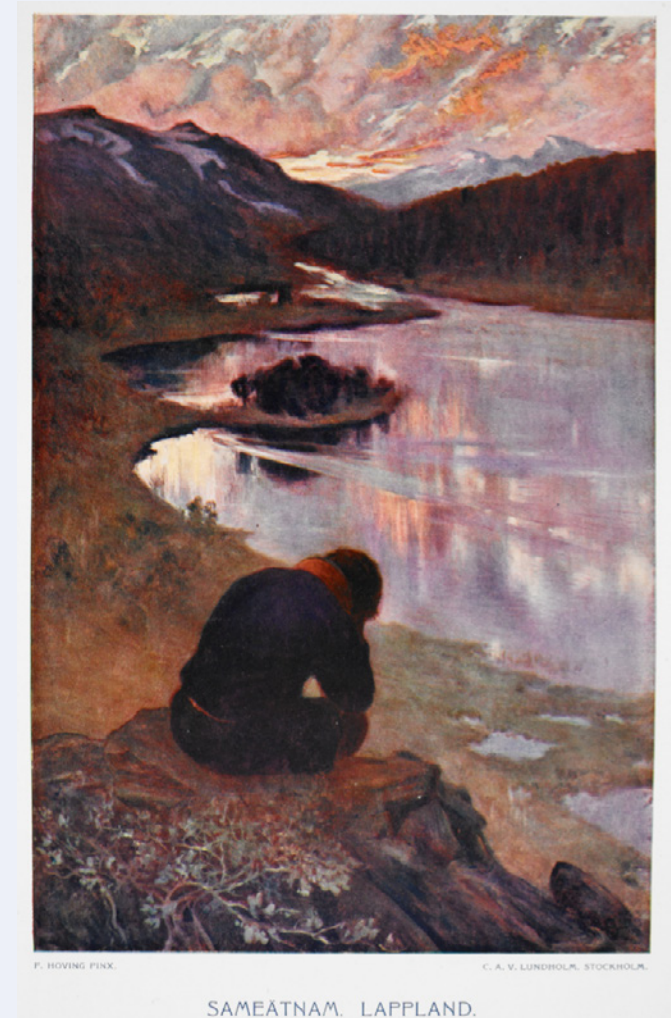


Fig 4. Folke Hoving, *Sameättnam Lappland*, 1908, oil on canvas, 100 x 66.5 cm, reproduction from Svenonius and Bergqvist, *Lappland: Det stora svenska framtidslandet* (Stockholm: C.A.V. Lundholm 1908).

arms towards the site surrounded by reindeer antlers and bones. It is particularly distressing to see how Swedish artists had no qualms in transforming sacred elements of Sámi cultures into a literal visual emblem of Lundbohm's hegemony. Moreover, in the very collection of these objects, Lundbohm enacts a patriarchal discourse so typical in colonial settings, wherein the colonizer feels it is his moral duty to protect the cultural heritage of the colonized, as if the Sámi were unable to take proper care of their own culture. On the other hand, Lundbohm was not oblivious to the role that the LKAB and Swedish settlers had played to the detriment of the Sámi.<sup>48</sup> It was Lundbohm's genuine interest in Sámi issues that made the publication of Johan Turi's ground-breaking *An Account of the Sámi* possible; it articulated Sámi issues and visualized Sámi ideas, a topic that requires further research.<sup>49</sup>

#### CARL LARSSON'S ENDURING RACE PROBLEM

In an article for *Svenska Dagbladet* in 2016, the art historian Per-Olof Boström declared that "there is no evidence that Carl Larsson harboured racist sentiments [...] against the Sámi."<sup>50</sup> Boström's claims were in response to a 1995 article by Per Bjurström, then Chief Curator of Sweden's Nationalmuseum. Bjurström's article "What story does *Midwinter Sacrifice* tell?" outlined how Larsson's infamous *Midwinter Sacrifice* propagated harmful racist stereotypes of Sámi and Jews.<sup>51</sup> As such, he emphatically declared that the painting did not warrant its intended prominent placement in the museum, or even as a part of the museum's collection. In the late 1980s Bjurström initially wanted to oust the painting from the museum on aesthetic grounds, but his later 1995 analysis of race and visual representation in Larsson's work was ahead of its time. For Boström in 2016, however, much was at stake in reclaiming *Midwinter Sacrifice* from its controversial history, as he was about to publish a new monograph on Larsson's monumental paintings.<sup>52</sup> In order to prove Carl Larsson never harboured prejudices against Sámi people, Boström cited the artist's

painting *Breakfast in the Open* (fig. 6). Boström described the painting as follows:

*In his large painting Breakfast in the Open, the central figure of the composition is a Sámi musician, Jon Johansson or Lapp-Jon. [Larsson] has mentioned that he had wandered in as if ordered to Sundborn, when he needed to find a figure for his picture. Studies in oil and watercolor demonstrate the loving interest he devoted to Lapp-Jon's physiognomy and Sámi clothing. When this one published the book Exorcisms and Spells: The Black Arts of Lappland, [Larsson] was among the underwriters.<sup>53</sup>*

This reading of Carl Larsson's depiction of the Southern Sámi musician Jávva Johansson in *Breakfast in the Open* blatantly reinforces stereotypes about Sámi people, and ignores Sámi demands for respectful language – the latter a public debate for over a century. For example, Boström refers to Johansson by the derogatory name of "Lapp-Jon," as if the nickname suddenly reveals a well-known figure to Swedish readers. The suggestion that Johansson conveniently "wandered" over to Sundborn just at the moment when Larsson was struggling with his composition suggests both aimlessness and mystical intervention. Furthermore, we must question the assumptions and biases in the argument that an artist of a dominant race can portray the physiognomy and clothing of someone of an oppressed race with "loving interest." It is imperative to interrogate the thin line between a "loving interest" in physiognomy and the illusionistic projection of truthfulness within figural realism.

The fact that Larsson supported Johansson's 1917 publication on indigenous "exorcisms" and "spells" blatantly reveals that Larsson indeed possessed prejudices and biases against Sámi. Johansson's book merely acted as fodder for Swedish stereotypes about Sámi indigenous

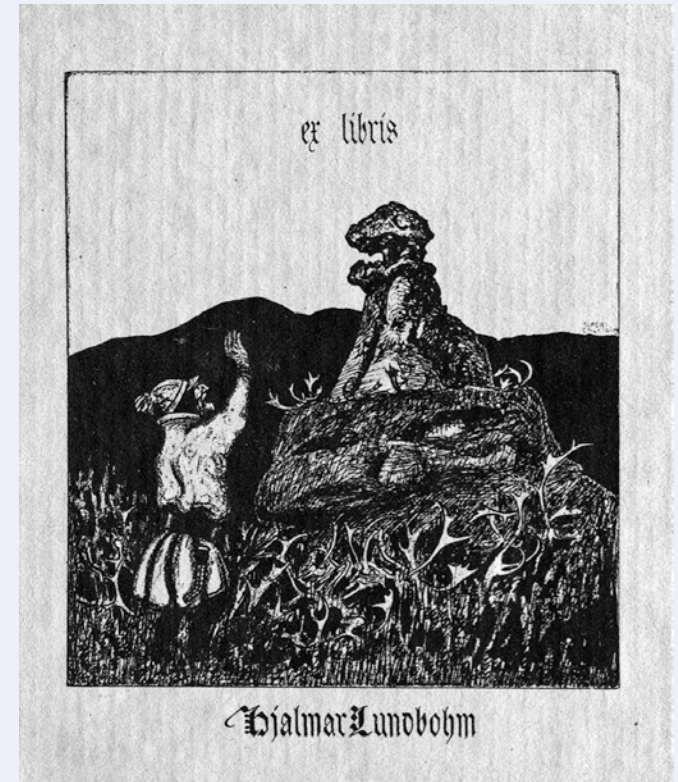


Fig 5. Albert Engström, *Ex-Libris of Hjalmar Lundbohm*, ca. 1908–1915, ink on paper, Hjalmar Lundbohmsgården, Kiruna.

culture, and ensured that their relationship to nature remained primordial and thus permanently incompatible with European “civilization.” Moreover, the final sentence in the original Swedish refers to Jåvva Johansson as *denne*, literally “this one,” whereas Larsson remains the subject “he,” *han*. Even the syntax reinforces Larsson’s unquestioned authority, completely removing any of Johansson’s agency in the situation. Boström’s problematic text reveals that Sámi people continue to occupy a precarious place in the construction of regional and national identities in the Nordic countries today as much as a century ago. He addresses the issue of race and Sámi representation by declaring it a non-issue. In doing so, his rhetoric reinforces Sámi erasure, and marginalizes Sámi people even more from public discourse than they normally are.

At 185 centimetres tall, Jåvva Johansson towered over Larsson. He was a master at the fiddle, participating in several music competitions throughout Sweden and winning first prize in 1907 in Muneberget.<sup>54</sup> Johansson was born into a destitute family and, despite his musical talents, would never escape poverty. He would travel long and far with his fiddle, playing wherever he could to earn a meagre income. In Larsson’s painting, Johansson sits on a green wooden lawn chair, plucking the strings of his fiddle for the amusement of a young seated boy, Larsson’s son Esbjörn. The central placement of Johansson in the canvas suggests that he is the main subject of the painting and not, as the title suggests, the outdoor breakfast. Unlike the young girl prominent in the foreground of the painting, wistfully staring off into the distance, we as viewers occupy a position more akin to the little boy, intently staring at Johansson. Larsson has paid close attention to the intricate details of Johansson’s dress, including the striking red embroidery on the front of his coat, the undulating red and navy blue embroidery beneath his collar, and the bundles of yellow, blue, and red threads at his ankles. This clothing, which we have seen in every example of Sámi representation thus far, is



Fig 6. Carl Larsson, *Breakfast in the Open*, 1910-1913, oil on canvas, Norrköpings Konstmuseum (Photo: Wikimedia Commons).

known as *gákti* or *kolt*, and is traditional, often ceremonial clothing. Johansson’s dress thus clearly delineates him from the other figures in Larsson’s composition, marking him as Sámi and the painting capitalizes on this difference.

The assumption that Carl Larsson never harboured sentiments against Sámi people because he painted Sámi costume in a “beautiful manner” is not only dangerous, but also glosses over the artist’s own contacts with Sámi people and culture. Larsson visited Kiruna at least twice before painting *Breakfast in the Open*, once in 1904 and again in 1905 in conjunction with the art exhibitions Hjalmar Lundbohm had funded. But beyond Larsson’s “patronage” of Johansson’s *The Black Arts of Lappland*, the most damning evidence proving Larsson’s worldview was his participation in the 1919 Exhibition of Swedish National Types (*Svenska folktypsutställningen*), which travelled

around Stockholm, Uppsala, Gävle, Göteborg, and Visby. The exhibition focused on the exploration of Sweden’s various “races,” and displayed, among other objects, the photographs of Borg Mesch, including a portrait of Johan Turi in the Sámi section.<sup>55</sup> Larsson, together with the artists Anders Zorn and Ossian Elgström, signed commemorative certificates, signalling they played at least some role in the organization of the exhibition.

Shows such as the 1919 Exhibition of Swedish National Types were the direct precursor to the establishment of the Swedish State Institute for Race Biology in Uppsala in 1922. This institution, the first official organization for race biology in the world, would lay the foundation for eugenics to be treated as a serious science undergirded by state funds. In Sweden, the Institute advocated for the separation of (especially non-nomadic) Sámi children

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from their families, forcing them into brutal assimilationist boarding schools, and later the sterilization of Sámi people deemed by the Institute to be dangerously harmful or “racially inferior” to the “purity” of the white Nordic race. As Ulrika Kjellmann has demonstrated, photography played a pivotal role in asserting the importance of racialized hierarchies promulgated by the Race Biology Institute, thus Larsson’s participation in 1919, alongside that of Anders Zorn and the painter Prince Eugen must be seen as directly related to these endeavours.<sup>56</sup> Although the Institute was founded officially only in 1922 (Larsson died in 1919), its ideologies had been popularized by Herman Lundborg for decades in Nordic cultural spheres. Carl Larsson’s *Breakfast in the Open* must be understood within this context, for Swedish interest in Sámi physiognomy was never neutral, and to consider it “loving” is naive as it is dangerous.

As one critic has rightly observed, Larsson’s painting may be titled *Breakfast in the Open*, but it is certainly not breakfast for all.<sup>57</sup> The picture is problematic; it creates a “false idyll” of communal joy among Sweden’s haves and have-nots, for it reveals not only a divide between social classes but also between who is and who is not Swedish. Jåvva Johansson does not take part in the breakfast, nor was he even invited to take a seat at the breakfast table. He sits and performs as exotic entertainment for Larsson’s son, a marker of desperately sought novelty in what was by 1913 more than a well-worn subject by the artist. To shed light on Sámi representation and critique the works of the most beloved generation of Nordic artists is, for some, an assault on their most cherished cultural values. But if we cannot come to terms with the damaging and harmful ideas normalized in artworks over a century ago in order to restore Sámi dignity and agency, then the Nordic countries are clearly not as open, welcoming, and progressive as the National Romantics had envisioned. In a way, then, Carl Larsson’s *Breakfast in the Open* is not too distant from Sweden today, tacitly acknowledging Sámi presence and

reinforcing ethnic stereotypes, while burying their voices, especially when they dissent. They perform for Swedish audiences under a veneer of inclusivity and cooperation. They sit in the sunny yard alongside Carl Larsson’s family, but should be grateful if they get to eat more than the scraps from the breakfast table. At least in Sundborn they are not obliged to pose awkwardly by a reindeer or under the northern lights.

Unless otherwise indicated, translations are by the author.

<sup>1</sup> Research and writing for this study were carried out before the publication of Svein Aamold, Elin Haugdal, and Ulla Angkjær Jorgensen's edited volume *Sámi Art and Aesthetics: Contemporary Perspectives* (Aarhus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag, 2017). I am grateful to Marja Lahelma and Frances Fowle for encouraging my investigation of this topic, as well as to the anonymous peer-reviewers for their insightful commentary in earlier versions of this article. Additional thanks are due to Roland Papp for his editorial prowess. Any further errors remain mine to bear.

<sup>2</sup> Michelle Facos, *Nationalism and the Nordic Imagination: Swedish Art of the 1890s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 89.

<sup>3</sup> Facos, *Nationalism*, 89.

<sup>4</sup> Anna Meister and Karin Sidén, ed., *Karl Nordström. Konstnärernas konstnär* (Stockholm: Prins Eugens Waldemarsudde, 2014); Michelle Facos, "Primitivism in Sweden: Dormant Desire or Fictional Identity?" in *Antimodernism and Artistic Experience: Policing the Boundaries of Modernity*, ed. Lynda Jessup (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 206–214; Patricia G. Berman et al., "Wildly, Modestly Modern: The North American Reception of the Scandinavian Exhibition of 1912," in *Luminous Modernism: Scandinavian Art Comes to America, A Centennial Retrospective*, ed. Patricia G. Berman (New York: The American-Scandinavian Foundation, 2011), 25–27. Reproduced at the beginning of this essay, on page 12 is a photograph of the Swedish painter Anna Boberg (1864–1935). Clad in heavy fur coats, her paints frozen on her palette, she demonstrates in her deliberate self-fashioning the self-primitivizing tendencies of Nordic artists at the turn of the twentieth century.

<sup>5</sup> Anna-Maria von Bonsdorff, "Pekka Halosen taiteen maailma: Ihmisen ja luonnon harmonia," in *Pekka Halonen*, ed. Anna-Maria von Bonsdorff (Helsinki: Ateneum Art Museum, 2008), 7.

<sup>6</sup> This term likely gained its politicized dimension in art history from Sixten Strömbom's 1965 study *Nationalromantik och radikalism. Konstnärförbundets historia* (Stockholm: Bonniers, 1965).

<sup>7</sup> Kirk Varnedoe, *Northern Light: Realism and Symbolism in Scandinavian Painting, 1880–1910* (New York: Brooklyn Museum, 1982). Scholars generally regard Varnedoe's ground-breaking scholarship on Nordic fin-de-siècle art as inaugurating ideas of National Romanticism into wider parlance, and sparking an international boom

in the field in the late 1980s and 1990s.

<sup>8</sup> Sámi (also written as Sami or Saami) live across the Nordic countries and parts of Russia, but historically lived in their northernmost areas. Whenever possible, I use the words "Sámi" and "Sápmi" instead of "Lapp" and "Lapland" even in period translations because Sámi people see the other imposed names as derogatory slurs. During the first pan-Sámi congress of 1917 in Norway, the debate over which name was appropriate was one of the first topics of discussion.

<sup>9</sup> Glenda Dawn Goss, Sibelius: *A Composer's Life and the Awakening of Finland* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 382.

<sup>10</sup> H. Arnold Barton, "The Silver Age of Swedish National Romanticism," *Scandinavian Studies* 74 (2002): 511.

<sup>11</sup> Gunlög Fur, "Colonialism and Swedish History: Unthinkable Connections?" in *Scandinavian Colonialism and the Rise of Modernity: Small Time Agents in a Global Arena*, ed. Magdalena Naum and Jonas M. Nordin (Springer: New York, 2013), 26.

<sup>12</sup> The topic of race and visual representation in Nordic art is a growing field, but one still in its infancy. The most thorough study is Jeff Werner and Tomas Björk, *Blond och blåögd: Vithet, svenskhet och visuell kultur / Blond and Blue-Eyed: Whiteness, Swedishness and Visual Culture* (Göteborg: Göteborgs Konstmuseum, 2014). Studies on the connections between race and exhibition practices in the Nordic countries include Rikke Andreassen, *Human Exhibitions: Race, Gender and Sexuality in Ethnic Displays* (London: Routledge, 2015); Leila Koivunen, *Eksotisoidut esineet ja avartuva maailma: Euroopan ulkopuoliset kulttuurit näytteillä Suomessa 1870–1910-luvuilla* (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 2015); and Åsa Bharathi Larsson, *Colonizing Fever: Race and Media Cultures in Late Nineteenth-Century Sweden* (Lund: Mediahistorisk Arkiv, 2016). Larsson argues that Sámi are beyond the realm of her study—a curious choice in a study about race and representation in Sweden—though they are mentioned in passing. Scholarship on this Sámi imagery is marginalized and appears most often within Sámi-specific works, rather than in art historical scholarship. Of the former, the most important to these endeavours are the recent colossal volumes edited by Kajsa Andersson. See Kajsa Andersson, ed., *L'Image du Sápmi: Études comparées* (Örebro: Örebro University, 2009) and the updated Swedish versions. *Sápmi i ord och bild: En antologi I*, ed. Kajsa Andersson (Hyltebruk, Sweden: On Line Förlag, 2015) and *Sápmi i ord och bild: En antologi II*, ed. Kajsa Andersson (Hyltebruk: On Line Förlag, 2017).

<sup>13</sup> Johan Turi, *An Account of the Sámi*, trans. Thomas A. DuBois (Chicago: Nordic Studies Press, 2011), 9.

<sup>14</sup> See Barbara Sjöholm, *Black Fox: A Life of Emilie Demant Hatt, Artist and Ethnographer* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2017).

<sup>15</sup> Unlike in Norway or Finland, northernmost Sweden became increasingly accessible through railways, and thereby more available

to artists. Tuija Hautala-Hirivoja has also done ground-breaking work on images of Sámi in Finland to a degree unparalleled in Sweden. See Tuija Hautala-Hirivoja, "The Image of the Sámi in Finnish Visual Arts Before the Second World War," *Acta Borealia* 23 (2006): 97–115. On Sámi-Finnish relations in the twentieth century, see Veli-Pekka Lethola, *Saamelaiset suomalaiset: Kohtaamisia 1896–1953* (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 2015). I have recently expanded Hautala-Hirivoja's research in the context of Finland's exploitation of its Sámi populace for international display. See Bart Pushaw, "Our Country Has Never Been as Popular as It Is Now! Finland at the 1900 Exposition Universelle," *Expanding Nationalisms at World's Fairs: Identity, Diversity, and Exchange, 1851–1915*, ed. David Raizman and Ethan Robey (London: Routledge, 2017), 130–146. Monica Grini has provided a compelling overview of the image of Sámi in Norwegian art and art historiography. Monica Grini, "Historiographical Reflections on Sámi Art and the Paradigm of the National in Norwegian Art History," *Sámi Stories: Art and Identity of an Arctic People*, ed. Charis Gullickson and Sandra Lorentzen (Tromsø: Nordnorsk Kunstmuseum, 2014), 48–67.

<sup>16</sup> Elin Klemetz, "Det är en kolonisation utan dess like: Sofia Jannok om rötter," *Filter*, 2013.

<sup>17</sup> Cathrine Baglo, "På ville veget? Levende utstillinger av samer i Europa og Amerika" (PhD dissertation, Tromsø University, 2009).

<sup>18</sup> Troy Storjell, "Colonial Palimpsest. Tracing Inscriptions of Sápmi and the Sámi" (PhD dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 2001), 121.

<sup>19</sup> Under the influence of racial hygiene and social Darwinism, laws such as the legislation of 1886 would help create the image of the "correct" Sámi solely as nomadic reindeer herders. Sámi who were hunters or fishermen in the forests and along the coasts thus became targets for assimilation, where over generations many would lose their knowledge of Sámi languages and connection to indigenous ways of life. See Daniel Lindmark, "Colonial Encounter in Early Modern Sápmi," in *Scandinavian Colonialism and the Rise of Modernity: Small Time Agents in a Global Arena*, ed. Magdalena Naum and Jonas M. Nordin (Springer: New York, 2013), 131–146, here 144. Ulf Mörkenstam, "Om 'Lapparnes privilegier': Föreställningar om samiskhet i svensk samepolitik 1883–1997" (Stockholm: Stockholm University, 1999); and A. Amft, *Sápmi i förändringenstid: En studie av svenska samers levnadsvillkor under 1900-talet ur ett genus-och etnicitetsperspektiv* (Umeå: Umeå University, 2000).

<sup>20</sup> Lennart Lundmark, *Stulet land: Svensk makt på samisk mark* (Stockholm: Ordfront, 2008).

<sup>21</sup> "Striden mellan bofaste och lappar," *Lunds Weckoblad*, March 19, 1891.

<sup>22</sup> Kajsa Andersson, "Om Johan Tirén – samernas konstnär," in *Sápmi i ord och bild: En antologi*, ed. Kajsa Andersson (Hyltebruk: On Line



Förlag, 2015), 142.

<sup>23</sup> Torkel Tomasson, “Johan Tirén – konstnären som stod samerna nära,” *Samefolkets Egen Tidning* 2 (1938), 15–16, quoted in Anderson, “Johan Tirén,” 137.

<sup>24</sup> Anderson, “Johan Tirén,” 153–154.

<sup>25</sup> As Kajsa Andersson explains, Tomasson took issue with Tirén’s *Wolves Attack* the scene was too implausible. Tomasson argued that Tirén, as person initiated into Sámi culture, would have known better than to place a Sámi person charging at wolves with his dog. It speaks volumes that Tomasson otherwise admired Tirén’s imagery to be keenly aware of the artist’s mishaps.

<sup>26</sup> See, for instance, Richard Martyn-Hemphill, “In Norway, Fighting the Culling of Reindeer with a Macabre Display,” *New York Times*, 6 Dec 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/06/world/europe/reindeer-norway-trial.html>, accessed on 27 Feb 2019.

<sup>27</sup> Lennat Lundmark and Lars Rumar, *Mark och rätt i Sameland* (Stockholm: Institut för Rätthistorisk Forskning, 2008).

<sup>28</sup> Andersson, “Johan Tirén,” 157.

<sup>29</sup> Turi, *Account of the Sámi*, 31.

<sup>30</sup> Andersson, “Johan Tirén,” 155.

<sup>31</sup> Barton, “The Silver Age,” 512.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Sverke Sörlin, *Framtidslandet: Debatten om Norrland under det industriella genombrottet* (Stockholm: Carlssons, 1988), 49–52.

<sup>34</sup> To this day, the mine produces the majority of Sweden’s iron ore, which is one of the country’s main exports, but the state is in the process of literally moving the city as it is in danger of collapsing.

<sup>35</sup> Brit-Marie Andrén, *Konsten i Kiruna: Patriarkalism och nationalromantik 1900–1914* (Umeå: Rathje, 1989).

<sup>36</sup> *Norrbottnens Kuriren*, June 23, 1904, cited in Curt Persson, *På disponentens tid: Hjalmar Lundbohms syn på samer och tornedalningar* (Luleå: Tornedalica, 2013), 128.

<sup>37</sup> Lundbohm likely kept in mind the numerous successful Nordic artists colonies elsewhere, most notably Skagen in Denmark, Fleskum in Norway, Varberg in Sweden, and the Åland Islands and Tuusula in Finland, among others. See *Art in Translation*, Vol 9, No 2, 2017, “Nordic Artists’ Colonies 1870–1914 (Part 1),” ed. Frances Fowle, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17561310.2017.1339253>, accessed on 27 Feb 2019; *Art in Translation*, Vol 9, No 4, 2017, “Nordic Artists’ Colonies 1870–1914 (Part 2),” ed. Frances Fowle, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17561310.2017.1405646>, accessed on 27 Feb 2019.

<sup>38</sup> John Bauer’s time in Sápmi and image of Sámi people were the artist’s first significant projects before illustrating *Bland Tomtar och Troll*. The relationship between his Sámi images, their supposed closeness to nature, and his subsequent well-known troll imagery has never been researched in depth, despite their clear interconnectedness. Bauer’s legacy is thus

another example where Sámi imagery has been excised from ideas of Swedish and Nordic National Romantic art.

<sup>39</sup> Carl Laurin, *Sverige genom konstnärsögon* (Stockholm: P. A. Norstedt & Söners Förlag, 1911), 45.

<sup>40</sup> Annika Lindskog, “Natures and Cultures: The Landscape in Peterson-Berger’s *Symfonia lapponica*,” *Svensk tidskrift för musikkforskning* 14 (2011), [http://musikforskning.se/stmonline/vol\\_14/lindskog/](http://musikforskning.se/stmonline/vol_14/lindskog/), accessed on 27 Feb 2019.

<sup>41</sup> *Dagens Nyheter*, January 26, 1908, quoted in Lindskog, “Natures and Cultures.”

<sup>42</sup> Turi, *Account of the Sámi*, 9.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>44</sup> Laurin, *Sverige genom konstnärsögon*, 45.

<sup>45</sup> See, for instance, Steven Conn, *History’s Shadow: Native Americans and Historical Consciousness in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Leslie Allan Dawn, *National Visions, National Blindness: Canadian Art and Identities in the 1920s* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2006); Ian MacLean, *White Aborigines: Identity Politics in Australian Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>46</sup> Tore Andersson Hjulman, *Ett med naturen. En studie av hur naturen omförhandlades i mellankrigstidens konflikter mellan naturskydd och samiska rättigheter* (Luleå: Luleå Tekniska Universitet, 2017).

<sup>47</sup> Persson, *Hjalmar Lundbohm*, 143–145.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> On the art of Johan Turi—a subject itself which needs to be framed within Swedish National Romantic discourse as well—see Harald Gaski, “More than Meets the Eye: The Indigeneity of Johan Turi’s Writing and Artwork,” *Scandinavian Studies* 83 (2011): 591–608. On Turi’s influence on the later art of Emilie Demant-Hatt, see Barbara Sjöholm, “The Art of Recalling: Lapland and the Sami in the Art of Emilie Demant Hatt and Johan Turi,” *Feminist Studies* 40 (2014): 356–393.

<sup>50</sup> Hans-Olof Boström, “Målning som alla tycks vilja missförstå,” *Svenska Dagbladet*, March 24, 2016.

<sup>51</sup> Per Bjurström, “Vad berättar Midvinterblot?” *Konsthistorisk Tidskrift* 64 (1995), 3–15.

<sup>52</sup> Hans-Olof Boström, *Carl Larsson: Monumentalmålaren* (Uppsala: Uppsala University Press, 2016).

<sup>53</sup> The original reads “I hans storamålning *Frukost i det gröna* (1913–14) är kompositionens centralfigur en samisk spelman, Jon Johansson eller Lapp-Jon. Han har själv berättat att senare kom vandrande som på beställning till Sundborn, då han behövde en samlande gestalt på tavlan. Studier iolja och akvarell visar det kärleksfulla intresse han ägnat Lapp-Jons fysionomi och samedräkt. När denne några år senare gav ut boken *Signerir och besvärjelser. Svartkonst från Lappland* hörde han till abonnenterna.” Boström, “Målning,” 2016.

<sup>54</sup> Sören Vedin, “Lapp-Jon – ett original,” *Angerman: Organ för Ångermanlands hembygdsförbund* (2007): 1.

<sup>55</sup> Thomas DuBois, “Borg Mesch: The Role of a Culture Broker in Picturing the North,” *Journal of Northern Studies* 8 (2014): 45–70.

<sup>56</sup> Ulrika Kjellmann, “A Whiter Shade of Pale: Visuality and Race in the Work of the Swedish State Institute for Race Biology,” *Scandinavian Journal of History* 38 (2013): 180–201.

<sup>57</sup> Estorardo Barrios Carillo, “Falsk idyll ger tröst utan att starka,” *Stockholms Fria*, October 19, 2013.

# *Photojournalism and the Canadian North: Rosemary Gilliat Eaton's 1960 Photographs of the Eastern Canadian Arctic*

*Danielle Siemens*



*A power of photographs is that, in their silence and stillness, they propose so much, and reveal nothing.*  
– Hugh Brody<sup>1</sup>

On 8 June 1963, *The Ottawa Journal* published a story on local photographer Rosemary Gilliat and her travels to the Canadian North.<sup>2</sup> Gilliat, who had emigrated from England a decade earlier, was a freelance photojournalist whose skills and sense of curiosity took her to parts of Canada that few were then afforded the opportunity to visit. In the span of nine years, she made several trips to Arctic and sub-Arctic regions of the country, taking photographs both “on assignment and on self-appointed expeditions.”<sup>3</sup> *The Ottawa Journal* reporter, noting the exceptional nature of Gilliat’s travels, stated that “these jaunts have introduced Miss Gilliat [...] to far more of Canada’s semi-explored territory than the majority of Canadians will ever see.” He continued, “while in the North, she had time to observe and get to know the Eskimos.”<sup>4</sup> Adopting the rhetoric of anthropology, the article constitutes an “othering” of the North, portraying both the land and its people as fascinating, unfamiliar, and deserving of study. At the same time, it emphasizes the critical role photography has played in bringing the North closer to the rest of Canada.

