

## Kathleen Winter. *Boundless: Tracing Land and Dream in a New Northwest Passage*

Nancy Pedri

Volume 30, numéro 2, fall 2015

URI : [https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/nflds30\\_2rev05](https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/nflds30_2rev05)

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Faculty of Arts, Memorial University

ISSN

1719-1726 (imprimé)

1715-1430 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Pedri, N. (2015). Compte rendu de [Kathleen Winter. *Boundless: Tracing Land and Dream in a New Northwest Passage*]. *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies*, 30(2), 337–339.

default but came at the cost of self-government. We could use a better explanation of these crucial few months at the end of 1933. This point ties back to the exclusion of the Governor from some discussions. Letto refers to John Middleton's telegram of 22 November 1933, in which Middleton describes his efforts to persuade Alderdice against the government's default proposal. Excluding Middleton from the exchange merely cut out the middleman in the talks at a crucial point. Alderdice would surely have understood that the Governor was merely a public servant acting, more often than not, as a functionary on behalf of Whitehall. As talks reached their climax, there would have been no reason for Alderdice to deal with the underling. Letto raises the point, but we are left with the issue unresolved. Perhaps a sequel is coming.

The story of how Newfoundland came to surrender its self-government is more intriguing than how it regained self-government within Canada. We do not have many examples of this to study. The earlier story has been given scant attention by scholars and popular historians alike, even though the political consequences of Newfoundland's crushing debt have come up periodically when countries like Greece find themselves in financial difficulty. Doug Letto has gone a considerable way to remedying that deficiency. As good a job as he has done, Letto thankfully has left a few nagging questions for others to explore.

Edward Hollett  
Gryphon Public Affairs

Kathleen Winter. *Boundless: Tracing Land and Dream in a New Northwest Passage*. Toronto: Anansi, 2014. ISBN: 978-1770893993

The Northwest Passage has fascinated explorers and writers since the end of the fifteenth century. Explorers in search of a northwest passage to the Indies tried to master the land by writing their language into the lines of maps, maps that changed with each charting expedition. Writers have set out to capture the wonders of this land of rock, ice, and water that is forever in flux. More than just a place, the Northwest Passage is an idea that pulls people to it. It is a "land of fables, channel of dreams" (19), a place "where an imaginary world intersects with the real: a place where time flows differently from the linear way in

which we have trained it to behave down here, in the southern world" (6). This mystical world is portrayed in *Boundless: Tracing Land and Dream in a New Northwest Passage*, Kathleen Winter's first-person account of her unanticipated journey through the Canadian Far North.

Joining a group of marine scientists, historians, archeologists, and others as a resident writer, Winter follows roughly the same route taken by John Franklin in 1845 on his third and last Arctic expedition. The emotional charge of walking in the footsteps of this legendary British explorer is coupled with the mystifying sense that comes from knowing that Franklin and his men perished. Her journey begins by boarding a chartered plane in Toronto that takes the group to Kangerlussuaq where their ship is moored. Following a relatively smooth trajectory through the Northwest Passage, punctuated by visits to the 15 port towns that are marked in the introductory two-page map, the ship grinds to a halt on rocks close to the Duke of York Archipelago. Unable to be freed from the rocks, it is left behind when the group is rescued and brought to their final destination, Kugluktuk. This final adventure accentuates the North's deep mystery, highlighting one last time before the journey's end how the land is boundless, infinite and fluid, obscure and baffling.

As in Winter's first novel *Annabel*, a strong sense of place runs through *Boundless*. In this second book, the land is described as a majestic corporeal entity, a living companion to those who travel across it. The land acts on those who are willing to listen to, see, and be transposed into its unnameable wonders (96). Our narrator is one such person. As she journeys deep into the Northwest Passage, she comes to experience the land as a conscious entity, a "mind-substance" (161) that touches her deepest consciousness. Their relationship is intense, its magnetism so forceful that she feels intimately connected with "the North's living energy" (161). This energy anchors her firmly in the experience of the present. The narrator's relationship with the land, described in the closing chapter as "sacred," provides her with a new sense of self, one of physical and spiritual wholeness.

Respect for the land is mirrored in the narrator's method of gathering the details of place that permeate her story. Like a casual visitor, she sets out to experience the northern land through unobtrusive observation, allowing its wonders to reveal themselves. Unlike the tourist, she resists turning the land into a place to be mastered, dominated, altered, or contaminated. The narrator's inquisitive mind and respectful fascination with the Far North — its land, history, and people — captivate for their attention to sensual detail. Throughout *Boundless* this intricate, suggestive Arctic reality carries her from present

sensations to past memories. Autobiographical stories weave in and out of the telling, emphasizing how the northern elements penetrate her very being.

The Arctic reality also renders language ineffective. Winter explains that in the North “words are a secondary language: first we see images, then we feel heat, cold rock, flesh. We taste air before words” (64). Particularly attentive to how her journey impacts her senses, Winter alludes to how the experience must be unspoken, unnamed, in order to remain whole and true. Language, we understand, forces a particular way of looking at the land that the land itself resists. In a place as spectacular and unique as the North, all is spoken wordlessly. In this sense, *Boundless* can be described as a book devoted to silences.

Winter’s *Boundless* is much more than a travel account through an enchanting land that both resists and welcomes discovery to those who are keen to fully experience it. It is a complex, layered story where personal history intersects with colonial history and colonial history intersects with the history of the people who have lived off the land since before it piqued the interest of explorers. Multiple and conflicting versions of this land’s history come together in *Boundless* through the juxtaposition of the “white man’s version of Arctic history” (183) and the stories and ways of the people of this land. Physical, emotional, and political realities bear witness to the collision of interests in a land that so majestically resists ownership.

This deep book incorporates many stories of journeys through the Northwest Passage, conversations with the northern people, autobiographical stories, and a series of photographs to indicate how the place has captured the imagination. Rich in sensory detail, *Boundless* is a book that transports readers to the immensity that is the Northwest Passage.

Nancy Pedri  
Memorial University of Newfoundland