

“How frigid Zones reward the Advent’ers Toils”:  
Natural History Writing and the British Imagination in the  
Making of Hudson Bay, 1741-1752

by

Nicholas Melchin  
B.A., Ottawa University, 2005

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department of History

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## **Supervisory Committee**

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## Abstract

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During the 1740's, Hudson Bay went from an obscure backwater of the British Empire to a locus of colonial ambition. Arthur Dobbs revitalized Northwest Passage exploration, generating new information about the region's environment and indigenous peoples. This study explores evolving English and British representations of Hudson Bay's climate and landscape in travel and natural history writing, and probes British anxieties about foreign environments. I demonstrate how Dobbs' ideology of improvement optimistically re-imagined the North, opening a new discursive space wherein the Subarctic could be favourably described and colonized. I examine how Hudson Bay explorers' responses to difficulties in the Arctic and Subarctic were seen to embody, even amplify, central principles and features of eighteenth-century British culture and identity. Finally, I investigate how latitude served as a benchmark for civilization and savagery, subjugating the Lowland Cree and Inuit to British visions of settlement and improvement in their home territories.

## Table of Contents

Supervisory Committee .....	ii
Abstract .....	iii
Table of Contents .....	iv
List of Figures .....	v
Dedication .....	vi
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: From “Arctic Tempests” to “ <i>North</i> benign”: Natural History Writing, Improvement and the Transformation of the North .....	28
Chapter 2: “Limit the Fury of the Lawless North”: Writing a Colonial Geography of Hudson Bay.....	68
Chapter 3: “Nor would exchange their native Clime, or Modes”: Climate, Landscape and the Representation of Indigenous Peoples of Hudson Bay .....	111
Conclusion .....	153
Bibliography .....	159

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Hudson Bay and Strait, drawn by John Gilkes, from Glyndwr Williams, <i>Voyages of Delusion</i> , 2002, 6. ....	3
Figure 2: Part of a map of Hudson Bay and the inland country, from Arthur Dobbs, <i>An Account of the Countries Adjoining to Hudson's Bay</i> , 1744. ....	13
Figure 3: Map of the 1746 expedition's route to Hudson Bay, from Henry Ellis, <i>A Voyage to Hudson's Bay</i> , 1748. ....	17

## **Dedication**

For Naomi,  
words cannot express.

## Introduction

[L]andscapes can be most parsimoniously defined as perceived and embodied sets of relationships between places, a structure of human feeling, emotion, dwelling, movement and practical activity within a geographical region which may or may not possess precise topographic boundaries or limits. As such, landscapes form potent mediums for socialization and knowledge for to know a landscape is to know who you are, how to go on and where you belong. Personal and social identities are played out in the context of landscapes and the multitude of places that constitute them. To be human is to be place-bound in a fundamental way. Places are elemental existential facts, and the social construction of place, in terms of others, is a universal experiential medium.<sup>1</sup>

Christopher Tilley

Landscape might be seen more profitably as something like the “dreamwork” of imperialism, unfolding its own movement in time and space from a central point of origin and folding back on itself to disclose both utopian fantasies of the perfected imperial prospect and fractured images of unresolved ambivalence and unsuppressed resistance.<sup>2</sup>

W.J.T. Mitchell

This study is about a landscape. Or rather, I am interested in the ideas that a certain group of people in history had about a foreign landscape, and the people who inhabited it. I am less interested in the actual details of this landscape, though these will become important from time to time, than in the notions by which this landscape was known, how these ideas influenced the ways people acted in relation to it, and how this interaction transformed their ideas of both the landscape and themselves. As the quotations cited above indicate, I embrace the perspective that understandings of landscapes are influenced by a complex mixture of factors, including the actual physical conditions of a place as well as the particular assumptions and notions of observers about that place. This is not a contest where either ‘reality’ or ‘bias’ wins out. Rather, it is a medium or moment of contact, wherein both reality and identity are defined in relation to one another. This study treats landscapes as a canvas upon which hopes and fears are painted.

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher Tilley, *The Materiality of Stone: Explorations in Landscape Phenomenology* (Oxford, Berg Publishers, 2004), 25.

<sup>2</sup> W.J.T. Mitchell, “Imperial Landscape,” in *Landscape and Power*, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 10.

