



AALBORG UNIVERSITET

Between fiction and reality: Exploring depictions of Greenland in historical and modern travel writing



Destination Challenges in Tourism

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Introduction

“Destinations, whether new or old, are expectations shrouded in imagined landscapes. We set off with ideas for adventures that we hope might materialize and we imagine pathways to things we fear but secretly wish to confront. We think of our destination as an end point to a journey, but its reality is seldom that. Destinations may also evolve into portals that devour expectations, immersing us in the inconceivable. So it is for me when I travel into the Greenland wilderness.”

-Glassley, A Wilder Time, Introduction

“All writing is travel writing” researchers propose, and all stories are stories of exploration, beginnings, transitions, and endings (Mewshaw, 2005, p. 5). The academic exploration of travel writing ventured even further, equalling the act of writing with travel itself, defining books as “travel substitutes” that allow readers to journey from the comfort of their own homes (Zilcosky, 2008, p. 4). The readers embark on a journey with the author, and in doing so, conceptualize an image of the destination in their mind. In the past decades, studies in tourism re-conceptualized the meaning of destination, arguing that they are not mere geographical places, but also a metaphysical space, one determined by a complex network of meanings and values” (Campelo et al., 2013, p. 154).

The meanings society attributed to certain destinations has varied greatly throughout history. For centuries, Greenland has been an object of fascination for explorers, scientists, writers, and readers. As part of the larger image of the Arctic, it represented a cold, isolated, and desolate territory (Ryall, 2014, p. 121). Both the uniqueness of its landscape and its culture have served as an inexhaustible source of inspiration. There seems to be a certain consensus among researchers interested in travel literature’s depiction of Greenland that European explorers and travel writers have significantly contributed to the long-lasting and still ongoing oppression, misrepresentation, and exploitation of Greenland (Hanrahan, 2017, p. 102). This largely unchallenged view has been contested only indirectly by scientists and travel writers who stress the importance of conducting research in the Arctic and preserving the “last, true wilderness” for the benefit of both the individual and society (Purgina and Menshikov, 2023, p. 180). Despite the prevalent critique, Greenland’s landscape and culture have remained a source of inspiration for a significant portion of travel literature.

While research on the topic is extensive, a simultaneous analysis of specific historical and contemporary travel texts concerning Greenland has not yet been conducted. Thus, the aim of this project is to fill this gap, offering deeper insights into the evolution of Greenland's depiction in travel writing and the broader societal shifts these changes imply.

The primary question of this paper is how the depiction of Greenland has changed—or remained the same—in travel writing accounts. More specifically, what are the similarities and differences that characterize the chosen examples of travel accounts of Greenland during the 18th century, a period marked by colonization and Christianization, and contemporary accounts of the 21st century, a time defined primarily by the pressing issue of climate change? A secondary question is to explore how travel writing has evolved in terms of its depiction of the land, its culture, and the relationship between the traveller and both.

The contribution of this project builds upon the premise that travel writing remains one of the most socially important literary genres (Stubbs and Mylne, 2024, p. 2), a genre that both speaks of and builds the society. As such, the study of its evolution through specific examples can provide a greater understanding of wider societal shifts, the nature of travel, and the relationship between the traveller and the destination. By examining personal accounts, we can uncover deeper insights into the individual traveller, as well as the sociocultural context they inhabit, since “reading a society through a biography” enables researchers to “unpack the explosive subjectivity” of the social world as it is experienced directly by individuals (Hookway and Snee, 2016, p. 3).

Methodology

This project investigates how the depiction of Greenland has changed or remained consistent in travel writing over time. The analysis explores not only the content of the narratives but also the evolving role of the travel writer and the genre's cultural, environmental, and inspirational significance.

The inductive investigation aims to develop insights into travel writing's evolution from analyzing chosen texts, rather than proving or disproving set theories. By contrasting classical and modern narratives, the project also seeks to challenge dominant critiques of travel writing as a vehicle of imperialist or stereotypical portrayals, emphasizing its role in fostering curiosity and conscious travel.

The project is based on interpretivist and constructivist paradigms. The ontology stems from the assumption that Greenland's depiction is constructed and subject to change based on the cultural, historical, and personal contexts of the travel writer and his audience. Epistemologically, the project is interpretive, as the aim is to interpret the meaning of chosen texts and concerns itself with the individual experience of the authors. However, the contrast between these two works and the implementation of the historical context and wider social implications reveal the constructivist nature of the project.

The project does not seek universal truths but rather a nuanced understanding of how travel writing has evolved in its portrayal of Greenland and what this evolution reveals about both the prevalent societal concerns, as well as travel writers as individuals within the social frames of their times.

The research design is qualitative and focuses on thematic content analysis of two literary works, each from a different historical context:

- “The History of Greenland, Including an Account of the Mission Carried on by the United Brethren in that Country” by David Crantz
- “A Wilder Time: Notes from a Geologist at the Edge of the Greenland Ice” by William E. Glassley”

After an extensive search for representative and complete accounts, these two travel accounts were chosen both in terms of availability and value, as I stumbled upon them rather accidentally, in search of more popular travel writing works, such as those of the famous Danish-Greenlandic explorer Knud Rasmussen, and Gretel Elrich's “This Cold Ice”. Regardless of accidental stumbling upon, the texts

analyzed turned out to be of great value to the topic discussed, for their authors' in-depth and detailed approach, as well as the remarkable contrast they sparked. David Crantz's *History of Greenland* is an extensive account describing not only its author's experiences and insights but also those of his predecessors. Crantz provides a detailed description both of the land and the people inhabiting it, thus enabling a deep insight into the prevalent observations and opinions of a particular period in history.