Since the late nineteenth century, photography has been used by the colonizer as an important documentary and artistic tool for picturing the North. Whether to chronicle expeditions, assert Canadian sovereignty, document indigenous peoples, promote industry, or picture a romanticized landscape, photography has contributed to what Sherrill Grace terms a “discursive formation” of

North.<sup>5</sup> These visual renderings, which remain the primary means through which Canadians and the rest of the world are acquainted with the North and Inuit, often perpetuate harmful stereotypes and ignore the live realities of northern Canada.<sup>6</sup> In Grace’s words, the North, as a construction of southerners, is “a constellation of racial stereotypes and seemingly intransigent exclusions.”<sup>7</sup>

This notion of the camera as an extension of the colonizer’s gaze was not lost on photographer Rosemary Gilliat who embarked on her longest and most ambitious trip to the North in 1960, spending four late summer months in the eastern Canadian Arctic. Travelling throughout the Ungava Bay region in parts of what are now Nunavut and Nunavik, Gilliat worked on several assignments for prominent Canadian magazines and commercial and federal agencies.<sup>8</sup> The archive of this trip is now housed at Library and Archives Canada and includes a journal totalling over 400 pages, a few small notebooks, and several hundred photographs.<sup>9</sup> For Gilliat this Arctic journey was an opportunity to bolster her career, marking her place as an ambitious and skilled photographer, while also fulfilling a personal desire to see and experience the North. As a professional Gilliat also felt an ethical responsibility to avoid the “usual popular misconceptions about the north.”<sup>10</sup> Evidently, she viewed herself as one who could play a part in rectifying this skewed view and educate her fellow citizens about the North and its peoples.

In her extraordinarily detailed diary of the trip Gilliat often articulated a discomfort with her position as a non-

indigenous visitor in the North. One particularly poignant passage reads:

*I always have this horror – even after 10 years of photography of imposing on other people’s privacy – and especially on native people. Such as the Eskimos who are always being photographed – as curiosities.*<sup>11</sup>

Gilliat thus understood, at least in part, the potential violence of the camera and the imbalance of power entrenched in the representation of indigenous subjects by white photographers. She also commented on the offensive tactics of other Qallunaat<sup>12</sup> photographers she encountered in the Arctic:

*The Eskimos here are so allergic to being photographed – they have too much of it. Last Saturday at Apex Hill sports, I heard a man from Lower Base, who was photographing an Eskimo shout roughly “Hold still you bastard,” and then told him to dance. The Eskimo just grinned and complied. But he was an older man. I think the younger men are beginning to realize that they don’t have to put up with everything from the white man.*<sup>13</sup>

This troubling passage reveals Gilliat’s disdain for photographers who resorted to violent extremes such as derogatory language and bribery to create images that conformed to a preconceived notion of primitive. At the same time, the photographic encounter she described sheds light on indigenous resistance to the camera as Inuit exerted control over the conditions of their representation, refused to be photographed, or took hold of the camera themselves.

Yet, despite Gilliat’s apprehension about photographing indigenous people, the archive of her 1960 trip is primarily dedicated to the documentation of Inuit. This is in large part because her clients, most of whom were mainstream

publishers, desired “human interest” stories that would appeal to their middle-class readership. At the same time, while Gilliat expressed trepidation over objectifying indigenous peoples she also articulated a genuine interest in their history and culture. In an effort to rectify the inequities in her position she sought to photograph life in the North as she saw and experienced it rather than staging an imagined and pre-conceived construction. She also adopted several empathetic, and in some cases uncommon, practices such as securing permission from most individuals she photographed, offering a good or service in return for someone’s portrait, and recording names and personal stories as best she could. However, as a white professional from the South who was employed by agents of the federal government and popular press, Gilliat was implicated in institutional power structures which her efforts could never fully circumvent. Further, while she may have seen herself as an objective documentarian, the irony of such a position is apparent to us today as writers have long disputed the truth claims of documentary photography. As John Tagg writes, “like the state, the camera is never neutral. The representations it produces are highly coded, and the power it wields is never its own.”<sup>14</sup>

In analysing Gilliat’s work in the North it is important to keep in mind the context of increased commercial and political interest in the area. While the earliest European colonization attempts in the Arctic were made in the first millennium, followed by intermittent periods of contact for centuries following, it was not until the mid-twentieth century that a rigorous and totalizing program of colonization took effect. In the late 1950s and 60s the federal administration initiated extensive programs to exploit natural resources and exert sovereignty over a vast Arctic region in this period of Cold War anxiety. A heightened investment in the North also drastically affected the region’s indigenous communities. Within a remarkably short period of time, most Inuit were forced to abandon

their nomadic way of life based on hunting and fishing to assimilate into a settled, wage-based society. As argued by Frank Tester and Peter Kulchyski, “the state became a critical agent in the struggle to incorporate Inuit into the dominant Canadian society.”<sup>15</sup>

While compelled by mythologies of the North that circulated in popular culture, Gilliat’s keen and critical interest in the Canadian mediascape as well as her life-long fascination with indigenous cultures ensured that she approached her northern work with a sense of awareness and empathy at odds with the paternalism of the federal government’s northern policies.<sup>16</sup> Her photographs were published in some of the most influential magazines and newspapers of the day and therefore constitute and were constituted by stereotypical views of the North that reinforced oppressive relations of power. Yet, her archival collections, which include personal writing and unpublished images, often complicate typical narratives and tell us more about her practice, the people she photographed, and the sociopolitical context of the time – revealing, in what Elizabeth Edwards terms, the “hidden histories” of intercultural encounter.<sup>17</sup>

Decades of scholarship on colonial photography have alerted us to the contexts of political and cultural domination under which these images were made, yet recent theorizations on the performative force of photography – from scholars including Elizabeth Edwards, Jane Lydon, Deborah Poole, and Ariella Azoulay – have made way for more complex and multivalent readings of the settler-colonial archive. In her influential writing on ethnographic photography, Edwards contends that the “affective tone” of the photograph cannot be reduced solely to its descriptive power.<sup>18</sup> Rather, “photographs assume a form of agency in the way they prescribe relations and the telling of history.”<sup>19</sup> Likewise, Jane Lydon, whose research centres on Australia’s colonial past, argues that a closer look at the production and consumption of the photographic image “reveals a dynamic

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and performative relationship between photographer and Aboriginal subject.”<sup>20</sup>

In this article, I focus on a group of photographs Gilliat made in the fishing communities of George River and Port Burwell, where the first two Inuit co-operatives were founded. A selection of this work was published by the National Film Board of Canada in a photo story that promoted northern resource extraction and upheld primitivizing views of Inuit (fig. 1). Yet, when examined alongside Gilliat’s unpublished images, writing, and letters, we are confronted with a narrative of encounter that offers “substantial evidence for a more contested, complex interaction.”<sup>21</sup> While institutional critiques of photojournalism, and documentary photography more generally, are certainly merited they risk unintentionally reifying the power they seek to dismantle, granting sole authorship to the photographer and unequivocally denying the “active participation and possible strategic agency” of the indigenous sitter.<sup>22</sup> In the archival material from George River and Port Burwell there is evidence of Inuit actively partaking in – and at times resisting – their photographic representation as well as Gilliat’s own struggle to define her position in the Arctic as a middle-class white woman working within a representational system that had long been used to marginalize and devalue Inuit culture and experience.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, a consideration of Gilliat’s photographs as performative visualizations of what Mary Louise Pratt has familiarly termed the “contact zone” allows one to move beyond a reading of her work as an uncomplicated expression of colonial ideology and to instead consider the photograph as a complex moment of exchange in which both the photographer and subject had something at stake, albeit within a space of dramatic inequality.<sup>24</sup>

Because of Gilliat’s relative obscurity in Canadian photographic history, I begin with a biographical sketch that outlines her training in Britain and subsequent

career in Canada, before turning to an analysis of her documentary photographs of Inuit fisheries.<sup>25</sup> This body of work is a rich case study for understanding both the critical role documentary photography played in a “discursive formation” of the North and the transhistorical malleability of photographic meaning contingent on contexts of production, circulation, and viewership.<sup>26</sup>

### GOING NORTH

Born in Hove, England, in 1919, Gilliat spent her youth attending boarding schools in Switzerland and vacationing in British Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), where her father was a tea planter. She developed an interest in photography at a young age, using the camera to record memories of friends, family and their travels, and in her early twenties moved to London to pursue photography professionally. There she received dark room training, took courses in commercial photography, and apprenticed with a photojournalist. By the end of World War Two Gilliat was publishing her own work in several magazines, including the *Sunday Observer*, *Strand Magazine*, and *Lilliput*. Between 1949 and 1951 Gilliat again spent sustained periods of time in Ceylon where she photographed for her own interest and on assignment for the *Times Educational Supplement*. Taken shortly after Ceylon’s independence from British colonial rule, this captivating and hitherto unanalysed body of work consists largely of photographs of the country’s indigenous peoples, an interest that continued throughout her career in Canada.

Influenced by a few friends and compelled, at least in part, by a curiosity about the North, Gilliat immigrated by herself to Canada in the fall of 1952.<sup>27</sup> Within a year of settling in Ottawa, the nation’s capital, Gilliat was publishing photographs in some of the most influential journals of the day while also working on assignment for several federal agencies, including Canada’s Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources (DNANR), the

Canadian Wildlife Service, and the National Film Board of Canada’s Still Photography Division (NFB). Fuelled by a love of travel instilled in her at a young age, Gilliat sought assignments that allowed her to explore the diverse landscapes and cultures of her adopted home.

It was not long after settling in Ottawa that Gilliat began searching for ways to go northwards. By 1953 she secured a contract to photograph in the Yukon, which was followed by subsequent trips to northern Saskatchewan and the Northwest Territories in 1956 and 1957 respectively. These early trips, in which Gilliat honed her photographic skills and furthered her northern education, were a natural progression to her most ambitious journey in the summer and early autumn of 1960 with British compatriot Barbara Hinds, a newspaper journalist based in Halifax, Nova Scotia.<sup>28</sup> On 17 June 1960, the women boarded a plane in Montreal and flew towards Frobisher Bay (now Iqaluit) where they spent the first three-and-a-half weeks of their trip. Other major destinations included Fort Chimo (now Kuujjuaq), and Cape Dorset (known as Kinngait in Inuktitut).<sup>29</sup> Along the way, they also visited a number of smaller communities for briefer periods of time, including Port Burwell (now Killiniq), George River (now Kangiqsualujjuaq), Lake Harbour (now Kimmirut), and Pangnirtung. Although Gilliat and Hinds organized and funded the trip themselves, their itinerary was largely determined by the DNANR and the availability of government transportation such as boats and planes. While typical of how non-indigenous people travelled around the Arctic at the time, this dependence meant that the women could only go to places in which the federal government or Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) had an active presence and that they had limited control over the length of their stays. While in the North, Gilliat worked on freelance assignments for *Weekend Magazine*, *Maclean’s*, *Star Weekly*, and the HBC magazine *The Beaver*, as well as for Imperial Oil and the NFB.<sup>30</sup>

# Ilkalupik: King of the Arctic



Arctic char from Canada's north is adding to the taste thrills of many southern gourmets who specialize in epicurean delights. Fashionable clubs and restaurants in New York, Chicago, Boston, Detroit and major Canadian cities offer the delicate-tasting char to their discriminating clientele. In the past couple of years, three Arctic fisheries have been established. The fishing, freezing and shipping of char to southern markets has given a small group of Eskimos a new source of income in a land where the traditional means of making a living is rapidly changing through contact with the civilization of the white man. For a limited number of Canada's 12,000 Eskimos this added income, which reduces their dependence on the vagaries of a fluctuating food supply, is now a reality. In the frigid waters of the Arctic Lakes char reproduce at a comparatively slow rate so the fish are never likely to be in abundant supply. Eskimos call the char "Ilkalupik" which means *special fish*, and, at \$1.25 a pound, the succulent char seems slated to hold its lofty position for some time to come. First overseas shipment of char went to Paris for a banquet of the French Nature Protection Society—a body that takes pride in serving its members something new, if possible exotic, in the way of foods. To those in the know, Arctic char is just that.

In photo at right, Eskimos stretch nylon gill net across the mouth of a small stream near Port Burwell on Ungava Bay. Catch is loaded aboard motor boats and sped to Port Burwell fishery where, last August, 18,600 pounds of choice-flavoured char filled the freezers to capacity. Here it is cleaned, flash-frozen, and loaded aboard refrigerated ships for transport to southern markets. Biological studies ascertain the quantity of char that may be taken without depleting fishing grounds.



Cleaning char is done with meticulous care to assure fish reach market in top condition. At Port Burwell Eskimo child gets on-the-spot view of the operation.



A fisherman's dream is this rack of Arctic char beauties! Increasing numbers of sportsmen are being attracted northwards to Eskimo-operated tourist lodges near Frobisher Bay and at Camp Dorset by the spunky, fighting char.



Henry Anatik takes the order of a young Eskimo mother at co-op store at Port Burwell. Here, skins, carvings and work done at the summer fishing camps, are exchanged for pipes, tobacco, sugar, tea and other necessities.



On Labrador coast, Eskimo fishermen unload char nets from their canoe. Everyone works hard during brief char-fishing season—mid August to end of September. Rifle ensures a daily diet of fresh meat while at the fishing grounds.

National Film Board of Canada Photos by Rosemary Gilliat.

Fig 1. Photo story 277, "Ilkalupik: King of the Arctic," January 24, 1961, photographs by Rosemary Gilliat, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa (Photo: Library and Archives Canada / National Film Board Fonds).

Throughout her career in Canada, Gilliat worked on a number of assignments for the NFB. While financially lucrative, these commissions also guaranteed a relatively wide circulation of her images. Mandated to promote the nation, the NFB is most known for its acclaimed filmmaking, however it also operated a highly successful Still Photography Division for several decades in the mid-twentieth century. Like the Farm Security Administration in the United States, the NFB used photographs to foster a sense of national cohesion, commissioning photographers to shoot a vast array of people, places, work, leisure, and cultural activities across the country. Millions of Canadians as well as international audiences saw these images reproduced in magazine, newspapers, NFB-produced books, filmstrips, and exhibitions. The Still Division was thus an important contributor to the project of nation building in Canada, producing, in what Carol Payne terms, an “official picture” of the country.<sup>31</sup>

While the Still Photography Division experimented with various forms of publication and display, most of its images reached viewers through narrativized arrangements of photographs and text known as photo stories. Taking the form of ready-to-use mat releases, these layouts were easily shared and reprinted in newspapers, magazines, government documents, and other publications. The photo story or photo essay has been a common narrative form since the emergence of European picture magazines in the 1920s and was popularized in the United States by *Life* magazine in the 1930s and '40s. While privileging the visual, photo stories also incorporate captions and text to provide “anchorage” as a way of closing or directing the viewer’s interpretation of an image.<sup>32</sup> In her seminal study of *Life* magazine, Wendy Kozol argues that *Life*’s brand of commercial photojournalism differed from documentary photography in a few key ways: in its use of the narrative form of the photo story, the commodity package with ads, and the specific focus on middle-class culture.<sup>33</sup> In a

Canadian context, Payne maintains that the NFB’s photo stories were the “chief vehicle for its ubiquitous and familiar banal nationalism over much of its history.”<sup>34</sup>

Shortly before her departure, Gilliat received a letter from Lorraine Monk, then editor of the Still Photography Division, requesting photographs for two stories; one, concerning Inuit print makers in Cape Dorset and the other, Arctic char fishing in the George River area.<sup>35</sup> For each story, Gilliat was required to submit twenty black-and-white images, including a “lead picture and an establishing shot of the area.”<sup>36</sup> Although the assignments were vague in detail, granting Gilliat a fair amount of liberty in fulfilling them, Monk emphasized that the division could “never have too many ‘human interest’ pictures,” thereby reiterating the NFB’s goal of creating a “sense of national cohesion, in part by defining Canadian identity visually.”<sup>37</sup>

Arriving in George River by plane on 16 July, Gilliat spent three days in the area before receiving the unexpected opportunity to travel to Port Burwell where she spent another week photographing their local fishery and craft production.<sup>38</sup> For Gilliat, these remote villages embodied the North of her imagination. Of her arrival in George River Gilliat wrote:

*From the rocky shore a kayak – the first I have ever seen outside a museum – slid out [...] This gave me a strange feeling – to have read so much about the arctic and the Eskimo – and I could hardly realize I was seeing this with my own eyes [...] I felt intensely happy, for this was the arctic as I had hoped to find it.*<sup>39</sup>

While betraying Gilliat’s primitivist underpinnings, this passage also expresses the elation she felt in George River and Port Burwell and foreshadows the care with which she approached her work in these communities. It was in these

sites that Gilliat also saw herself as possessing a particularly significant and powerful role as a photojournalist. After learning that the George River fishery had only sold half of what they caught the year before, Gilliat wrote, “I do hope most earnestly that my photographs will come out well enough to make some worthwhile propaganda for the char fisheries.”<sup>40</sup> Of course, by accepting the patronage of the NFB, Gilliat was effectively producing propaganda for the state, as her photographs were used to depict interventionist federal policy in a positive light and to market Inuit products to southern Canadians. Yet, Gilliat also understood the potentially positive benefits of co-operatives, including economic stability and a movement towards self-governance, and thus expressed a sincere interest in their success.<sup>41</sup> In her words, “in this lie the hopes of this small band of Eskimo people. So more than ever I hope that our photographs and stories will help to educate the public.”<sup>42</sup> Beyond the commercial promotion of Arctic char, Gilliat hoped her photographs would provide southern audiences with a glimpse into local Inuit culture as well as the social and economic implications of recently formed Arctic co-operatives. Gilliat desired, in other words, to humanize the Inuit who were most often pictured as specimens of anthropological investigation, or to use Gilliat’s terminology, “curiosities.”

The introduction of the co-operative movement is a critical period in the history of contact in the North. By Inuit art expert Marybelle Mitchell’s estimation, it was the “crucial transforming agent, definitively linking pre-contact practices with those of Western Capitalism.”<sup>43</sup> By the end of the 1950s, a pre-contact way of life had been largely displaced as Inuit were settled into communities formed around trading posts and missions where they had access to schools and medical services. As Inuit transitioned into a sedentary mode of living their means of production were drastically altered as they now supported themselves through fur trapping, some seasonal wage employment, and supplementary subsistence

hunting. But as the fur trade collapsed and hunting was no longer viable, many communities fell into economic despair and short food supply. Shortly thereafter civil servants in the North introduced a state-initiated co-operative program intended to develop local economies and provide Inuit with wage labour.

Comprising multipurpose ventures that involved retail stores, restaurants, construction projects, tourism, commercial fishing and handicraft production, the co-operative model was intended to “substantially increase their [Inuit’s] exploitation of renewable resources in order to generate profit that would eliminate the need for state assistance.”<sup>44</sup> The civil servant or co-operative officer was therefore expected to facilitate the initial planning and establishment of a co-op but to eventually step aside to make way for indigenous self-sufficiency. This model, however, did not always follow such progression as the reception by Inuit was varied and the benefits unstable. In her critical analysis of the emergence of social class among the Inuit, Mitchell argues that “co-op ideology promoted the idea that Inuit could be independent and equal partners in the Canadian economy, but the effect was an organization aligned with state and church to keep Inuit in their place and outside the mainstream economy.”<sup>45</sup>

The first Arctic co-operative was established in April 1959 in George River.<sup>46</sup> Based on commercial fishing and logging, the co-op began with twenty Inuit hunters and a loan from the federal government. A few months later a second fishery and the first co-op store were set up 200 km north of George River in Port Burwell, a community of only 23 residents.<sup>47</sup> Gilliat was sensitive to the difficult circumstances of these two communities which both faced precarious food supply and inadequate access to resources as a result of the collapsed fur trade. She therefore supported the introduction of Arctic co-ops but expressed concern over their sustainability and monetary success. She was

particularly troubled that Inuit were continually forced to rely on white men to survive:

*What a lot is risked in this operation, too much I think, the odds against the successful fishery operation are so high – and that is incorrect too – the Eskimos are successful in catching the fish – it is the white man who cannot make his clever machine work that lets the Eskimos down.<sup>48</sup>*

According to Mitchell, while Inuit were able to “retain some control over the terms and conditions of their work,” it was the government and southern markets that dictated what was produced and how much it was worth.<sup>49</sup>

In another passage Gilliat described the fishermen’s “undefinable feeling of pride,” a sentiment she attempted to capture on film.<sup>50</sup> In George River she took several photographs of a man she identified as Johnny Emukadluk who played a central role in the fishery operation. In one striking picture (fig. 2), the centrally framed Emukadluk flashes a grin and shows off his large silvery catch. Dressed in a plaid shirt, black vest, and yellow smock, he confronts the camera’s gaze and takes pride in the fruits of his labour.<sup>51</sup> Emukadluk appears as a man proud not only of his fishing abilities but also of his community’s economic and cultural independence. His returned gaze also suggests a sophisticated understanding of the power of photography to disseminate his image and promote the fishery.<sup>52</sup> While Gilliat took several pictures in George River in which her Inuit sitters appear to have welcomed and actively posed for the camera, these are not, as I will later explain, the photographs that were selected for the NFB mat release.

Many of Gilliat’s photographs of the fishing camps are idyllic scenes of tents scattered on tundra, relying on a familiar visual trope that equated indigenous peoples with the natural world, yet she also turned her lens towards



Fig 2. Rosemary Gilliat, *Johnny holding up Arctic char, Kangiqsualujuaq (George River), Quebec, July 16-August 9 [July 16-19, 1960], 1960, 35 mm colour slide, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa (Photo: Library and Archives Canada / Rosemary Gilliat Eaton Fonds).*



Fig 3. Rosemary Gilliat, *Keith Crowe (right) and Johnny (left) carrying arctic char to a walk-in freezer, Kangiqsualujuaq, Quebec, July 16-August 9, 1960 [July 16-19, 1960], 35 mm colour slide, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa (Photo: Library and Archives Canada / Rosemary Gilliat Eaton Fonds).*



Fig 4. Rosemary Gilliat, *Two women cleaning Arctic char on an outdoor counter while a young girl looks, Kangiqsualujuaq, Quebec, July 16-August 9, 1960 [July 16-19, 1960], 35 mm colour slide, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa (Photo: Library and Archives Canada / Rosemary Gilliat Eaton Fonds).*

the modern technologies necessary for large-scale fish production. Taken from a distanced vantage point, another photograph of Johnny Emukadluk shows him carrying fresh char into an industrial freezer with Keith Crowe, the civil servant in the area (fig. 3). As a counterpoint to the picturesque scenes described and photographed by Gilliat, the unsightly freezer more accurately reveals the infrastructure of modern Inuit fisheries. But again, this, and other photographs that pictured commercial technologies, were not included in the NFB photo story. Such an omission is in keeping with numerous other Division pictorials of indigenous peoples that reflect aspects of anthropological discourse as critiqued by Johannes Fabian. In his influential study *Time and the Other*, Fabian identified anthropology's tendency toward the "denial of coevalness," defined by the refusal to acknowledge the subject's contemporaneous existence with that of the researcher.<sup>53</sup> Payne argues that NFB images representing indigenous peoples translated "anthropological allochronism into photographic and photo-textual form."<sup>54</sup> While this is true of the NFB fishery photo story, Gilliat's unpublished images, such as the photograph of the freezer, complicate anthropological ideology. In this instance, Emukadluk is not relegated to an "ethnographic present" but rather is pictured as a self-determined man negotiating with his contemporary conditions of change.<sup>55</sup>

Gilliat also took several pictures of Inuit women who were an integral part of fisheries and co-operatives more generally. While in the eastern Arctic she often wrote about and photographed women engaged in various forms of labour, including sewing, hunting, and childrearing. As a childless woman herself, Gilliat actively resisted romantic views of motherhood and instead sought to understand and picture Inuit women's diverse and complex roles.<sup>56</sup> In one particularly arresting image from George River, two Kangiqsualujuaq women clean fish as a young girl peeks up over the table to see what her elders are doing (fig. 4). While run by Inuit and Qallunaat men, the fishery co-ops

were a collaborative effort between the sexes, requiring women to prepare the fish for freezing while also taking care of their children. Another photograph depicts two women cleaning fish at a wooden table within an interior space (fig. 5).<sup>57</sup> The woman in the white parka, identified by Gilliat as Maggie Eetok, carries a baby in her outer garment known as an *amauti*, while two young children stand around the table and look on. In the background is an unidentified Inuk man and civil servant Keith Crowe. This photograph illustrates the collaborative labour that went into char fishing, which involved the efforts of Inuit men, women, and sometimes children, as well as the aid of white workers in the North. While framed to emphasize the mother and child, the "excess" visual information in this seemingly unrehearsed snapshot unexpectedly confronts today's viewer with the complex politics and ominous history of place. In her writing on race and visual technologies, Deborah Poole argues that it is in excessive detail, such as facial expressions, gestures, or objects, that photography's intention of fixity is unsettled and negotiated, inviting rich and polysemous readings of historical photographs.<sup>58</sup> In the image of Eetok, the children amongst the women are relatively young in age because the older ones were likely at the nearby summer residential school known as the George River Seasonal School. This seemingly innocuous detail gives way to a deeper understanding of the context of the photograph's making. In the words of visual culture theorist Ariella Azoulay, "the spectator must reconstruct what was there from both what is visible and what is not immediately manifest, but what can – in principle – become visible in the exact same photograph."<sup>59</sup>

In the mid-twentieth century Inuit were still mainly unilingual Inuktitut speakers and thus the government deemed primary education as an "absolute necessity" in its program of assimilation.<sup>60</sup> About 32 kilometres inland from the mouth of George River a six-week summer school was set up in a community hall to instruct Inuit children



in English, arithmetic, reading, and writing. Adjacent to the school were the George River Federal Hostels where students slept in tents on gravel floors. Run by community teacher Joan Ryan, the non-denominational hostel operated for only one summer although the school continued for a number of years.<sup>61</sup> While many scholars have addressed the legacy of residential schooling, I refer here to The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) for an apt summary of this scarring past. In its executive summary of findings, the TRC identified 139 Indian Residential Schools that operated across the country for over 120 years:

*These residential schools were created for the purpose of separating Aboriginal children from their families, in order to minimize and weaken family ties and cultural linkages, and to indoctrinate children into a new culture – the culture of the legally dominant Euro-Christian Canadian society.*<sup>62</sup>

Based on extensive archival research and the testimonies of multigenerational residential school survivors, the report details how the horrific experiences of thousands of children, from the forced loss of language to sexual and verbal abuse, have been hidden from public view for most of Canada's history. Although the hostel was in operation for only one summer, documentary evidence suggests that coerced attendance resulted in the separation of families, the significant loss of culture and language, and a legacy of trauma. Gilliat's own writing sheds light on the troubling realities of the George River Seasonal School. In her diary she commented on the lack of clean water and the school's remote location, making it difficult to access in the case of emergencies, as well as the separation anxiety experienced by children and their families: "Actually the parents were as homesick for the children as the children were for their parents – as Eskimo families are very close indeed – and this *experiment* is an entirely new conception for the Eskimos."<sup>63</sup> Gilliat did not photograph the George River school or

hostel nor was she hired to do so, however, she did take pictures of the students and their teacher. In one image (fig. 6), a group of children dressed in colourful coats and scarves crowd around Ryan as she rings a large silver bell in the air. Some of them look away from the camera, presumably towards their teacher, while others shield their eyes from the glaring sun. One child, wearing a beige hooded jacket, solemnly stares down towards the ground, while three young girls in the foreground look towards the camera with expressions of apprehension and suspicion. Unlike Johnny Emukadluk's returned gaze in the previously analysed photograph, here the action begs the viewer to bear witness to this historical atrocity.<sup>64</sup> Not a single student is smiling. These are the faces of children who have been forcibly removed from their families to attend summer school. Gilliat's photograph differs from typical historical images of residential schools. Shot outside, it does not include any school buildings or students learning, nor is it a before and after photograph used to represent progress by an "altered physical appearance."<sup>65</sup> Rather, it captures the dispirited expressions of children involved in a disastrous social *experiment*.<sup>66</sup>

By contrast, most of Gilliat's other photographs of the George River Seasonal School show students playing in a nearby pond after the instructional day had concluded (fig. 7). Stripped down to their underclothes, the children splashed about in a watering hole, seemingly oblivious to Gilliat or other observing adults. It was in this moment of temporary joyfulness that Gilliat claimed to witness the true spirit of youth: "[It] was the happiest scene I had watched in years [...] How I wished I had lots of film [...] because it was the essence of childhood – the delirious gaiety of it all."<sup>67</sup> While the picture depicts ostensibly happy, healthy children, thereby promoting colonial education and contrasting the realities of what we know about residential schools, we might also consider this and other images of leisure as a subtle mode of resistance. According to Métis artist and



Fig 5. Rosemary Gilliat, *Maggie, the wife of Willy Eetok, cutting fish with her daughter Elizabeth on her back, George River [Kangiqualujuaq], Québec, August 1960 [July 17, 1960], colour slide, 6 x 6 cm, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa (Photo: Library and Archives Canada / Rosemary Gilliat Eaton Fonds).*



Fig 6. Rosemary Gilliat, *Joan Ryan ringing a school bell, Kangiqualujuaq, Québec, July 16-August 9, 1960 [July 24, 1960], 35 mm colour slide, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa (Photo: Library and Archives Canada / Rosemary Gilliat Eaton Fonds).*



Fig 7. Rosemary Gilliat, *Children in a swimming hole, Kangiqsualujjuaq, Quebec*, July 16-August 9, 1960 [July 24, 1960], 35 mm colour slide, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa (Photo: Library and Archives Canada / Rosemary Gilliat Eaton Fonds).

scholar Sherry Farrell Racette, images of students engaged in team sports, playing musical instruments, or enjoying free time were used to “generate public positivity and mask other realities, but they also reveal moments when students could escape into artistic or physical expression.”<sup>68</sup> In fact, Gilliat’s photograph was printed a few years later in a NFB photo story titled “Play in the *Land of the Long Day*” in which the rhetoric of leisure and recreation masked the darker realities of Inuit children’s lives.<sup>69</sup> Yet when viewed with an understanding of its historical context, the joyous and fleeting abandon of these children also reminds us of the rigidity and injustice that structured the rest of their days. Farrell Racette reads such images as a “visual tribute to the resilient spirits of children. [...] a spirit that eroded the power of the panopticon from within, causing the failure of the ‘laboratory of power.’”<sup>70</sup>

As a collection, Gilliat’s fishery photographs visualize two vibrant communities in a moment of cultural and economic transformation. Individually, these images can be read in a number of ways: As Inuit men promoting their co-operative, as Gilliat’s feminist intervention in a masculinized narrative of the North, or as a subtle commentary on the abuses of residential school. Yet, the NFB photo story that integrated a selection of Gilliat’s fishery images is anchored by layout and text that attempted to fix meaning to suit a federally endorsed and culturally imagined idea of the North.

### THE OFFICIAL NORTH

In January 1961, the Still Photography Division released a photo story titled “Ilkalupik: King of the Arctic,” which included six of Gilliat’s northern fishery photographs from the previous summer.<sup>71</sup> The story is exemplary of the rhetorical strategies typically employed by the NFB in its representation of indigenous peoples.<sup>72</sup> As Payne argues, these images, which often reflect an “anthropological distance absent from NFB portrayals of Euro-Canadians, position Inuit and other aboriginal peoples as complex

markers of Canadian identity for Canadians themselves and international audiences.”<sup>73</sup>

The title, in its use of an Inuktitut variant for char, introduces the “exotic” subject matter of the story. This is reinforced by the lead image of a sailboat voyaging through an empty and vast body of water. Lacking descriptors of time or place, this shot is striking in its graphic simplicity of line, light, and shadow. Notably, the mast, which penetrates the fluffy white clouds overhead, creates a strong vertical line through the centre of the image, which can be read as a symbol of exploration, industry, and progress. At the same time, the receding horizon line suggests immense and foreboding waters, connecting the exoticism of the essay’s title to a wild and unfamiliar landscape. Thus, without picturing Inuit bodies this image reduces them to a symbolic association with the land.