The landscape that I am interested in is Hudson Bay. Or more specifically, the “dreamwork” of Hudson Bay: I am concerned with the shape that people’s ideas about this landscape bent it into, the manners in which ideas about this place influenced perceptions of its inhabitants, and the moments and ways through which this peculiarly large indent in the Arctic coast of North America came to be seen as a notable landscape in the English and British imagination.<sup>3</sup>

When European countries first started exploring the Americas in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, it was not evident that this region would be of any significance to England. Even after Henry Hudson first happened upon the bay that now bears his name in 1611, this vast and difficult to reach inland sea was visited less than a handful of times over the next half century by European explorers. And while many of these explorers ended up perishing in Hudson Bay, they were in truth less interested in the region itself than in discovering a route through it to the Orient. It was only with Radisson and Groseilliers’ realization that the Bay region carried an enormous and untapped wealth in furs that Hudson Bay came to be a destination in its own right. In 1670, the Company of Adventurers of England Trading into Hudson’s Bay (the Hudson’s Bay Company) was incorporated by royal charter and established an English presence on the Bay-side,

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<sup>3</sup> On the subject of using the terms ‘British’ versus ‘English’, I follow Linda Colley’s interpretation that an important element in the formation of a distinct sense of British nationalism was the sporadic but ongoing conflict with France over the course of the eighteenth century. However, I do not seek to downplay the role that empire played in this process, seeing these forces as mutually reinforcing rather than competing factors. The use of the terms “British Empire” and “British Colonies” by historian John Oldmixon (an author who will figure prominently in my analysis) in 1708 points to how metropolitan promoters and historians were self-identifying as British Nationalists even in the earliest stages of the “forging” period that Colley blocks out. In this study, for the period leading up to the eighteenth century, I will solely use the term English to describe these peoples and their activities. As my analysis moves into the eighteenth century I will employ the terms British and Britain where authors or subjects are referring to this emerging nation, which includes England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland, or English and England where authors or subjects are only referring to England. See Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1701-1837* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), 1-9; John Oldmixon, *The British Empire in America, containing the history of the discovery, settlement, progress and present state of all the British colonies, on the continent and islands of America*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 2 vols. (London, 1741), 1: 542.