The value of Glassley's work is expressed in a different way – it is written from the view of a geologist conducting research in remote regions of Greenland, yet he strives to infuse his text with messages far more expressive than mere scientific observations. Lastly, his account directly addresses contemporary environmental concerns. As discussed in the further literature review, these works stem from two substantially different literal and philosophical movements – Enlightenment and Postmodernism. As such, the analysis of chosen texts can dive into various elements that constitute travel writing, depictions of Greenland, and wider societal shifts.

The data is analyzed using thematic content analysis, focusing on:

1. The Frame (title and content structure)
2. Depiction of the land
3. Depiction of the people
4. Depiction of the self

This approach provides a structured way to address the research questions by examining the language and tone, underlying beliefs, and reflectivity of the author.

With the data collected being highly personal accounts, it is crucial to approach work with respect and a high degree of sensitivity. Furthermore, the content of the texts represents the land and the people of Greenland, and thus requires a high degree of criticism towards the content, the critique of the content, as well as my interpretations.

Literature review

To proceed with the discussion, it is necessary to establish a certain degree of understanding of the wide genre of travel writing. Its fluid character is captured by the statement that “travel writing means different things to different people” (Stubbs and Mylne, 2024). Some authors argue that the question of what travel writing is has, until recently, been answered poorly, and that its fluid character has been reduced to travel reports mentioned at the end of a writer’s bibliography as a “leftover” (Zilcosky, 2008). Contemporary discussions bring forth the diversity of the genre, which ranges from personal letters, scientific reports, commercial guides, poetry, and objective accounts. It is precisely this “hybridity” of the genre that distinguishes it and gives it its appeal (Zilcosky, 2008). This suggests that a broad definition is required to encompass travel writing’s scope: “textual recording of a variety of practices of mobility, spontaneously in the field or retrospectively on the traveller’s return” (Stubbs and Mylne, 2024).

Travel literature is brimming with depictions of Greenland. Throughout history, Greenland has been an object of fascination for travellers and travel writers, but the nature of this fascination has been changing ever since—from the colonization of new lands during the Viking Age to the re-establishment of contact with long-forgotten Norse settlers (University of Copenhagen, 2023), the conversion of the Inuits to Christianity, and finally to the subsequent Danish colonization of the island (Borm, 2016).

Today, due to extensive scientific research and the urgency of climate change, the image of Greenland, both in the minds of many travellers as well as in global media, has shifted from a land to be “claimed and conquered” to a territory to be “preserved” (Purgina and Menshikov, 2023, p. 174).

This shift is evident in travel literature. An example of a 16th-century depiction of the Inuits comes from the famous Danish explorer Hans Egede, who viewed the Inuits as barbarians in desperate need of Christianity and European civilization:

“I do hold that it contributes greatly to their stupidity and cold-heartedness that they lack the education and means by which their minds could be polished and sharpened”

(Rud, 2017, p. 13).

As interactions between the Inuits and Europeans grew, travel accounts began to depict a more positive image of the natives. Over the 19th century, the portrayal of Greenlanders gradually moved further away from notions of savagery, giving rise to an idealized, romanticized version that represented an unspoiled community living in harmony with nature (Rud, 2017, p. 13).

However, this evolution of representation is not only due to the expansion of knowledge and more frequent cultural encounters but is also in line with the ideas of Romanticism, a literary movement of the 18th and 19th centuries. Unlike their predecessors in the Enlightenment, who valued facts and empirical methods above all, travel writing in Romanticism framed travel as a generator of epiphanic insights into the self (Saidia, 2016, p. 20). As such, Romantic-era travel writers stressed the importance of nature and wilderness for attaining self-knowledge (Somers, 2024).

Researchers argue that the ideas of Romanticism are still prevalent in contemporary travel literature (Borm, 2016, p. 266). However, in contrast to early travel accounts from Greenland, a contemporary travel writer does not merely celebrate the beauty of the landscape and the uniqueness of Greenlandic culture. Instead, they are culturally sensitive, knowledgeable about current issues, and aware of their own privilege to travel to the Arctic:

“I thought of my own journey, how many air miles I had flown to reach Iceland and Greenland, in order to have the luxury of observing these changes first-hand. Like many others, I felt guilty about the lifestyle I had chosen, the air miles that I flew, but did not have any answers and could not decide whether to radically alter the choices that I made.”

(Borm 2016, p. 269)

Literature engaged with the topic of travel writing and Greenland is extensive. Many works, such as Lubowicka’s *Mapping Ultima Thule* directly, or indirectly (Rud’s *Colonialism in Greenland*), address the issues of colonialism and the changing image of Greenland. A pattern of research can also be observed in the examination of the Arctic as a whole, or rather, its depictions and meanings in travel texts. Some researchers actively engage in comparative analysis of different travel writings.