Below the lead image is a short text describing the burgeoning industry of commercial Arctic char fishing “where the traditional means of making a living is rapidly changing through contact with the civilization of the white man.”<sup>74</sup> While alluding to the effects of contact in the North, the text glosses over the historical circumstances of Arctic co-operatives. Rather, it applauds Inuit for successfully adapting to a market economy and “reduc[ing] their dependence on the vagaries of fluctuating food supply.” This paternalistic view, which promotes assimilation while continuing to distance Inuit from Euro-Canadian society, is reiterated throughout the photo story in both image and text. The five additional photographs, read from upper-left to lower-right, are tightly cropped views of Inuit men and women arranging fishing nets, preparing char for the market, and purchasing tobacco and food goods at the local co-op store. In keeping with Euro-Canadian rhetoric of the time, the figures are referred to generally as “Eskimos” and all but one are nameless. The fishermen, none of whom face the camera, are also visually distanced and thus rendered

as objects of the colonial gaze. As Payne elucidates, “the photographs diminish the apparent status of the people portrayed while situating the implied, non-native viewers at a cultural remove, endowing them a superior caretaking role.”<sup>75</sup>

In this photo story, the physical presence of non-native bodies in the North is also erased from view. A slightly different shot of Maggie Eetok (labelled image “C”) is framed to exclude the civil servant in the background, thereby focusing attention on the garment in which she carries her child. Likewise, the caption for photograph “F” does not mention federal employee Max Budgell whose back faces the viewer. These design choices strategically obscure the realities of settler-colonial collaboration, suggesting instead that Arctic co-operatives were entirely Inuit-run enterprises, thus amplifying their exoticism and driving up prices in southern restaurants.

The landscape view of the lead image is repeated in the second largest photograph, labelled “B,” with the addition of a boat and three men in the foreground. Enveloped by expansive waters and mountainous forms, the labouring bodies are framed and diminished by a majestic northern wilderness. In his influential writing on landscape and power, W.J.T. Mitchell argues that the indigenous relationship with nature is oppositionally positioned to that of the secularized western conception of landscape. The “primitive” dweller is seen as part of the land rather than as a “self-consciously detached viewer who sees nature for its own sake” and asserts power over it.<sup>76</sup> In this case, the photo story paradoxically endorses Inuit assimilation into western or southern life, particularly in their ability to exploit the land for profit, while simultaneously reducing them to “anthropomorphized elements of nature itself.”<sup>77</sup> Further, even though by 1960 modern technology such as guns and outboard motors had been introduced in the North and adopted by Inuit, the photo story visually privileges ostensibly primitive tools

and methods such as canoes, nets, and knives. The NFB narrative thus denies indigenous modernity, or rather pictures it as non-threatening, suggesting that the terms of modernity are determined by the colonizer rather than by the colonized.<sup>78</sup>

In other images that emphasize modernization, such as the scene of commerce in the lower left (“E”), the viewpoint is one of paternalistic distance. Appearing at ease and, in the case of the figure on the far right, joyful, photographs such as this helped to assure readers in the South that Inuit were readily and happily adapting to Western models of capitalism when in fact, this transition was anything but smooth and uncontested. As Gilliat’s notes reveal, both fisheries failed to sell everything they produced and were plagued by problems with their freezers. Co-ops also often brought about physical and social afflictions such as sickness and the separation of families.<sup>79</sup>

In their published form, Gilliat’s photographs upheld a primitivist discourse, defining Inuit as part of Canadian identity yet at a cultural and geographical remove. Within the archive, however, her unpublished images and writing offer a challenge to typical renderings of the North, allowing for multivalent readings of photographs not grounded by text or layout. This is not to say, however, that her images were manipulated to achieve meaning beyond their maker’s intent. Gilliat did, after all, willingly accept the support of the DNANR and kept their objectives in mind as she photographed throughout the Arctic. However, my purpose has been to demonstrate how photographs allow layered readings and how image-makers, particularly those working within the genre of photojournalism, have to navigate between their own point of view and the expectations of their clients. While Gilliat’s detailed diary and unpublished images offer a glimpse into the workings of two communities and the lands they lived on, the edited photo story decontextualizes place and distances local

narrative, thus reinforcing stereotypes and naturalizing assimilationist-based policies in the North.

## CONCLUSION

In her book *Eye Contact* Jane Lydon offers close readings of nineteenth-century photographs of indigenous Australians but her conclusions are easily translated to the settler-colonial context of Canada:

*In a nation wracked by uncertainty about its identity, and especially about the status of its indigenous peoples, photographs still speak eloquently of oppression, but also of collaboration and intimacy.*<sup>80</sup>

Lydon suggests that while photographs created within colonial systems are an extension of oppressive power, there remains the potential for them also to reveal encounters that were resistant, collaborative, and perhaps mutually beneficial. Drawing on Lydon, Edwards, and others who theorize photographs as “social objects of agency”, I have argued that photography has played a critical role in constructing and disseminating ideas of the North. While I have aimed for interpretative complexity, trying to disentangle the multiple, and at time competing meanings, that Gilliat’s photographs engender, my reading is inherently limited by my own position as a Qallunaat researcher in the South. The next phase in the social lives of these objects ought to be their return to source communities. Escaping their static position in the national archive – a site that many have argued is itself a technology of oppressive power – and travelling back to the North would allow these photographs to continue to accrue layers of meaning and to perhaps be useful to Inuit communities today who continue to “repossess their histories and to reassert sovereignty over their culture” and territory.<sup>81</sup>

There are a number of visual “returns” projects taking place around the globe.<sup>82</sup> In Canada, *Project Naming*, an

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ongoing initiative launched in 2001, has embarked on the task of identifying thousands of anonymous indigenous peoples in Library and Archives Canada's photographic holdings.<sup>83</sup> Gilliat herself understood the importance of both naming the individuals in her photographs and granting them the opportunity to view their own image. She kept lists of people's names and wrote many of these on the back of prints or slides that are now in the archive. She also maintained correspondence with a few people in the North, both Inuit and non-Inuit, and desired to send her photographs back to the North, which evidence suggests she did on at least one occasion.<sup>84</sup> Today, while some of Gilliat's northern images have been included in *Project Naming's* database, the bulk of them remain unseen and undescribed. Given the relatively recent period in which Gilliat went to the Arctic as well as the availability of her rich field notes, these archival photographs are "ripe for the excavation" of counter narratives of colonial history as generated through what Lydon terms "local ways of seeing."<sup>85</sup> In the opening epigraph of article anthropologist Hugh Brody maintains that the power of photographs resides in their ability to incite multiple narratives while never fully revealing anything. Returning Gilliat's photographs to their source communities to be recognized and described by the very people within them would bring them that much closer to their full potential.

<sup>1</sup> Hugh Brody, "In Conclusion: The Power of the Image," in *Imaging the Arctic*, ed. J.C.H. King and Henrietta Lidchi (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1998), 227.

<sup>2</sup> Blaire McKenzie, "Camera-toting Travels to the North Takes Rosemary Gilliat Among Eskimos," *The Ottawa Journal*, 8 June 1963.

<sup>3</sup> Throughout this article, I use the general moniker "North" to refer to both Arctic and sub-Arctic regions. Northern Canada is variously defined by geography and politics. Politically, the North refers to three territories that make up approximately 2/5 of the country's landmass: Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut. For other purposes, as for my own, northern Canada includes the northern regions of provinces such as Quebec and Labrador. In the 1960s Canadian geographer Louis-Edmond Hamelin developed the concept of "nordicity" to refer to the perceived, real, or imagined conditions of high-latitude regions. Louis-Edmond Hamelin, "Nordicity," *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/nordicity/>, accessed on 25 Feb 2019.

<sup>4</sup> "Eskimo" is a term used to describe Indigenous peoples of the North. While some countries, such as the United States, continue to employ "Eskimo," in Canada it is considered outmoded and derogatory. Inuit, the word some northern Indigenous peoples use to describe themselves, is the accepted term. Inuk is the word for one Inuit person.

<sup>5</sup> Sherrill Grace, *Canada and the Idea of North* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2001), 15.

<sup>6</sup> Amy Adams, "Part One: An Accurate Representation of the World," *Inuit Art Quarterly* 15, no.2 (Summer 2000): 6.

<sup>7</sup> Grace, *Canada*, 15.

<sup>8</sup> An area of land formerly subsumed within the Northwest Territories, Nunavut was created in 1999 after years of land claim negotiations between Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami and the federal government. Nunavik is a region of northern Quebec.

<sup>9</sup> This is part of the larger Gilliat Eaton Fonds which consists of approximately 25 000 photographs and 30 films as well as extensive textual materials written and collected by Gilliat. Another archival collection at the Cole Harbour Heritage Farm Museum in Halifax, Nova Scotia has also been useful in my research but is dedicated primarily to Gilliat's life after 1964, at which point she had largely given up photojournalism.

<sup>10</sup> Gilliat to Frank Lowe (Editor of *Weekend Magazine*), no date, Gilliat

Eaton Fonds, R12438-0-0-E, box 1 file 40, "Correspondence," Library and Archives Canada (LAC), Ottawa, Ontario.

<sup>11</sup> Gilliat, diary entry, July 10, 1960, Gilliat Eaton Fonds, box 3 file 5, "Arctic Trip Diary," LAC.

<sup>12</sup> Qallunaat is the Inuktitut term for a non-Inuit. Throughout this article, I use Qallunaat interchangeably with white, southern Canadian, and Euro-Canadian to describe the settler population of Canada.

<sup>13</sup> Gilliat, diary entry, July 10, 1960, Gilliat Eaton Fonds, box 3 file 5, "Arctic Trip Diary," LAC.

<sup>14</sup> John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on photographies and histories* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 63-4. In Martha Rosler's words, "Documentary, as we know it, carried (old) information about a group of powerless people to another group addressed as socially powerful." Martha Rosler, "In Around, and Afterthoughts (On Documentary Photography)," in *Contest of Meaning*, ed. Richard Bolton (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1989), 306.

<sup>15</sup> Frank Tester and Peter Kulchyski, *Tammarniit (mistakes): Inuit Relocation in the Eastern Arctic, 1939-63* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1994), 4. This thoroughly researched study is important for understanding how colonialism operated in the unique setting of the North. Notably, the authors take issue with writers like Sherrill Grace who co-opt Michel Foucault's concepts of discourse and power to muddy the waters of what they believe is a sharp distinction between the colonized and colonizer. I, however, have found Grace's theorizations to be useful in understanding how ideas of the North are constructed and perpetuated in the Canadian imaginary.

<sup>16</sup> Loren Lerner's definition of paternalism is useful for understanding the context of federal policy in the North. "In paternalism, a dominant power adopts attitudes and practices that deny the people being cared for individual responsibility and choice and leave them in a subordinate position. It often includes meddling in their lives, the imposition of gross inequalities, and the creation of devices for legitimating hierarchical and exploitative relationships." Loren Lerner, "Kathleen Daly's Images of Inuit People: Professional Art and the Practice of Ethnography," in *Rethinking Professionalism: Women and Art in Canada, 1850-1970*, ed. Kristina Huneault and Janice Anderson (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012), 241.

<sup>17</sup> Elizabeth Edwards, "Introduction," in *Anthropology and Photography 1960-1920*, ed. Elizabeth Edwards, (New Haven: Yale University Press in association with The Royal Anthropological, 1992), 12.

<sup>18</sup> Elizabeth Edwards, "Photographs and the Sounds of History," *Visual Anthropology Review* 21, no. 1 & 2, (2000): 34.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Jane Lydon, *Eye Contact: Photographing Indigenous Australians* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), xiv.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>22</sup> Aaron Glass, "A Cannibal in the Archive: Performance, Materiality, and (In)Visibility in Unpublished Edward Curtis Photographs of the Kwakwaka'wakw Hamat'sa," *Visual Anthropology Review* 25, no. 2 (2009): 130.

<sup>23</sup> For other compelling examples of white women in the North in the mid-twentieth century who operated within colonialism's social structures while exhibiting an opposition to its norms, see Lerner, "Kathleen Daly's Images of Inuit People," 225-258; and Rachel Alpha Johnston Hurst, "Lorene Squire's Psychological Landscapes of Colonial/ Modern Gender in the Canadian North," *History of Photography* 40, no.4 (2016): 413-431.

<sup>24</sup> Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), 6

<sup>25</sup> While in part an effect of the general curtailment of women's professional histories, Gilliat's absence is also related to photojournalism's subordinate position in the photographic canon. Carol Payne and Andrea Kunard, "Writing Photography in Canada," in *The Cultural Work of Photography in Canada*, ed. Carol Payne and Andrea Kunard (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011), 235.

<sup>26</sup> Here I am drawing on Edwards who espouses a social biography model of analysis that is attentive to the layers of meaning that photographs accrue over time and within different spaces of consumption. Edwards, "Objects of Affect, Photography beyond the Image," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 41(1): 222.

<sup>27</sup> The North as a motivation for Gilliat's move to Canada was expressed to me by her friend, Elizabeth Courser, in an interview conducted on March 9, 2016 in Cole Harbour, NS. Gilliat's "strange attraction to the North" actually began years earlier when she visited Norway. Gilliat, diary entry, 1953, Gilliat Eaton Fonds, box 2 file 4, "Diary - Canada."

<sup>28</sup> While gender and the North is beyond the scope of this article, it is important to note the uncommon nature of such a trip. Unlike most women who travelled to the Arctic before them, Gilliat and Hinds were not missionaries, teachers, or the wives of civil servants or Royal Canadian Mounted Police officers. They had to work overtime to convince employers and government personnel of their professional motives and skill. Gilliat's archive is thus a fascinating counterpoint to traditionally masculinized accounts of the North and one worthy of further study. For further discussion on gender and the North, see Renée Hulan, *Northern Experience and the Myths of Canadian Culture* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002); and Joan Sangster, "Constructing the 'Eskimo' Wife: White Women's Travel Writing, Colonialism, and the Canadian North, 1940-1960," in *Through Feminist Eyes: Essays on Canadian Women's History* (Edmonton: Athabasca University Press, 2011), 327-353. For other studies of women photographers in the north, see Susan Close, "Geraldine Moodie's Arctic Photographs," in *Framing Identity: Social*

*Practices of Photography in Canada* (1880-1920) (Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Publishing, 2007), 20-47; Molly Lee, "With Broom and Camera: Gladys Knight Harris's Photography of Inupiat Women," in *Imaging the Arctic*, 168-174.

<sup>29</sup> In recent years, many colonial place names have been replaced by their Inuktitut language names as Inuit have gained political rights over their territory. For the sake of clarity and to reflect their historical semantic usage, I use outmoded place names throughout this article but make note of amended names when applicable.

<sup>30</sup> These were Gilliat's main photographic assignments but do not reflect all of the places in which her northern work was later published. Some of her photographs of Inuit artists, for example, were used in the West Baffin Eskimo Co-operative's annual print catalogues and were published internationally in *The Geographical Magazine* (March, 1962).

<sup>31</sup> Carol Payne, *The Official Picture: The National Film Board of Canada's Still Photography Division, 1941-71* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013), 7-8.

<sup>32</sup> Roland Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," in *Image, Music, Text*, 32-51, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 156.

<sup>33</sup> Kozol, *Life's America: Family and Nation in Postwar Photojournalism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 34

<sup>34</sup> Payne, *Official Picture*, 111.

<sup>35</sup> Editors of *The Beaver* and *Star Weekly* also requested photographs of Inuit char fishing. Malvina Bolus to Gilliat, May 26, 1960, "Correspondences.," Gilliat, notebook, 1960, Gilliat Eaton Fonds, box 3, file 4, "Arctic Trip," LAC.

<sup>36</sup> Monk to Gilliat, June 10, 1960, Gilliat Eaton Fonds, box 1 file 33, "Correspondences," LAC.

<sup>37</sup> Payne, *Official Picture*, 10.

<sup>38</sup> While this was not a part of her initial itinerary, Gilliat submitted several of her Port Burwell photographs to the NFB to be included in her fishery photo story.

<sup>39</sup> Gilliat, July 16, 1960, "Arctic Trip Diary."

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> As Ariella Azoulay notes, photojournalists often operate under competing motives. These include economic, professional, moral, and cultural motives, all of which exerted influence on Gilliat's work photographing co-operatives. Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (New York: Zone Books, 2008), 156.

<sup>42</sup> Gilliat, August 1, 1960, "Arctic Trip Diary."

<sup>43</sup> Marybelle Mitchell, *From Talking Chiefs to a Native Corporate Elite: The Birth of Class and Nationalism Among Canadian Inuit* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), xiii.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. It is important to note that co-ops have become the largest nongovernment employers of Indigenous people in the North. With

annual sales of nearly \$200 million, Inuit co-operatives remain a vital economic, cultural, and political force.

<sup>46</sup> While the HBC operated a post south of today's village intermittently until the 1930s, Inuit of the area had never settled there, preferring to live along the coast in the summer and setting up camp about 50 km inland in the winter. The construction of a village began in 1962 and within a few years most Inuit of the area lived in prefabricated houses. As George River grew, the community also built a school, co-operative store, and various government buildings.

<sup>47</sup> This former settlement was located on Killiniq Island situated in Ungava Bay at the northern tip of Labrador. Notably, this co-operative did not succeed in the long term. A decline of government services and programs gave rise to a slow outmigration of families and by 1978 the 47 remaining residents were evacuated. They scattered throughout Nunavik but most settled in George River. Separated from their traditional hunting territory, families were broken up and arrived in communities without housing, income, or many of their personal effects. For an analysis of the Canadian government's policy of forced relocation see, Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit (Mistakes)*.

<sup>48</sup> Gilliat, August 8, 1960, "Arctic Trip Diary."

<sup>49</sup> Mitchell, *Talking Chiefs*, xiv.

<sup>50</sup> Gilliat, August 1, 1960, "Arctic Trip Diary."

<sup>51</sup> Lydon contends that while images of Indigenous peoples adopting Western dress and agricultural ways of life were historically important for representing successful civilizing missions, today we can read them as record of indigenous "self-determination and courage in choosing a new future." Lydon, *Eye Contact*, xix.

<sup>52</sup> Margaret Olin has written about competing understandings of the returned gaze. For some theorists, it "rescues the beheld's sense of self." "Rather than emphasizing the power of the gazing one to make the one gazed into an object, this idea [of a shared gaze] suggests responsibility toward the living person looking back at one." Yet for others, the returned gaze is rendered powerless by the fact that it is a representation, not the person, looking back. For others still, the returned gaze is a tacit invitation to look. Olin, "Gaze," *Critical Terms for Art History*, ed. Robert S. Nelson et al., 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 217.

<sup>53</sup> Johannes Fabian, *Time and The Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 31.

<sup>54</sup> Payne, *Official Picture*, 123

<sup>55</sup> According to Fabian, the "ethnographic present" is an anthropological tendency to describe the subject's culture in the present tense, whether or not this reflects its current state, which paradoxically suggests a pre-contact view of non-Western society.

<sup>56</sup> I have argued elsewhere that Gilliat's focus on Inuit women, or the female Other, was a strategy in exploring and asserting her own identity.

Danielle Siemens, "Picturing Inuit Women," in *Photographic Encounters in the North: Rosemary Gilliat Eaton's 1960 Trip to the Eastern Canadian Arctic*, M.A. thesis, Carleton University, 2016.

<sup>57</sup> Usually fish cleaning and preparation was done outdoors but on the day this photograph was taken heavy rain had forced workers inside. Gilliat's flash had gotten wet and her lens acquired condensation, explaining the poor quality of the negative.

<sup>58</sup> Deborah Poole, "An Excess of Description: Ethnology, Race, and Visual Technologies," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 34 (2005): 167.

<sup>59</sup> Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, 159.

<sup>60</sup> Mitchell, *Talking Chiefs*, 166.

<sup>61</sup> For a brief history of the Federal Hostels at George River and related archival documents, see National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, University of Manitoba, [http://nctr.ca/scripts/mwimain.dll/127/1/1?SEARCH&dboption=search&database=irs\\_school\\_val&report=web\\_location&advanced\\_search=n&showsingle=y](http://nctr.ca/scripts/mwimain.dll/127/1/1?SEARCH&dboption=search&database=irs_school_val&report=web_location&advanced_search=n&showsingle=y), accessed 27 Feb 2019.

<sup>62</sup> *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (Ottawa: Library and Archives Canada, 2015). The report can be read in entirety at [www.trc.ca](http://www.trc.ca).

<sup>63</sup> Gilliat, July 24, 1960, 'Arctic Trip Diary,' emphasis added.

<sup>64</sup> For Azoulay, the performative force of the photograph includes the agency of the sitter and implicates the viewer in space of encounter. The spectator (or citizen of photography), Azoulay argues, has a responsibility to occupy a critical position of suspicion and the power to translate gaze into action.

<sup>65</sup> Sherry Farrell Racette, "Haunted: First Nations Children in Residential School Photography," in *Depicting Canada's Children*, ed. Loren Lerner (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2009), 52.

<sup>66</sup> Gilliat, July 24, 1960, "Arctic Trip Diary."

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Farrell Racette, "Haunted," 78.

<sup>69</sup> National Film Board of Canada Still Photography Division, photo story 305, "Play in the *Land of the Long Day*," February 20, 1962, photographs by Gar Lunney, Ted Grant, Bud Glunz, Jean Roy, Dough Wilkinson, and Rosemary Gilliat. The photo story's title makes reference to the NFB film, *Land of the Long Day*, directed by Doug Wilkinson in 1952, [https://www.nfb.ca/film/land\\_of\\_the\\_long\\_day](https://www.nfb.ca/film/land_of_the_long_day).

<sup>70</sup> Farrell Racette, "Haunted," 78.

<sup>71</sup> The mat release also included several supplementary images and captions which publications could pick up individually. A close reading of the supplementary images is beyond the scope of this article but is worthy of further analysis. While these images are stylistically and ideologically similar to those included in the layout, it is possible that

when printed individually they served differing ends or were open to more interpretive complexity.

<sup>72</sup> My reading of the photo story is ideological as I am interested in what Payne terms the “official picture” of the Still Division. I realize however that I am not taking into account the fact that some contemporary viewers would have constructed their own narratives through these photographs and challenged normative representations. Payne, *Official Picture*, 13; Kozol, *Life’s America*, 18.

<sup>73</sup> Payne, *Official Picture*, 34.

<sup>74</sup> The text may have been based on Gilliat’s notes, detailing the creation of the fisheries and those involved, but was likely written by staff writer John Ough. Her diary and notebooks also clarify in which communities she took certain photographs. The photo story, however, conflates the distinct communities of George River and Port Burwell, referring to both but misidentifying some of the images in the layout.

<sup>75</sup> Payne, *Official Picture*, 120.

<sup>76</sup> W.J.T. Mitchell, “Holy Landscape: Israel, Palestine, and the American Wilderness,” in *Landscape and Power*, ed. Mitchell, 2<sup>nd</sup>ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 265.

<sup>77</sup> Payne, *Official Picture*, 120.

<sup>78</sup> Thank you to Dr. Ruth Phillips for pointing this out to me in her comments on a conference paper I presented at the UK Association of Art Historians annual conference in Edinburgh, April 8, 2016. For an introduction to the concept of multiple modernities, see Susan Friedman, “Periodizing Modernism: Postcolonial Modernities and the Space/ Time Borders of Modernist Studies,” *Modernism/Modernity* 13, no. 3 (September 2006): 425-33.

<sup>79</sup> Gilliat grappled with conflicting feelings about colonial policy; she was both critical of state intervention (“the paternalism of the old system” she called it) and believed in the need for non-indigenous aid and the promotion of industry. Her photographs, however, unlike those we tend to associate with social documentary, avoid picturing poverty, starvation, or abysmal living conditions. On the one hand, Gilliat’s “sanitized” views were contingent on the institutional bodies she worked for. Moreover, as a woman and a photojournalist she was denied entry into certain spaces as part of the overall social management of the Arctic that worked to keep oppressions from view. On the other hand, Gilliat was emphatic about not victimizing her indigenous subjects. Photographs themselves cannot not adequately depict the history of settler-indigenous contact in the North, the rapid transformation of Inuit culture, or the trauma of state-run schooling. Thus, it is by ceding to Elizabeth Edwards’ call to look *through* rather than at Gilliat’s photographs, that we can better grasp the political and social context of their making. Edwards, “Negotiating Spaces: Some Photographic Incidents in the Western Pacific, 1883-84,” in *Picturing Place: Photography and the Geographical Imagination*, ed. Joan M.

Schwartz and James R. Ryan (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003), 278.

<sup>80</sup> Lydon, *Eye Contact*, 251.

<sup>81</sup> Pamela Stern “The History of Canadian Arctic Photography,” in King and Lidchi, *Imaging the Arctic*, 51-52. For a discussion of the relationship between colonialism and the archive see, Laura Ann Stoler, “Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance,” *Archival Science* 2 (2002): 87-109.

<sup>82</sup> Lydon, “Return: The Photographic Archive and Technologies of Indigenous Memory,” *Photographies* 3, no. 2 (September 2010): 173-87; Laura Peers and Alison K. Brown, *Pictures Bring Us Messages / Sinaakssiiksi aohtsimaahpibhkookiyaawa: Photographs and Histories from the Kainai Nation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006).

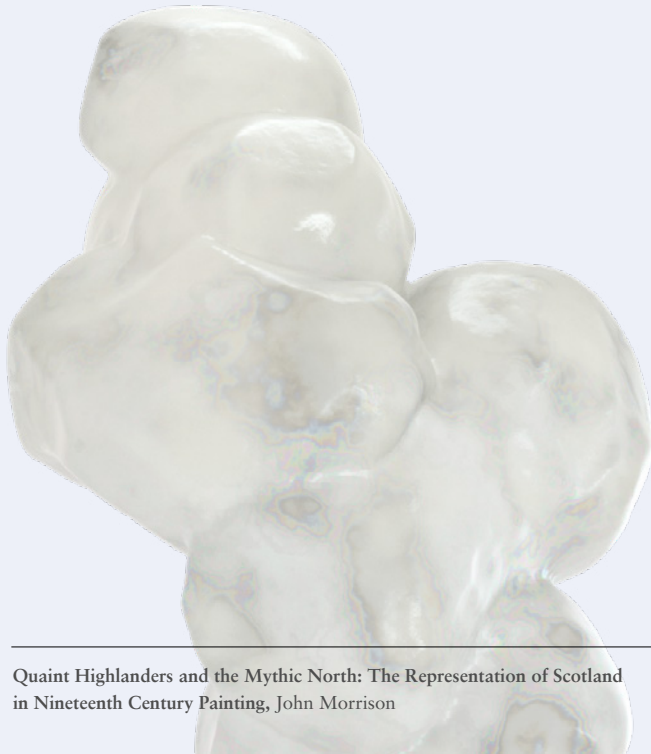
<sup>83</sup> See also, Carol Payne, “Culture, Memory and Community through Photographs: Developing an Inuit-Based Research Methodology,” *Anthropology and Photography* 5 (2016): 1-17.

<sup>84</sup> In 1961 she sent a photograph of an Inuk man named Kingwatsiak back to his home in Cape Dorset. An exchange of letters between her and a government official in the North confirmed receipt of the print. From Esmond Butler to Gilliat, 1961, “Correspondence.”

<sup>85</sup> Glass, “A Cannibal in the Archive,” 131. Lydon, “Eye Contact,” 9.

# *Quaint Highlanders and the Mythic North: The Representation of Scotland in Nineteenth Century Painting*

*John Morrison*



Over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the period covered here, Scotland underwent great social, economic and cultural change. It was a time when painting came to be accorded tremendous significance, both as a record of humanity's highest achievements and as a vehicle for the expression of elemental truths. In Britain in the nineteenth century the middle classes assigned great significance to the art they bought in increasing quantities; indeed, painting became their preferred instrument for the promotion of their vision of a prosperous modern society. Art was valued insofar as it expressed their highest aspirations and deepest convictions, and it was a crucial instrument in the task of moulding a society of people who shared these values regardless of their class, gender or wealth. If nineteenth- and early twentieth-century painting functioned to corroborate the narratives people used to help validate their lives; if further it was closely linked to middle-class ideologies, then we are likely to find that the social and political power of the middle classes made art a barometer of Scottish society as a whole.<sup>2</sup>

That society, for much of the nineteenth century, was concerned either with what it meant to be Scottish, or with asserting that distinctive Scottishness. Throughout the nineteenth century and arguably until after 1914, expressions of Scottish national identity, Scottish "nationalism," concentrated on those aspects of life which gave the country its unity: the land, the people, the history, and most importantly the country's "myths."<sup>3</sup> It is in representations of these subjects, which were repeatedly painted in the period, that an expression of contemporary ideas of national identity can be found. The nature of

Scotland's myths and the cultural formations which carried them are complex.

## THE MYTH OF SCOTLAND

The term myth, in this context, is taken to mean a widely accepted interpretative traditional story embodying fundamental beliefs. Every country has its myths. They arise via judicious appropriations from the popular history of the country and function as a contemporary force endorsing belief or conduct in the present. They explain and interpret the world as it is found, and both assert values and extol identity. Here, in addition, the concept embodies something of the overtones of the moral teaching of a parable.

A myth is a highly selective memory of the past used to stimulate collective purpose in the present. With no collective purpose, there can be no national identity and therefore no nationalism. Myths are central to the very existence of nationalism. The word "myth" implies fabrication, but to have evolved at all a myth must have some connection to reality. It must reflect aspects of the realities of life and be seen to do so, or it simply will not survive. That is not to imply that myths are at some basic level objectively true. Rather they must be conceived by those to whom they relate as expressing a broader allegorical truth about themselves and their identity. The objective truth or otherwise of a myth is irrelevant and myths are not subject to destruction by dispassionate proof that they are false. What people believe is real, is real in its consequences. Given that a myth exists, its perpetuation relies on it being continually reiterated. It must become embedded in one or more cultural carriers. To borrow Raymond Williams's breakdown of the cultural



process, “traditions,” endure through incorporation into the “institutions” and “formations” of a country.<sup>4</sup> To apply this to Scottish culture we must consider the myth of Scotland and its cultural carriers.<sup>5</sup> In the nineteenth century, as Kate Flint has observed, painting in particular fulfilled the role of carrier of myth. “Art,” she observes, “had the function of confirming the narratives which (people) used to make sense of their lives.”<sup>6</sup>

The myth of the land was particularly powerful. A myth of nature “acts economically: it abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them the simplicity of essence, [...] myth does not deny things, on the contrary its function is to talk about them, it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them natural and eternal justification.”<sup>7</sup> The Romantic landscapes of Horatio McCulloch (1805–1867) reflect the dominant narrative in Scotland and it is a myth of the North. As Peter Womack observed of Scotland’s defining northern myth:

*We know that the Highlands of Scotland are Romantic. Bens and glens, the loan shieling in the misty island, purple heather, kilted clansmen, battles long ago, an ancient and beautiful language, claymores and bagpipes and Bonny Prince Charlie – we know all that, and we also know that it is not real.*<sup>8</sup>

Though not by any means unchallenged, this visual expression of Scottish identity was very powerful in the period under discussion. The Highlands of the north of Scotland were understood, from their representation by Walter Scott in the early nineteenth century onwards, as the home of a different type of culture and it was to that culture, or rather to a very particular fantasy view of that culture, that Scotland pinned its identity.<sup>9</sup> The Highlands as a landscape were understood as wild, empty, desolate and with a terrible beauty. The people who inhabited the region lived in a society presented as being founded on

bonds of kinship and of community, as being classless and fiercely loyal. These characteristics spawned numerous depictions of noble Highlanders operating to a different code from modern, evolving Lowland Scottish society. Paintings depicting this “different” culture or depicting simply the Highland landscape as does *My Heart’s in the Highlands* (fig. 1), are prime carriers of the Scottish myth.