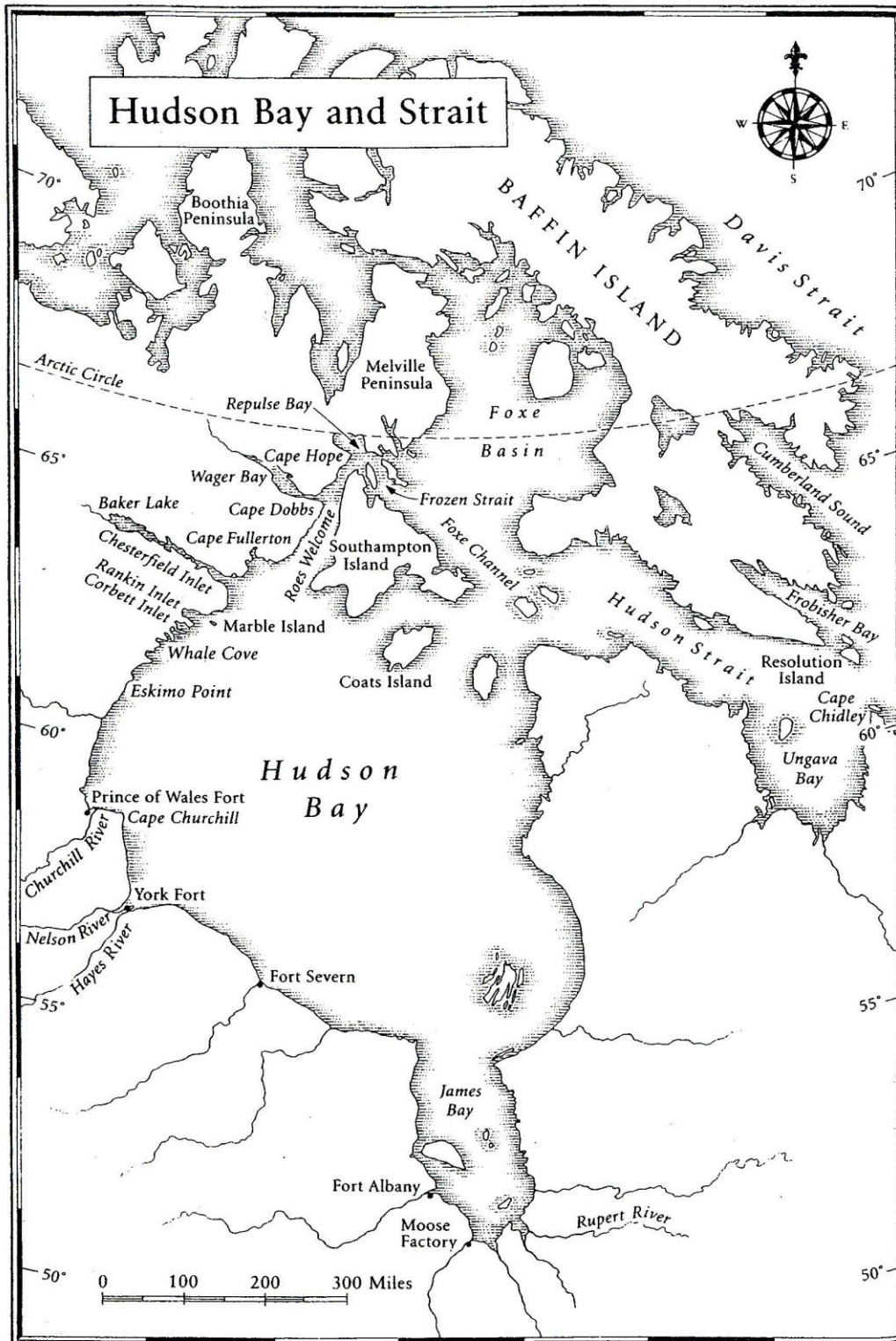


Figure 1: Hudson Bay and Strait, drawn by John Gilkes, from Glyndwr Williams, *Voyages of Delusion*, 2002, 6.

trading English goods for furs with the Lowland Cree people (the Muskekeowuck Athinuwick) who lived in the region.<sup>4</sup>

The first fifty years of the Hudson's Bay Company were tumultuous to say the least. After only a few decades of operation, the Company found itself in the midst of international conflict. French forces seized control of the majority of the Bay-side posts before the end of the century. The Company regained control of their posts with the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 and resumed their trading activities out of the Bay. Faced with competition from French traders who travelled overland from the Saint Lawrence River and Great Lakes regions, and interested in protecting their monopoly from potential rivals at home, the Company operated their trade in the strictest of secrecy and minimum of risk. When James Knight briefly resumed the search for the elusive Northwest Passage along the western shores of the Bay in 1719, the public was misinformed of his purpose and heard nothing of the disappearance of his party.<sup>5</sup>

It is during this long period of silence that my study picks up the thread. For with the Company's stranglehold on information at the same time as European explorers and travellers were spreading across the globe, publishing stories of their experiences in strange lands for audiences back home, Hudson Bay was becoming a forgotten backwater. Indeed, travel literature was an extraordinarily popular genre. From the seventeenth century onwards there was a growing interest in the cultures and geography

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<sup>4</sup> Victor Lytwyn asserts that "Muskekeowuck Athinuwick, the original people of the Hudson Bay lowlands, have been known by a number of different names, including "Swampy Cree, Homegaurd Cree, and Lowland Cree." I will follow Lytwyn's lead and describe this group as the Lowland Cree in my subsequent discussions. (Victor P. Lytwyn, *Muskeowuck Athinuwick: Original People of the Great Swampy Land* [Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2002], xi.).

<sup>5</sup> Glyndwr Williams, *Voyages of Delusion: The Northwest Passage in the Age of Reason* (London: Harper Collins, 2002), xvii-xviii, 4, 25. For further discussion of this period, see E.E. Rich, *Hudson's Bay Company 1670-1870*, Vol.I:1670-1763 (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1961), Book II, 61-426.

of the wider world on the part of British and European elites.<sup>6</sup> This trend was not without precedent; works such as John Harris' *Navigantium atque itinerantium bibliotheca: or, a compleat collection of voyages and travels*, published by bookseller Awnsham Churchill and his brother John in 1705, built upon the older traditions of Hakluyt and Purchas, whose voluminous collections published narratives of travel from around the world (1598-1600). However, between the mid seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a number of shifts occurred in both the techniques that writers employed to represent the natural world, as well as in their ideas about humanity's relationship to the natural environment.