Sigfrid Kjeldaas addresses the attempts of Gretel Ehrlich to experience Greenland in a completely new way and to present the experience in her novel *This Cold Heaven* (Kjeldaas, 2015), while Borm compares contemporary travel texts from two British

travellers in Greenland (Borm, 2017). Lastly, a research article most relevant to this project, *Environmental Imaginaries of the Arctic in 21st Century Travel Writing*, examines Glassley's travel account *A Wilder Time*, exploring a biologist's take on Greenland and the deeper messages he tries to convey (Purgina and Menshikov, 2023).

Theoretical framework

Based on the previous literature review, three key pillars of the theoretical framework for data analysis have been identified. Firstly, it is necessary to address the postcolonial theory upon which most of the research engaged with the topic is built.

Postcolonialism and its Critique

This argument is guided by the studies of postcolonialism, a field of research interested in the “system of practices used to produce and naturalize hierarchical structures of power globally and to shape colonial relations” (Lubowicka, 2019, p. 45). According to postcolonial studies, travel writing was a significant and compliant “trope” in the systematic oppression and misrepresentation of Greenland. Postcolonial research on Greenland highlights the repetition of “an empty space, which invites and reinforces the legitimacy of neoliberal colonial activities” (Hanrahan, 2017, p. 102). This vast, empty, cold space came to be seen as a compelling site for white, male, Western adventure (Lubowicka, 2019, p. 47).

Valid critique notwithstanding, research seeking patterns of misrepresentation may fail to acknowledge the importance of scientific research conducted in Greenland's wilderness, especially in the face of rapid climate change (Holm, 2010). Furthermore, Greenland's biological and geographical features offer a unique opportunity to explore Earth's geological history, which could provide invaluable biological insights not just about the environment but also about humanity itself (Glassley, 2018, Preface).

While postcolonial research serves well to exemplify how Greenland became a playground for Western travellers, it could be argued that the critique of travel writing disregards the importance of natural landscapes and wilderness for the human psyche. In his essay *Why We Travel?*, critic Pico Iyer examines how technological advancement urges us to seek refuge in quieter and more isolated

places (Saidia, 2016). In light of the struggle with technological progress, famous fantasy writer J.R.R. Tolkien defends escapism, stating that a rational human being, after reflection, will condemn progressive things such as factories and machine guns, which seem to be staples of modern European life (Tolkien, 1947, p. 31). Postcolonial research on Greenlandic depictions in travel writing acknowledges that the Inuits have often been presented in a positive manner, even idealized, as examples of life in harmony with nature (Hanrahan, 2017, p. 107). Yet even this, such research argues, is an expression of superiority and imposition of European values, even when the traveller himself, such as Knud Rasmussen, has Greenlandic heritage and spent his childhood in Greenland (Lubowicka, 2018, pp. 84-87). This fierce scrutiny raises the question of whether anyone has the right to portray any destination.

Furthermore, the postcolonial critique, in its efforts to discover patterns of oppression, often overlooks the escapist purpose of travel literature. For example, during the Industrial Revolution, travel writing held such value that both readers and authors preferred texts over actual trips (Zilcosky, 2008, p. 4).

This project aims to bridge the gap between the established postcolonial paradigms in the study of Greenland's depictions in travel literature and the value of such literature by examining its evolution and often overlooked societal and individual aspects.

Enlightenment and Postmodernism

The theoretical framework for further analysis is built upon the contrast between the prevalent philosophical and literary movements of the periods in which the chosen texts were written. These movements reflect significant shifts in the meaning travel literature presents to individuals and society, as well as the approaches chosen by their authors.

Postmodernism, mostly loosely defined, marks the cultural shift after modernism and is primarily characterized by “fragmentation, pluralism, and difference” (Gloag, 2013, p. 2). Essentially, some researchers argue, postmodernism adopts a highly skeptical and critical attitude toward modernism (Gloag, 2013). As such, it rejects “metanarratives” and belief in grand, overarching stories, preferring “little narratives”—suggesting that there are now many smaller, diverse stories to be told

(Gloag, 2013). This aligns with research in postmodernism in travel literature, which notes that contemporary travel writers tend to favor fragmented narratives, incorporating multiple voices and points of view, thereby decentering the narrative from the self (Saidia, 2017, p. 38).

In contrast, postmodernism stands in stark opposition to the Enlightenment of the 18th century, when travellers prioritized informative narratives, fact-finding, and empirical measurement. Furthermore, Enlightenment travellers weren't inclined to be changed by the traveling experience, with such tendencies emerging later in Romanticism (Saidia, 2017, p. 20).

This philosophical dichotomy plays out in the concept of destinations themselves. As noted in the literature review, recent research indicates a shift in the perception of destinations—what was once a purely geographical location has now evolved into a sense of place, “constructed from particular interactions and mutual articulations of social experiences embedded within subjective and emotional attachments” (Campelo et al., 2013, p. 155). The essence of this philosophical contrast can be summed up in the Enlightenment's drive for progress and rational measurement, set against postmodernism's skepticism toward absolute truths and its focus on personal narratives.

Anthropocentric and Ecocentric

Out of the previously discussed philosophical dichotomy emerges a broader discussion. The third theoretical framework of this project is based on the evolving relationship between humans and the environment. Anthropocentrism is defined as thinking that considers humanity's existence as central and the most important fact of the universe (Cambridge Dictionary, 2024). It is argued that such reasoning is a primary cause of human devastation of the planet and the disappearance of wilderness (Purgina and Menshikov, 2023, p. 180). In light of scientific findings that highlight the evident impact of modern civilization on the environment, a new, more sustainable way of thinking is needed (Moser, 2019, p. 113). Philosophers like Michel Onfray propose a new way of being—an approach that is more sensual and mindful, allowing us to take our true place within the natural world (Moser, 2019, p. 113). Thus, ecocentrism emerges as a philosophy that values all life, not only those

aspects that are useful to humans (“Dictionary.com | Meanings & Definitions of English Words” 2021).

