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**Into the White: The Renaissance Arctic and the End of the Image.**

Christopher P. Heuer.

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Rather than open this review with a pithy anecdote drawn from some early modern encounter with the frozen north, I begin with an observation about this book as an object: it is beautiful. From its elegantly produced dust jacket and exceptional overall production values, to its finely wrought prose, richly imaginative syntheses, and taut argumentation, Christopher Heuer's *Into the White* is a pleasure both to behold and to read. The book thus offers a fascinating counterpoint to its very discussion of the Renaissance conception of the Arctic not simply as an anti-aesthetic site, but as a place utterly devoid of anything one could align either with or against normative notions of beauty. The Renaissance Arctic, as Heuer argues, thereby forced its European witnesses to confront nothingness as a material reality. Heuer reminds us that the Renaissance discourse of New World exploration pivoted on questions of aesthetic experience. European explorers invariably articulate their encounters through the lens of beauty. Recollected beauties of the Americas and the West Indies offered their readers both an enticement to settlement, trade, and plantation, and an index of indigenous people's simultaneously assumed Edenic innocence and moral lassitude. Centering these ideologies of beauty, Heuer suggests, were mimetic strategies of differentiation and exoticization coalescing around "categories such as wonder, identity, and curiosity"; these, in turn, were sustained by the "stable humanist contingency between subject, object, and image" codified in the "perspectival model of encounter and subjectivity" established by the humanist art theorist and architect, Leon Battisti Alberti (19–20). The Arctic, in Heuer's account, forced Renaissance explorers and their audiences to confront the epistemological inadequacies both of humanist interpretive methods and of their underlying assumptions about the human itself. "In the frigid north," he suggests, "the idea of description as a kind of accumulative endeavor of 'representation' was thrown into question. The north was unsettling not because of dazzling difference, but because of monotonous sameness" (11–12).

In its methods and intentions, *Into the White* is an idiosyncratic book. If it touches on key scholarly conversations circulating around the early modern Arctic (for instance, ethnography and cartography, early capitalism and empire-building, and the differences between Arctic and other forms of New World discourse), it does not stake out the typical monograph claims of intervening within these local scholarly discussions. Rather, it uses them as launching-pads for a much more ambitious and far-reaching concern. The Arctic, Heuer argues, bore for its early European witnesses the potential to undo the category-seeking ways

of seeing underpinning the Western *episteme* itself. As he suggests in the book's concluding paragraphs, attention to such a recognition in our own moment of ecological crisis might force a necessary reckoning with those fictions that privilege the human as a category discrete from a raw and "unformed" nature (197). Turning to the example of Thomas Ellis, the illustrator who accompanied Martin Frobisher on his doomed 1578 voyage to the north, and who struggled mightily to capture what he saw on paper, Heuer suggests that the Arctic "is, as Ellis realized, literally impossible to fix in a single view" (197). This exceptional site of human experience, in other words, refuses to make itself legible to those categorical distinctions seeking to center and thus privilege the human.

Heuer organizes the book's chapters around a series of case studies, for instance, a Scandinavian prelate exiled to Rome by the Reformation, a buried sheaf of seventeenth-century Dutch engravings recovered in 1871 by Norwegian hunters, and the fate of an indigenous family brought back to Europe as expeditionary trophies. In each case, Heuer delves into the broad representational questions each posed to contemporary discourses ranging from draughtsmanship to ethnography. Each case affords a different perspective onto the ways in which the "Arctic cold resisted" those definition-making critical methods that early modernity's touchstone thinkers sought, with almost reflexive urgency, "to codify" (159). The book's final chapter offers an extended coda whose analyses move beyond the early modern era and into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Its discussion ranges from a prewar Soviet shipwreck to a 2015 art installation outside the Louvre in Paris. Here, Heuer's argument polemically situates the book's conceptual claims within a post-humanist and anti-capitalist ecological imperative. Indeed, the final sentences assume nearly the tone of a biblical prophet by declaring an ecological catastrophe in the process of subsuming humankind. "It is all too late," Heuer's apocalyptic rejoinder concludes, "[t]he Arctic is coming for *you*" (197). The end of the image, as Heuer implies, is perhaps best understood as a synecdoche for the end of humanity.

It should be clear at this point that, although *Into the White* centers the Renaissance in its title and in its analytical frame of reference, it is not strictly a book about the Renaissance. Rather, it is about the ways our own modernity has failed to resolve, and thus remains haunted by, the imaginative crises with which this frozen region's blankness confronted those early European visitors. That being said, the book's syncretic and wide-ranging vision draws many connections that scholars of the period will find illuminating. One of the most intriguing lines of thought (and one to which this reader would have liked to see more attention granted) was the recurrent through line of interest in a Reformation aesthetics of blankness. Indeed, at the very moment that the Reformation called into question long-standing assumptions about art's moral reality, the Arctic posed challenges to art's basic mimetic functions and presumed epistemological realities. At a number of moments throughout the book, Heuer describes the ways the Arctic made radically real, and thus forced a confrontation of what truly

is at stake in, the reformers' promise of a space in which there was "nothing to consider" (50). In fairness, teasing out this line of thought more fully would have imposed too much of a constraint on Heuer's scope and intention, subjecting this very different kind of book to the limitations of monograph-style argumentation. Nevertheless, this story demands more fulsome exposition and could be a fruitful avenue for future consideration.

In sum, *Into the White* is a book with a large and compelling story to tell, a story whose reach extends well beyond its author's disciplinary home in art history. Literary scholars, historians of culture, globalization, the book, capitalism, and the Reformation, scholars working in posthuman and ecocritical theory, and anyone interested in the roles of periodization and disciplinary boundaries in conceptualizing our understanding of, and present relation to, early modernity will gain much from this book. Furthermore, *Into the White* could be incorporated into a wide range of graduate (and perhaps advanced undergraduate) syllabi both in and across multiple disciplines. Construing the Renaissance Arctic as an enigmatic mirror reflecting our deepest anxieties about the ontological status of categories such as place and time in our self-understanding, Heuer positions himself as an Arctic theorist much like chapter 5's exiled Swedish bishop, Olaus Magnus. For Heuer, like Magnus nearly five centuries earlier, the Renaissance Arctic is not simply a "wasteland," but is "more like a vast archive, an active sender of messages, a place perversely *undifferent* from" the moment and location in which we now live (133).

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