

Canada's Idea of North

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Outline

- I. Introduction: Canada and the Idea of North
- II. Southern Ideas of North
- III. Inuit Notions of a Northern Homeland
- IV. Conclusion

I. Introduction: Canada and the Idea of North - What and Where Is North?

- is North defined by climate, by temperature and weather, by latitude, or by how the land is used by indigenous peoples?
- geographer Louis-Edmond Hamelin in *Canadian Nordicity*: "the North is more than an area, it is a passion"
- historian William Morrison in *True North*: "The Canadian north is in some ways not a physical region at all, but a place of dreams, of imagination and fantasy. [...] Even those who have travelled to the north *have read into it* what they needed to see." (my emphasis)

Symbolic Spaces

The Canadian North is a symbolic space because it is here that the nation sees its uniqueness, those characteristics that make it different from other nations, most accurately represented, preserved, and reproduced.

Symbolic Spaces

Human geographer Rob Shields in *Places on the Margin: The Canadian North* "forms the mythic 'heartland' of Canada but remains a zone of Otherness in the spatial system of Canadian culture."

II. Southern Ideas of North

Canada First Movement

- arose shortly after Confederation in 1867
- Robert Grant Haliburton: physically as well as morally strong Anglo-Saxon race is predestined to populate the North because only they will be able to thrive in its rough climatic and geographical conditions.

II. Southern Ideas of North

Richard Cavell

- using North as a test space for man's abilities and as a last frontier "dehumanized" the North by erasing indigenous and reinforced gender codes through spatial divisions