Thematic content analysis

The historical example chosen for this project is *The History of Greenland: Including an Account of the Mission Carried on by the United Brethren in that Country*, a detailed account of observations and findings written by David Crantz, a German missionary sent to Greenland for a year in 1759. This work was part of the Moravian Mission's effort to Christianize the local population. In his account, Crantz records observations about the land, the Inuit people, their way of life, and traditions. He also provides an account of the Moravian mission in Greenland, describing the encounters between European missionaries and the locals (Crantz, 2014).

According to an unofficial source, David Crantz was a German theologian, historian, writer, and later in life, a pastor. Born in Nowogard (modern-day Poland) in 1777, Crantz grew up in a religious household under the care of a pietistic pastor. At the age of 15, he began studying theology at Friedrich University, where he encountered the Hermhut brothers and joined the pietistic church. In 1761, after years of travel and writing in Europe, Crantz was sent to Greenland as part of the Herrnhut mission, which had been active on the island since 1733 (Wikipedia, 2008).

The preface of the English translation of Crantz’s book, published in 1820, provides further insight into Crantz’s reputation as a writer. The unknown author of the preface defends the necessary adaptations made during the translation, emphasizing that the text is far from lacking in merit. It describes Crantz’s writing as “simple, manly, correct and energetic,” and praises its “fascinating charm” derived from sound judgment, veracity, and integrity of purpose (Crantz, 1820, Preface). The editors also highlight the intrinsic value of the work, noting that it “has long been a standard one in all that relates to Greenland,” and commending Crantz for his informed approach, scrupulous attention to sources, and his well-known integrity (Crantz, 1820, Preface).

The book is divided into two parts: the first discusses the geography, weather patterns, traditions, and social habits of the Inuit, while the second focuses on the Moravian mission at Godthåb, today’s Nuuk, the capital of Greenland.

The contemporary example chosen is *A Wilder Time: Notes from a Geologist at the Edge of the Greenland Ice* by William E. Glassley. Glassley was a renowned geologist, researcher, and natural history writer with a deep passion for the natural world, which began during his youth when he enjoyed surfing. He spent 30 years studying the geological history of Greenland, resulting in this book, which earned the Burroughs Medal for Distinguished Natural History Writing and the New Mexico-Arizona Book Award (“William E. Glassley Obituary,” 2023). Glassley passed away in 2023, leaving behind a legacy that continues to inspire his colleagues in the field (“Shelf Awareness for Thursday, June 8, 2023,” n.d.).

A Wilder Time reflects its author as a person of both scientific background and deep humanistic values and interest in the spiritual: “It delves into the kind of spiritual effect that wilderness has on those privileged to work in it and how it changes the way we experience and understand our surroundings and our lives” (Glassley 2018, Praise for *A Wilder Time*)

Further reviews of *A Wilder Time* reflect the successful contrast between scientific endeavor and subsequent philosophical inquiries, infused with poetry and personal impressions. As one review notes, Glassley writes with “openness, clarity, and a keen eye for detail, weaving adventure, research, astonished awe, and thoughtful reflection into an absorbing account of his sojourns” (Glassley, 2018, Praise for *A Wilder Time*).

Perhaps the best way to encapsulate the symbolic meaning of Glassley’s experience are his own words: “Although our scientific interests are purely academic, the experiences we have lived through are almost mystical” (Glassley, 2018, p. 17).

The book details Glassley’s first-hand experiences in Greenland, recounting six different expeditions aimed at unraveling the mysteries of rock, earth, and water, and the ancient stories of Earth's geological history these elements reveal. The accounts of these expeditions are not presented in a chronological order, as Glassley explains: “experiences that change perception accumulate in odd ways that are personal and often not initially understood” (Glassley, 2018, p. 26).

The Frame

To begin with, the very titles of the two works reveal a stark contrast. David Crantz titles his book *The History of Greenland – Including an Account of the Mission Carried on by the United Brethren in that Country*, which serves as a

straightforward, almost statistical frame that literally explains the content before the reader even opens the book. The title is devoid of symbolism, and there is little effort to draw the reader in beyond the literal description of the subject matter.

In contrast, William Glassley's *A Wilder Time: Notes from a Geologist at the Edge of the Greenland Ice* is steeped in symbolism. The phrase "A Wilder Time" is an abstraction that does not convey its meaning explicitly, suggesting that the content of the book may be as abstract as its title. Furthermore, Glassley attaches the symbol of "the Edge" to "Greenland Ice." This pairing can be interpreted in two ways: first, it may symbolize Greenland's position at the frontier of climate change; second, it suggests the extremity of its geographical location, standing at "the edge of the world." By comparison, Crantz's use of the phrase "that country" to refer to Greenland appears cold and detached, indicating a more distant perspective from the author.