Ralph Bauer roots this "general transition" in the writings of Francis Bacon (1561-1626). Dissatisfied with the state of contemporary (Aristotelian) philosophical inquiry, Bacon offered a new model based on inductive reasoning, emphasizing personal observation, investigation and experimentation as ways to move from the "level of the observably particular"<sup>7</sup> to general axioms. In doing so, Bacon challenged older traditions that relied on the established authority of classical and biblical texts. He argued that natural histories, which offered a systematic empirical study of nature, would form the foundation for a new natural philosophy. Where older natural histories were seen as hamstrung by their eclecticism and superficiality, Bacon suggested a host of techniques and methods by which inquirers could eliminate subjectivity and focus their attention on discovering the underlying laws that explained natural phenomena.<sup>8</sup> In 1660, these

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<sup>6</sup> Glyndwr Williams and P.J. Marshall, *The Great map of Mankind: Perceptions of New Worlds in the Age of Enlightenment* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), 7, 45-61.

<sup>7</sup> Ralph Bauer, *The Cultural Geography of Colonial American Literature* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 14-15.

<sup>8</sup> Patrick Chassé, "'Hereticks for Believing the Antipodes': Scottish Colonial Identities in the Darien, 1698-1700" (MA thesis, University of Victoria, 2007), 41-42.

practices were embraced as official policy by the torchbearers of New Science, the Royal Society of London.<sup>9</sup>

This new direction of thinking tapped into deeply held assumptions about the relationship between humans and their environment. Keith Thomas argues that since the sixteenth century in England, agricultural reforms had encouraged the ‘improvement’ of barren and waste lands by transforming them into agriculturally productive lands. This notion of improvement carried an ancient and profoundly religious association: by the will of God the Earth had been left unfinished, and it was humanity’s duty to improve upon this work. Advocates of agricultural improvement saw their mission as not simply economic, but also moral. Extending cultivation and trade furthered the spread of civilization.<sup>10</sup> Baconian science embodied these notions of improvement. By gaining knowledge of the laws that explained the natural world, natural historians’ empirical study of nature was intended to free humankind from the bondage of nature, allowing humans to manipulate the natural world to improve their condition.<sup>11</sup>

One of the earliest and most noteworthy examples of Baconian natural history was written to direct English Protestants settling in Catholic Ireland during the 1650’s. The documentation of plants, wildlife and agricultural practices within Gerard Boate’s *Ireland’s Natural History*, and his brother Arnold’s *An Interrogatory Relating more particularly to the Husbandry and Natural History of Ireland*, informed plans for improving economic activity and resource exploitation by the newly arrived Protestant settlers. As Patrick Chassé remarks, “English ... colonial activities in Ireland served as a

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<sup>9</sup> Bauer, *The Cultural Geography*, 14-15.

<sup>10</sup> Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: A History of the Modern Sensibility* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), 254-255; Chassé, “Hereticks for Believing the Antipodes”, 40; and Williams, *The Great Map of Mankind*, 48-49.

<sup>11</sup> Chassé, “Hereticks for Believing the Antipodes”, 41.

basis for cementing the exploitative relationship between the new natural history, improvement, and colonialism.”<sup>12</sup> Not surprisingly, Arthur Dobbs, the man largely responsible for promoting the improvement and settlement of Hudson Bay almost one hundred years later, did so through his natural history of that region. His great grandfather was among the first wave of English Protestants to settle in Ireland following the suppression of the Irish armies and the late sixteenth century colonization of Ireland. Dobbs’ grandfather and father prospered over the seventeenth century when English and Protestant authority was increasingly asserted through initiatives such as those of the Boate brothers.<sup>13</sup> Over this period, discourses of improvement, natural history and colonialism were intertwined and established as dominant perspectives among English and British elites.