This myth stressed that Scotland was an ancient land with continuing traditions, that it still possessed a distinctive social system and that it had a unique and valuable contribution to make to the constructed state of Great Britain. This manufactured identity read the Highlands as an unchanging society and, from a highly selective reading of the culture of the north and west of Scotland, purported to identify a medieval system of tribal affiliations, manrent and feudalism. This became Scotland’s defining national characteristic. Some liberal opinion objected but this northern identity held sway for a century and still resonates today.

### THE ROMANTIC HIGHLANDS

Against this reading Horatio McCulloch is seen not only as the creator of archetypal Scottish landscapes but as the producer of images embodying the essential qualities of the nation itself. During his lifetime McCulloch was hailed as “strictly a national painter,” a master of the “bold bluff of a craggy steep.”<sup>10</sup> Allusions to the culture of the North and the supposed inherent emotional, war-like tendencies of the people, are seen in the castle in the middle distance. It is not simply the link between the human culture and the land that is important. The presence of the deer in the left foreground is not negligible. It deliberately alludes to the Highlands as a place of wilderness, “unspoiled” by human impact. A place where one might encounter nature in the raw. It offers up the region as a retreat from modern human society.



Fig 1. 1. Horatio McCulloch, *My Heart’s in the Highlands*, 1860, oil on canvas, 61 x 91.4 cm, Glasgow Museums: Art Gallery & Museum, Kelvingrove.

Artists who supplied the huge demand for images of “the mountain and the flood” knew only this sentimental elegiac vision of the Highlands initially promoted by Walter Scott and burgeoning throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>11</sup> Scott’s *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* was published in 1805. From then onwards his vision of the Highlands as a land out of time, a wild rugged landscape, home to an ancient culture, was hugely popular. In 1822 King George IV visited Scotland, the first reigning British monarch to do so in almost two centuries. Scott was placed in charge of the ceremonial aspects of the jaunt. His orchestration of George IV’s sojourn in Edinburgh sealed the northern identity for the country. After it, the majority of Scots embraced the notion of a dual identity. They were content to be both Scottish and British. To these sentiments Scott’s pageant grafted a myth of Scotland as a unified, northern, Highland culture, with a heroic past and a history of extravagant loyalty. While the visit was taking place, the fully fifteen percent of the population that visited Edinburgh to participate or watch, embraced Highlandism wholeheartedly.

Scott sought, in his orchestration of the visit, to present Scotland as a distinct, undivided and loyal component of the United Kingdom. His manufactured identity gave the country a collective character it had lacked since the Union with England of 1707, albeit a simplistic one. It stressed that Scotland was an ancient land with continuing traditions; that it still possessed a distinctive social system and that it had a unique and valuable contribution to make to Great Britain. The loyalty of the clans was a central part of the sub-text of Scott’s celebrations. In a self-referential argument, the loyalty of the Highlanders to George IV was seen as proof of his status as legitimate heir to the Scottish throne; while simultaneously his standing as heir gave him irrefutable call on Highland loyalty. In 1822, with forced emigration from the Highlands, and political reform a focal point for both debate and direct, sometimes militant action, Scott stressed continuity, not change.

The painted image of the North which derived from Scott bore little relationship to reality. The iconographic content of the paintings was only superficially Highland and to residents of the region would often have appeared cruelly mocking rather than celebratory. The paintings frequently misinterpreted images, misrepresented people and places and ignored awkward truths. Images of wild landscapes with windswept sheep and deer became stock Scottish scenery but only for those unaware of the reality. This mythic Highlandism was a paradigm to serve the needs of a Scottish nationalism that was bound to the British union. It was a construct, not a likeness. In depictions of the people, representations of noble, simple unsophisticated, incorruptible warriors inhabiting a simple, unsophisticated, untainted environment abound. John Pettie’s *A Highland Outpost* (fig. 2) is standard fare in this regard.

In all its guises a country’s myth defines identity for those who live in it. In the nineteenth century, as now, these beliefs were held to be what make Scots “different” from anyone else. The concept of “difference” is fundamentally important. Given the exceptional cultural relationship between Scotland and England, Scottish “difference” is particularly important in maintaining a sense of identity. David McCrone explains:

*In asking who we are, the totems and icons of heritage are powerful signifiers of our identity. We may find tartanry, Bonnie Prince Charlie, Mary Queen of Scots, Bannockburn and Burns false descriptors of who we are, but they provide a source of ready-made distinguishing characteristics from England, our bigger southern neighbour.<sup>12</sup>*

Comfortable or not, this adoption of a Romantic identity by Scotland differed from mainstream European Romanticism in two ways. While it had emerged as a revolutionary force

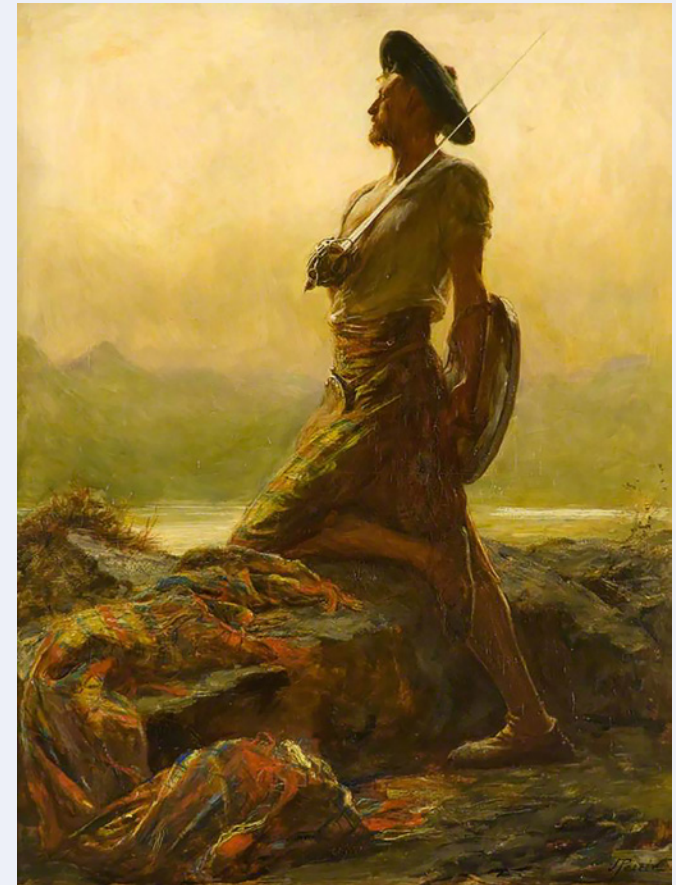


Fig 2. John Pettie, *A Highland Outpost*, 1878, oil on canvas, 74 x 86 cm, Dundee Art Gallery and Museum.

in Scottish painting, it soon lost its identity as an avant-garde, struggling against an established cultural elite.<sup>13</sup> Instead it rapidly came to fill the vacuum left by Scotland's abandoned political independence. In the face of the self-doubt which accompanied the earlier loss of statehood and the failure of Scotland's attempt at reinventing itself as "North Britain," the Romantic landscape of the North offered the notion that in the land itself could be found the heart of a unique and separate identity conferring on those who partook of it a cast of tragically heroic antecedents. The northern identity was irresistible to early nineteenth-century Scots. The outcome of this very widespread success of the myth of the North is that from the Romantic period onwards, for most Scots everything that needed to be said about what it was to be Scottish could be encapsulated in a stark mountainous Highland landscape, for example, Arthur Perigal's *Morning in Glen Nevis* (fig. 3). This mass popular appeal meant that Scotland's Romantic northern identity was not the milieu of the dissident. "Romantic Scotland" was embraced by the whole of society, making it both more entrenched and less radical than its European counterparts.

The long survival of this identity in popular culture stems directly from these factors. When the relentless pursuit of the original dictated by modernism gave rise in Europe to new cultural forms, in Scotland Romanticism continued to hold sway. McCulloch remained enthroned as the country's national painter. Emergent artists seeking to supplant Romanticism faced not only the entrenched opposition of the art establishment, but also the *vox populi*. Scotland had found its post-Union identity only with difficulty. The uniqueness it embodied was central to the country's sense of self-worth. It was not to be relinquished lightly.

#### MYTH AND REALITY

The incongruity of this northern identity was only occasionally remarked upon, and then most often, early

on before it became firmly entrenched. J.G. Lockhart remarked on the artificiality of the "plaided panorama" created by his father-in-law Walter Scott. He observed that the new identity was in poor taste and that it was positively cruel to Highlanders to lavish praise on their society while simultaneously condoning its destruction through the policy of clearance. In truth "traditional" Highland society had been under increasing pressure from the earlier eighteenth century and the putative traditional clan culture was very largely extinct by the beginning of the nineteenth century. Principal among these changes was a shift in the attitude of Highland landlords towards the land. Increasingly they sought to maximise the commercial potential of their lands and to extract as much as possible of that worth in cash rather than in any other form. As a consequence of these new attitudes the established system of Highland settlements, the *baile*, consisting of multiple tenant farmers, cottars and servants, came under unremitting attack to be replaced by a variety of systems. In the southern and eastern Highlands larger single tenant farms emerged with some additional small holdings. In the north and west the "crofting" society of individual small holdings predominated. The lauding of the ancient ways of the Gael then was by the nineteenth century a non-sequitur. The long-standing culture of the Highlands had been largely erased. There remained vestigial traces of localised loyalties, mainly, though not exclusively, in the minds of estate tenants, but the interdependent society of landowner and people bound by a system of mutual obligation had in practice been destroyed and replaced by an increasingly legalistic money-based relationship. From its nineteenth-century inception this northern identity was a fabrication.

Its formula is seen at its most complete in examining paintings where the landscape is utilised as a reinforcing agent for a message expressed in narratives of human action. Jacques Derrida has argued for the importance of landscape



Fig 3. Arthur Perigal, *Morning in Glen Nevis*, 1880, oil on canvas, 89.5 x 155 cm, Smith Art Gallery and Museum, Stirling.



Fig 4. John Crawford Brown, *The Return from Waterloo*, 1851, oil on canvas, 91 x 144 cm, private collection (Photo: Sotheby's picture library London).

in figure subjects as more than setting or background. He presents it as “parergon,” meaning “alongside the work,” rather than wholly subordinate to the work. “A parergon comes against, beside, and in addition to the *ergon* the work done, [...] but it does not fall to one side, it touches and co-operates within the operation, from a certain outside neither simply outside nor simply inside.”<sup>14</sup>

J.C. Brown’s *The Return from Waterloo* of 1851 (fig. 4) is one such work. Though neither a particularly successful nor a particularly innovative work, Brown’s painting is stereotypical of an approach to the North which began in the 1820s, dominated Scottish painting for forty years, and remained a significant force in the depiction of Scotland at least until the First World War. The landscape in this work is not “background” and it is not “subject.” Rather the setting and the figures act synchronously, each reinforcing the message inherent in the other. The narrative human element is dominant here but never wholly independent of the topography in which it takes place. Two soldiers in full military Highland dress halt while the horse, pulling a wagon carrying their effects, pauses for a drink at the roadside. A young woman, unknown to either of the men – judging by their indifference – accosts them apparently in welcome. She may have emerged from the low cottage to the right of the road. In the distance can be seen a second wagon and accompanying Highland soldier.

The painting derives its signifiers and signs, that is, its carriers of symbolic meaning and the meanings themselves, entirely from the constructed myth of the North. The Highlands are here equated with militarism and personal valour and identified simultaneously as the source for staunchly loyalist instruments of Britain’s military victory at Waterloo. Highland social structure is also stressed. The woman greets the returning soldiers, not as her own family members, but as part of the extended Highland clan society of interwoven personal loyalties. By implication,

the acknowledgement offered to this first pair of soldiers will be extended to the second group further down the road. The community of interdependency is stressed. The landscape in which the action takes place reinforces the central planks of this identity. The ruined castle alludes directly to the long military history of the region and the strong unquestioning strength of the individuals is echoed in the stark, bleak mountains and barren heath of the middle distance. The figures, Brown tells his audience, have left behind the rich sunlit lower ground in the distance and returned to the northern landscape which bred them. Highlanders are strong, warlike and loyal. These qualities are inherent in the people and are the outcome of their ancient unbroken heritage worked out in a starkly beautiful but uncompromising natural environment. This harsh northern landscape is here made the progenitor of culture.

At the heart of these images of Scotland’s northern identity are two central incongruities. Firstly, they characterise Scotland as rural, timeless and largely empty, when the reality for the majority was urban, industrial and rapidly changing. Secondly, they grossly misrepresent the Highland culture which they purport to admire. That misrepresentation serves to illustrate the particular character of Scotland’s myth of the North. It appears to embody Scottish identity in a romanticised vision of an identifiable, if marginal, section of the populace. Of itself that is not remarkable. French rural realism in the hands of Jules Breton and his like pursued precisely this end. Both movements sought to idealise a section of indigenous culture and utilise the images as a touchstone for the nation. Scotland’s northern myth however derived not from a simplification of a particular section of society but from a largely separate and wholly dominant Lowland Scottish fantasy view of a minority northern, Highland culture that was largely alien to the majority from the south. Furthermore, as it hailed its own fantasy creation, the Lowlands actively pursued a policy of eradication against the actual remnants of that northern

culture. The ignorance and lack of interest in the reality, rather than the fantasy, led to an iconography which was often marked by sentimentality, excessive sanguinity and was not infrequently deeply, if unintentionally ironic.

### PAINTING THE NORTHERN LANDSCAPE

Paintings of the region typically exhibit a profound lack of knowledge and concern for the culture they purport to celebrate. Perigal's painting, *Morning in Glen Nevis*, depicts a sensationalised view of jagged, mist-sheathed mountains. Making their way towards the viewer along the floor of the glen is a kilted, plaid-wrapped shepherd and approximately thirty rather ambiguously rendered sheep. By 1880 when this work was painted the sheep population of the Highlands was made up largely of Blackface and Cheviot flocks. These breeds were introduced into the area in ever increasing numbers from the early nineteenth century onwards. Referred to by the Gaels as *Na Caoraidh Mora* or "big sheep," they were quite distinct from the smaller, hardier animals commonly kept in small numbers by the local populace. Their spread was driven by the desire of landowners to maximise the financial revenue generated by their lands and the recognition that large-scale sheep walks rented to a single individual grazier yielded both more money and was more reliably collected than rents on numerous smaller holdings. The amount of land given over to sheep walks expanded very rapidly. Between 1811 and 1854 the sheep population of Ross-shire multiplied five times, that of Inverness-shire grew from 154,000 to over half a million.

The sheer weight of numbers dictated that sheep farms would take over large tracts of land previously rented as multiple small holdings. The type of sheep introduced however made the consequences even more dramatic for the local population. The "big sheep" were considerably less hardy than the smaller indigenous variety. In order to survive the northern climate, they had to be moved to low-

lying ground in the winter. In the mixed farming practised by the small-scale sitting tenants this more sheltered and more fertile land was under arable cultivation. Impatient for the increased profits to be made from large-scale sheep farming the local population was cleared from the land specifically to make way for graziers, often southerners, bringing these new breeds with them.

The most notorious clearances occurred in Sutherland where possibly as many as ten thousand people were evicted from their interior arable farming lands to new crofting communities on the coast. Arguments abound about the numbers involved, the motivations of the landlords and the humanity or otherwise of the removals. What is unquestionable however is that the large numbers of people removed from their homes were often bitterly resentful at their treatment and that the focus of their ire was often the sheep walks and the sheep which supplanted them. On Skye in the 1830s, for example, there were numerous incidents of sheep killing and mutilation. Graziers were hated individuals. Patrick Sellar, a major figure in the Sutherland sheep related clearances, caused the death of an elderly woman while clearing Strathnaver. During his trial for murder the local populace expressed their hatred of him by cutting the throats of twenty of his sheep. A "Thibetan goat" belonging to Lady Sutherland, the owner of the land Sellar farmed, suffered a similar fate. Though the best known, the Sutherland clearances were not at all unique. In the 1840s and 1850s there occurred large-scale removals (rather than relocations) from the lands of the north-west of the mainland and from the islands. During the time that forced emigration and replacement with sheep were carried out, George IV's niece Victoria came to the throne. Throughout the period when these acts, which served to destroy the remnants of more traditional Highland culture and practices, were being perpetrated, Queen Victoria very publicly embraced the myth of the North, cultivated the notion of the Highlands as a Romantic retreat and, with

her consort, built a fantasy highland castle at Balmoral in Aberdeenshire.

Landscapes with sheep were therefore, singularly unsuitable vehicles for encapsulating the life and grandeur of the traditional Highlands, which was the overt intent of this celebratory iconography. Perigal's painted sheep are somewhat ill defined but it appears likely that he compounded his error by intending to depict Blackface, one of the incoming "big sheep." In fact the breed has horns and none are seen here, making the animals resemble Suffolk sheep more than anything else, but as Suffolks were unknown in the region it appears likely that it was the Blackface he (mis)represented. Joseph Farquharson was a more accomplished painter of animals. His stock-in-trade was sheep in the snow, indeed so often did he exhibit works on this general theme that his nickname at the Royal Academy was "frozen mutton." In *Driving Sheep in the Snow* (fig. 5) Farquharson rendered his animals more accurately than did Perigal but with no more suitability if his intention was to evoke the Romantic myth of the North and to hold up for admiration the less fraught way of life of its inhabitants. The inability of his subjects to thrive in poor weather was precisely the reason why so many people had to be forcibly removed from their homes and pressed into a new type of existence. This reality is very largely ignored by purveyors of Scotland's Romantic northern myth. Rather than the removal of people they instead stressed the mystical bond of people and land.

### THE PERSISTENCE OF VISION

The painting of the mythic North, which celebrated Scottish difference from England and cast that difference in terms of the culture and topography of the Highlands, dominated painting in Scotland for generations. In embracing a simplistic set of values, it unconsciously reflected and naturalised the wholesale social, economic and cultural

transformation of the region, as occurred in many European countries.

Romanticism brought on a veritable cult of the North, which gained in strength throughout the nineteenth-century, riding on the back of the nationalist wave that swept across Europe at the fin-de-siècle. However, in Scotland the identity was consciously manufactured outside of the North. It served the purposes of the majority lowland culture and quite certainly not the northern culture and landscape it purported to celebrate. In Scotland, northernness was always an invention, always an imposition. With the exception of William McTaggart none of the artists were themselves Gaels from northern and western Scotland.<sup>15</sup> They were all lowlanders or non-Scots offering a fantasy version of the North and northern identity. Beyond Romanticism there are more modern, Realist attempts to treat northern subjects in a manner equivalent to that employed in European Realist terms. Images of rural labour abound in Scotland as elsewhere and those set in the North have a particular character.

#### RURAL WORKERS – GRAIN HARVESTING

Grain harvesting images are worthy of note in this context because of the subject's iconic status in English rural painting, where it is almost invariably represented as taking place in the Home Counties around London. In England, particularly at the beginning of the nineteenth century and again in the 1850s and '60s, wheat harvesting was an immensely popular subject for painters, easily the most popular of all agricultural topics. The importance of bread as the staple element of the diet of the masses made a successful grain harvest a matter of enormous importance, and national unity and collective identity coalesced around depictions of harvesting.<sup>16</sup> It has even been argued that paintings of harvesting in 1815 directly reflect patriotic pride in the victory over Napoleon at Waterloo.<sup>17</sup> In this context paintings of grain harvesting set in northern

Scotland, always remembering contemporary perceptions of the backward, primitive, wild nature of the land and the people, make for an interesting set of images.

The topos of the grain harvester as defined by the huge number of English depictions, would seem to preclude a northern setting, the region being the antithesis of his usual locale. In fact, grain was grown in the Highlands, though, given the climate and the soil, not extensively and not very successfully in the north-west. That is precisely where Joseph Farquharson set his very unusual Highland version of *Harvesting* (fig. 6). Farquharson's main outlet for his paintings was in London, and this work is clearly intended for the English market. The painting is a strange and largely unsuccessful coupling of explicitly English agrarian references with elements drawn from the myth of the North. The location Farquharson chose to represent is very specific. The two off-shore islands seen in the background are Rhum and Eigg. Given that they are five miles apart, Eigg, the closer to the mainland, is seen to overlap Rhum differentially, depending on the viewpoint. The relationship in the Farquharson painting unequivocally gives the location as the coast midway between the villages of Arisaig and Morar in Lochaber. In case his audience were in any doubt as to the setting, Farquarson furnished his elderly harvester with a glengarry bonnet to identify him as a Scot. With the locality established, the painter added the inevitable sheep in the background. Curious, then, that the reaper wields an English farm implement. The scythe increasingly replaced the sickle, and the even more venerable heuk, in grain harvesting in Scotland as the nineteenth century progressed. It required considerable strength and skill to use, however, and the elderly individual depicted would have experienced great difficulty. Had he been able to use the tool at all he would have been extremely unlikely to have used the English model, clearly identifiable by its S-shaped shaft or "sned." Such implements were used in Scotland but only in the south-east. The standard in Scotland



Fig 5. Joseph Farquharson, *Driving Sheep in a Snowstorm*, c.1890, oil on canvas, 81 x 122 cm, private collection (Photo: Sotheby's Picture Library.)



Fig 6. Joseph Farquharson, *Harvesting*, c.1890, oil on canvas, 84 x 151 cm, private collection (Photo: Sotheby's Picture Library.)

was the Y-shafted scythe. In summary, Farquharson's aging Scot is depicted standing right on the Atlantic coast, in a region with poor soil on metamorphic rock and cuts an abundant grain crop which has been generously left to mature by the free roaming sheep, using an iconic English agricultural implement. Overall an extremely unlikely set of circumstances.

The popularity and centrality of English harvesting images has been thoroughly examined. Vicat Cole's *Harvest Time* (fig. 7) celebrated all aspects of the work with the artist consciously conflating the various activities of grain harvesting into a single composite image. While the tightly packed grain in the Farquharson is reminiscent of Cole's fecund scene in Surrey, the stacked grain is only marginally less tall than the English crop; the rocky outcrop on the extreme left and the wild flowers and weeds on the right represent an attempt to acknowledge the backward, wild nature of the Highlands and promote Scotland's myth of the North. Similarly, the aging reaper in the Scottish painting, rather than the team of healthy young farm hands painted by Cole, is intended to illustrate the poverty of the region. The painting is an unconvincing assemblage of disparate parts, lacking both the drama of a Romantic Highland subject and ethnographically unable to access what was referred to in relation to Vicat Cole as a "distinctly English [...] face of the country."<sup>18</sup>

By abstaining from the usual melodrama of the myth of the North, from the "land of the mountain and the flood", Farquharson's painting largely forgoes the fey strangeness of the North inherent in the earlier images. While the technique is strongly related to contemporary European Realist visual language, the glaring inconsistencies and illogicalities in the subject undermine its claim to objectivity. The painting clearly relates to the entrenched northern markers of Scottish identity with its Hebridean background and references to rough ground and unenclosed fields. But

its ultimate source in England's fertile grain valleys show its author's failing faith in the myth of the North. Farquharson could no longer fully believe the myth but neither could he wholly abandon it, a dilemma, it might be argued, which the country as a whole still possesses.

#### RURAL WORKERS – KELP MANUFACTURE

Rather than losing some of its viability, the myth was entirely unsustainable for someone who wholly embraced Realism rather than paid lip-service to it, as did Farquharson. Joseph Henderson attempted to document the realities of particularly regional rural labour and in so doing consciously sought to dismantle the myth of the North. Kelp burning (see fig. 8), the object of which was to extract an alkaline ash from seaweed, to be used in the industrial manufacturing of soap and glass, began, flourished and all but died in the hundred years before 1850.<sup>19</sup> Kelp manufacturing had prospered because of huge rises in demand for the products to which it contributed. In addition, a contemporary government tax on salt, the root of the nineteenth-century alkali industry, made kelp relatively cheap and further stimulated production. There were better alternatives to be imported, but the almost constant wars in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries made supplies unreliable and expensive, again supporting indigenous kelp manufacture. Prices climbed dramatically over sixty years, rising ten-fold to £20 a ton by 1810 and then falling back even more swiftly to only £3 by 1834. From 1750, these price rises prompted very rapid expansion of the industry all along the west coast of Scotland and especially in the Hebrides. With a freely available and abundant supply of the seaweed, the conditions for individual enterprise would appear to have been very favourable. In fact, when letting out the land, proprietors reserved for themselves the rights to manufacture kelp, controlled the process and reaped the financial reward. Tenants were required to make kelp and paid at a fixed rate, no matter what the ultimate selling price of their product. Thus, while the landowners sold

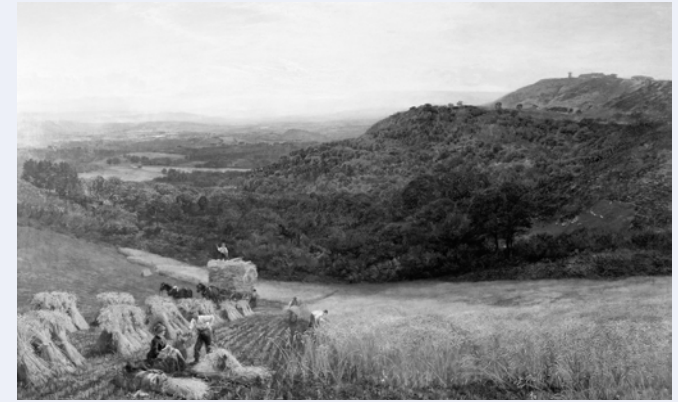


Fig 7. Vicat Cole, *Harvest Time*, 1860, oil on canvas, 95.9 x 151.7 cm, Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery.



Fig 8. Joseph Henderson, *Kelp Burning*, 1870, oil on canvas, 119.4 x 180.3 cm, Dundee Art Gallery and Museum.

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the kelp to industry at £20 a ton, they paid the producers only between two and three pounds a ton. On Skye, kelp made Lord Macdonald £14,000 in one year, more than the combined income from all other activities on his estate.<sup>20</sup>

Landowners established communities on their estates entirely devoted to kelp manufacture, with the population, much larger than could be sustained by working the land and the sea, wholly dependent on the income they made from the process. When the price crash came after 1820 these bloated communities were effectively redundant. They had no alternate means of supporting themselves. This made kelping settlements very vulnerable when landowners decided upon “clearance.” Having created the communities to serve their purpose, then exploited the price boom entirely for their own, and not their workers’ benefit, proprietors then frequently targeted the communities for forced removal and emigration.<sup>21</sup>

Kelp production fell off very rapidly from the 1830s but it did not cease entirely. If communities were not cleared, landowners found it economically sensible to keep production going, even after costs became greater than the selling price. The money which workers made allowed them to pay their rent, and thus gave the proprietor some income rather than none at all. Nevertheless, by the time artists were becoming interested in painting labour imagery, the industry was down to a trickle of its former volume. In this very reduced state kelp manufacture continued into the twentieth century. Kelp was still being transported by sea to Glasgow until at least 1914. The price at that time was just over £5 per ton.

Though no longer an economically significant factor for the Highland economy as a whole, kelp making continued to be practised and potentially witnessed by painters. The bright, light technique of Joseph Henderson helps to locate his painting firmly as a record of the dying days of the kelp

industry. The female figure is shown tending the kiln in which the dried seaweed was burned. Henderson’s image appears authentic in that it reveals specific knowledge about the process. Typically the kiln was dug into the ground on the foreshore and was approximately three metres long, as seen in Henderson’s painting. There was considerable skill involved in the burning, and the fire, which produced a heavy, oily white smoke, required constant tending over the 12 to 24 hours that any given firing lasted. That active care forms the central subject of the painting. As with the Cole image of grain harvesting which conflated the separate acts of cutting, stacking and collecting the crop, different stages of kelp manufacture are referred to in the same work. The two men shown are bringing armfuls of the dried weed, which had been collected and dried over the preceding months, to the stone lined kiln. Meanwhile the burning process, which would have started around 4 am with lighting the fire and bringing the kiln to the right temperature before starting to burn the weed, is already fully operational. There are two long poles shown between the female figure and the picture plane. These were used to stir the hot molten mass collecting in the base of the kiln. In addition to the poles, a spade, used for cutting the solidified product into manageable pieces after the burning was concluded is shown in the foreground. That cutting took place at least a day after the burning was complete and the kelp had cooled and solidified. These pieces of extremely heavy, blue-toned blocks were then put in sacks and loaded onto a cart for transportation. The sacks are seen held down by one of the poles. The single operating kiln shown makes the contemporary nature of the activity more likely. More than twenty tons of seaweed was required to produce one ton of kelp. Given that at its peak more than 5,000 tons of kelp a year was produced, implying the consumption of over one hundred thousand tons of seaweed, in the heyday of the industry multiple kilns would have operated in any one site.

In 1870 the relatively high-keyed colour employed would have furthered the reading of this painting as a consciously modern image. Though lacking the unambiguous colour divisionism seen elsewhere in Scottish painting in the later nineteenth century. Henderson’s image is clearly aware of more progressive developments in Continental painting. There is at least an acknowledgement of colour theory in the juxtaposition of the central figure’s red scarf with the grass. The generally light tone and keen interest in conveying a sense of the freshness of the breezy day also indicate modern concerns and probably indicate a general response to current developments in French painting. Whatever its origins, the method reinforces the reading of the painting as a documentary record of contemporary practice, rather than a nostalgic elegy for the past as was the stock in trade of the Romantic painters.

Henderson dismissed Scotland’s mythic North. In place of its innate falsehood and masking of the region, he saw only people and the work they undertook. Inherent in that vision was a recognition that because the identity was consciously manufactured outside of the North it served the purposes of the majority lowland culture and quite certainly not the culture it purported to celebrate. The artists producing these northern images were almost entirely lowlanders or non-Scots, thus there was no emergence of northern artists to a prominent position on the international stage as there was in other parts of the world where a mythic North held sway. Scotland had a mythic North, but its inherent falseness meant that it masked the region and exploited the people. It was not a vehicle for their rise to prominence.



<sup>1</sup> The expression of Scottish national identity through architecture is considered in Miles Glendinning, Ranald MacInnes, and Aonghus MacKechnie, *A History of Scottish Architecture from the Renaissance to the present Day* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), 188–9, 252, 276, and passim.