II. Southern Ideas of North

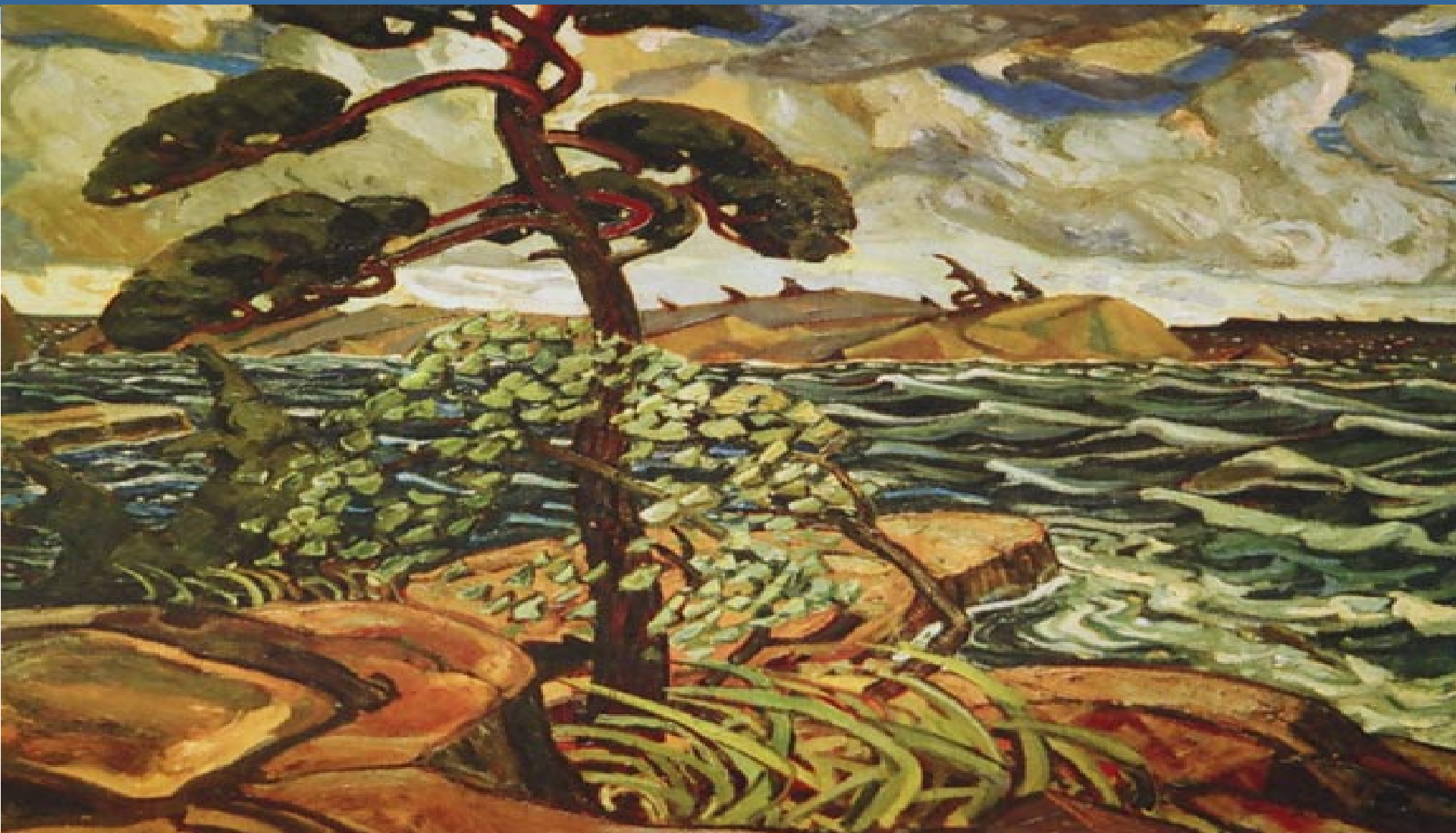
The Group of Seven

- defined themselves at their formation in 1920 as "Canada's national school of painters"
- predominantly painted unpopulated northern landscapes
- their paintings "adorned every second school-room," according to Glenn Gould