The content structure of the two works further emphasizes their differences. *The History of Greenland* is divided into four "books": the first concerns geography and weather, the second focuses on animals, the third discusses the Greenlanders and their way of life, and the fourth provides an account of the Moravian mission in Greenland. The chapters are described with brief, literal descriptions such as:

- "I. Of the country in general. Its situation and boundaries"
- "II. Of the air and seasons. Cold in winter and frost-smoke. Of the summer"

The tone of the structure is informative, resembling an objective report (Crantz 1820, *Contents*).

Glassley's *A Wilder Time*, by contrast, is non-chronological, and the narrative of his expeditions is divided into three parts:

1. **Fractionation** – "the deconstruction of expectations, relating experiences that exposed the depth of my ignorance about knowing place"
2. **Consolidation** – coming to terms with the reality of ignorance and awareness
3. **Emergence** – epiphanies about existence and human beings' place in the Universe (Glassley 2018, *Preface*)

The structural contrast between the two books highlights not only differences in content but also in focus and purpose. Crantz's informative and objective approach, coupled with his absence from the account, distances him from the experience,

creating an almost omniscient authority. His intent appears to be providing a comprehensive report on all things relevant to Greenland.

In contrast, Glassley makes his own ignorance, inquiries, and philosophical realizations the central themes of his work. This subjective approach is shaped by his surroundings and scientific exploration. Furthermore, unlike Crantz's straightforward portrayal of Greenland, Glassley's use of terms like "fractionation," "consolidation," and "emergence" loosens the structure of the story, pushing it beyond the confines of a traditional travelogue. With its subjectivity, intertextuality, and non-linear plot, Glassley's text exemplifies postmodern travel writing.

The Land

"Greenland is well known as the most northern tract of land lying between Europe and America; and considering its vast extent, compared with the small part as yet known to Europeans, may be justly numbered among the unexplored regions of the north. Various navigators have coasted it from the most southern point, the promontory of Farewell, in lat. 59°, proceeding in a north easterly direction towards Spitzbergen, as far as 80° north latitude, and towards the north or north-west as far as lat. 78°. No vessel, however, has hitherto gained its northern extremity, so that we cannot determine with any degree of certainty, whether it be an island or connected with some other continent."

(Crantz 1820, p. 1)

The beginning of Crantz's account follows in the informative manner, describing currently known facts about Greenland. The author acknowledges European ignorance of the island's extent, and the uncertainty of whether it is an island at all. He is preoccupied with its position on the world map and continues the chapter describing known facts about regions of Greenland, landscape features such as fjords, mountains, and lakes. He dots the map through use of latitudes, proximity to colonies, Greenlanders' activities, and natural resources such as seals. It could be argued that Crantz's crude depiction of the land is as far from fantasy as possible. The construction of fantasy might appear in the absence of the knowledge which evokes curiosity, or in the process of the reader's imagining of the place, yet, at least in the first chapters, Crantz's emotion and abstraction-stripped text leaves the reader alone in his attempts to imagine an emotional story about Greenland. For

Crantz, Greenland is an object of study. In contrast, the following is Glassley's introduction of Greenland:

"ONE OF THE MOST EXTENSIVE, continuous wilderness regions on Earth, Greenland remains largely submerged by ice. In the area not ice-covered, the landscape materializes as experience, not place. Boundaries, whether real or imagined, named or anonymous, dissolve into opportunities. Senses become remarkably acute, sharpened by the raw purity of what it means to be wild. Greenland is a place of surfaces so rich with history that simply setting foot on them seems to clarify reality. The objective meaning of Greenland, expressed as simple facts, deserves consideration."

(Glassley 2018, p. 24)

Glassley introduces Greenland as an experience rather than a place. His description is brimming with imagination and stimulating choice and order of words. He presents Greenland as raw wilderness, purity, a rich depository of biological data, and momentary clarity. Although with a significant difference in expressiveness, both authors are concerned with the vastness of the land, even using almost identical expressions – vast extent/one of the most extensive.

Somewhat ironically, theologian Crantz is rational and concerned with measuring, mapping, and describing, while scientist Glassley is spontaneous and concerned with sensing, dissolving, and experiencing. It is only after a spectacular introduction of Greenland's landscape as the protagonist, that Glassley inquires into "simple facts" and "objective meaning," which he does further in the introduction, albeit with the same degree of fascination.

Glassley, knowingly or unknowingly, challenges his fellow 18th-century travel writer's approach to experiencing Greenland:

"Lines on maps suggest boundaries, and boundaries shape expectations and provide limits; they simplify and categorize, making it easier to react without thought. The natural world, though, is flow and process, not limits. What we place on a map is an approximation, at best, a way of saying that things here differ from things over there. If we were truly to understand the place we wandered through, sampling and measuring and recording, we needed to respect the implication that boundaries are simply another form of illusion."

(Glassley 2018, p. 66)

Some researchers argue that the inability of Western travellers and their use of language is robbing the reality of the Arctic of its true depth and scope. The usual ways of comprehending the natural world and rationalized human divisions are far too inadequate to comprehend the boundlessness of the natural world. (Purgina and Menshikov 2023) It might appear that even Crantz in the 18th century, albeit in a more “rational” manner, was aware of the incomprehensibility of Greenland: “of so wild a country, only thinly inhabited on the coast, a long geographical description would be needless” (Crantz 1820, p. 4). However, his primary concern lies with the usefulness of information and of inhabited land. Furthermore, he is aware of the lack of data regarding the geographical features such as mountains:

“The mountains of this country cannot be made the subject of a strict and scientific analysis, as no mines have yet penetrated their recesses, nor any researchers explored their natural cavities. We must therefore draw our conclusions from their external figure.”