<sup>2</sup> Murray Pittock dates the decline of “Scottish-Britishness” from 1945. Murray Pittock, *Celtic Identity and the British Image* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 106–7; Murray Pittock, *Scottish Nationality* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 135. Normand agrees that the unionist-nationalist phenomenon extended beyond 1914 in so far as he sees nationalist parties and groups through the later 1920s and into the 1930s as being largely unionist-nationalist in character. Tom Normand, *The Modern Scot: Modernism and Nationalism in Scottish Art 1828-1955* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000) 31–3.

<sup>3</sup> Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 115–120.

<sup>4</sup> All three aspects of the above – the myths, their carriers and their treatment – were brought together in the 1980 *Scotch Myths* exhibition at the Crawford Art Centre, St Andrews, organised by Barbara and Murray Grigor. The show mercilessly pilloried the myths of Scotland; at least that was its intention. In fact it attacked the carriers of the myths, “Tartanry” and “Kailyard.” The Grigors isolated and ridiculed these formations, accusing them of hijacking Scottish culture, masking the true personality of the country and reducing the identity of Scotland to a nightmare world of kitsch tartan gonks and caricatures of meanness. What is interesting in this context is that although the exhibition purported to be a dissection of “myth,” the analysis did not get beyond the carriers of myth. This attack on the “tartan monster” could proceed no further therefore than earlier efforts. There was no identification of the fundamental Scottish myths and no discussion of any other potential carriers of these myths.

<sup>5</sup> Kate Flint, *The Victorians and the Visual Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 197.

<sup>6</sup> Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (London: Paladin, 1973), 143.

<sup>7</sup> Peter Womack, *Improvement and Romance: Constructing the Myth of the Highland* (London: MacMillan, 1989), 1.

<sup>8</sup> For a discussion of the development of the Scottish myth of the Highlands see, Womack, *Improvement and Romance*; C. Withers, “The

Historical Creation of the Scottish Highlands,” in *The Manufacture of Scottish History*, ed. Ian Donnachie and Christopher Whatley (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1992), 143–156.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Lindsay Errington and James Holloway, *The Discovery of Scotland: The Appreciation of Scottish Scenery through Two Centuries of Painting* (Edinburgh: National Gallery of Scotland, 1978), 111.

<sup>10</sup> The phrase originates in Scott’s *Lay of the Last Minstrel*. Canto vi, stanza 2.

‘O Caledonia! stern and wild,  
Meet nurse for a poetic child!  
Land of the heath and shaggy wood,  
Land of the mountain and the flood,  
Land of my sires! what mortal hand  
Can e’er untie the filial band  
That knits me to thy rugged strand!

<sup>11</sup> David McCrone, Angela Morris, and Richard Kiely, *Scotland the Brand: The Making of Scottish Heritage* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1995) 7.

<sup>12</sup> For a discussion of Horatio McCulloch as a revolutionary Romantic landscape painter see John Morrison, “Debating Chamber: The Royal Scottish Academy and Artistic Discourse in the Nineteenth Century,” in *Ages of Wonder: Scotland’s Art 1540 to Now* (Edinburgh: Scottish National Gallery, 2018, 63–76.

<sup>13</sup> Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 54.

<sup>14</sup> William McTaggart (1845-1910). McTaggart was the son of a crofter from Campbeltown in Kintyre. His paintings, most pointedly those directly depicting emigration, address the realities of Highland rural life and culture rather than the fantasies of the mythic north.

<sup>15</sup> See Christiana Payne, *Toil and Plenty: Images of the Agricultural Landscape in England, 1780-1890* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993) 16–17, 60.

<sup>16</sup> Michael Rosenthal, *British Landscape Painting* (London: Phaidon, 1982), 132–34.

<sup>17</sup> *Art Journal*, April 1861, 139. The observation was made in relation to A Surrey Cornfield.

<sup>18</sup> See Malcolm Gray, “The Kelp Industry in the Highlands and Islands,” *The Economic History Review* 4, no. 2 (1951): 197–209; K.H. Wolff, “Textile Bleaching and the Birth of the Chemical Industry,” *The Business History Review* 48, no. 2 (1974): 143–163.

<sup>19</sup> T.M. Devine, Clanship to Crofter’s War. The Social transformation of the Scottish Highlands (Manchester: MUP, 1994), 48, 52, 54.

<sup>20</sup> Malcolm Gray, “The Kelp Industry,” 200.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 205.

<sup>22</sup> William D. McKay’s *A Hard Taskmaster* (1883) in Royal Scottish Academy Diploma Collection is an example.

# The North, National Romanticism, and the Gothic

Charlotte Ashby

*The wild and widely changeable nature in the North does not accommodate the painter like the harmonious nature in France. The former does not, like the latter, offer the artist ready-made motifs like ripe fruit[...] In France a landscape painter may perhaps be an artist using only his eyes. [...] In the North the landscape painter must be a poet.<sup>1</sup>*

The emphasis within art histories of Nordic landscapes has traditionally been on topography, landmarks, light and nature. In all these dimensions the touchstone has been the oppositional binary between North and South, as exemplified in the quote from Richard Bergh above. In this paradigm the South is an Arcadian realm, bathed in an easy, golden light, whilst the North is harsh in its extremes and its light alternatively too stark or too dull for the purposes of art. As such, the North is frequently presented in discourse as a demanding subject for art, something that you must push beneath the surface to understand, a poetic landscape. This chapter seeks to analyse this convention through consideration of a few artists who broke the implicit rules governing the representation of the North, thus revealing the boundaries of what could and could not be accommodated within the shared visions of National Romanticism.

It was not enough to paint landscape within the national borders to fulfil the requirements of a truly national art. It had to be painted in the right way to become part of the great resonance chamber of national art histories. There are various ways an artist might deviate from this. Marianne Koskimies-Envall has, for example, explored why the prolific Finnish landscape artist Arvid Liljelund

(1844–1899) was and remains excluded from the canon. His oeuvre, revolving around the fishing communities of the west coast and Finnish archipelago, represented the wrong Finland and the wrong (Swedish-speaking) Finns for a national movement that located itself in the central and eastern Finnish lakelands.<sup>2</sup> Alternatively, women artists in general are frequently excluded from the canon and regarded as too open to foreign influences.<sup>3</sup>

For a number of decades now, art history of the Nordic region has been pushing back against the parameters, early-established in traditional national canons. Art History as a discipline emerged in the nineteenth century in close connection with linguistics, ethnography and archaeology, all guided by a pursuit of a distinctive national language and/or culture. All these disciplines can be linked to the demarcation of national boundaries, “us and them,” located in the practices of census taking and mapping.<sup>4</sup> For nations newly constituting themselves in the nineteenth century, the landscape had the potential to function as a shared point of origin with roots that reached back into the past, circumventing the complexities of fractured political realities.<sup>5</sup>

I am interested here in what I identify as artists whose work did not fit despite their focus on landscape themes. The idea I will propose is that the grounds for this outsider status can be traced in their handling of landscapes in which the lurking threat of the untamed North remains too strong, destabilizing the precarious consensus of National Romanticism. The work of these artists is disruptive in a number of ways. One form of disruption is temporal.

Though the National Romantic landscape often recorded nuances of season or time of day, it also existed outside time, a uchronic fantasy: the nation-in-the-land must have always existed. Imagery that showed the land as subject to change and the marks of modernity disturbed this vision of a timeless landscape. The second form of disruption I will consider relates to the relationship between the land and the individual viewer. In particular, where they are placed in a position of vulnerability – subject to the land – rather than the land subject to their gaze. This latter idea presents a connection to that alternative framing of the North within the Gothic tradition: not as home but as haunting site of threatening allure.

### PEDER BALKE AND THE ARCTIC

My central case study is the Norwegian artist Peder Balke (1804–1887). His career in the early nineteenth century took many promising turns but stopped short, ultimately, of a sustainable income. Balke's paintings have in recent decades been rediscovered and re-inserted into the canon, the grounds for their marginalisation no longer resonant. His work has been re-evaluated as Nordic Sublime, leading to international exhibitions and to the recent acquisition of his works by Nordic National Galleries.<sup>6</sup>

Balke failed as a professional artist, despite his focus on the Norwegian landscape/seascape genre and despite the support he received at various points in his artistic career and his (incomplete) studies at the Royal School of Drawing in Christiania (Oslo), the Royal Academy at Stockholm, as well as with Johan Christian Dahl in Dresden.<sup>7</sup> I propose that the reasons for his commercial and critical failure in his lifetime can be traced back to the two disruptions to National Romanticism introduced above. Reflection upon this continues the work of revealing the culturally constructed and bounded, rather than inherent and natural, relationship between landscape art and national identity.<sup>8</sup>

*From North Cape* (c.1840; fig. 1) is an example of Balke's work on the theme of his expedition to northern Norway, undertaken in 1832. The icy headland of the North Cape, popularly understood as the northernmost point of Europe, is shown illuminated by a burst of sunlight from behind dark clouds. The almost monochrome palette emphasises cold, dark sea, land and sky and the dazzling effect of the sun on the waves. The viewpoint is low, sweeping across the surface of the sea and up to the cape. It is shared by a group of tourists in a rowing boat, while others gather on the nearby headland. Though the North Cape constituted a notable landmark within the borders of Norway, it nevertheless falls short as national landscape.

The icy wastes of the Arctic were a subject that chimed more with the European Gothic sensibility. Descriptions of such landscapes featured in the novels of Charlotte Brontë, Mary Shelley, Edgar Allan Poe and the poetry of Novalis.<sup>9</sup> The inhospitable nature of the Arctic was dramatized in such a way as to suggest allegories of man's struggles with an implacable, uncaring universe. This can be seen, for example, in Caspar David Friedrich's (1774–1840) *The Arctic Sea* (1823–24, Hamburger Kunsthalle) in which the jagged peaks of pack ice present the ultimate, inhospitable landscape.<sup>10</sup> Balke would likely have had the opportunity to see this work, as it was in the possession of Dahl during the period Balke studied with him in Dresden. But *From North Cape* does not present an allegory of this kind.

Only a few artists actually made the trek to the far North. The majority, like Friedrich, relied for their depictions on descriptions from travelogues and the limited selection of topographical views made by the more intrepid. Balke had encountered the Arctic paintings by the German artist Johann Christian Ezdorf (1801–1851) in the royal collection at Rosendal Palace, Stockholm. Ezdorf was one of those who had actually visited the North Cape. Balke was inspired by Ezdorf and by other prints and drawings available in



Fig 1. Peder Balke, *From North Cape*, c. 1840, oil on canvas, 67.5 x 84 cm, The National Museum, Oslo (Photo: The National Museum).

Stockholm from various Arctic expeditions and was the first Norwegian artist to venture so far.<sup>11</sup> The impact of this journey marked Balke's art for the rest of his life. Though he continued to produce scenes of rural Norway alongside Arctic scenes, his return again and again to the view of the North Cape and the crashing surf of the Arctic ocean on rocky shores.

Balke's preoccupation with the Arctic as a subject differed markedly from the customary subjects of Norwegian art. For the emerging Norwegian middle class, paintings of fjords and valleys offered consumable access to the landscape of their nation. These views mirrored the evolving tourist routes that allowed travellers to visit the dramatic and picturesque scenery of western Norway. But the Arctic was another matter. Sparsely inhabited, it did not offer the viewer a point of connection with national history and national settlement. The possibility of appealing to a self-consciously Norwegian, emerging intelligentsia with such Arctic scenes was therefore limited.

The alien nature of the Arctic may explain the appeal of Balke's work to his international patrons. King Louis Philippe of France, who had visited northern Norway during his youth in exile, commissioned two paintings depicting his journey and purchased thirty-three more sketches. German newspapers also spoke enthusiastically about Balke's North Cape scenes, though after 1849 no more of Balke's works were purchased by the Christiania Art Society, and Norwegian commissions in general dried up.<sup>12</sup> Though there are other factors in play, this suggests that the dramatic subject matter and Balke's handling of it was perhaps more readily accepted as imagery of the exotic North by non-Norwegians.

Again, unlike the Arctic of Friedrich's *Arctic Sea*, where unforgiving nature implacably destroys and forbids humanity's encroachment on its eternal domain, Balke's

*From North Cape* is a contemporary scene. Modern ships ply their maritime trade even here. This is typical of Balke. The majority of his landscapes contain people or evidence of contemporary human activity. Balke's North is often majestic, but it is also a contemporary wonder. The modern infrastructure of steamship tourism and fisheries was what made the North Cape accessible and sustained its community. Tourism to the North Cape accelerated at the end of the eighteenth and into the nineteenth century, as it did to the whole Nordic region.<sup>13</sup> Publications made these travels more widely accessible, particularly with British readers who sought to leaven their increasingly urban lives with visions of nature's wonders.<sup>14</sup>

The viewer of Balke's painting stands on the rocky shore admiring the wonder of the cape in the company of other tourists. They do not float above the scene as they so often do in Friedrich's work, where from the perspective of their unique sensitivity they are privileged to see and comprehend the unseen and incomprehensible. Balke's viewer, so the viewpoint implies, is standing on the wet shingle and it is most likely that his companions are other tourists and they all arrived by steamship. Even in scenes where the position of the viewer is more unstable the view is always a contemporary one, without the temporal slippages of National Romanticism, nor the metaphysical slippages of Friedrich's Romanticism.

#### DAHL, BALKE AND THE GOTHIC

Johan Christian Dahl (1758–1857) is in many ways the father figure of Nordic National Romanticism, both in terms of his work and his historiographical reception, following his championing by art historian Andreas Aubert in the 1890s.<sup>15</sup> He did much to establish the paradigm of the national landscape. This can be seen in a letter by him, to his friend and patron Lyder Sagen in 1841:

*A landscape must not only show a particular country or region, it must have the characteristic of this country and its nature, it must speak to the sensitive beholder in a poetic way – it must, so to speak, tell him about the country's nature – way of constructing – its people and their customs – often idyllic, often historic – melancholic, what they were and are[...]*<sup>16</sup>

The quote above illustrates the synonymous overlap between people, landscape and nation within National Romanticism, as well as the uchronic connection between the past and the present, located in the perceived timelessness of the landscape and people. Resident in Germany for the majority of his career, Dahl engaged with the European Romantic tradition of friends such as Friedrich. The national nature of his work is rarely questioned. The fact that the majority are images recalled from memory and sketches in a Dresden studio and informed by a sophisticated understanding of how paintings work, learnt in the Academies in Copenhagen and Dresden, and intended for German clients, does not appear to disrupt this “Norwegianness.” *View From Stalheim* (1842; fig. 2) exemplifies this and a comparison between this work and Balke's illuminates where some of the boundaries lie in terms of what can and cannot be contained within the national landscape.

*View From Stalheim* was painted in Dresden in 1842, for the Norwegian nobleman, Count Wedel Jarlsberg and exhibited in Dresden before being sent up to Christiania.<sup>17</sup> It was based primarily on a sketch from 1826 made on the artist's first major sketching expedition to Norway (fig. 3). The vantage point was inspired by drawings made by Dresden geologist, Carl Friedrich Naumann, who made an expedition to Norway in the early 1820s. Naumann's drawings were accessible to Dahl back in Dresden and used as the basis for a number of compositions in 1823 prior to, and possibly motivating, the first of his own expeditions in 1826.<sup>18</sup> It is therefore possible to frame Dahl's initial



Fig 2. Johan Christian Dahl, *View From Stalheim*, 1842, oil on canvas, 190 x 246 cm, The National Museum, Oslo (Photo: The National Museum/ Jacques Lathion).



Fig 3. Johan Christian Dahl, *View from Stalheim*, July 29, 1826, ink on paper, 10.5 x 16.9 cm, The National Museum (Photo: The National Museum / Anne Hansteen Jarre).

engagement with this landscape through the lens, not of nationalism, but of the pan-European Enlightenment project of scientific exploration.

Topological specificity was clearly important to Dahl. The source sketch is annotated with the names of the various peaks, whose forms are reproduced in the finished painting. The title of the painting and the close relationship to the sketch, made on site, underscore that this was to be a painting of a particular place, not a generic mountain scene. Its identity as a Norwegian landscape is emphasized by the addition of figures in national dress. But there is also a darkness to the painting, a sense of drama, that represents the “poetic” interpretation of the landscape. Dahl’s long, successful career in Germany attests to the existence of a non-Norwegian audience for the wilder, bleaker landscapes of Norway, and the form of beauty they saw there.

The Sublime was a category of beauty that revolved around the stimulation of strong emotional response – awe and fear rather than reverie. It emerged as an aesthetic category in the mid-eighteenth century more or less simultaneously across Europe, in the work of the English aesthetician Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), and in the work of the German philosopher Immanuel Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (1764). The idea struck a chord in contemporary Romantic thought. Kant’s *Critique of Judgement* (1790), Johan Gottfried Herder’s *Kalligone* (1800), Arthur Schopenhauer’s *The World as Will and Representation* (1818) all seek to tease out further the contradictory ramifications of the appeal of the awful.<sup>19</sup>

The Sublime maps onto our enquiry here in two ways. There is a direct relationship to the expansion of domestic tourism. The idea can be traced in the Romantic and Gothic turn in Britain towards northern landscapes, the Lake

District and the Highlands. These landscapes, previously regarded as repellent in their bleak inhospitality, became new destinations for recreational travel and supported by travel guides and a new infrastructure of modes of transport and accommodation.<sup>20</sup> A similar turn can be traced in the Nordic countries in, for example, the formation of organisations such as The Norwegian Tourist Association in 1868. Tourism represents a departure from the normal patterns of everyday experience. Tourism, cartography, topographical prints and albums and landscape painting went inextricably hand in hand in the development of a new appreciation for the rugged vastness of the North in contrast with the halcyon pleasures of the South.<sup>21</sup> The value of the national landscape took on a particular force in the nineteenth century as agricultural reform and, in particular, the expanding forestry industry brought rapid change.<sup>22</sup> The artistic record of the landscape was aimed at a primarily urban middle class who encountered the landscape from the perspective of a real or imagined tourist and through the lens of a set of very contemporary preoccupations.<sup>23</sup>

The Sublime is also an important ingredient in the Gothic, as a category that revolved around the encounter with what is feared, with the strange and the unknown. The Gothic was a cultural turn to the North, carrying associations of medievalism over the rational and classical, darkness over light and superstition and disorder over order. Central to this is the context of European modernity and a new tension between the (increasingly) known and the (persistent) unknown. The modern individual, settled within a stable society, maintained in their desire to be transported, thrilled and terrified in a new sensibility that has been called Gothic.<sup>24</sup> In cultural history terms, the Sublime and the Gothic represent the desire of essentially ordered societies and individuals who did not live in daily fear of survival, to probe at the atavistic fears that continue to exist in the shadows; to enrich the mundane everyday world with a connection to things marvellous and unconquerable. This

is both a turn outwards, beyond daily concerns, and a turn inwards, towards the sense of unease that persisted despite, or because of, modernity. Travel and imagined travel to wild places provided a natural forum for this. There are parallels here to Christoph Hennig's argument that tourism, as a sanctioned deviation from the norm, is the modern cultural equivalent of the Roman Saturnalia or Early Modern Carnival.<sup>25</sup>

Though these ideas were part of a re-validation of northern landscapes, they had to be carefully managed within the evolving genre of the national landscape. If we return to *View from Stalheim*, the deviations from Dahl's topographical sketch of the valley before Stalheim are illuminating. The landscape has been compressed laterally, so that the looming mountains are pressed together, rising even higher and appearing more massive. Their peaks have become a little more distinct and the valley running between them becomes more fissure and less vale. There is a narrative tension introduced by means of the particular weather effect added: the departing storm clouds, the rainbow and the sun breaking through. This is a landscape in which the terrible power of the mountains, their awe-inspiring height and mass, has been emphasised, even exaggerated for dramatic effect. This is not to suggest that this is a Gothic painting, but it is one that employs elements of the Sublime. The feelings of awe inspired by the scene are also intentionally arrested and managed by means of a careful balance between light and dark, hope and fear.

In this work, Dahl fuses the modern, Gothic appetite for the terrible drama of wild places with a rugged, northern arcadia. The village is rendered slightly larger than in the original sketch and evidence of human habitation is pushed a little further up the mountain slopes. The destructive power of nature, exemplified in the blasted tree, is recognised, but countered by the pale wisps of smoke from the chimneys of the hamlet. The connection between the viewer and the

landscape is bifurcated. The viewer stands on a high ridge, with the valley unfolding below. Yet the mountains opposite rise higher still. There is golden sunshine and lowering shadow. The balance comes down on the side of beauty and hope by means of the rainbow, the ultimate symbol of God's promise. But it is the threat of the mountains that makes the succour of the village so attractive and the warm sun on the meadow so valuable.

Balke's work did not seek to imbue nature with the same kind of oblique narrative content as Dahl, nor the more overt metaphysical content of Friedrich. Without this lens, landscape alone did not hold sufficient appeal for either Norwegian or non-Norwegian audiences. He gave up professional painting in the 1850s and by his death in 1887 it was almost forgotten that he had ever been an artist and sold his work to patrons across Europe. He did not, however, cease painting and his later paintings reveal further aspects of his fascination with the North.

Torsten Gunnarson's comment in his introduction to the exhibition catalogue *A Mirror of Nature* is illuminating:

*Through him [Dahl], moreover, the mountains became a national symbol of Norway, at that time the only extravagance that this impoverished peasant country could boast. Whereas Dahl had declared it his aim to record the natural environment of his homeland as truthfully and accurately as possible, Balke was, from the 1850s on, to produce depictions that were dramatic and highly expressive in character. Balke's desire to dramatize may have been inspired by his visits to Paris in 1844–47 and London 1849–50.<sup>26</sup>*

In this quote we see the contrast set up with Dahl, whose depiction of Norway is marked, supposedly, by truth and accuracy. Even the acknowledged fact; that partly through his agency, mountains "became" a national symbol, is

framed as an act of revelation rather than mediation. Balke's dramatization of his scenes of northern Norway have, it is implied, something of the foreign about them. Dahl's long residence abroad and interactions with German Romanticism, in contrast, seem to have had no deleterious effect on his Norwegianness. All this indicates how hermetically the myths of nation-building shut the door behind themselves, erasing the processes of invention that lies behind tradition.

Painting for no one, but himself and his friends through the 1860s and 70s, Balke's later works are loosely captured memories of places once visited and never forgotten. Liquid paint floats loosely on the increasingly small picture surface. The marks of sweeping brush or hand coalesce into landscape and then back into paint on canvas or board. He returned again and again to images of the North Cape and to the dramatic form of Mount Stetind, also in Northern Norway. *Mount Stetind in Fog* (1864; fig. 4) is an example of this latter theme. It is a particular place, rather than the pure mindscape of Friedrich's *Monk by the Sea* (1808–10, Alte Nationalgalerie, Berlin), and yet it is a landscape taken from a memory over thirty years old and it is little concerned with topography. The starkness of the near-monochrome palette is testament to the power of that memory.

Depth in the painting is elusive. The sea stretches away from where we stand, on shore or low outcrop. Our vantage point is echoed in the group standing on a rock in the mid-ground. But the figures are tiny, their diminutive scale functioning like the figures in a Piranesi drawing to make the mountain still more vertiginously overwhelming, looming out of the fog. They have gathered to look at the mountain and a wrecked ship nearby. This is a motif that Balke uses in a number of his other paintings of Mount Stetind, suggesting a memory of a real sightseeing expedition. In the distance there is a fishing boat, heeling in the wind,

its sails becoming ghostly and translucent as the far shore disappears into the fog bank. Rising above the fog, Mount Stetind is at once ominously dark and craggy and streaked with snow. This whiteness catches the eye and causes the mountain to appear to advance towards us through the fog, even while the receding lines of the surf in the foreground dictate that it must be in the distance.

The wet rock protruding from the sea in the immediate foreground is the last point of stability in a composition that draws us in and sweeps us aside. The signs of humanity, the figures and ships are themselves too small and too ephemeral to offer us an anchor. The footing of the figure group on an outcrop insufficiently distinguished in form from the surrounding sea instead amplifies our own precarious position. This is not the Sublime terrors of God-wrought tempests or meditations on man's place in the universe, but a dream landscape where crisp reality shifts from one moment to the next into danger, into nothingness, and then back. What remains, through decades of returning to the same subject, is the indelible and profound encounter with the North as experienced by Balke, the *Ultima Thule*.

In an astonishing series of small-scale, monochrome works, created through the 1860s and 70s on postcard-sized bits of wood and cardboard, Balke captured this memory-landscape of storm-tossed ships, wheeling gulls and crashing surf. Painting on a white ground, he revived the technique of his youth decorating wooden panelling in prosperous farmhouses. The light is in the ground and the landscape is conjured into place by sweeps of black paint, contoured by means of the bristles themselves. In *Northern Lights over Coastal Landscape* (c.1879; fig. 5) a few broad, vertical brushstrokes reveal the white ground beneath and create the light-fall of the aurora borealis, dancing in a black sky. Lively daubs of black, perhaps applied directly with fingers if the white thumb-print is anything to go by, create the silhouettes of rocks, rising out of a moon-white sea.

Through the 1830s and 1840s Balke strove to accommodate himself to the desires of his contemporaries. He did much that was correct, studying art collections in Stockholm, Copenhagen, Berlin, Munich, Dresden, Paris and London, though he never completed a full academic course of study. He did study directly under Dahl and indirectly under Friedrich, sharing the same lodging house with both Dahl and the aging Friedrich in Dresden. But there were points he either could not or would not compromise on or learn. His work persistently expressed an uncomfortable coexistence of the real and the unreal. Both Dahl and Friedrich shifted at will between the real and the ideal in their canvases, but in such a way that the overall effect accommodated itself to the expectations of the viewer. Balke appears implacably out of step in this regard. His viewpoint was consistently low, so that even when we hover above the sea, the viewer never achieves the omnipotence offered him by Friedrich or Dahl. The contemporary business of rural or maritime life constantly intrudes and prevents a contemplation of unspoilt nature, God or timeless, rural Norway.

The choice of Arctic scenes, like another of the themes Balke fixed upon – coastal lighthouses – did not correspond to the vision of Norway being curated in poetry and song and in the paintings of Dahl, and other National Romantics such as Hans Gude and Adolphe Tidemand. Balke failed to capture the then-as-now, timeless unity of folk and land required by National Romanticism. His landscapes, in their objectivity, failed to address the “we” of the nation. They also seemed little interested in addressing the privileged “I” of Friedrich’s Romantic subject.<sup>27</sup> Balke could not shake off the memories of what he saw, memories he shared again and again. He painted what it was like for him to be there and see what he saw. And, latterly, what it was like to remember this experience decades later.



Fig 4. Peder Balke, *Mount Stetind in Fog*, 1864, oil on canvas, 71.5 x 58.5 cm, The National Museum, Oslo (Photo: The National Museum/ Frode Larsen).



Fig 5. Peder Balke, *Northern Lights over Coastal Landscape*, c. 1879, oil on canvas 10.5 x 12 cm, The National Museum, Oslo (Photo: The National Museum).

### WILLUMSEN, JOTUNHEIM, AND THE GOTHIC OBJECT

Ultimately, visions of the far North and of the truly inhospitable mountains and icefields are incompatible with the national visions being created in the Nordic countries. To survive, humanity must differentiate itself from wild and hostile nature and resist it, even if that wildness continues to hold certain compelling attractions. These attractions lie beneath the surface of the ominous clouds, shadowed mountains, and moonlit lakes that do appear in National Romantic landscapes, but never without recourse to shelter and a break in the cloud to offer relief. National Romanticism required viewers to identify themselves with the landscape and project their hearts and minds into it as a beloved space. To be reminded of the wild and hostile nature that lies beyond and that resists efforts to tame it; that, in its sublime magnitude, mocks attempts to differentiate one's self from its vastness, threatens to disrupt the necessary suppressions that survival, civilization and nation paradoxically demand.

In the Gothic, the subject is thrilled by the glimpse of this threat. It is on this basis that *Arctic Sea* holds its appeal. The vastness of the icefields, their palpable danger in the chaotic and jagged forms of ice, and then the terrible realisation that the shadows within their crevasses contain the mangled remains of a lost ship and the corpses of all those aboard, plays out like a Gothic plot, as the darkness of a hidden chamber resolves into a scene of past horrors. But this thrill becomes more unacceptable, the more real the threat of danger. Therefore, where the veneer of civilisation is more recent and precarious, the further north you go, and the atavistic dread it conjures up is closer to the surface, the reminder of the hostility and implacability of northern nature becomes more difficult to accommodate, along with the requirement to love and collectively identify with it.

The challenges and inner conflicts and crises engendered by real encounters with the North are revealed in the remarkable work, *Jotunheim* (1893–94), by Jens Ferdinand Willumsen (Fig 6). Willumsen was a Danish artist from Copenhagen. Like Balke he never completed his academic studies as a painter, but pursued his own course of artistic education abroad, this time in Paris. *Jotunheim* represents Willumsen's attempt to come to terms with his encounter with the inhospitable North. The Jotunheim is a high Alpine range in southern Norway. Not the Arctic, then, but not a domesticated landscape. Willumsen travelled there from Paris in 1892, completing and exhibiting the first phase of *Jotunheim* back in Paris in 1893.<sup>28</sup>

For Willumsen, the trip was challenging physically and emotionally. He sought in his landscape painting to capture the impact of the trip. It is not a view from a particular known vantage point, but it is a specific, rather than a generic mountain scene. It is a fundamentally bleak outlook, without any signs of human habitation. Indeed, the impenetrability of the landscape was a key part of what Willumsen wanted to capture. His commentary on the painting, written for its exhibition in 1895 begins: "The clouds drifted away and I found myself on the edge of an abyss, looking over a mountain landscape in the far North, grim, harsh, covered by eternal snow and ice, a world uninhabitable by human beings."<sup>29</sup> In his diary he commented on distant peaks, "so high that no one can reach them because the air is so thin and the cold so fierce and the way so far that those who set out will die halfway. One must be satisfied with the sight of those peaks from down below."<sup>30</sup>

Drawn, as he was, to the wildness and beauty of the landscape, the overwhelming impression was that man was not welcome and did not belong. Willumsen recalled that, one day in the mountains he got lost in fog:





Fig 6. Jens Ferdinand Willumsen, Jotunheim, 1893–94, oil on canvas, mahogany, zinc and enamel on copper, 275.5 x 152.5 cm (Photo: J. F. Willumsens Museum / Anders Sune Berg).