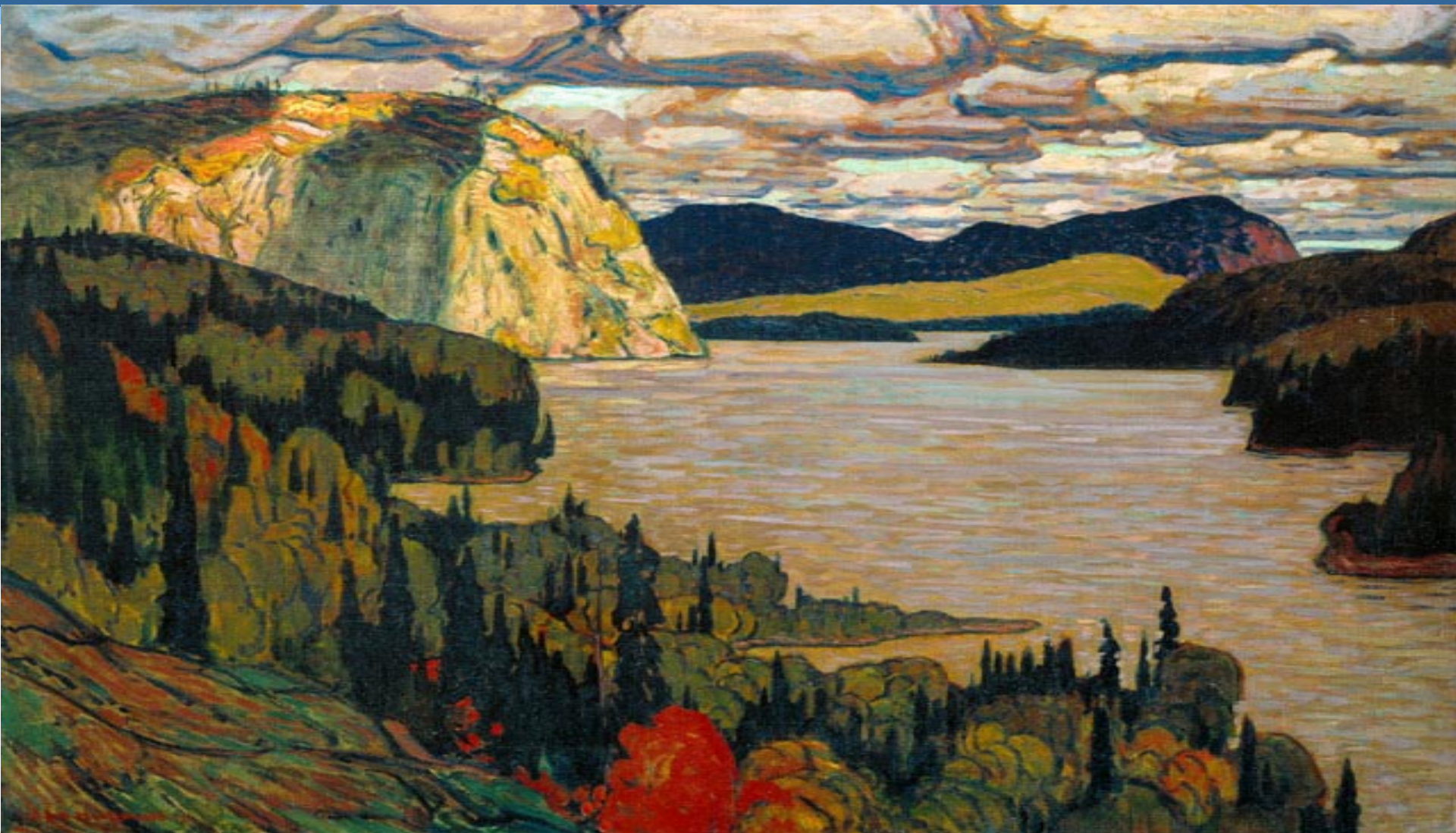
J. E. H. MacDonald: Lake McArthur



Arthur Lismer: A September Gale Georgian Bay



J. E. H. MacDonald: The Solemn Land



Franklin Carmichael: Light and Shadow



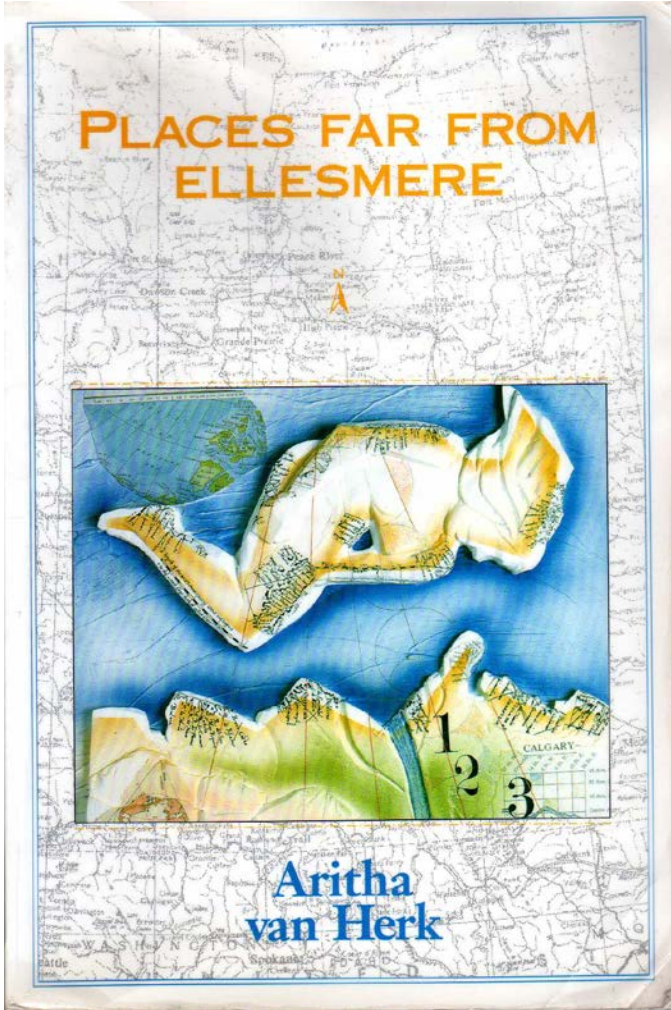
III. Southern Ideas of North

Glenn Gould

- 1967 radio documentary "The Idea of North"
- one-hour piece in a collection of three documentaries published as *Glenn Gould's Solitude Trilogy*
- interviewed five white southern Canadians who had lived up North
- undercut the form of the documentary in a technique he termed 'contrapuntal radio', arranging the material in a musical and drama-like quality
- saw North as a space of "staggering creative possibility."