Over the course of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Bacon’s project of systematizing the study of nature through empirical evidence collection was refined, developed and made more accessible. This project was transformative. Mary Louise Pratt argues that with the publication of Swedish naturalist Carl Linné’s (Latin: Linnaeus) study of plant classification, *Systema Naturae* (*The System of Nature*, 1735), “[t]ravel and travel writing would never be the same again. . . . [Whether] or not an expedition was primarily scientific, or the traveler a scientist, natural history played a part in it. Specimen gathering, the building up of collections, the naming of new species, the recognition of known ones, became standard themes in travel and travel books.”<sup>14</sup> These new practices allowed learned natural philosophers and mundane travellers alike to partake in this new

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<sup>12</sup> Chassé, “Hereticks for Believing the Antipodes”, 43.

<sup>13</sup> Desmond Clarke, *Arthur Dobbs Esquire, 1689-1765: Surveyor General of Ireland Protector and Governor of North Carolina* (London: The Bodley Head, 1958), 9-16.

<sup>14</sup> Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (Routledge: London, 1992), 27.

project of knowledge collection. As travel texts held an increasingly important role in mediating between networks of scientific practitioners and the reading public, greater importance was placed on the authority and legitimacy of the eye-witness travel writer/natural historian, and the linguistic techniques of representation and classification, to accurately represent distant realities. Natural history writing allowed for a new kind of transnational European community: “an empire of science.”<sup>15</sup>

Another important result of this new kind of writing was that the eye-witness traveller/authors’ accounts were increasingly available to metropolitan historians and geographers seeking to write with authority on distant lands and peoples. These ‘armchair geographers’ became a common phenomenon in the eighteenth century. Numerous authors compiled first-hand accounts to present authoritative collections on expansive topics such as world history, world geography or the scope and extent of British colonial activity. These writings tended to carry strong overtones of patriotism and civic pride; authors glorified the work of their nation and the efforts of settlers and colonial officials to bring the light of civilization into dark corners of the world. Needless to say, this trend highlights the optimism and ‘improving’ fervour of English Enlightenment gentlemen.<sup>16</sup>

Most significant for these purposes regarding these broad cultural transformations is that while the rest of the world was becoming more accessible to the British reading public, the lack of new information about the Hudson Bay region meant that it faded into relative obscurity for a time. The representations of the Bay region during this period of neglect will be discussed in detail in chapter one, but what is important to note now is that from 1730 to the mid 1740’s, Hudson Bay went from being a backwater of the

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<sup>15</sup> Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 27-30. This topic will be taken up further in chapter two.

<sup>16</sup> Marshall and Williams, *The Great Map of Mankind*, 45-61.

Empire to a locus of significant colonial ambition. The man responsible for this transformation was Arthur Dobbs. A moderately wealthy landlord in Ireland, Dobbs occupied several local official positions before being elected to Irish Parliament in 1727. During the 1720's he published a number of writings, including celestial observations from Castle Dobbs in the Royal Society's *Philosophical Transactions*, as well as an analysis of the state of Ireland in *Essay on the Trade and Improvement of Ireland*, which provides suggestions for improving Irish employment and living standards, removing impediments to commerce and trade, and achieving eventual union with Britain.<sup>17</sup> During his early years as a politician Dobbs worked to effect agricultural and economic reforms at home and he took a keen interest in British colonies overseas, believing that Britain's future lay in these distant lands. He viewed the prosperous peacetime administration of English Prime Minister Robert Walpole to be lethargic and complacent in its overseas policy, and he worried that the French and Spanish would capitalize upon Britain's inactivity. To this end, Dobbs developed networks among prominent English merchants, businessmen and politicians, including Walpole, to advocate that Britain take a more active role in their American colonies as a means to open new channels for trade and expand British naval power.<sup>18</sup>

Some time in 1730 or 1731, Dobbs began to take an interest in the Northwest Passage, despite the failures of previous explorers to find it. While the germ of his interest in the Passage remains unclear, its potential increase to trade and commerce must

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<sup>17</sup> Clarke goes on to state that Dobbs was "a strong advocate of free trade ... In his comments on trade and commerce generally, Dobbs was many years in advance of his time and antedated Adam Smith by more than forty years". (Clarke, *Arthur Dobbs Esquire*, 24, 26, 28-30.)