(Crantz 1820, p. 50)

Somewhat symbolically, Crantz acknowledges the limitations of existing research, and leaves the scientific exploration of mountains for another age and future scientists. The main objects of his observations were lands of current use to humans, the Greenlanders, European colonies, and the triangular relationship of the three.

The People

A large portion of Crantz’s account is dedicated to the description of the Greenlanders. Although he gives a detailed report on their clothing and physical appearance, Crantz is predominantly concerned with their conduct, morality, laws, and beliefs. Crantz creates the image of the Inuits out of his own observations, as well as previous accounts he studied. Many of these accounts, he states, lean towards a bright depiction, and many, on the contrary, lean towards a negative view of the Greenlanders. He acknowledges that their national character is not easily depicted or grasped. In the very beginning of the description, he states that his observations would lead him to side with the admirers of the Inuits (Crantz 1820, p. 169):

“If we take the term savage to imply a brutal, unsocial, and cruel disposition, the Greenlanders are not entitled to the appellation. They are not unattractive, wild, or barbarous; but a mild, quiet, and good-natured people. They live in a

state of natural liberty without government, but in societies in some measure realizing the dreams of modern republicans. They have in this way subsisted, probably for several centuries, with more quietness than the far-famed Athens or Sparta. The Greenlanders may, comparatively speaking, be called a happy people."

(Crantz 1820, p. 170)

Crantz's acknowledgment of the complexity of the topic, as well as his positive view of the Inuits, stands in contrast to that of his predecessor, Danish-Norwegian missionary Hans Egede, who traveled to Greenland 40 years prior. Egede plainly described Greenlanders as stupid, cold-hearted, emotionless, and unable to have a rich inner life (Rud 2017, p. 13). Forty years later, Crantz experiences Greenlanders as good-humored, friendly, sociable, having no desire to amass wealth, and liberal in giving. Furthermore, he states, vices common in "civilized" countries are essentially non-existent among the Greenlanders. Later in the text, the author goes so far as to ascribe Stoic traits to the Greenlanders, who, at the sight of misbehaving Europeans, talk of "mad waters," referring to the intoxication with liquors (Crantz 1820, p. 171).

However, his fundamental view is perhaps not as different from that of Egede. Drawing on previous researchers, Crantz ascribes these admirable traits of the Inuits to an "*inward impulse resembling the instinct of animals, which is nothing else than the secret working of the Deity.*" Their restraint from vices comes from fear of social exclusion, threat to their lives, and self-love. Crantz names Greenlanders as the perfect examples of an axiom that Christ had instilled in all heathens:

"they only love those that love them, and do good to those from whom they expect the same."

He continues ascribing their traits to those of heathens, although indicating they could be the least corrupt and most simple example of all. Crantz acknowledges that their simple morality may sometimes even shame Christians, and that many evils were unknown to them before the arrival of Europeans (Crantz 2018). Crantz draws upon the Bible to show that in each man, no matter the degree of his savagery and distance from the Gospel, a seed of God is placed. He presents the example of baptized Greenlanders, who apparently became aware of the obvious existence of a great Being, and, astonished with their own previous ignorance, came

to realize that man is made differently from all other animals that have no understanding, thus being made for man to produce food and other purposes.

Crantz's seeming affection for the Greenlanders suddenly disappears when he declares that even the "stupid Greenlanders" in their various interpretations of God prove the truth of the Gospel. Those who believe that a human being's soul is not inherently different from an animal's, he calls the most stupid sort and wicked (Crantz 1820, p. 184).

"Their dim conceptions of religious truth we may conjecture to be some small remnant of the light possessed by the first men, and preserved through the progress of tradition, which, in proportion as their posterity removed to a distance from the seat of civilisation, would of course become more and more obscured by the idle fancies of superstition."

(Crantz 1820, p. 188)

Crantz's reasoning implies an inherent belief that all the notions of Deity originate in the Biblical story of the first man, and that their resemblance around the world confirms its authority. Additionally, the further away from civilization and the more isolated a community is, the further they are from the truth, and the more distorted their beliefs become.

No matter Crantz's appreciation of the Greenlanders, they are, for him, still savages and heathens. A European, civilized man is the carrier of truth, and it is his mission to spread the word of God into the remote areas among those who have strayed as the times passed. The author's reasoning is an echo of anthropocentric thinking, one that assumes humans—or rather, Christians—have a "biblical imperative to control everything that lives" (Moser, 2019, p. 116).

Glassley's mentions of the Inuits are few. He introduces the indigenous population of Greenland briefly in the beginning, as part of the simple facts about the island itself. The traditional activities of Greenlanders are, according to Glassley, deeply connected with the land and sustainably performed for hundreds of years. These practices, such as seal hunting and fishing, are disturbed and devastated by the economic machinery of the global world, and Greenland finds its economy largely subsidized by the Kingdom of Denmark (Glassley 2018, pp. 25–26).