Postmodernism

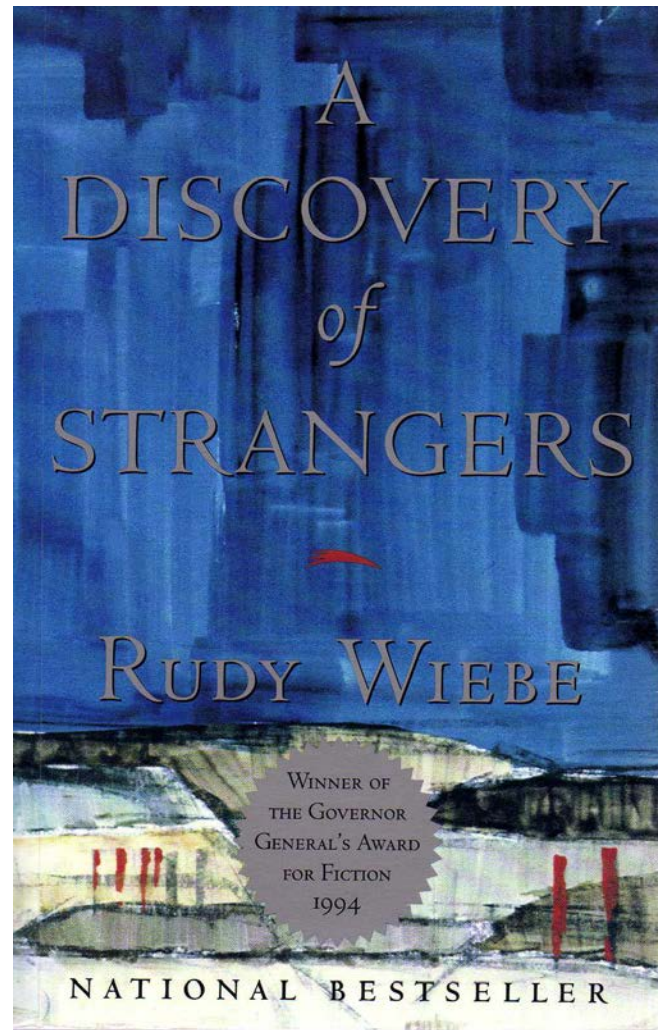
- For postmodern Canadian writers, the North became an experimental space, a blank page for playful investigations of identity, language, and gender but also for rewriting earlier inscriptions of North, and for questioning concepts such as historiography, truth, or authenticity.
- While before postmodernism the absence of founding myths or of a master narrative was regarded as a lack, at the time of postmodernism this turned into an asset because postmodernism in general is characterized by fragmentation rather than unity
- As Aritha van Herk put it in her essay "Piloting North": "Narratives of the Arctic, however much they attempt to display some essentialist Canadian configuration, are polyvocal, even global alchemies."
- Sherrill Grace in *Canada and the Idea of North* (2002) has called these texts "counter-texts" because they challenge and re-represent earlier northern representations such as maps or exploration accounts



III. Southern Ideas of North

Aritha van Herk *Places far from Ellesmere: A Geografictione* (1995)

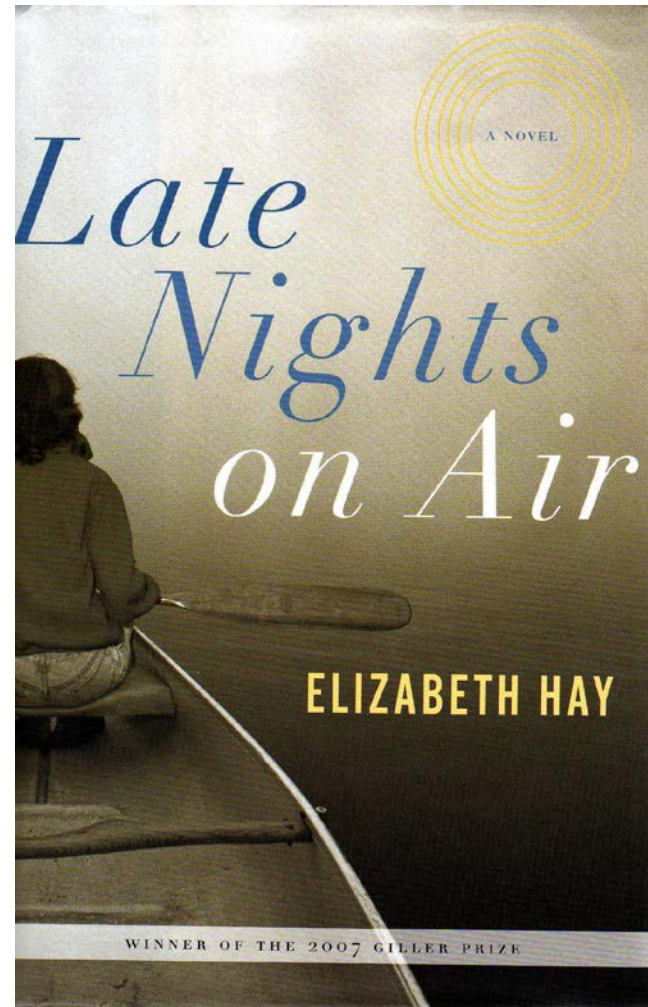
- blurs boundaries between disciplines
- blends geography – the act of mapping, naming, and categorizing the land – with the act of writing and reading, and, as the silent e at the end of the word indicates, with feminist theory on subject formation
- narrator rereads herself, the North, and Leo Tolstoy's 19th century novel *Anna Karenina* to show how it has misread and misrepresented women