*The distant mountains on the other side of Tyin Lake looked so strangely compelling that I absolutely had to go over to them and see them in more detail. I did a little walking tour that lasted a few days. I came to a valley through which ran a stream that came from a glacier. I worked my way laboriously up between the broken boulders and finally came upon the ice [...]. The weather changed and the large bank of dark fog that came rolling in from all sides, from above and from below, seemed to contain evil spirits. They pounced on me and rushed past. The whole thing was terrifying, and I was struck with horror, gripped by a powerful fear that I could not overcome. It was as if all the rocks were alive and sought me. I thought that behind each one lay a monster who would kill me. I panicked, packed up my belongings and turned and crashed into a wild run that got wilder and wilder down the gorge. Only once I reached the valley, I regained my equilibrium when I saw some greenery. It was the bleakness of the two colours, or rather lack of colours (black and white only was all you see up there) that had the eerie effect.<sup>31</sup>*

Willumsen's *Jotunheim* tries to capture this duality of attraction and repulsion. The landscape is inhospitable, without vegetation or signs of human presence. It suggests awe at the power of nature, but nothing that makes that landscape knowable and comprehensible as a national symbol. It remains disorientating, inaccessible and incomprehensible. The vista of the lake and rising mountains fractures into black-and-white jags that disrupt the sense of recession. As well as the strange reflections in the lake, which defy the eye's focus and create confusion, there are also gouts of smoke or vapour rising out of various points of the painting, both rock and lake. The viewer gropes for meaning in the painting, seeing glimpses of totemic animals or faces in the patches of snow and ice. In these opaque

patterns Willumsen invites the viewer to share his own fear, disorientation and awe in the face of a landscape of extreme power.

Willumsen grapples here with a reality that has no place in National Romanticism. It lies closer to the Gothic. Recent studies of the Gothic have turned to Julia Kristeva's theory of the Abject to explore the complicated dynamics of intentional disruption and subversion of stability played with there.<sup>32</sup> The Abject is that which must be put away from us in order that we become whole and bounded individual subjects. It is the unacknowledgeable reality of birth, death, decay and bodily emissions that signal that the body of the self is not as inviolable and bounded as it would wish to be.

*There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated.<sup>33</sup>*

Applied in cultural terms, this idea can be used to frame the intolerable realities that lie beneath the skin of the body of the nation and that are unspeakable and experienced only as aversions and pollution or foreignness that must be rejected, cannot be recognised as coming from within. The "naturalness" of the national body, as created in nationalist discourses including National Romanticism, lends itself in a number of ways to parallels with the psychological paradigm of the infantile identification of the self. The nation was always there. Its *not being there* is unthinkable, a violation. It is also frequently conjured in terms of a body and in terms of birth and the necessity to revive it or preserve it from decay.

Speaking of British nation-building in the eighteenth century, the suppression of Britain's Catholic past and fear of Catholic insurgents, Robert Miles writes:

*[...]one might say that nationalism and the heritage industry are part and parcel of the same process of historical amnesia and nation building. The general aim of nationalist ideology is to create a myth of unitary national origin, whereby the present "congruent" polity is understood to be the manifestation of an ancient culture. Nothing must contradict this narrative, including, or indeed, especially, evidence of past diversity, heterogeneity, and conflict.<sup>34</sup>*

Miles turns to the theory of the Abject as a model for the horror/repression/fascination with the fear of Catholic insurgency expressed in British Gothic art and literature, where it manifested in the form of decadent Catholic aristocrats, monks and ghoulish ritual. In relation to Nordic nationalisms, it was not sectarian history, or even a history of mobile borders and allegiances that was most dangerous to the integrity of the national body. Instead what was abjected was the truth that life in the North was often far from idyllic and that, for many, poverty, hunger and unrelenting cold remained real dangers. Population shifts from the countryside to the cities and immigration from Scandinavia to America revealed the challenges of living off the land. Hardships that had to be countered by images of rural utopia and togetherness.<sup>35</sup>

The ice-giants of the sagas, the Jötunar, after whom the *Jotunheim* was named in the early years of Norwegian National Romanticism in the 1820s, could be seen as familiar figures from beloved childhood tales, but their original form as an embodiment of the endless battle with the forces of Winter was a reality that lay beneath.

Willumsen laboured extensively in *Jotunheim* to express and then suppress this encounter with the darker side of the North. Kelly Hurley, writing about the persistent attraction towards the Abject, comments on the desire to entertain, temporarily, intolerable possibilities. It is the frame that makes this bearable and, the more robust the frame, the more safely the viewer can engage.<sup>36</sup> It is interesting that the second phase of work on *Jotunheim* was the construction, by Willumsen, of an elaborate narrative framing structure. To right and left the harsh landscape is framed by allegorical figures. Willumsen described them in his 1895 commentary as follows:

*The figures in the relief on the left represent those who determinedly seek through learning and the intellect to find the connection between the infinitely great and the infinitely small. The infinitely great is represented by a stellar nebula, the infinitely small by some microbes. [...] The relief on the right represents a contrast to the relief on the left: pointlessness; at the bottom two men, one of whom is weaving a piece of wickerwork which the other is just as quickly unravelling; in the middle a group of indifferent figures; at the top a figure representing a chimeric dream.*<sup>37</sup>

Superficially, this would seem to be a division between intellect and reason, and emotion and sensuality, a mapping out of the competing values of the North and the South. But Willumsen's description is undercut profoundly by his own imagery. The incomprehensible graphic renderings of nebula and microbes and the stiff, hieratic gestures of the men on the left contrast markedly with the energy and joy of the figures on the right. The men of reason appear transfixed, staring longingly at the laughing figures opposite. Even the two men weaving and unweaving are seemingly more engaged in the dexterous operation of their task

than the men on the left, begging the question of where the pointlessness lies.

Tellingly, the mountain range that the frame is built to contain breaks free from its bounds and the peaks in the background of the painting are repeated in enamelled copper, bursting forth from the upper edge of the frame. Willumsen appears to be at great pains to mediate this image, first through elaborate framing and then through accompanying textual commentary. Yet he also desired to remain true to the sensations of his terrifying encounter and so all his devices unweave themselves and the implacability of the mountains reasserts itself.

Willumsen's experience was one of losing bodily integrity. The fear of being absorbed and destroyed by a careless and powerful natural world. Kristeva sees, at the root of the Abject, the horror of birth, between being and non-being, between wholeness and being part of the mother, the fear of reabsorption into her body, loss of integrity and self. Artists who come too close to revealing that which is Abject are shunned. This is, arguably, what happened to Balke and what Willumsen foresaw and sought to guard against when he added the frame to his *Jotunheim* landscape.

The emotional pull between viewer and landscape has been frequently theorised in masculinist terms, with the omnipotent male viewer staking claim to a landscape implicitly gendered as feminine.<sup>38</sup> The trope of male viewer and the motherland and mother nature has been varied at times by the land as widow,<sup>39</sup> or as beloved or bride, all of which require male protection and veneration.<sup>40</sup> The idea of the Gothic and the Abject allows an exciting but uncomfortable alternative to surface. Not a loving and beloved, feminine nature, but something more primordial. This land-as-mother has the power to destroy and to claim back into herself any or all of her offspring. She cannot be known or captured, only encountered with suitable

humility. The appeal of this encounter lies in the desire of the modern spectator to court danger, in a way that the ordered confines of modern life do not ordinarily allow. That artists who strayed too far in this direction were regarded as particularly subject to foreign influences can be understood as a part of a desire to put away from oneself that which they represented. This is not to say that the influence of Turner in the work of Balke or Gauguin in the work of Willumsen was not there. But, rather, to point out that the influence of Friedrich on the work of Dahl and the influence of Jules Bastien-Lepage on the work of many later National Romantic painters was equally present, but assimilated as a mark of their modernity, rather than as a troubling foreign influence.

I am not trying to argue for a new category of Gothic landscape. A Gothic sensibility permeated National Romanticism (and Romanticism) on certain terms. Looking at these terms, at the successful and less successful integration of these elements, reveals the challenge of harnessing together the appeal of the haunting North and that of homeland. The National Romanticism of the Nordic countries celebrates northern distinctiveness, but ameliorates, as Dahl's example shows, the more terrifying aspects of the North. The perilous inhospitality of the North must be set aside, the trolls and giants recalled fondly, and yet a frisson of this ancient dread must remain to titillate the modern, urban audience. It is by considering deviations from the main path of art historical narratives, the oddities that do not fit, that we can challenge perception of the truth and accuracy of the dominant narratives in the representations of national landscape.

The Gothic was a practice of giving voice to that which had to be kept at bay, uncomfortable truths that could not be allowed to intrude. At the same time, these unwelcome realities exercised a persistent fascination. If the South was order and clarity, then perhaps the North was wildness

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and chaos, possibly more than a mere poetic reading could tame. Reflecting on these issues allows us to recognise the exclusions maintained by National Romanticism and the persistence of these exclusions in the historiography and wider culture. As art history grows away from national histories and towards a plurality of new histories, we face a challenge, not simply of inserting outsiders into the canon – as is now happening to Balke – but of revealing and tackling the very contingent nature of the canon itself.

Unless otherwise indicated, translations are by the author.

<sup>1</sup> Richard Bergh, 1896, cited in H. A. Barton, *Sweden and Visions of Norway: Politics and Culture, 1814–1905* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2003), 146

<sup>2</sup> Marianne Koskimies-Envall, *Vaurastuva kansakunta kuvina 1869–1899: Arvid Liljelund, hänen laatukuvamaalausensa, niiden todellisuuspohja ja vastaanotto* (Helsinki: Hagelstam, 1998).

<sup>3</sup> Riitta Konttinen, Naistaiteilijat Suomessa: keskiajalta modernismin murrokseen (Helsinki: Tammi 2007); Vibeke Røstorp, *Le mythe du retour: les artistes scandinaves en France de 1889 à 1908* (Stockholm: Stockholms universitets förlag, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

<sup>5</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *Chosen peoples* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Akos Moravansky, “Magic Mountains: Constructing the Geography of Modernity,” in *Vernacular Art in Central Europe: International Conference, 1–5 October, 1997*, ed. Jacek Purchla (Cracow: International Cultural Center, 2001).

<sup>6</sup> *Peder Balke: Painter of Northern Light*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 10 April – 10 July 2017; *Paintings by Peder Balke*, ed. Marit Ingeborg Lange, Knut Ljøgodt, and Christopher Riopelle (London: National Gallery Company, 2014); *Peder Balke: vision og revolusjon*, ed. Marit Ingeborg Lange, Knut Ljøgodt, and Christopher Riopelle (Tromsø: Nordnorsk Kunstmuseum, 2014); Per Kværne, *Un peintre norvégien au Louvre: Peder Balke (1804–1887) et son temps = A Norwegian Painter in the Louvre: Peder Balke (1804–1887) and His Times* (Oslo: Novus Press, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> Marit Ingeborg Lange, “Peder Balke: Vision and Revolution,” in *Paintings by Peder Balke*, ed. Marit Ingeborg Lange, Knut Ljøgodt, and Christopher Riopelle (London: National Gallery Company, 2014), 9–19

<sup>8</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *The Nation Made Real: Art and National Identity in Western Europe, 1600–1850*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>9</sup> Russell A. Potter, *Arctic Spectacles: The Frozen North in Visual Culture, 1818–1875* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2007).

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.hamburger-kunsthalle.de/sammlung-online/caspar-david-friedrich/das-eismeer>, accessed on 21 Feb 2019.

<sup>11</sup> Lange “Peder Balke,” 18, 48.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 32, 36–37.

<sup>13</sup> H.A. Barton, “Iter Scandinavicum: Foreign Travellers’ Views of the Late Eighteenth-Century North,” *Scandinavian Studies*, 68 no.1 (1996): 1–18.

<sup>14</sup> Peter Fjågesund and Ruth A. Symes, *The Northern Utopia: British Perceptions of Norway in the Nineteenth Century* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003); Kathryn Walchester, *Gamle Norge and Nineteenth-Century British Women Travellers in Norway* (London: Anthem 2014); Giuseppe Acerbi, *Travels through Sweden, Finland, and Lapland, to the North Cape, in 1798 and 99* (London: Joseph Mawman, 1802); A. F. Skioldebrand, *A Picturesque Journey to the North Cape* (London: J.M. Richardson, 1813); Arthur de Capell Brooke, *Travels through Sweden, Norway and Finmark, to the North Cape* (London: Rodwell & Martin, 1823).

<sup>15</sup> Andreas Aubert, *Professor Dahl: et stykke av aarhundredets kunst -og kulturhistorie* (Kristiania: Aschehoug, 1893); Andreas Aubert, *Den nordiske naturfølelse og professor Dahl hans kunst og dens stilling i aarhundredets utvikling* (Kristiania: Aschehoug, 1894).

<sup>16</sup> John Christian Dahl, “Letter to Sagen of 6 April 1841,” reproduced in Marie Lødrup Bang, *Johan Christian Dahl, 1788–1857: life and works*. Vol. 1 (Oslo: Norwegian University Press, 1988), 250–51.

<sup>17</sup> Bang, *Johan Christian Dahl*, 289

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 80–81, 202

<sup>19</sup> Frances Ferguson, *Solitude and the Sublime: Romanticism and the Aesthetics of Individuation* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>20</sup> Claudia Bell and John Lyall, *The Accelerated Sublime: Landscape, Tourism, and Identity*. (Westport: Praeger, 2010), 5–11.

<sup>21</sup> Brenna, “King of the Road: Describing Norwegian Landscapes in the Eighteenth Century,” Mari Hvattum, Janike Kampeveld Larsen, Brita Brenna, and Beate Elvebakk, eds. *Routes, Roads and Landscapes* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 13–26; Maunu Häyrynen, “The Kaleidoscopic View: The Finnish National Landscape Imagery,” *National Identities* 2, no. 1 (2000): 51–59.

<sup>22</sup> Oscar Julius Falnes, *National Romanticism in Norway* (New York: Colombia University Press, 1933), 58–61

<sup>23</sup> Ville Lukkarinen and Annika Waenerberg, *Suomi-kuwasta mielenmaisemaan: kansallismaisemat 1800- ja 1900-luvun vaihteen maalaustaiteessa* (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 2004).

<sup>24</sup> David Punter, *A New Companion to the Gothic* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015).

<sup>25</sup> Christoph Henning, *Reiselust: Touristen, Tourismus und Urlaubskultur* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1997).

<sup>26</sup> Torsten Gunnarsson, “Introduction,” *A Mirror of Nature: Nordic landscape painting*, ed. Leena Ahtola-Moorhouse, Frode Ernst Haverkamp, and Torsten Gunnarsson (Odder: Narayana Press, 2006), 16.

<sup>27</sup> Julian Jason Haladyn, “Friedrich’s ‘Wanderer’: Paradox of the Modern Subject,” *RACAR: Revue D’art Canadienne / Canadian Art*

*Review* 41, no. 1 (2016): 47–61.

<sup>28</sup> Roald Nasgaard, “‘Seul en Plein Nature’ Les perspectives dans l’Europe du nord,” in Guy Cogeval, et al. *Au-Delà des étoiles: Les paysages mystique de Monet à Kandinsky* (Paris: Musée D’Orsay, 2017), 204–209.

<sup>29</sup> Ernst Mentze and J. F. Willumsen, *J.F. Willumsen: mine Erindringer fortalt til Ernst Mentze* (Copenhagen: Berlingske forlag, 1953), 100–101.

<sup>30</sup> Unpublished notebook in J. F. Willumsen Museum, cited in Pedersen Troels Branth, *Bjergtaget: J.F. Willumsen i Norge 1892* (Århus: Klim, 2006), 38.

<sup>31</sup> Unpublished notebook in J. F. Willumsen Museum, cited in Lise Buurgård, *J.F. Willumsen: bjerget, kvinden, selvet* (Odense: Odense Universitetsforlag, 1999), 41.

<sup>32</sup> Kelly Hurley, *The Gothic Body: Sexuality, Materialism, and Degeneration at the fin de siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Robert Miles, “Abjection, Nationalism and the Gothic,” in *The Gothic*, ed. Fred Botting (Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 2001), 51–69; Kirsty Macdonald, “‘This Desolate and Appalling Landscape’: The Journey North in Contemporary Scottish Gothic,” *Gothic Studies* 13, no. 2 (2011): 37–48.

<sup>33</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: an Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1).

<sup>34</sup> Miles, “Abjection,” 51.

<sup>35</sup> Michelle Facos, *Nationalism and the Nordic Imagination: Swedish Art of the 1890s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 58–61.

<sup>36</sup> Hurley, *Gothic Body*, 50.

<sup>37</sup> Mentze and Willumsen, *J.F. Willumsen*, 100–101

<sup>38</sup> Gillian Rose, *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

<sup>39</sup> Marc Cabal, “Faith culture and sovereignty: Irish nationality and its development 1558–1625,” in *British consciousness and identity: the making of Britain, 1533–1707*, ed. Brendan Bradshaw and P. R. Roberts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 112–139; Smith 2003, 151–154.

<sup>40</sup> Johanna Valenius, *Undressing the Maid: Gender, Sexuality and the Body in the Construction of the Finnish Nation* (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2004), 99–119.

# *Feminine Androgyny and Diagrammatic Abstraction: Science, Myth and Gender in Hilma af Klint's Paintings*

*Jadranka Ryle*

*At this moment I have knowledge of, in the living reality, that I am an atom in the universe that has access to infinite possibilities of development. These possibilities of development I want, gradually, to reveal.<sup>1</sup>*

The work of Swedish modernist artist Hilma af Klint (1862–1944) has gained increasing prominence over the last few years. A touring exhibition has taken her work to major museums in Stockholm, Copenhagen, Berlin, Málaga, London, and elsewhere, and at the time of writing her work is being shown in a solo exhibition at New York's Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum.<sup>2</sup> Although her innovative abstract and esoteric images were not known to the wider public in her lifetime, seven decades after her death she is becoming recognised as one of the most interesting and prolific modernist artists in northern Europe.

Af Klint's art, although deeply invested in an esoteric world view, also offers an image of the meeting of modernist discourses. As the citation above makes clear, af Klint contemplated the magnitude of modern atomic science. In addition, Nordic mythical traditions, combined with scientific knowledge of the physical structure of space and the atom – which are transformed into spiritual questions via theosophical spiritualism – become modernist, transnational and gendered abstraction in af Klint's painting. Criticism has recognised multiple diverse sources of inspiration in af Klint's oeuvre;<sup>3</sup> and the influence of scientific discoveries in her work is explored in two recent articles by Tessel M. Bauduin<sup>4</sup> and Stephen Kern<sup>5</sup>. My paper builds on this research by analysing how the fusion of Nordic

mythology and new discoveries in atomic science in af Klint's abstract art reflect a timely demand for the material changes that women sought in the first decades of the twentieth century. Drawing from theosophical ideas of androgyny and its interpretation of atomic science, as well as Nordic mythology, af Klint innovates what I term a political “diagrammatic” abstraction centred on gender equality and androgyny.

The artistic National Romantic Movement developed in Scandinavian countries at the turn of the century partly as a reaction to new discoveries in science and contemporary societal changes. Celebration of Nordic identity was involved in this revival of past folk traditions, myths and nature. In this essay, I argue that af Klint's subversive and androgynous use of Nordic mythology alongside advances in modernist science should be read as breaking with patriarchal hierarchies of the artistic world and with Swedish National Romanticism. In a range of groundbreaking early abstract works painted between 1914–17, af Klint develops a “diagrammatic” aesthetics, which remodels geometric abstracted forms to related utopian ends. Particularly, in two series of paintings that this paper considers: *Swan* (1914–15) and *Atom* (1917), I claim that af Klint develops a diagrammatic form whose abstracted stylistics is borrowed from scientific contexts in order both to chart and resist sexual and gender inequalities in early twentieth-century Swedish society.

The gender inequalities of early twentieth-century Swedish society, and the catastrophic personal tragedies that could result from outwardly resisting patriarchal conservatism,

are also why af Klint kept her radical feminine abstractions a secret during her lifetime. Exemplifying the fraught position of women artists in turn-of-the-century Sweden, af Klint developed two bodies of work: her professional, public and stylistically conventional representational painting, and her private abstractions, painted for the all-female spiritualist group that she regularly joined to conduct séances. In the early years of the twentieth century, female artists had only recently been admitted to Stockholm's Royal Academy of Art, and women were still denied suffrage by Swedish society. The predominantly male critics of the day were especially prejudicial and dismissive towards women artists when they showed innovation and progressive aesthetic ideas.<sup>6</sup> In this context, af Klint's decision to keep her radical work away from the public eye seems pragmatic. The "safe space" of the feminine spiritualist group allowed her to fashion a transformed social relation-to-come, without exposing her to the misogynist attitudes of her own time.

It is my contention that af Klint's private diagrammatic style involves a visionary futurity quite unlike other utopias of her time. Painting in an era when Nietzsche's influential *Übermensch* defined an explicitly violent and masculinist goal for humanity, when Futuristic celebrations of masculine powers glorified war and machine guns while war ravaged Europe and beyond, and when the National Romantic and Symbolist idea of the male artist as a genius who would re-enchanted social life had reached its peak, af Klint's abstraction turned towards a quite differently sexed politics. At the turn of the century, the utopian myth of androgyne was revived in spiritualist and artistic circles. I would suggest that these ideas were frequently constructed as responses to the changing socio-political position of women, and in many instances involved a sophisticated new phase of patriarchal repression. The emergence of the emancipated "New Woman" ushered in a need to redefine women's sexuality and their role in professional life, so that the spiritualist and artistic question of androgyny at the turn

of the century always broached or involved "the woman question" – even though, very frequently, the celebration of androgyny went hand-in-hand with suppression of the feminine.

In af Klint's work, on the other hand, a diagrammatic utopianism makes visible a new phase of polymorphous androgyny. Often gender-ambivalent or gender-mixed, and consistently charting a feminine alternative to patriarchal aesthetics, af Klint's work contained unique and idiosyncratic abstract forms (several years in advance of Wassily Kandinsky) by turning diagrammatic and utopian abstractions towards a feminine political aesthetic. During the 1980s–90s, a number of high-profile critical feminist studies of literature sought to explore and deploy utopias to feminist political ends. Mostly concentrating on feminist utopian fictions, these theorists seemed to imply that utopian thought is inherent in feminism, since it "must include an impulse to improve human community."<sup>7</sup> Utopias, imagined communities, science fiction futures, and re-charted sex relations are among the genres and modes turned towards the exploration of revolutionary change in this period. Perhaps feminisms have always been forward-looking expressions of modernity, since historically a gender-free or completely equal society has never existed.<sup>8</sup> However, it is notable that late-twentieth-century criticism concentrates mostly, if not exclusively, on writing, leaving the utopian qualities of feminine art largely unexplored. This essay extends the historical reach and stylistic specificity of the utopian critical moment in late-twentieth-century literature by locating in af Klint's diagrammatic abstraction an important yet critically unrecognised early exemplar of the feminine androgynous utopia.

Her use of diagrammatic expression is not coincidental here. A diagram has the possibility of describing both the way things are and suggesting the way they should be. If a diagram does not limit itself to a social or ontological

reality, but also arranges or reconfigures data in order to chart potential futures, it can take on utopian dimensions. In the words of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, diagrams serve as vehicles that reach into the future, and thus extend the possibilities of thought beyond conventional juridical, geopolitical, epistemological realities: "The diagrammatic or abstract machine does not function to represent even something real, but rather constructs a real that is yet to come, a new type of reality."<sup>9</sup> For Deleuze and Guattari, in describing reality, the diagram is also always potentially a transformative agent.

### AESTHETICS OF GENDERED MATERIALITY

Let us consider the appropriation of scientific modernity in af Klint's work on the atom. In 1917, the year in which Ernest Rutherford successfully conducted the experiment in which he "split" the atom in his Manchester lab, disintegrating the nucleus of nitrogen, af Klint wrote in her private notebook: "The atom has at once limits and the capacity to develop. When the atom expands on the ether plane, the physical part of the earthly atom begins to glow."<sup>10</sup> She further described the exchange of power between ether and earth atom which prevents it from breaking apart. The text is a reflection on the series of paintings that she executed in January of the same year. It is immediately apparent from this work that af Klint's enthusiasm for new scientific knowledge, which she explores exclusively in her private and abstract body of work, functions in opposition to the prevailing romantic aesthetic of the period. Likewise, by elsewhere terming herself "an atom" she employs the vocabulary of the new science to further her spiritual and aesthetic explorations of subjectivity.

The *Atom* series, as she entitles it, consist of twenty-two small watercolours on paper (27 x 25 cm), and despite the dynamic description of the exchange between atoms on the spiritual and physical realm in her writing, the images appear to be relatively static. Across the series, the

lower right-hand corner of the images contains a square divided either in four smaller squares, or with intersecting diagonal black-and-white lines with a circle at the point of the intersection. In the upper left-hand corner of these paintings there is situated a smaller black square. It is divided in a similar manner, either into smaller squares or by two diagonal lines, with a circle in the middle, mirroring the larger image in the lower portion of the picture. In each square in *Atom Series no. 5* (fig. 1), the atomic form is represented, in a diagrammatic sense, on two different graphic planes. As in the rest of the series, the “earthly” atom from the lower part of the pictures is bordered by a green line, which, as a combination of blue and yellow (feminine and masculine colours in af Klint’s idiosyncratic colour code),<sup>11</sup> constitutes a colour symbol of androgyny. As Bender and Marrinan describe, in their history of diagrammatic form, this mode of colour coding (common to both the *Atom* and *Swan* series) is a typical feature of the diagram.<sup>12</sup> Since black and white also represent masculine and feminine, according to her colour code, the dual sex of the atom is given gendered expression, its dematerialising of matter emphasised by the black-and-white nucleus, as well as the lines of the square diagonals. Black and white diagonals thus make each triangle of the divided square of the earthly atom consists of a white-female, a black-male, and a green-androgynous side.<sup>13</sup>

The formal arrangement of nearly all of the pictures from the *Atom* series is the same, making them reminiscent of isotopes. First defined in 1913, isotopes are atoms of the same element which have similar chemical properties, but different physical properties, due to the way they combine the same number of protons with differing numbers of neutrons. Each of af Klint’s images consists of a text about the behaviour of atoms on earth and the ethereal plane, which is inscribed in the upper right-hand part of the image. These texts are further represented by two squares. As in the diagrammatic mode of representation,

three different elements coexist on the same picture plane, perhaps as different points of view of the same phenomenon, and while being separated, they are also clearly put in correlation. Variations of colours and details of atoms follow the descriptions in the images. In this way, af Klint turns the disorienting changes brought by science towards a utopian vision of gender merging that is mediated by the diagrammatic transformation of form and colour. Resolutely modern, in the divisions of her atom diagrams, which are sustained by her gendered colour coding, af Klint weaves issues of gender and androgyny into her abstracted aestheticising of the atom.

As her *Atom*-paintings illustrate, af Klint was enthused by contemporary discoveries, such as work on radioactivity by Ernest Rutherford, and Niels Bohr. In 1909, at the University of Manchester (then called the Victoria University of Manchester), Rutherford, together with Hans Geiger and Ernest Marsden, implemented his famous gold foil experiment, which demonstrated the nuclear nature of atoms. This experiment led to the definition of the “Rutherford model” of the atom. Rutherford showed how J. J. Thomson’s model of the atom, which had described as electrons of negative charge surrounded by a “soup” of positive charge, was incorrect. Rutherford’s model stated that much of an atom’s charge (specifically its positive charge) is concentrated at the centre of the atom (today known as the nucleus), and that it is orbited by low-mass electrons. Working in Copenhagen, in 1913 Niels Bohr refined this model by describing the travel of electrons around the nucleus in circular orbits similar to the Solar system, but instead of gravity they were attracted by electrostatic forces. Widely reported across Scandinavia, and the wider western world, these revolutionary discoveries had immense implications for the understanding of the universe. As Hans Christian von Baeyer states:

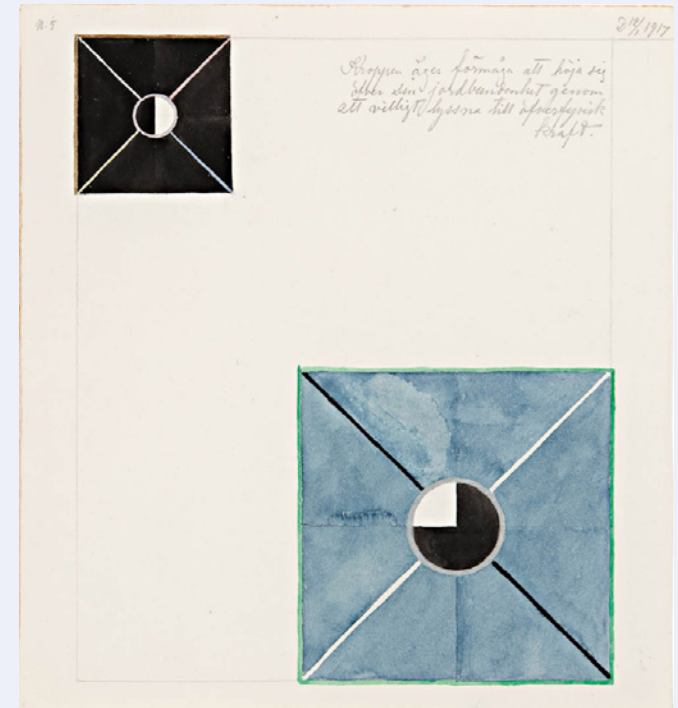


Fig 1. Hilma af Klint, HaK357 *Atom Series no. 5*, 1917, the Hilma af Klint Foundation (Photo: Moderna Museet, Stockholm).



*[T]he revolutionary implication of the discovery of the nucleus is hard to overestimate. Five years earlier Albert Einstein had published the special theory of relativity, thereby destroying the rigid framework of space and time that had been the skeleton of classical physics. But while Einstein had merely demolished an abstract idea, Rutherford had dissolved matter itself; the atom that was imagined as a tangible object, as a miniature grain of sand, could no longer exist. He had transformed it into a ball of vacuum in which a minuscule nucleus and a few point-like electrons dance an arcane minuet. Rutherford pulled the rug, as well as the rigid floor and the solid ground beneath it, out from under our feet and left us walking on a void. Thus he contributed even more than Einstein to the overthrow of the coherent worldview that had dominated physics virtually unchanged since classical antiquity.<sup>14</sup>*

Matter itself was suddenly no longer fully material, perhaps more enigmatic than emptiness.

According to Michelle Facos, Swedish National Romanticism, unlike similar movements elsewhere, embraced modernist changes and scientific developments.<sup>15</sup> As Facos further argues, National Romantics in Sweden favoured development as long as it was beneficial for their society. However, the centre of interest for National Romantics was identifying the Swedish essence with a pastoral idyll, which often involved a nostalgic and regressive attitude towards the modern world.<sup>16</sup> National Romanticism has also been described as a response to the new science and nascent industrialisation by seeking to evade this disconnect of matter and human existence.<sup>17</sup> As I describe elsewhere, the National Romantic strategy of traditionalism, the return to nature and to myth, and its aesthetic conservatism was bound up, in the Scandinavian context, with a number of other disturbing political issues.<sup>18</sup>

Significant here is the ambivalent status of the individual in the politics of modernism following the Industrial Revolution and the division of labour. Marx explained the condition of the modern worker's discontent with modern work: the worker "[d]oes not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind. The worker therefore only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself."<sup>19</sup> Max Weber universalised Marx's worker's as a wider diagnosis of the modern condition, as "one special case of a universal trend."<sup>20</sup> For the National Romantics, alienation was a sign of modernity's failings, and their intention was to "reintegrate the individual into society in a meaningful way,"<sup>21</sup> while for later more progressively-minded leftists such as Brecht, alienation effect was an aesthetic technique for prompting an awakening of consciousness to dissatisfaction with the political status quo. In af Klint's day, enthusiasm for modern urban living, technical and scientific advancements and industrialisation was described in Italian Futurism. The Futurists' celebration of aggressive manliness and strength attained a good deal of prominence in Swedish modernist painting from the 1910s onwards, when it was introduced by Gösta Adrian Nilsson (aka GAN), who is often said to be a pioneer of Cubism and radical modernist expression in Sweden.<sup>22</sup> As a homosexual, GAN was faced with illegality and social bigotry, and his response for a while was to paint images of very masculine bodies of sailors and sportsmen, linking his motifs with the Futurists' credo. However, in his later work, GAN abandoned Futurism and Cubism, and returned to a romantic style of painting, citing romantic landscape painter Marcus Larson as an inspiration.