Throughout the book, no names of the locals are mentioned, with the author simply referring to them as either "Greenlanders" or "Inuits." The absence of individual

names is a common recurrence in travel writing depictions of Greenland (Hanrahan 2017). In the continuation of the romantic depiction, Glassley puts the Inuits and their way of life on a pedestal, celebrating their connectedness with earth and wilderness. The descriptions of encounters are so rare that they might appear as an encounter with mythical, otherworldly creatures in an otherworldly landscape. At the very end of the book, Glassley briefly depicts an exchange between a seal hunter and an Inuit woman, before using the interaction to convey a message:

“This is a traditional scene, an old way of commerce and sustainable coexistence with wildlife and wild land that has changed little over hundreds of years. But the catch of cod is diminishing, whales are harder to find, the migratory routes of the reindeer are more difficult to discover, and the seal population is now out of balance with its ecosystem. What was once a strenuous but consistent existence is now threatened.”
(Glassley 2018, p. 184)

Glassley’s absence of the Inuits could be justified by his preoccupation as a geologist and his concern for the planet as a whole:

“But this is not a situation unique to Greenland; on every continent, wilderness is being consumed, and the people who have depended on it, living at its fringe and within its embrace, are forced to relinquish what they cherish. With infinite hubris, the modern world is imposing the consequences of its industrial avarice on lifestyles it knows nothing of. The moral bankruptcy of the rationalizations for the destruction of wilderness and the people who live in harmony with it is staggering.”

(Glassley 2018, p. 184)

In contrast to Crantz’s assumption that the Greenlanders are inferior and supposed to be Christianized, Glassley celebrates their way of life and points the finger the other way around, at the aggressive expansionism of the industrial world that slowly but surely corrupted Greenland and now threatens its authentic existence. Glassley is by no means an exception of his time in doing so, as many contemporary travel writers have addressed current Arctic issues (Borm 2016), but what might set his account apart is the novel depiction of the complex merging of the self and its surroundings.

The Self

While Glassley gives little account of the locals, Crantz is reserved in portraying himself. In the few parts where he does so, it is mostly to state that particular observations are drawn from his own experiences and unsubstantiated by previous accounts or science:

“The hills are of very different elevations; their highest pinnacles do not, in my judgement, equal the mountains of Switzerland.”

(Crantz 1820, p. 50)

“I never myself discovered any petrifications... but towards the end of my stay in Greenland, I was informed by the natives, that several petrified fishes had been found.”

(Crantz 1820, p. 56)

The writer aims to make a clear distinction between general knowledge and his subjective conclusions gathered through inquiry during his stay in Greenland. These subjective conclusions are, as previously shown, most present in his depiction of the locals. However, throughout the whole text, there is no information on the author's life or a more personal reflection on his time in Greenland. Although he is keen to give his opinion, his depiction of both the land and the people breathes distance between the observer and the observed. It seems as though he is an alienated visitor, boarding onto Greenland to make his observations on “that country”. It must be noted that the absence of the self might as well be ascribed to the writing style of the Enlightenment period, rather than the author's intentional abstinence.

In the wide time gap between Crantz and Glassley, researchers suggest that travel writing created a repetitive myth of a hero persona, a brave explorer going into peripheral countries in the name of either country or science, or both (Lubowicka 2019). Environmental concerns eventually gave rise to an ecocritical travel writer (Purgina and Menshikov 2023), one that is even aware of his own privilege to experience Greenland (Borm 2016).

Although still largely led by the notion of the “land to be preserved,” Glassley's relationship of the self and the nature offers a fresh approach to transmitting the value of the traveling experience:

“We are the result of water insinuating itself into the latticework of crystalline forms, of its persuasive discourse with the elements that reside there to run to

the sea. Water encourages unities and pairings; it facilitates the necessity of elements to become molecules, and molecules to form the most complex construct the moment might allow. But water, too, is the catalyst for decay and dissolution. Water decomposes rock just as surely as it encourages reconstruction.”

(Glassley 2018, p. 92)

The writer, not only fully immersed but lost in the experience, conveys the message through merging biological narrative and creative expression:

“It is that process of relentless reconstruction that made us. We live in an illusion that is a consequence of our trial-and-error biology. Our reality, consequently, is an impoverished truth. In pristine wildness, one has a chance to experience small epiphanies that expose one’s preconceptions and misunderstandings.”

(Glassley, 2018, p. 92)

By merging the two, Glassley conveys the meaning of his subjective experience, as well as the importance of Greenland’s preservation on a broader scale. The author challenges both the enlightenment’s rationalist and the romanticism’s hero persona by dissolving himself in the environment, putting the emphasis on the revolving biological processes. Glassley reveals his epiphany: human beings are not only inherently connected to nature, but also its direct result. It is in only in wilderness, he advocates, that humans can recognize their oneness with the rest of the Universe.

Findings

Both Crantz and Glassley recognize the vastness of Greenland’s landscape, which remains a recurring theme over the centuries of travel writing. Furthermore, both authors are interested in the relationship between the people and the land, recognizing its uniqueness and exploring its nature. However, previous content analysis reveals differences in their depiction of Greenland as well as their way of writing at a more fundamental level.

For Crantz, Greenland is an interesting yet distant and unfamiliar object of exploration—a new land that he, as a travel writer, wishes to capture to the best of his abilities in order to inform the reader about a country and its people, who are completely different from everything previously known. His work is extensive and

demonstrates a praiseworthy dedication to researching and collecting knowledge, both through previous accounts and direct experience. As such, he represents an Enlightenment traveller: a rationalist seeking to measure and describe objectively. However, despite his objective tendencies, his approach is still based on the assumption that the people he so extensively studied are inferior and somewhat fundamentally less human than Christians, with their admirable behaviour being guided by instinct and self-preservation, due to their isolated and distant existence. Hence, it becomes the duty of a rational Christian to colonize and baptize the Inuits, bringing them back to the “true teaching.”