III. Southern Ideas of North

Rudy Wiebe *A Discovery of Strangers* (1994)

- retells John Franklin's second expedition of 1820s
- replaces Eurocentric with indigenous perspective
- deals with cultural contact of the British and the Yellowknives: central is the love story between midshipman Robert Hood and a Dene girl called Greenstockings



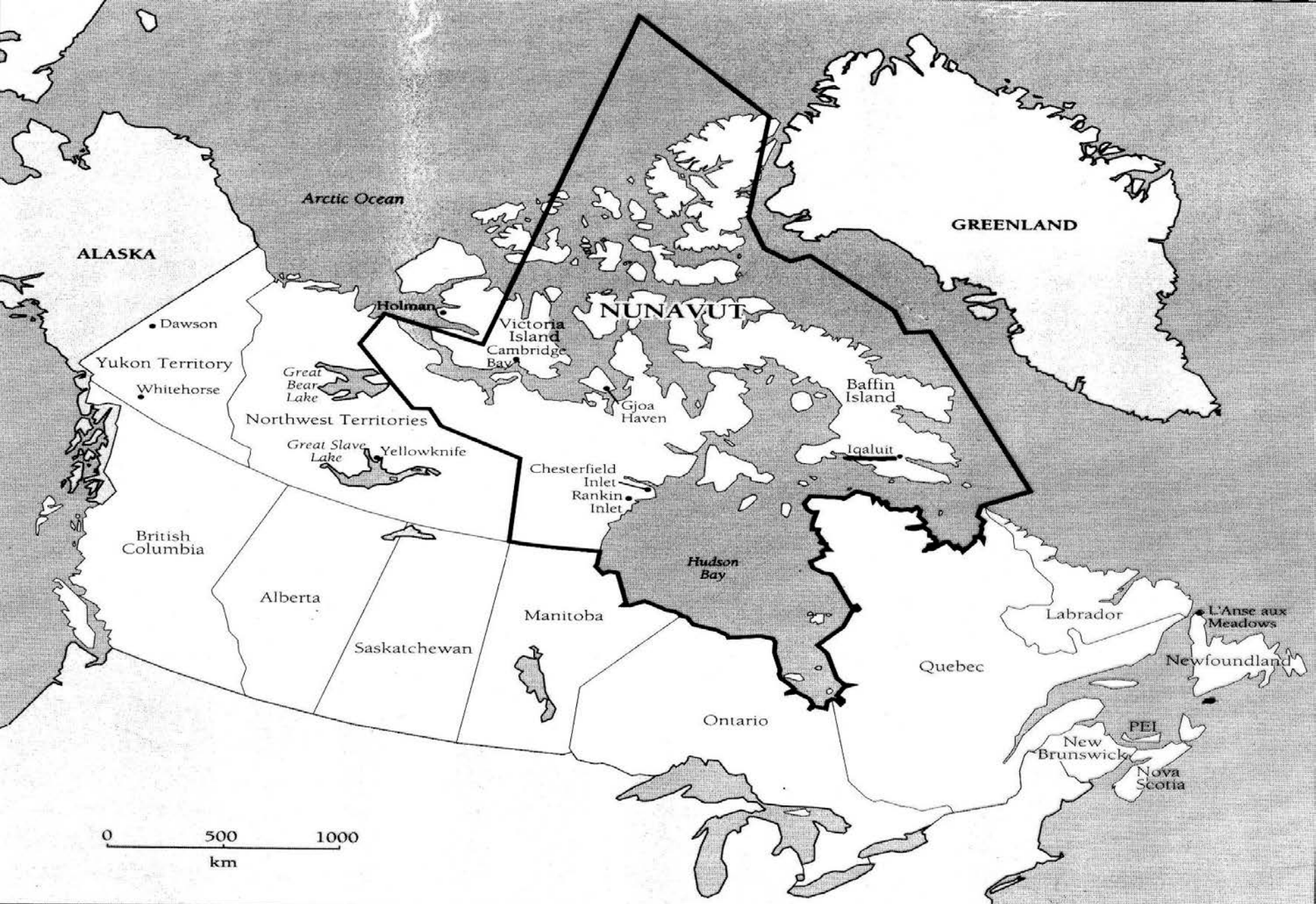
III. Southern Ideas of North

Elisabeth Hay *Late Nights on Air* (2007)

- set in Yellowknife, North West Territories
- traces trip of British explorer John Hornby on the Thelon River through the so-called barren lands, who together with his two companions starved to death there in 1926
- Tom Thomson, painter who was closely affiliated with and painted in the style of the Group of Seven painters. Was found dead floating beside his canoe 1917

III. Southern Ideas of North

- deals with judge Thomas Berger's Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry in the 1970s, entitled *Northern Frontier – Northern Homeland*, which for the first time recorded and acknowledged the concerns of indigenous peoples in the Arctic
- pipeline was met with resistance by First Nations organizations, led to foundation of Inuit brotherhood (The Inuit Tapirisat of Canada/Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK)), founded in 1971 and the Inuit Circumpolar Conference, founded in 1977



IV. Inuit Notions of a Northern Homeland

- In 2002 research project in Iqaluit and Pangnirtung, Nunavut, on how Canada's national idea of North changed with the creation of Nunavut
- French Canadian anthropologist:
"What is North?" "It's the Inuit. They know the land, they know how to survive, have their stories. Canadians are not there, they are transient, even us. We gonna leave."

IV. Inuit Notions of a Northern Homeland

Alexina Kupplu, college teacher:

- "I do not see Canada as a northern country. The southern part of Canada is not northern. Even when you are in any of the provinces and they are talking the north, their north only goes as far as the 60th parallel. [...] Southern Canada is not a northern country."
- "It's not just climate because Ottawa can be so cold because of the humidity when you are not accustomed to the humidity. So I think it is just the people. This is not just Nunavut or the NWT, it also includes the northern parts of the Provinces, whether it's northern Manitoba or northern Saskatchewan, northern Alberta, and B.C., Quebec. [...] So it's not at the 60th parallel, it's just where the predominant population are the people who are indigenous to the area."

