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Francis Spufford. *I May Be Some Time: Ice and the English Imagination.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997. 372 pp. $26.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-312-17442-2.

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Students of Canada's past are suckled on a range of environmentally determined histories of the nation. These largely stem from Harold Innis's seminal work in the 1920s and 30s, describing the economic history of Canada. Innis's primary work, *The Fur Trade in Canada* (1930) connected the exploitation of Canada's originally abundant natural resources with the importance with the trans-Atlantic communication links back to the centre of the British Empire in England. This work focused upon the importance of the St. Lawrence as the core of the Canadian economic and political system. The resulting historiographic direction, described as the "Laurentian thesis", became the central analytical framework for the study and understanding of Canadian history to the 1960s.

The Laurentian thesis grew out of the primary concern of Canadian intellectuals in the first half of the century–the definition of Canada as a distinct and organically logical country in its own right. This definition included a strong desire for connection to, and identification with, the Old World, with the core of Empire. It also emphasized the importance of the major metropolitan centres of the country, all located in the St. Lawre nce Valley, that extended links outward into the periphery of the country, knitting it into a single national entity.

It was only in the 1970s that effective regional history in Canada began to erode the unity of Canadian historiography. The rise of a more broadly based economy and the gradual erosion of the St. Lawrence as the only densely populated area of the country challenged the hinterland designation of many parts of the country. As historians across the country began studying the various forces shaping these changes in different regions the limits of the Laurentian thesis became apparent. In fact, as in the New Western history, the old ideas were turned on their head. Writers began to describe the various ways in which the periphery had changed the centre, rather than noting merely the centre's effects upon the periphery.

Francis Spufford's *I May Be Sometime: Ice and the English Imagination* is, in this context, a refreshing study of the effects of peripheries on the centre through the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Through a study of the incorporation of polar exploration into the public life of England, Spufford examines the peripheries of both geography and gender.

The book considers the spirit of English identity as expressed through polar exploration. Spufford describes the evolution of polar exploration in both practical and spiritual terms. The large navy and skilled force of seamen created during the Napoleonic Wars and the need to keep it employed continued a tradition of global exploration by the English. Further, through the nineteenth century there was growing sense of Englishness fostered by a connection drawn between the Elizabethan buccaneers and the contemporary polar explorers.

These ideas supported the physical expansion of the Empire through trade and resource exploitation. In 1916 Shackelton's failed Antarctic expedition struggled over open seas back to South Georgia where they saw "the sheds, chimneys, wharves of Stromness. After two years stranded in the *Endurance* the first human sound they heard that they had not made themselves was factory whistle; and the manager summoned to deal with the trio of filt hy travellers … had to be called from his office desk, where he was having an ordinary working day. At the time of the heroic expeditions, Antarctica had an industry on its doorstep" (p. 45).

Perhaps more importantly for Spufford's purpose however, was the mental picture of the expansion of England, of the psychic incorporation of the periphery with the centre. Imperial possession, if not presence, did more than expand sovereignty in the Edwardian mind–it made the outer world part of England. Through such activities as naming places and putting on plays based on Arctic exploration, the English incorporated these far flung regions into the heritage of their country. This activity reduced the foreignness of these places, they made them part of the homeland. "With claims of possession went

claims of familiarity. The British sense of proprietorship over Antarctica partly rested on the curious conviction that the continent was 'not foreign'... the Antarctic, a howling wilderness, somehow did not count as abroad, but as a wild annex of England" (p. 250).

Another prominent theme in Spufford's investigation of the Victorian interest in their place in nature. "Nature mattered more, not less to the nineteenth century as it discovered ... it could reshape the natural world to a n unprecedented degree ... Victorians ... wanted to know to what extent they were created, and to what extent they created themselves" (p. 92). The scientific discoveries of the period, especially Darwin's evolution thesis, reinforced their sense of self-importance. And the effect of this expansion of scientific knowledge upon the public mind Spufford traces a growing disparity between what was known and what was desired–a disparity that eventually led to the polar disaster of Scott's final expedition.

To build his case Spufford looks to the idea of the sublime, the role played by women (especially explorer's wives) in mediating the idea of polar exploration, and the changing perception of the aboriginal arctic inhabit ants–the Inuit. The sublime, that romantic incorporation of uncontrolled nature into literature and art, had the effect of negating or diminishing the value of technological improvement and environmental adaptation. It was the spirit of the contact with nature that became important, not the method of interacting. In describing the lives of the polar exploration crews, Spufford notes a continuing tradition, through the almost hundred yea rs of probing, on the routine of physical and social activities used to keep the spirits up; "While the darkness grew, and the thermometer dropped, the crews of (Ross's) Hecla and Fury did calisthenics danced to a barrel-organ, read a shipboard newspaper, and watched amateur theatricals... Strangely snug, paradoxically homely, it seemingly made parlour games a way of defying the elements" (p. 50).

This English spirit, determined to be at home where ever the corporeal body wandered, exhibited an incredible stubbornness to accept change. If spirit was the crucial feature then technological or methodological changes to ease the travel were viewed as impairments and had to be avoided. In a lengthy biographical chapter on Sir Clements Markham, the eminence gris of the Scott expedition, Spufford describes this attitude of resistance to unsporting exploration–the use of dogs was deemed inhuman, thus the expedition was outfitted with ponies and man-hauled sledges. And in considering the unwelcome success of the Inuit of Arctic Canada in surviving this w ild piece of England, the explorers ignored them. In the revival of English polar exploration in the late nineteenth century, Spufford notes they looked to the south, "where no natives complicated the performance of explo ration" (p. 234).

The alternative visions of English women are also of a piece. Extensive notes on Lady Jane Franklin and Kathleen Scott point out once again the highly centric nature of Empire and of the men purportedly in control of it. He effectively draws upon English literature here as well, culling women writers' understanding of exploration and the periphery. He quotes Elizabeth Gaskell's *Sylvia's Lovers* (1863) where the heroine notes men delude themselves with their importance; "whose chosen posture of authority prevents him from seeing aright" (p. 148).

The evidence of attitude is built up in an irresistible case. In the end, the tragedy of Scott is laid before us, both as the sublime where Scott does not fail, his death and the death of his companions, especially Oates, whose stoic farewell is the title of the book, becomes a success of the spirit rather than a failure to return. And in the real–Shakleton's conversation with the Stromness manager draws an immediate parallel between Scott's death and the larger tragedy of the spirit; "Tell me is the war over?", he hears "The war is not over. Millions are being killed. Europe is mad. The world is mad."

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