<sup>18</sup> Clarke, *Arthur Dobbs Esquire*, 31-37.

have been enticing.<sup>19</sup> In 1731, Dobbs wrote a lengthy memorandum arguing that, by virtue of Captain Luke Fox's tidal observations from 1633, the Passage did indeed exist, that it would be found among the inlets along the north west coast of the Bay, and that its discovery would give Britain an immeasurable advantage over Spain in the Pacific. The Passage would also provide Britain with untold wealth through access to new markets. Dobbs' memorandum "was an appeal to national pride, to commercial acquisitiveness, to old fantasies of the wealth of the South Seas."<sup>20</sup> In the next years he presented his scheme to men of importance such as Colonel Bladen, Lords Commissioner of Trade and Plantations, and Sir Charles Wager, First Lord of the Admiralty. Through these men he was introduced to key figures in the Hudson's Bay Company. By 1735, Dobbs had gained access to the Company's charter, which he used to persuade the reluctant Governor of the Company, Sir Bibye Lake, to send sloop voyages north from Churchill factory to Ne Ultra (the northerly limit of the known west coast of the Bay) to measure the tides in search of a Passage. Dobbs argued that since the Company's charter accorded them a monopoly on trade in the region, they stood to gain most from any discovery, and so were obliged to pursue exploration.<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately for Dobbs, the sloop voyages were a failure, either never setting out (1736), or never reaching the destination (1737). Lake cited the costs and perceived danger of the voyages to bring an end to them, forcing Dobbs to seek alternative means of support to pursue his objective.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Clarke, *Arthur Dobbs Esquire*, 37.

<sup>20</sup> William Barr and Glyndwr Williams eds., *Voyages to Hudson Bay in Search of a Northwest Passage, 1741-1747: Vol. 1, The Voyage of Christopher Middleton, 1741-1742* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1994), 3, 33-34.

<sup>21</sup> Barr and Williams, *The Voyage of Christopher Middleton*, 4-6.

<sup>22</sup> Barr and Williams, *The Voyage of Christopher Middleton*, 7.

During these same years, Dobbs approached a ship's captain employed by the Company – one Christopher Middleton – in hope of gleaning first-hand information on the region and the prospect of a Passage. Fatefully, Middleton harboured longstanding desires to seek the Passage. He agreed to help Dobbs and gather information. Dobbs in turn promised that if a discovery voyage should be arranged, Middleton would command it. Unfortunately, as long as the Company's monopoly was unchallenged no other private investors would support such a venture. And by 1739 war was brewing against Spain over disputes involving trade with the West Indies, so the government was not prepared to finance his scheme. Surprisingly, however, when Wager spoke to King George II on the matter in the spring of 1740, the King approved of the idea: Royal sanction gave Wager the authority to support Dobbs' project, and planning commenced to organize a naval voyage the following spring, with Middleton in command. The voyage departed in early June, a month late, and upon reaching the Bay decided to head directly to Churchill to prepare for winter. The expedition set off again in late June, 1742.<sup>23</sup> Middleton sailed his ships north along the coast, exploring Wager River (now Wager Bay) for signs of a passage, but after pushing as far up as it seemed they could go, his lieutenant, John Rankin, declared Wager to be an inlet. Middleton proceeded north into Repulse Bay, but found no route through the ice, only that the erratic tides in the strait of Sir Thomas Roe's Welcome were due to the hitherto unknown Frozen Strait, which separated Melville Peninsula from Southampton Island. Middleton returned to England in disappointment in the autumn of 1742.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Barr and Williams, *The Voyage of Christopher Middleton*, 7-8, 99-104. Dobbs approached Middleton based on articles Middleton published in the *Philosophical Transactions* on magnetic variation in the Bay.

<sup>24</sup> Barr and Williams, *The Voyage of Christopher Middleton*, 105-109.