IV. Inuit Notions of a Northern Homeland

Mark Nuttall, social scientist in *The Arctic: Environment, People, Policy* (2000):

- Names for the Inuit "are not merely geographically descriptive. The names that indigenous peoples have given to the Arctic landscape are multidimensional, in that they contain information about physical features, community history and mythological events [...] This differs sharply from the practice of naming places by explorers, colonialists and settlers in order to control, own and dominate the landscape."

IV. Inuit Notions of a Northern Homeland

Jacopoosie Peters, Inuk hunter:

- "The word tradition is kind of distorted among Europeans in that tradition is boxed in the past. [...] It's human nature to change, you can't be static."

IV. Inuit Notions of a Northern Homeland

Alex Cambell, then Deputy Minister of Sustainable Development:

- If I went back and tried to survive on a traditional way of life, I wouldn't ever survive on my own. My father would, and my grandfather would, because they know and they lived through that process but I didn't, I grew up in a modern western society [...]. So when people argue that you want to go back to traditional ways of doing things to me I don't think that's realistic. But I think it is realistic to appreciate that culture, appreciate that tradition and understand where your parents and grandfather and grandmother came from and what kind of traditions they followed, leading up to where we are now. And understanding that and understanding who you are.

IV. Inuit Notions of a Northern Homeland

Jacopoosie Peters, Inuk hunter:

- The older I get the more conscious I am that the animals are also connected to my thoughts. [...] If I would make sense in a western mind I would say they have the same telepathy and they are all connected. And they know their place in the world. They may not be able to communicate to us in human terms but they do communicate to us in our dreams. One particular dream I had was [...], I was amongst a group of harbour seals surfacing, and I thought a voice deep in my thought told me these are your cousins. And these seals are actually looking at my eyes and basically telling me I have to respect them."