Might one speculate that GAN's shift from apparently opposing modernist positions, Futurism and Romanticism, was aided by the masculinist gender politics espoused by each movement? Despite his homosexual identity and occluded queer aesthetics, masculinist predominance eased

the passage of his own professional transition – just as the central position that gender inequalities take in the first decades of the twentieth century, such as the long resistance to female suffrage alleviated the alienating passage to modernity. Both in a social and an artistic context, women were marginalised during this period, and the view that patriarchal society had of women as incompatible with political and professional commitment also put them in a peripheral position within the avant-garde.<sup>23</sup>

The anti-feminine potential of androgyny was also important to early abstraction. For Mondrian, "A Futurist manifesto proclaiming hatred of *woman* (the feminine) was entirely justified."<sup>24</sup> Mondrian sought to eradicate the feminine element and curved lines through rigid geometrical abstraction. Yet he too felt that he had found a solution for his gender concerns in the concept of androgyny. As Mark Cheetham argues, his androgyny is discriminating rather than inclusive. It served him as a basis for gender hierarchy and man's superiority over woman, and it was "an integral part of his ruthless purification of self, art's tradition, and (ideally) society, a purification that can be seen as nothing short of an aesthetic eugenics based on the discrimination of gender."<sup>25</sup>

In contrast to the range of masculine responses to scientific knowledge, af Klint's *Atom* series celebrates contemporary science and aligns it with gender questions, resisting the contemporary moment, and charting a new potential for sexed relations. This inclusive, polymorphous approach that af Klint explores might be termed "feminine androgyny." Rather than GAN's male queer abstractions that deploy idealised maleness in order to evade modernist alienation, or Mondrian's eradication of curved forms that are identified as feminine, af Klint's feminine-androgyny charts a multitude of imbricated lines and colour forms by actively pursuing a hybrid aesthetics of mythology, science and sex. Explicitly gendering her diagrammatic renderings of atoms, af Klint

foregrounds the occluded gender inequalities at the core of modern politics.

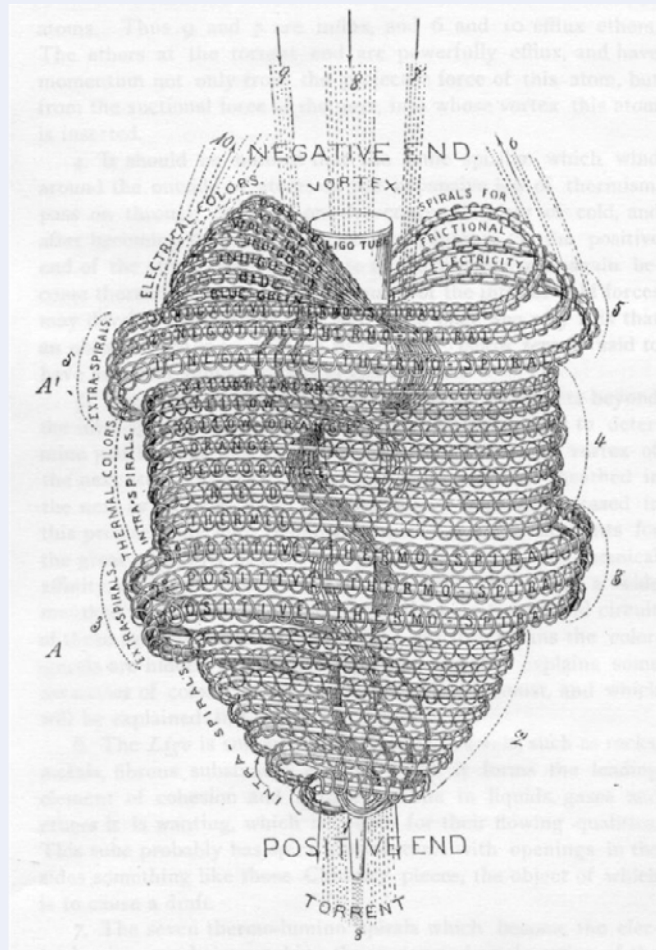
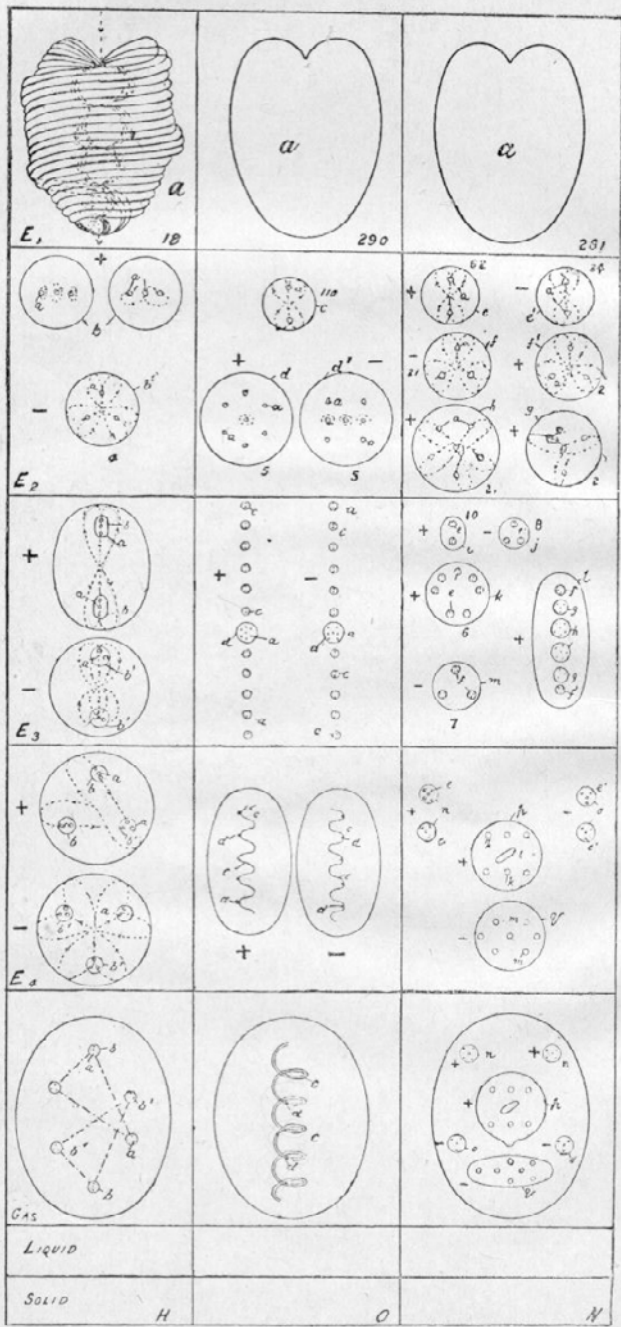
In establishing an aesthetics of gendered materiality, af Klint draws from contemporary populist and esoteric discourses where the new science carried a wide range of non-scientific connotations. For this reason, it is necessary to consider more closely the early twentieth century's proliferating and influential hybrids of science-spirituality. Helena P. Blavatsky and Colonel Henry Olcott, founders of the Theosophical Society, observed in the experiments and discoveries of prominent scientists such as Wilhelm Röntgen, J. J. Thomson, Frederick Soddy, Rutherford, and Marie and Pierre Curie, a practical validation of their teachings about alchemy and invisible realms.<sup>26</sup> It is important to note that such esoteric interests were not marginal in relation to the centres of scientific knowledge, as they are today. Prominent scientists, such as the astronomer Camille Flammarion, the chemist William Crookes, and the physicist Oliver Lodge, were deeply interested in aspects of the occult, and were associated with the Society for Psychical Research.<sup>27</sup> Founded in 1882 by professors at Trinity College, Cambridge, including Henry Sidgwick and Frederick Myers, the Society had the goal of conducting scientific research on mesmeric, psychical and spiritualist phenomena.<sup>28</sup> As Linda Dalrymple Henderson shows, Crookes even believed he had found a possible model for telepathic "brain waves" and declared before the British Association for the Advancement of Science, in 1898 that "[e]ther vibrations have powers and attributes equal to any demand — even to the transmission of thought."<sup>29</sup> Considering this, it is not a surprise, as Dalrymple Henderson claims, that "advocates of alchemy seized upon radioactivity for support [of their practice]," and that "similar connections were regularly made between X-rays and both spirit photographs and clairvoyance, electromagnetism and the practice of Magnetism or Mesmerism, and telegraphy and telepathy."<sup>30</sup>

In 1895, notably, the same year in which Charles Wilson built his first cloud chamber for visualising the passage of ionising radiation, and Röntgen discovered x-rays – tools that would make atoms visible to conventional science – Besant and Leadbeater started a series of psychic "experiments" on the nature of the chemical elements.<sup>31</sup> They conducted a succession of clairvoyant observations, bringing to bear "a special form of will-power, so as to make its [the atom or chemical compound's] movement slow enough to observe the details."<sup>32</sup> It was their contention that the structure of elements "could be assessed through observation with the microscopic vision of the third eye."<sup>33</sup> They published their first findings on hydrogen, oxygen and nitrogen, (fig. 2) in the Theosophical magazine, *Lucifer*. In 1907, the experiments were resumed with fifty-nine more elements, both Besant and Leadbeater claiming that with the power of their minds, they were capable of breaking down the chemical compounds into their elements and then breaking apart the subatomic structures.<sup>34</sup> These findings are published in *The Theosophist*, and later collected into a book called *Occult Chemistry: Investigations by Clairvoyant Magnification into the Structure of the Atoms of the Periodic Table and Some Compound*, which ran to several editions. With their experiment, they tried to connect science and spirituality into a new form of knowledge, which Rudolf Steiner later termed "spiritual science." As an alternative to National Romanticism and brutalist Futurisms, theosophy sought its own utopian hybrid of spirituality and the scientific knowledge of its day. Occult chemistry, as Morrison argues, "explicitly addressed the role of the will and the mind of the spiritually purified."<sup>35</sup> It wanted to manipulate the matter of the physical world, and to gather information about an invisible subatomic world, which became available through sensuous experiments.

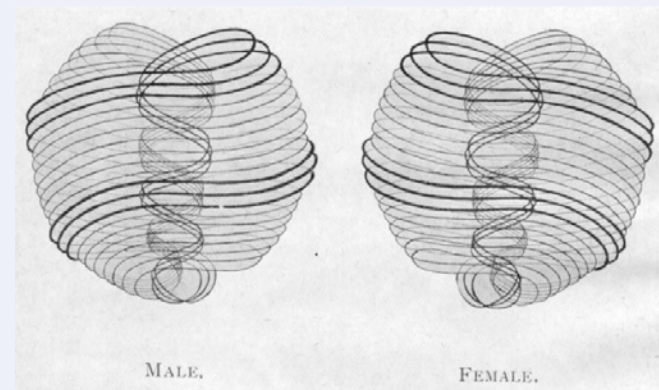
In many of these works, diagrammatic practice is explicitly linked to the utopian reconstruction of human relations. In Leadbeater and Besant's diagram of hydrogen, oxygen

and nitrogen atoms from *Occult Chemistry*, the top row of their illustration shows a "common particle," "the ultimate physical atom"<sup>36</sup> that is later identified as "anu" which is used as a term for the indivisible elementary particle of matter in ancient Indian metaphysics. The form of this "anu" is taken from the drawing of the atom by Edwin D. Babbitt (fig. 3), who in 1878 believed he had discovered the secrets of bonding heat, psychic power, the harmonic law of the universe, and the "Etherio-Atomic Philosophy of force."<sup>37</sup> Besant and Leadbeater, "admitted" that Babbitt's drawing is "fairly accurate," however, they added another dimension to his picture by making the mirror-image of male (positive) and female (negative) "anu" thus representing subatomic particles not only as animate but also as gendered (fig. 4).<sup>38</sup> For the Theosophists, both macro- and micro-cosmoses had a gendered division at their bases.<sup>39</sup> As theosophist and suffragette Clara Codd claimed in 1930, "sex nature in us" puts us "in connection with the greatest spiritual verities of the universe." Sexual difference arose from and described "that primal hour in the dawn of our universe when the one became two."<sup>40</sup> Even the question of atom was connected to the question of a gender duality that theosophy believed structured the universe.

Appropriately, for an illustration of a scientific theme, af Klint uses the diagrammatic method in her depiction of the atom. In diagrams, the emphasis is on putting different aspects of things in correlation. It is possible to show multiplied points of view at the same time in one image. As Bender and Marrinan argue: "[d]iagrams incite a correlation of sensory data with the mental schema of lived experience that emulates the way we explore objects in the world. They are closer to being things than to being representations of things."<sup>41</sup> Following the diagrammatic mode, for af Klint the arrangements of symbols and organisation of pictorial space plays a crucial role. It is a recurring motif of her work to show the duality and the contrast of two worlds



† Fig 3. Edwin D. Babbitt, "The general Form of an Atom", *The Principles of Light and Colour: including among other things the Harmonic Laws of the Universe, the Etherio-Atomic Philosophy of Force, Chromo Chemistry, Chromo Therapeutics, and the General Philosophy of the Fine Forces, Together with numerous Discoveries and Practical Applications* New York: Babbitt & Co. 1878).



† Fig 4. Annie Besant and Charles W. Leadbeater, *Occult Chemistry: A Series of Clairvoyant Observations on the Chemical Elements*, revised edition by A. P. Sinnet (London: Theosophical Publishing House 1919).

† Fig 2. Annie Besant and Charles W. Leadbeater, *Occult Chemistry: A Series of Clairvoyant Observations on the Chemical Elements. Revised edition by A. P. Sinnet* (London: Theosophical Publishing House 1919).

(for example, ethereal and material, male and female), putting multiple viewpoints into correlation on a single pictorial plane. Through references to modern science, af Klint attempts to understand and even locate material support in the enigmatic emptiness of atomic form for her own spiritual message. As in Besant's and Leadbeater's "experiments" on chemical elements, she tries to "observe" and understand the behaviour of atoms by visual means. The artist is able to "see" by "willingly listening to the super-physical powers," she writes directly onto painting no. 5 of the atom series.

The arrangement of the elements and her new manner of putting them into relation with and through the text inscribed on the image is something that is specific to her studies of natural and scientific phenomena. Despite the fact that af Klint's *Atom* series closely follows the experiments of Besant and Leadbeater, and despite the fact that theosophy's pedagogy of higher and better forms of existence via migrations through different stages of consciousness can likewise be understood in terms of utopianism, af Klint's diagrammatic form perhaps reaches beyond the theosophical gendering of matter.<sup>42</sup> Where Besant and Leadbeater's representations of atoms follow existing esoteric traditions in which the tension of the gendered struggle at the heart of matter reinforces duality of male and female, in af Klint's aesthetics of atomic materiality the dual division of black and white is complicated by a colour-coded androgyny.

This "androgenising" modification is also to be found in the difference between their diagrams and af Klint's diagrammatic aesthetics. Besant's and Leadbeater's representations of atoms comply with the general formal characteristic of the diagram, which Bender and Marrinan describe as "[...] reductive renderings, usually executed as drawings, using few if any colors; they [diagrams] are generally supplemented with notations keyed to explanatory

captions, with parts correlated by means of a geometric notational system."<sup>43</sup> In contrast, af Klint's diagrams introduce painterly qualities, that I claim should also be read as expressions of androgynous sexuality. The gradation of colours, traces of brushstrokes, and tactile painterly qualities of the images are present, in contrast to Besant's and Leadbeater's more purely graphical schematic representations. In combining the standard diagrammatic representations with painterly qualities, af Klint builds a stylistic hybrid. This fusion or hybridisation of parts is also, in a different register, a stylistic recapitulation of her concerns with androgyny. In tying together scientific diagrams, theosophical esoteric teaching, and timely questions of gender, af Klint creates a hybrid aesthetic style that parallels her aesthetics of the androgynous. If the shift to abstraction in the atom series reveals a gendered atomic world beyond reality that is consistent with theosophical teaching, the behaviour of af Klint's atoms is unlike either Besant's and Leadbeater's, or Bohr's and Rutherford's. Moving away from the reality of physical science, she also breaks from direct description of esoteric theosophical knowledge, in order to prioritise androgynous diagrammatic abstraction.

### MODERNIST ANDROGYNY

To understand the political implication of her androgynous colour codes, it is instructive to look at the context of the idea of the androgyne in the artistic and spiritualist circles of af Klint's time. The most recurrent source for the late-nineteenth-century construction of the idea of androgyny is the myth told by Aristophanes in Plato's *Symposium*. Further sources come mostly from the tradition of western esotericism, and teachings of influential mystics, such as Jakob Böhme in Germany, and Emanuel Swedenborg in Sweden. Picked up by Joséphin Péladan's Rosicrucianism and Blavatsky's theosophy, the idea was transmitted into artistic creation, where it was ever further charged with political and social connotations. Af Klint studied the doctrines of both movements, and it is useful to look at their

teachings on androgyny briefly before exploring further af Klint's own androgynous aesthetics.

It is important to emphasise the patriarchal uses of androgyny to be found in esotericism and aesthetics of the period. French occult writer and founder of the religious movement, the Rose + Croix, Joséphin Péladan, understood androgyny as the highest creative principle, and as an "ideal symbol of art."<sup>44</sup> His extensive writing on the subject influenced Symbolist writers and painters, most notably Théophile Gautier, Fernand Khnopff, Jean Delville and Gustave Moreau. In Péladan's thought the notion of androgyny is closely related to his view of the artist as a mediator between the material and ideal world, and as someone who can transmit knowledge of the ideal. On the other hand, the androgyne itself is the symbol of the ideal for Symbolists.<sup>45</sup> It is essential to note here that Péladan's and the Symbolists' notion of ideal androgyny, as with Mondrian's, is rather a feminised man than a balanced combination of man and woman. In fact, the female androgyne (or gynander) was considered to be an anomaly, and for Péladan it was a perversion of the *femme fatale*.<sup>46</sup> The elevated state, according to Péladan, was reserved for male artists: women could only tend towards the ideal. For Péladan, women were incapable of the same level of men's genius. His infamous claims that women have no intelligence and that they could never be equal to men were in practical terms manifested by the exclusion of women artists from the exhibition of the Rose + Croix Salon. Gudrun Schubert writes about this exclusion:

*[...] women, particularly when their sexuality is divorced from maternity, are considered incompatible with the pursuit of the ideal, and with art. The sphere of art, from which women are effectively excluded, and consequently that of artists, occupies a brilliantly elevated place in Péladan's scheme.*<sup>47</sup>

In a similar occlusion, for Symbolists stereotypically feminine characteristics such as intuition, sensitivity, spirituality and emotionalism are commonly positioned as desirable and celebrated in artistic men, though only when they are essentially separated from femininity. Possession of those characteristics for male artists meant an escape from the increased materialism of the turn of the century.<sup>48</sup> The idea of an artist as sensitive as well as androgynous disrupted the traditional, dual division of sexes. However, while blurring the differences, Symbolists at the same time strove to preserve the distinctions and boundaries between the genders. They distanced themselves from certain characteristics that they considered feminine, such as lack of intellect and control, weakness, and emotional excess. In addition, feminine traits were only celebrated in the male artist-genius; the same characteristics in women were considered to lead to a form of madness due to their supposed lack of intellect.<sup>49</sup>

This celebration of a specifically male androgyny is common in early modernist aesthetic circles. A similar approach to androgyny is to be found in the artistic circle in Berlin known by the name of the tavern where they gathered and discussed artistic and political ideas, *Zum schwarzen Ferkel*. Among the most prominent members of the group were Scandinavian artists Edvard Munch and August Strindberg, who shared the idea of male/androgynous artist genius. In fact, Strindberg claimed that artistic and creative women cannot be truly feminine, and that women demanding equality were “not normal.”<sup>50</sup> Moreover, women who deviate from conventional femininity are presented in his plays as villainesses.<sup>51</sup>

Although in keeping with an alternative attempt to understand the emerging modernist concern with the disruption of binary (specifically male) definitions of gender, Blavatsky’s theosophy adopted a completely different approach. The concept of androgyny is central

to theosophical understanding of identity and salvation, and according to Siv Ellen Kraft, it was an important factor in the feminist appeal of the movement.<sup>52</sup> In addition, the Theosophical Society was largely led by charismatic women figures, like Blavatsky and Besant, who were critical of the inequality of gender in major world religions (especially Christianity).<sup>53</sup> This probably inspired Blavatsky’s teaching on the androgynous beginnings of mankind, and the androgynous Masters, who, she claimed, transmitted to her all theosophical truth. However, although Blavatsky’s theosophy involves a less explicitly patriarchal androgyny, she too ultimately adopts binary gender codes – often referring to the androgyne Masters in masculine terms. As a clear example we can observe how she repeatedly refers to them as “men” in her *Key to Theosophy*.<sup>54</sup> This was in fact a major concern for feminist theosophists, and despite Blavatsky’s attempts to reassure them, in the words of Kraft: “the issue remained unsettled, with androgynization – as it was portrayed through comments and examples – looking very much like a process of masculinization.”<sup>55</sup> Although unsuccessful in achieving equality and fluidity of gender in her teachings on androgyny, as Joy Dixon argues in *Divine Feminine*, many women saw potential in this teaching for redefining the relations between sexes.<sup>56</sup>

In af Klint’s personal experience from encounters with Rudolf Steiner, this potential to achieve equality again fails to actualise, and in fact reveals the striking extent to which conventional gendered relations are encoded in theosophy. Steiner, at the time the president of the German branch of the Theosophical society and later the founder of anthroposophy, was one of few men who saw af Klint’s abstract paintings in 1908. His reaction to af Klint’s paintings was very sceptical, and he pointed out that men and women have not yet reached the same stage in their development, which appeared to be evidenced in her paintings.<sup>57</sup> Despite this negative comment, af Klint continued to study theosophy as well as other esoteric

sources. For af Klint, theosophy provided a vehicle for the development and dissemination of new and empowering ideas; but, coming at the outset of her shift to abstraction, might it be that this negative experience prompted her to depart from the conventional gender norms of theosophy? In this rejection of theosophy’s inherently masculine biases, I suggest, we might locate af Klint’s transformation of the movement’s androgyny into a radically new abstract aesthetics.

### ABSTRACTING THE SWAN

The political and utopian aspects of af Klint’s diagrammatic hybridity are perhaps even more apparent in the geometrical abstraction of her *Swan* series, painted a few years after her negative interaction with Steiner, and a couple of years before the *Atom* series. The *Swan* series forms a much more developed vision, as well as a much more substantial body of work than the *Atom* series. In the proliferating abstracted forms and expressions of the swan that the series experiments with, af Klint binds gender duality and androgyny to her stylistic dissolution of the swan form. The series is useful for making plain how af Klint’s modernity brings the scientific into contact with the mythological. A traditional feature of Norse mythologies, swans carry a particular nationalist and patriarchal political charge. The white swan is a native bird of the European north, emotive symbol of five Scandinavian nations, and the national symbol of two Nordic countries, Denmark and Finland. Swans feature in northern European nineteenth-century Romantic and Symbolist art, both in the form of female deities, as in Richard Wagner’s *Die Walküre*, in August Malmström’s paintings of female spirits and deities (Dísir, fairies and Valkyries), and in figurative representations of swans, for example, Edvard Munch’s *Vision*, numerous works by Akseli Gallen-Kallela, and Bruno Liljefors’s wild life romantic paintings of swans.

By abstracting the swan, rendering it as the subject of

a diagrammatic dissolution of form, af Klint challenges the traditional and National Romantic gender politics central to Swedish and wider, pan-Scandinavian national discourses. The late 1910s and early 1920s mark the culmination of national romanticism in Sweden. As the historian H. Arnold Barton commented (the pun was presumably unintentional), “[t]he 1910s were at once the mature culmination and the swan song of creative Swedish national romanticism.”<sup>58</sup> In the years prior to World War I, there was an intense effort to revive Swedish folk culture, traditional handicrafts and mythology. The swan was centrally involved as a figure of the mythical revival, and the National Romantic re-enchantment of social life, in the face of alienating modernity. Malmström, who was af Klint’s professor at the art academy, was deeply engaged with the Norse Revival and from the 1850s his main preoccupation was history paintings based on Norse mythology.<sup>59</sup> In his famous painting *Dancing Fairies* from 1866 (Nationalmuseum, Stockholm), Malmström depicts ethereal fairies in a romantic landscape dancing over the surface of a lake. With the organic movements of the dance, the fairies form a curved shape reminiscent of a swan’s neck, creating a subtle reference to the Valkyries, transforming the playful magical spirits into a force of life and death that the Valkyries represent.

As with other modes of National Romanticism, swans were often deployed to represent woman as submissive, even if she was tricked into this state. In the *Poetic Edda*, a collection of Old Norse anonymous poems, swans feature as swan maidens, associated with Valkyries. Dressed as swans, Valkyries go to battle and choose which men will die. From these they further select the ones which will go to Valhalla and fight alongside Odin in the final battle. But when they discard their swan plumage they become vulnerable: any man who steals it is able to command them. Thus, an immortal being is trapped into a mundane domestic existence, as a contrast to her native magic realm

of fairies and deities. Variants of this story appear across different times and cultures, and as Barbara Fass Leavy claims, “[t]he stories of supernatural spouses, [...] seem to be *about* the freedom from cultural necessity as well as about the requirement that such necessity eventually prevail.”<sup>60</sup> As Fass Leavy further argues, the deceptively romantic swan-maiden stories are about “fierce marital struggle,” and they can be understood in terms of a power struggle. Culture’s triumph over nature and man’s control over woman are expressed in the story in the motif of the stolen plumage. “The stolen maiden’s possession is a link not only to her freedom,” claims Fass Leavy,

*but also to her sisters, from whom she is separated precisely because they retain the outward signs of their precious identity while she loses hers. And thus her encounter with her mortal mate thematically links the war between the sexes with the controversial subject of female bonding.*<sup>61</sup>

In some versions of the story, the swan-maiden returns home when the family is out, to cook and do domestic work, only to disappear when her husband and children are back home. During a period of turbulent political events the myth evoked the “taming” of supernatural beings; at the same time, important scientific advances which foregrounded the existence of the invisible world could be seen as an attempt to retain control of nature and the existing order of things.

As a quite different example of the use of Nordic mythological implications of the swan, Munch’s self-portrait from 1892, *Vision*, shows a head with a dark expression and distorted features floating above the water’s surface. Contrasting with the head, in the upper part of the picture, there is a white swan, floating on the water, whose reflection is missing the head. Munch’s image seems to be a very personal and ambiguous meditation. The lines in the image are blurred,

and the atmosphere is meditative. In Marja Lahelma’s interpretation of this image, the swan represents a vision of life, death and art. “The swan can then be seen as a symbol of the ideal that the artist is forever chasing yet never able to achieve.”<sup>62</sup> Lahelma’s interpretation of the swan is twofold: on the one hand, she connects Munch’s swan to the myth of swan as Apollo’s bird. In this case the swan – belonging to the god of music and poetry, light and knowledge – is connected with the divine, abstract ideal of art and the artist. On the other hand, as Lahelma further suggests, the swan can represent the illusion, with the real truth actually being under the water’s surface.<sup>63</sup> In contrast to Munch’s meditative introvert, and personal search for the artistic ideal, af Klint’s *Swan* series is oriented towards a more universal and political gender utopianism. To move towards universalism, she had to find a radically new expression to distance herself from a symbolic orientation. This she achieved by coding in a diagrammatic way and transforming the symbolist image of the swan into abstracted political aesthetics of the diagram.

By reconfiguring her swans as balanced cuboid forms and symmetrical colour arrangements, gradually moving towards this realignment across the series, af Klint’s progressive diagrammatic abstractions of the swan figure make a radical and politically charged feminine intervention into the gender inequalities obscured and naturalised by the National Romantic Norse revivalists of her day. Moreover, in reconfiguring the mythic motif as a scientific diagram, af Klint creates a similar melding and interpenetration of opposed unities that also occurs in the recurring theme of androgyny. In an early painting from the series (fig. 5), a black and a white swan are locked in a balanced compositional embrace. In the upper part of the canvas, the white swan is surrounded by a black background, an arrangement mirrored in the lower half. Although the image is not as symmetrical as it may seem at first glance, we still get the impression of balance from the picture, which is also

related to the square shape of the canvas. This balance is in tension with the dynamic quality of the composition, but also emphasises the axial coming together of the components at the centre. The swans are in movement towards each other, and this movement is arrested at two points on the middle line of the painting. On the mythical level, this merging of swan forms might be read as rendering dynamic the metamorphic, transformative process investigated in the occult processes of alchemy, which sought to distil the spiritual from the impure. However, this dynamic balance and movement also relates to the diagrammatic gender coding of the swans, whose sexes coalesce and flow into one another. Moreover, there is also an aspect of gender reversal to the centrifugal dynamics of the composition. As Klint's writing clarifies that the blue feet and beak of the white swan indicate that this is the female swan. The yellow feet and beak of the black swan indicate that it is the male. The esoteric tradition of dark, lunar female swan, and the solar white of the male swan, evoked in Blavatsky's theosophical teaching, is reversed by Hilma af Klint's gendered system of colours.

If myth/science and male/female form the four central axes of Hilma af Klint's composition, her abstracted symbolism works a subversive, destabilising and androgynous melding of disparate unities. This coalescing four-part structure takes a central place in subsequent paintings in the *Swan* series, and it is also the case that across the entire *Atom* series, from two years later, the motif of division into four parts forms the central conceit of her composition. In addition to dividing the whole image into four quarters, each of the corner images of each atom is further divided into four parts, either by diagonals or by vertical and horizontal lines through the middle of the squares. In the introductory image "b" (fig. 6), the four-part division is multiplied and emphasised by both diagonal and middle dividing lines of both squares. Additionally, the square in the upper left-hand corner has four smaller squares further divided into fourths,



Fig 5. Hilma af Klint, HaK149, *Group IX, Series SUW, The Swan no. 1*, 1915, the Hilma af Klint Foundation (Photo: Moderna Museet, Stockholm).

while under the right-hand bottom square the text reads: “4 times enlarged.” The importance of the four-part division is emphasised and partially explained in af Klint’s writings. A notebook entry from 28 June 1916 gives an account of af Klint’s complicated and non-binary understanding of identity. First, she writes that the human race must obtain knowledge about the physical and ethereal bodies, and this will in turn offer them “some insight into what is behind the veil between man and woman.”<sup>64</sup> However, af Klint does not stop at this dualist understanding of gender. She further makes claims that she is at once her father and mother, her sister and brother. “So I possess all fourths in me and let me be crucified before them”<sup>65</sup> At the end of the passage of writing, af Klint draws a square with a circle and cross inscribed – perhaps linking her recurrent concern with quartering with the Christian crucifix.