Initially Dobbs shared Middleton's disappointment. However, after scrutinizing Middleton's report he was still convinced that the Passage existed, in Wager River no less, and that Middleton had not pushed far enough south. Middleton became exasperated by Dobbs' insistence. When Dobbs was informed by members of Middleton's crew that the captain had falsified his data and was concealing signs of a Passage, he grew suspicious. The matter rapidly became public when Dobbs brought the matter to the Admiralty who demanded official explanation from witnesses, causing Dobbs and Middleton to set upon one another in a pamphlet war that lasted two years.<sup>25</sup> Glyndwr Williams explains that the crux of the matter lay in Dobbs' comment that if a Passage was found, it would "be a great Inducement to open the Trade to the Bay."<sup>26</sup> Dobbs connected his argument for a Passage to his larger scheme to challenge the Company's monopoly in the Bay region; he believed Middleton's claims that the Passage did not exist implied that Middleton was complicit with the Company in hiding its existence to protect their trade security. By blaming Middleton, Dobbs cleared his own name and alleviated the concerns of potential investors as he planned for a second voyage of discovery.<sup>27</sup>

Despite never having visited the Bay, in 1744 Dobbs published a natural history of the region entitled, *An Account of the Countries Adjoining to Hudson's Bay*. In true Baconian style, Dobbs' *Account* was based on first-hand reports of men who had spent time in the region, including a significant amount of unpublished evidence procured from the Hudson's Bay Company, which provided British readers with elaborate descriptions

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<sup>25</sup> Barr and Williams, *The Voyage of Christopher Middleton*, 239-240. Williams insinuates that Dobbs may have fabricated the allegations against Middleton and bribed the crew members, but the evidence is inconclusive.

<sup>26</sup> Arthur Dobbs, quoted in Barr and Williams, *The Voyage of Christopher Middleton*, 241.

<sup>27</sup> Barr and Williams, *The Voyage of Christopher Middleton*, 241.