Two hundred and fifty-eight years later, Glassley delivers a diametrically opposite message. It is the Western traveller who should learn from the Greenlanders and their way of life, which is now threatened by the progressive expansion of industrial machinery. For Glassley, Greenlanders are an example of living in accordance with nature—a way of life that humanity must adopt if it is to preserve what remains of the wilderness. It is no longer possible to consider humans as the center of the Universe, a separate entity with a God-given purpose to subjugate and conquer the domain of nature. These findings align with larger changes in travel writing, indicating a significant shift away from the metanarratives of the Enlightenment into the openly personal, complex, and expressive forms of Postmodernism.

Lastly, a shift in the understanding of destinations is clearly visible. For Crantz, Greenland is an object of study and a clear geographical location. For Glassley, it is an experience of complex natural processes with which the self is intricately connected. If an analogy is to be taken, Crantz uses the magnifying glass to study Greenland; Glassley is the magnifying glass itself.

Conclusion

It must be noted that the examples chosen as objects of analysis cannot fully represent all travel literature of their respective periods. Due to its widespread and diverse nature, it is safe to assume that history has produced works resembling Glassley's abstract, ecocentric account, just as there are contemporary works that mirror Crantz's informative and empirical approach. Furthermore, it is undeniable that Greenland's vast expanse and unique culture have been subjects of great interest throughout the history of travel writing. However, the previous discussion has brought to light several underlying differences in the perspectives of Greenland, which point to significant societal changes.

Firstly, the contrast between the chosen examples supports previous research findings that the perspective on Greenland has shifted from a "land to be conquered" to a "land to be preserved" (Purgina and Menshikov, 2023, p. 174). Secondly, the depiction of the Inuit people has evolved—from being portrayed as admirable yet savage people in need of Christian salvation – to an almost mythical symbol and role-model society, living in harmony with nature, which the modern, industrialized world is urged to emulate. Thirdly, the author is no longer portrayed as an all-knowing authority conducting measurements and informing civilization about unfamiliar people and lands. Instead, the writer has become a personal and emotional being, consciously infusing the narrative with subjective experiences and abstract, imaginative expressions. This evolution of narrative style indicates a profound shift in the relationship between the traveller and the destination itself. The traveller is no longer a detached observer in a foreign land; he is fundamentally connected to his environment, simultaneously experiencing and shaping the destination.

Some researchers conceptualize the Arctic as a microcosm of global processes, arguing that "what awaits the Arctic, is what awaits the whole Earth" (Purgina and Menshikov, 2023, p. 174). In this sense, portrayals of Greenland can be interpreted as reflections of broader societal transformations. On a broader scale, it can be argued that travel literature projects the society back to itself. As Stubbs and Mylne (2024, p. 2) note, it exemplifies "the multiple facets of modern identity" while simultaneously playing an active role in shaping and constructing those identities.

As such, travel writing has the potential to stimulate and challenge travellers to expand their understanding of destinations, reality, and their place within it.

Destinations are not merely geographical locations or imaginative expectations; they encompass the immediate reality, including everything from the people to the land, the self, and the interactions between these elements. They have evolved into portals that “devour expectations” in the face of incomprehensible reality. Glassley 2018, Introduction).

This project aimed to contribute to research by examining the evolution of travel writing and depictions of Greenland, thereby broadening our understanding of the genre’s importance as both an indicator and a creator of perspectives. Further research could explore the potential future developments of travel writing, as well as the role Greenland might play in the global shift toward ecocentrism or other emerging paradigms.

Appendix 1. On the use of generative AI

Generative AI, more specifically ChatGPT, has been used as a multifunctional tool during the making of this project. At the very beginning of the project, ChatGPT was used as a conversational partner in developing the general theme into a more specific topic. Its help primarily consisted of assessing whether a particular idea was sound, whether multiple questions could be combined, and how these ideas could be integrated into the general semestral topic. Furthermore, I asked ChatGPT to find relevant works of literature that could serve as primary data. However, the literature it suggested was not used as the object of analysis, as I subsequently found alternative sources.

As the project evolved, ChatGPT became particularly useful in generating possible scenarios for further development, which helped me see more clearly whether a particular subject was relevant and worthy of engagement. ChatGPT also proved helpful in understanding different paradigms, more specifically the differences between constructivism and interpretivism. Based on this general understanding, I was then able to further expand my knowledge through legitimate sources.

During the process of data collection and analysis, ChatGPT provided some general ideas on the possible thematic outlook for data examination. It must be noted that the way in which its answers contributed was not direct. Its responses, being mostly general indicators, proved useful as conversational feedback, allowing me to gain a better understanding of my own ideas.

At the final stages of the project, ChatGPT's technical feature of spelling and grammar checking was used to refine the text. Instructions were given to keep changes of expression to a minimum, with its sole duty being to correct word order, punctuation, and spelling mistakes. Finally, the cover photo on the front page of the paper has been produced by ChatGPT as well. The final image was generated after a few adjustments to previous efforts to depict the topic. However, due to the daily restriction of maximum 5 generated images, symbolically, the element of the pen I had to insert myself.

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