Likewise, in the development of the earlier *Swan* series, af Klint offers multiple arrangements of the axial unit, and explores successive, ever-increasing abstractions of the quartered cube composition in her diagramming of the mythic swan. In the subsequent two paintings of the series, swans invade each other’s spaces, in an aggressive fight in painting no. 2 (fig. 7), and in loving embrace in painting no. 3 (fig. 8). After these dramatic events, in painting no. 4 (fig. 9) she redefines the spatial arrangement: this time it is divided into four squares in pastel pink, blue, yellow and black. The image also redefines the gender of the swans: the beak of the white swan is now half blue, and half yellow, and one of its feet is blue and the other yellow. It is situated in the upper left, pink square of the image, and from there a ray of pink light leads the eye diagonally towards the lower right square, where the black swan seems to be in a process of transformation into similarly androgynous black-and-white swan, with a yellow and a blue foot.

After this image, the series seems to be increasingly abstract, only to return to the swans in the final painting. In painting

no. 7 of the series, (fig. 10) the swans are multiplied and cut into halves. Some of them are hollow, dissected, or shown almost as if under x-rays. They are connected with a heart in the middle of the painting, and a snail-shaped line that runs through their space, which is divided by two diagonal lines. These paintings also frequently deploy an apparent symmetry whose near-balance leads the eye to a small symbol or symbolic meaning as a focal point in the middle of the painting. The subsequent painting of the series (fig. 11) moves more fully towards abstraction but keeps the structure of the first painting, so we can “recognise” the swans in the shape of cubes. The same cubes we find in painting no. 9 but they are shown from a different perspective (fig. 12).<sup>66</sup>

In the impressive body of work that she produced in the pivotal year of 1915, af Klint exercises an almost relentless drive to abstract from her swans. In some of the later images, black and white are not strictly separated any longer; other colours are added, and the theme is explored through varying geometric patterns and organic elements. In subsequent paintings, swans are transformed into circles, snail shells, and hexagons. Apart from the title, isolated from the series, some of the images do not carry any resemblance to the figures of the swans. For this reason, image no. 17 (fig. 13) seems to be a source of confusion in several instances, both in terms of technical knowledge and interpretation. In a book on Swedish art from the first half of the twentieth century by Elisabeth Lidén, this painting was incorrectly printed, rotated ninety degrees anticlockwise.<sup>67</sup> More recently, in 2016, the official press release from the Serpentine Art Gallery, of the London exhibition “Hilma Af Klint Painting The Unseen,” interprets this image as a human female breast, though no justification for this claim is offered, and the claim seems to bear scant relation to visual evidence.<sup>68</sup> In the last painting, figurative swans reappear, positioned upon four flattened planes of colour that quarter the image space (fig 14). The swans are put into

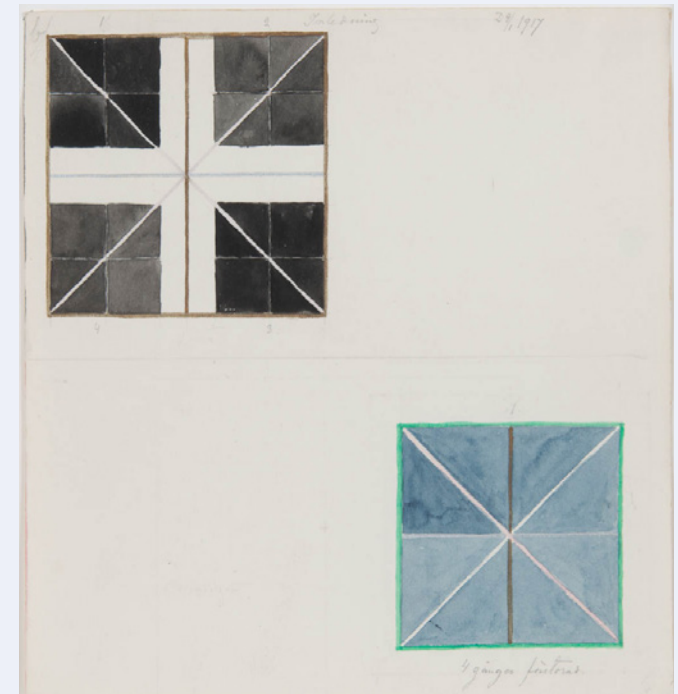


Fig 6. Hilma af Klint, HaK352 *Atom Series Introduction b*, 1917, the Hilma af Klint Foundation (Photo: Moderna Museet, Stockholm).





⌚ Fig 8. Hilma af Klint, HaK151, *Group IX, Series SUW, The Swan no. 3*, 1914, the Hilma af Klint Foundation (Photo: Moderna Museet, Stockholm).

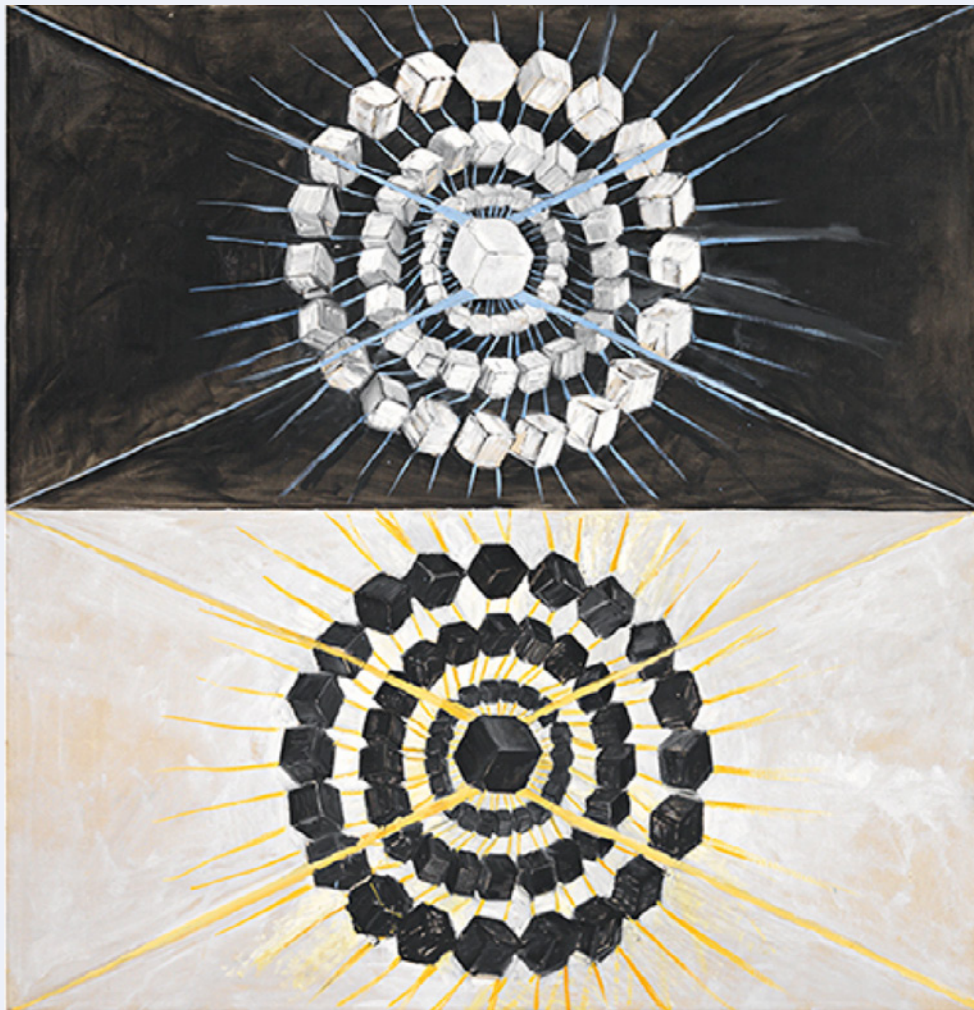
↶ Fig 7. Hilma af Klint, HaK150, *Group IX, Series SUW, The Swan no. 2*, 1914, the Hilma af Klint Foundation (Photo: Moderna Museet, Stockholm).



Fig 9. Hilma af Klint, HaK155, *Group IX, Series SUW, The Swan no. 4*, 1914, the Hilma af Klint Foundation (Photo: Moderna Museet, Stockholm).



Fig 10. Hilma af Klint, HaK155, *Group IX, Series SUW, The Swan no. 7*, 1915, the Hilma af Klint Foundation (Photo: Moderna Museet, Stockholm).



⌚ Fig 12. Hilma af Klint, HaK157, *Group IX, Series SUW*, *The Swan no. 9*, 1915, the Hilma af Klint Foundation (Photo: Moderna Museet, Stockholm).

↶ Fig 11. Hilma af Klint, HaK156, *Group IX, Series SUW*, *The Swan no. 8*, 1915, the Hilma af Klint Foundation (Photo: Moderna Museet, Stockholm).



Fig 13. Hilma af Klint, HaK165, *Group IX, Series SUW, The Swan no. 17*, 1915, the Hilma af Klint Foundation (Photo: Moderna Museet, Stockholm).



Fig 14. Hilma af Klint, HaK172, *Group IX, Series SUW, The Swan no. 24*, 1915, the Hilma af Klint Foundation (Photo: Moderna Museet, Stockholm).

a closer relation in this final image, in a mutuality which perhaps represents something like a final goal. Their bodies are intertwined, and they hold an object in their beaks that resembles a key. It is half blue, half yellow – a final gesture of the gendered tension in the feminine androgyny that drives her diagrammatic abstraction. From the key hangs a cuboid form comprising three planes of the quartered square – which offers a miniature of the abstract cuboid swans from the immediately preceding image from the series. If this quartered cube held by the swans expresses both the swans in diagrammatic form, and the way their abstracted composition has caused the androgynous and imbricating melding of myth with science and male with female, it is also the case that this quartered cuboid structure forms the compositional basis of the later *Atom* series. In each of these images, a compositional dynamic seeks to undo the unity – exploring a polymorphous feminine androgyny of axial melding – just as af Klint’s esoteric understanding in her diary writing likewise involves the meeting of four identity positions in her own self.

## CONCLUSION

We might return here to the Deleuzian conception of diagrammatic form. Af Klint’s work seems to be concerned with fully and constantly pushing for the elasticity of the swan figure, which in the context of the diagram, gets “topologically redistributed” into the forms of cubes and circles in different paintings in the series. Deleuze writes:

*[...] the diagram acted by imposing a zone of objective indiscernibility of indeterminability between two forms, one of which was no longer, and the other, not yet: it destroys the figuration of the first, and neutralizes that of the second [...] There is indeed a change of form, but the change of form is a deformation, that is a creation of original relations that are substituted for the form.*<sup>69</sup>

The zone of indiscernibility is to be understood as an ontological sphere in which the terms which appear to be clearly separate, actually overlap. To press more closely on my claim that these paintings develop an innovative new “diagrammatic” abstraction, we can observe that throughout the series, af Klint multiplies forms and points of view, resisting the legislation of “the single view of a replete spatial environment,” which is an important characteristic of diagram, according to Bender and Marrinan.<sup>70</sup> It is always related to the process of becoming. In af Klint’s works, we can see the zone of objective indiscernibility across different images of the series. This allows us to perceive the swans in the forms of cubes and circles, and in another sense, to understand colours and organisation of forms in terms of a gender-becoming-androgyny.

In af Klint’s *Swans*, diagrammatic abstraction enables a utopian transformation of form, from one stage of sexual identity to androgynous hybridity, from myth to diagram, and from figuration to abstraction. Breaking with the romantic aesthetic and resisting gender inequalities of early-twentieth century Swedish society, af Klint’s feminine-androgynous hybrid of myth, spirituality and science leads to her creation of an innovative abstract aesthetics. Her employment of the diagram, taken from the science of the day, opened new possibilities, new visions of the future, and of the utopian redistribution of form. If this leads to the complete geometrical abstraction that is unburdened with mythical traditions later in the *Atom* series, it is perhaps in the earlier *Swan* series that we more clearly perceive this process of becoming in operation. Diverting gender-divided theosophical utopias, and feminising masculinist Futurisms, af Klint diagrams a hybrid utopia: an abstraction in opposition to the conservative patriarchy of her society that charts the process of becoming feminine-androgynous.

<sup>1</sup> Hilma af Klint, cited in Catherine de Zegher and Hendel Teicher, ed., *3 x Abstraction: New Methods of Drawing by Hilma af Klint, Emma Kunz, Agnes Martin* (New York, New Haven, London: The Drawing Center – Yale University Press, 2005), 26.

<sup>2</sup> The exhibition *Hilma af Klint: Paintings for the Future* is on the view in Guggenheim from 12 Oct 2018 to 2019.

<sup>3</sup> The bibliography on af Klint's work is becoming increasingly rich and diverse, following various exhibitions and events that were organised around her work since the first major retrospective in Stockholm in 2013. I cite here a selection of relevant publications: Åke Fant, *Hilma af Klint: Ockult målarinna och abstrakt pionjär* (Stockholm: Raster Förlag, 1989); Gurli Lindén and Anna Maria Svensson, *Enheten bortom mångfalden: Två perspektiv på Hilma af Klints verk* (Stockholm: Eosengårdens Förlag, 1999), Catherine de Zegher and Hendel Teicher, ed., *3 x Abstraction: New Methods of Drawing by Hilma af Klint, Emma Kunz, Agnes Martin* (New York, New Haven, London: The Drawing Center – Yale University Press, 2005); Iris Müller-Westermann and Jo Widoff, ed., *Hilma af Klint: A Pioneer of Abstraction* (Ostfildern: Hatje Canz, 2013); Emma Enderby and Melissa Blanchflower, ed., *Hilma af Klint: Painting the Unseen* (London: Serpentine Galleries and Koenig Books, 2016); Kurt Almqvist and Louise Belfrage, ed., *Hilma af Klint: The Art of Seeing the Invisible* (Stockholm: Axel and Margaret Ax:son Johnson Foundation, 2015); Tessel M. Bauduin, “Að sjá og sýna hið ósýnilega: Um nútímalist og andleg verk Hilma af Klint“ [“Seeing and Depicting the Invisible: On Hilma af Klint's Modern Art and Spiritual Paintings”], trans. Eva Dagbjört Ólafóttir, *Ritið*, no. 1 (2017): 187–224; Tracey Bashkoff, ed., *Hilma af Klint* (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 2018).

<sup>4</sup> Tessel M. Bauduin, “Science and Occultism in Af Klint's Time and in Her Work,” in *Hilma af Klint*, ed. Tracey Bashkoff (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 2018), 187–93.

<sup>5</sup> Stephen Kern, “Hilma af Klint and the Fin-de Siècle Culture: Abstraction, Technology, Androgyny, Nihilism.” in *Hilma af Klint: The Art of Seeing the Invisible*, ed. Kurt Almqvist and Louise Belfrage (Stockholm: Axel and Margaret Ax:son Johnson Foundation, 2015).

<sup>6</sup> One of the most notable examples of this is the case of outspoken modernist artist Sigrid Hjertén. Hjertén's work received harsh, at times cruel critical evaluations. Scorned by the Academy, Hjertén ended up in a mental asylum few years later, and eventually died due to a botched

lobotomy. See Shulamith Behr, “Differencing Modernism,” *Utopia and Reality: Modernity in Sweden 1900–1960*, ed. Cecilia Widenheim (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), 108–121; Katarina Borgh Bertorp, “Sigrid Hjérten: Kritiken och Liljevalchs,” in *Sigrid Hjérten Catalogue* (Stockholm: Liljevalchs Konsthall, 1995), 11–21.

<sup>7</sup> Sarah Webster Goodwin, “Feminism and Utopian Discourse,” in *Pride and Prejudice, Villette, and ‘Babette’s Feast’*, in *Feminism, Utopia, and Narrative*, ed. Libby Falk Jones and Sarah McKim Webster (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), 1.

<sup>8</sup> On women and utopia, see Jones and Webster, *Feminism, Utopia, and Narrative*; Carol Pearson, “Women's Fantasies and Feminist Utopias,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 2, no. 3 (Autumn, 1977): 50–56; Lyman Tower Sargent, “Women in Utopia,” *Comparative Literature Studies Special Issue on Utopian Social Thought in Literature and the Social Sciences* 10, no. 4 (December, 1973), 302–316; Anne K. Mellor, “On Feminist Utopias,” *Women's Studies* 9, no. 3 (1982): 241–262; Frances Bartowsky, *Feminist Utopias*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991); Christine Buci-Glucksmann “Catastrophic Utopia: The Feminine as Allegory of the Modern,” *Representations, The Making of the Modern Body: Sexuality and Society in the Nineteenth Century*, no. 14 (Spring, 1986): 220–229.

<sup>9</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Continuum, 2004), 157.

<sup>10</sup> Hilma af Klint, *HaK579*, Unpublished manuscript. 13/01/1917, 119.

<sup>11</sup> Hilma af Klint, *HaK418*, Unpublished manuscript.

<sup>12</sup> John Bender and Michael Marrinan, *The Culture of Diagram* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 7.

<sup>13</sup> Af Klint's interest in science is also evident in her series entitled *Primordial Chaos* (1906–07), which often includes images of spirals and electromagnetic waves. The whole series is almost exclusively painted in yellow, blue and green.

<sup>14</sup> Hans Christian Von Baeyer, *Taming the Atom: The Emergence of the Visible Microworld* (Mineola: Dover Publications, Inc., 2000), 26.

<sup>15</sup> Michelle Facos, *Nationalism and the Nordic Imagination: Swedish Art of the 1890s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

<sup>16</sup> Rochelle Wright, “Nature Imagery and National Romanticism in the Films of Alf Sjöberg,” *Scandinavian Studies* 70, no. 4 (Winter 1998): 462.

<sup>17</sup> Barbara Miller Lane, *National Romanticism and Modern Architecture in Germany and the Scandinavian Countries* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>18</sup> See Jadranka Ryle, “Reinventing the Yggdrasil: Hilma af Klint and the Political Aesthetics,” *Information – Nordic Journal of Art and Research* 7, no. 1 (2018).

<sup>19</sup> Karl Marx, *Economic & Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Moscow:

Progress Publishers, 1959), xxiii.

<sup>20</sup> H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, trans. and ed., *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, (New York: Oxford University Press: 1946), 50.

<sup>21</sup> Facos, *Nationalism*, 121.

<sup>22</sup> Cecilia Widenheim, “Utopia and Reality: Aspects of Modernism is Swedish Visual Art During the First Half of the Twentieth Century,” in *Utopia and Reality: Modernity in Sweden 1900–1960*, ed., Cecilia Widenheim (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), 72.

<sup>23</sup> See Susan Rubin Suleiman, *Subversive Intent: Gender, Politics and the Avant-Garde* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 11–21; Behr, “Differencing Modernism.” On situation of women artists in Royal Art Academy in Stockholm, see Ingrid Ingelman, *Kvinnliga konstnärer i Sverige: En undersökning av elever vid Konstakademien, inskrivna 1864–1924, deras rekrytering, utbildning och verksamhet* (Uppsala: Acta Univ. Ups., 1982). On the suffrage movement in Sweden, see Barbro Hedvall, *Vår rättmätiga plats: Om kvinnornas kamp för rösträtt* (Stockholm: Bonnier fakta, 2011); Ida Blom, “Structures and Agency: A Transnational Comparison of the Struggle for Women's Suffrage in the Nordic Countries During the Long 19th century,” *Scandinavian Journal of History* 37, no. 5 (2012), 600–620.

<sup>24</sup> Cited in Mark A. Cheetham, *The Rhetoric of Purity: Essentialist Painting and the Advent of Abstract Painting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 123.

<sup>25</sup> Cheetham, *Rhetoric of Purity*, 123.

<sup>26</sup> Only privileged adepts were able to observe this, including Blavatsky and Olcott, as well as prominent figures in theosophy such as Annie Besant and Charles W. Leadbeater. Mark S. Morrisson, *Modern Alchemy: Occultism and the Emergence of Atomic Theory*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 67.

<sup>27</sup> Morrisson, *Modern Alchemy*, 21.

<sup>28</sup> Society for Psychic Research official web page: <https://www.spr.ac.uk/about/our-history>, accessed on 27 Feb 2019.

<sup>29</sup> William Crookes, *Address by Sir William Crookes, President: Report of the Sixty-Eighth Meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science (1898)*. (London: John Murray, 1899), 31, quoted in Linda Dalrymple Henderson, “Modernism and Science,” in *Modernism*, ed. Astradur Eysteinnsson and Vivian Liska (Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2007), 391.

<sup>30</sup> Dalrymple Henderson “Modernism and Science,” 391.

<sup>31</sup> Morrisson, *Modern Alchemy*, 67.

<sup>32</sup> Annie Besant and Charles W. Leadbeater, *Occult Chemistry: Clairvoyant Observations on the Chemical Elements*, 2nd ed. (London: Theosophical Publishing House, 1919), 1.

<sup>33</sup> Charles W. Leadbeater, *The Chakras* (Wheaton: Theosophical Publishing House, 1927), 79.

<sup>34</sup> Morrisson, *Modern Alchemy*, 69.

<sup>35</sup> Mark C. Morrisson, “Occult Chemistry and the Theosophical Aesthetics of the Subatomic World,” *RACAR: revue d’art canadienne / Canadian Art Review, The Visual Culture of Science and Art in Fin-de-Siècle France / La culture visuelle de la science et l’art dans la France fin-de-siècle* 34, no. 1 (2009): 86.

<sup>36</sup> Besant and Leadbeater, *Occult Chemistry*, xiii.

<sup>37</sup> Edwin D. Babbitt, *The Principles of Light and Colour: including among other things the Harmonic Laws of the Universe, the Etherio-Atomic Philosophy of Force, Chromo Chemistry, Chromo Therapeutics, and the General Philosophy of the Fine Forces, Together with numerous Discoveries and Practical Applications* (New York, Babbitt & Co., 1878), 94–166.

<sup>38</sup> Besant and Leadbeater, *Occult Chemistry*, 10.

<sup>39</sup> See Joy Dixon, *Divine Feminine: Theosophy and Feminism in England*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 183.

<sup>40</sup> Quoted in Dixon, *Divine Feminine*, 183.

<sup>41</sup> Bender and Marrinan, *Culture of Diagram*, 42.

<sup>42</sup> Ronald W. Neufeldt, “In Search of Utopia: Karma and Rebirth in the Theosophical Movement,” in *Karma and Rebirth: Post Classical Developments*, ed. Ronald W. Neufeldt (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), 233–256.

<sup>43</sup> Bender and Marrinan, *Culture of Diagram*, 7.

<sup>44</sup> For history of Rose + Croix, Péladan, and his notion of androgyny, see Robert Pincus Witten, *Occult Symbolism in France: Joséphin Péladan and the salons de la Rose + Croix* (New York and London: Garland, 1976); Geurt Imanse, “Occult Literature in France,” *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985*, ed. Maurice Tuchman (Los Angeles: La County Museum of Art and New York: Abbeville Press, 1986).

<sup>45</sup> See Brendan Cole, *The Mystic Feminine in Symbolist Art Idealism and Mysticism in Fin-de-siècle Painting*, (MA diss., University of Capetown, 1993); Brendan Cole, “Khnopff’s *Avec Verharen: Un Ange and Art*, or *The Caresses*,” *Art Bulletin xci*, no. 3 (September 2009), 329–30; For more widely on occultism and esotericism in Symbolist aesthetic see Marja Lahelma, “The Symbolist Aesthetic and the Impact of Occult and Esoteric Ideologies on Modern Art,” *Approaching Religion* 8, no. 1 (2018), 31–47.

<sup>46</sup> Patricia Mathews, *Passionate Discontent: Creativity, Gender, and French Symbolist Art* (University of Chicago Press, 1999), 115–116.

<sup>47</sup> Gudrun Schubert, “Women and Symbolism: Imagery and Theory,” *The Oxford Art Journal* 3, no. 1 (April 1980), 33.

<sup>48</sup> Mathews, *Passionate Discontent*, 74.

<sup>49</sup> See Mathews, *Passionate Discontent*; Christine Battersby, *Gender and genius: Towards a feminist aesthetics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).

<sup>50</sup> Kristina Sjögren, *Transgressive Femininity: Gender in the Scandinavian Modern Breakthrough* (Phd diss., UCL, 2010), 147.

<sup>51</sup> As a contrast to these European intellectual debates on androgyny and artistic identity, one might look at the geographically more distant to af Klint, situation in New York. In 1910s aesthetic experimentation, feminism, political activism, and sexual liberation made a fertile ground for artistic expression which dealt with the question of non-binary gender identity, such as Georia O’Keeffe and Marcel Duchamp, with his alter ego Rose Sélavy. See Susan Fillin-Yeh, “Dandies, Marginality and Modernism: Georgia O’Keeffe, Marcel Duchamp and Other Cross Dressers,” *Oxford Art Journal* 18, no. 2 (1995): 33–44.

<sup>52</sup> Siv Ellen Kraft, “Theosophy, Gender, and the ‘New Woman’,” *Handbook of the Theosophical Current*, ed. Olav Hammer and Mikael Rothstein (Leiden: BRILL, 2013).

<sup>53</sup> See for example: Helena P. Blavatsky, (2011). *The Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy*, Vol I (London: The Theosophical Publishing Press, 1888), 136.

<sup>54</sup> Helena P. Blavatsky, *The Key to Theosophy* (London and New York: The Theosophical Publishing Company Ltd. 1889), 289–291.

<sup>55</sup> Kraft, “Theosophy, Gender, and the ‘New Woman’,” 368.

<sup>56</sup> Joy Dixon, *Divine Feminine*, 154.

<sup>57</sup> Lindén and Svensson, *Enheten bortom mångfalden*, 33

<sup>58</sup> H. Arnold Barton, “The Silver Age of Swedish National Romanticism, 1905–1920,” *Scandinavian Studies* 74, no. 4 (Winter 2002): 505–520.

<sup>59</sup> Tomas Björk and Victoria Airey Skans, *August Malmström: Grindslantens målare och 1800-talets bildvärld* (Nordiska museets förlag: Stockholm, 1997).

<sup>60</sup> Barbara Fass Leavy, *In Search of the Swan Maiden: A Narrative on Folklore and Gender* (NYU Press, 1994), 11. See also Boria Sax, *The Serpent and the Swan: The Animal Bride in Folklore and Literature* (University of Tennessee Press, 1998).

<sup>61</sup> Fass Leavy, *Swan Maiden*, 40.

<sup>62</sup> Marja Lahelma, “Lure of the Abyss: Symbolism of Surface and Depth in Edvard Munch’s Vision (1892),” *Between Light and Darkness: New Perspectives in Symbolism Research, Studies in the Long 19th Century*, 1 (2014): 63. <https://birchandstar.files.wordpress.com/2014/06/lahelma.pdf>, accessed on 27 Feb 2019.

<sup>63</sup> Lahelma, “Lure of the Abyss,” 63.

<sup>64</sup> Hilma af Klint, *HaK578*, Unpublished Manuscript. 28/06/1916, 16.

<sup>65</sup> Hilma af Klint, *HaK578*, Unpublished Manuscript. 28/06/1916, 17.

<sup>66</sup> For an analysis of painting no. 9 from the *Swan* series with regard to af Klint’s gendered colour code see Stephen Kern, “Hilma af Klint and the Fin-de-Siècle Culture,” 34–35.

<sup>67</sup> Elisabeth Lidén, *Sveriges Konst 1900-talet: Del 1, 1900-1947* (Stockholm: Sveriges Allmänna Konstförening, 1999), 19.

<sup>68</sup> Press Release “Hilma Af Klint Painting The Unseen” 3 March – 15 May 2016 Serpentine Gallery <http://www.serpentinegalleries.org/sites/>

[default/files/press-releases/hak\\_press\\_pack\\_final.pdf](default/files/press-releases/hak_press_pack_final.pdf), accessed on 27 Feb 2019.

<sup>69</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017), 157–158.

<sup>70</sup> Bender and Marrinan, *Culture of Diagram*, 21.

# Contributors

**Charlotte Ashby** is an art and design historian based in London. Her research focuses on her interests in nationalism, transnationalism and modernity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and in art, design and architecture as vehicles for identity and ideals. Recent publications include *Modernism in Scandinavia: Art, Architecture and Design* (Bloomsbury 2017).

**Frances Fowle** is Professor of Nineteenth-Century art at the University of Edinburgh and Senior Curator at the National Galleries of Scotland. Her research interests include collecting, the art market, national identity, cultural revival and artistic networks. She is the author of *Van Gogh's Twin: The Scottish Art Dealer Alexander Reid* (2010) and editor of *Nordic Artists' Colonies 1870–1914* (2 vols, 2017). She has curated numerous international exhibitions on late nineteenth-century art, notably *Patrick Geddes: The French Connection* (2004), *Impressionism and Scotland* (2008), *Van Gogh to Kandinsky: Symbolist Landscape 1880-1910* (2012–13) and *Celts: Art and Identity* (2015–16).

**Marja Lahelma** is an art historian whose main areas of interest are in the intersections of art, science, and esotericism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Since receiving her PhD in 2014, she has worked as a Postdoctoral Researcher at the Universities of Helsinki and Turku and as a Visiting Researcher at the University of Edinburgh, including a six-month period as a Visiting Research Fellow at IASH. Among recent publications are biographies of Hugo Simberg (2017) and Akseli Gallen-Kallela (2018), published by the Finnish National Gallery.

**John Morrison** joined the Art History Department, at the University of Aberdeen after a period at the Yale Center for British Art in Connecticut. From July 2019 he will be Head of the School of History and Heritage at the University of Lincoln. He has published several monographs on Scottish art and cultural history, most recently *Painting Labour in Scotland and Europe 1850–1900* (Ashgate 2015) and is a regular curator of exhibitions. He is currently working on Nineteenth-century Scottish History painting.

**Bart Pushaw** is a PhD Candidate in the Department of Art History and Archaeology at the University of Maryland. His research focuses on global modernisms, especially the intersections of race, colonialism, gender, and medium in the Baltic and Nordic countries. He has recently published articles on Konrad Mägi, the globalization of Japanese modernism, and Baltic Orientalist portraiture.

**Jadranka Ryle** is a PhD candidate in Art History and Visual Studies at the University of Manchester. By exploring the emergence of abstraction in Hilma af Klint's work, her research offers a micro-history of the interrelated discursive upheavals of modernism, such as the rise in popularity of spiritualist movements, aesthetic debates about decoration, social changes in the private and public spheres, changes in modern music and new discoveries in physics and botany.

**Danielle Siemens** is an art historian and museum professional. With an undergraduate degree from the University of Alberta and an MA in art history from Carleton University, Danielle has interned at the National Gallery of Canada and the National Gallery of Art in Washington DC and currently works as the Curator of Interpretation and Engagement at the Art Gallery of Alberta (Edmonton, Alberta Canada).