IV. Inuit Notions of a Northern Homeland

"That's what they want, they want to give themselves, it's their way of giving. The animals to me are givers, we are the takers. Human beings are the ones that take, but it's the animals that give. And I look at them as equal creatures. [...] I didn't get to respect animals over night. It's a life long process, you continue to learn and the older you get you remember what your grandfather used to say or your father and you start wondering, hm, I think they were quite on to something, they knew something."

IV. Inuit Notions of a Northern Homeland

- Penny Petrone *Northern Voices: Inuit Writing in English* (1988)
- Robin Mc Grath's *Canadian Inuit Literature: The Development of a Tradition* (1984)
- Robin McGrath [then Gedalof] *Paper Stays Put: A Collection of Inuit Writing* (1980); *Teacher's Handbook* (1981)
- Alex Spalding *Eight Inuit Myths* (1979)
- Father Maurice Metayer *Tales from the Igloo* (1972)

V. Conclusion

Contemporary Nordicity:

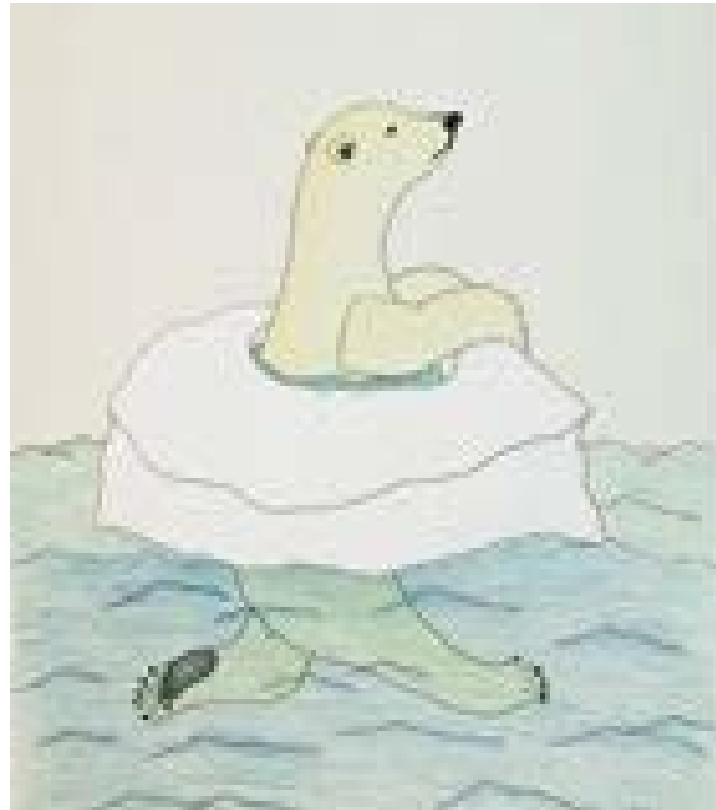
- No longer sees North as "a bastion of freedom and a permanent frontier," as Hugh Keenleyside, then Commissioner of the NWTs phrased it in 1949.
- Jean Chrétien, then Prime minister of Canada, on April 1st 1999: "On the eve of the new millennium, we are showing the world that respect for diversity is an essential and enduring aspect of our history and future together."
- Jessica Shadian: Arctic has forged "a new *indigenized* Canadian identity"

V. Conclusion

Three Reasons for Acknowledging Inuit Presence and Concerns in the Arctic

- North now a role model and symbolic space for multiculturalism and diversity
- to ensure and control sovereignty in the Arctic
- effects of global warming:
 - Mary Simon, president of the Inuit Brotherhood of Canada: Inuit are "the canary in the global coal mine"
 - Franklyn Griffiths, political scientist: Inuit could be seen as today's Distant Early Warning system

Discussion



Anmerkung zu den rechtlichen Grundlagen: Die Rechte der Bilder und Graphiken liegen, sofern nicht anders angegeben, beim Verfasser der Folien. Die Folientexte beziehen sich, wenn nicht anders angegeben, auf eigene Forschungs-, Lehr- und Praxistransfer-Tätigkeiten und sind deshalb bei deren Verwendung zu zitieren.