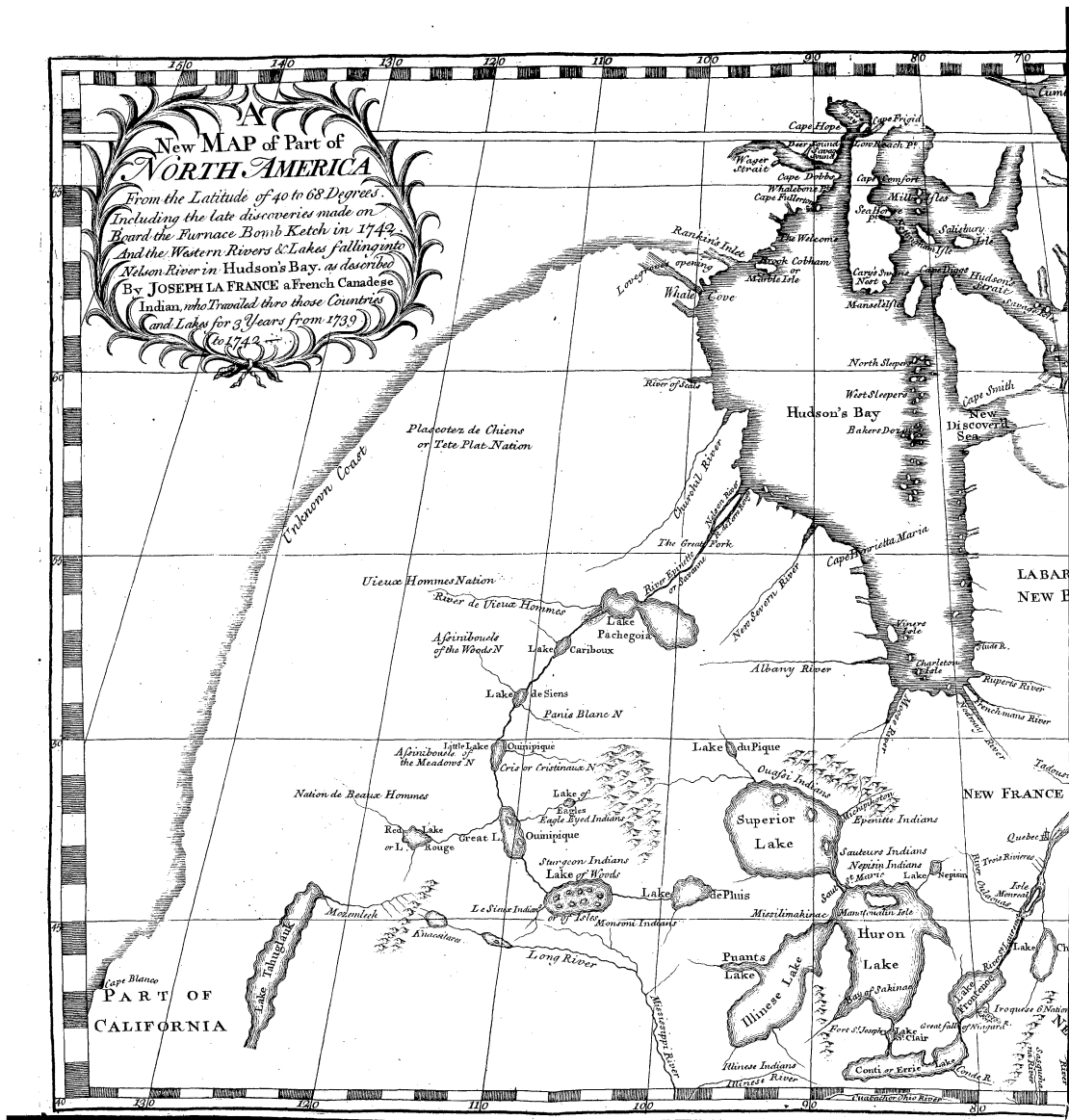


Figure 2: Part of a map of Hudson Bay and the inland country, from Arthur Dobbs, *An Account of the Countries Adjoining to Hudson's Bay*, 1744.

of the flora, fauna and inhabitants of this little known region. Within these pages he intertwines arguments for the existence of a Passage with powerful attack on the Company's monopoly, critiquing its negligence in pursuing exploration or expanding the trade. He juxtaposes the meagre Company posts along the rim of the Bay against the rapid progress of French, Saint Lawrence based trade through the interior and into river heads upland from the Bay, emphasizing their extreme threat to the British trade. In order to wrest this trade from the French, he calls for the opening of trade and the establishment of permanent settlements in the more favourably represented regions inland from the Bay-side.<sup>28</sup> Other than a brief presentation by Middleton to the Royal Society upon his return, which was published in 1743,<sup>29</sup> Dobbs' natural history was the first attempt to present a complete picture of the region to British readers since John Oldmixon wrote his authoritative compilation *The British Empire in America*, in 1708. Oldmixon published a second edition of this book in 1741; however, the only new details about the Bay region included were already over twenty years old and his history of the region ends with the 1713 Treaty of Utrecht.<sup>30</sup> There were competing images of Hudson Bay to Dobbs'

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<sup>28</sup> Barr and Williams, *The Voyage of Christopher Middleton*, 245-248.

<sup>29</sup> This presentation was titled *Captain Middleton's Account of the Extraordinary Degrees and Surprising Effects of Cold in Hudson's Bay, North America*. Middleton's paper was published in his book, *A Vindication of the Conduct of Captain Christopher Middleton* (London: Jacob Robinson, 1743), 193-206, as part of his response to Dobbs' attacks, and it was printed again in the *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society*, XLII (1742-43): 157-171.

<sup>30</sup> In the 1708 edition, the author notes that "Notwithstanding the pressing Instance I made to the concerned in the Hudson's-Bay Trade for Information to continue the Account of it down to this time; it not being yet come to hand, I am, obliged to be short therein; though I was very desirous to have enlarged a little upon it, on Account of the present Revival of the Fur-Trade." The only details added in the second edition are to present the results from the Treaty of Utrecht, which saw Bay-side posts return to English control. Oldmixon, *The British Empire in America*, 1: 566-567. See also Gyndwr Williams, "The Hudson's Bay Company and its Critics in the Eighteenth Century," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5<sup>th</sup> Series, vol. 20 (1970): 151-152.

Regarding the timing of Oldmixon's second edition, it is not clear exactly why he published it in 1741, though in the preface of the second edition he declares to have been "importuned to publish it above 25 Years ago", but his "unhappy Absence from London for many of those Years in a vexatious office", along with "[waiting] for new Memoirs", "put that out of [his] Head." More importantly, he explains that "Till now the Interest of *Great Britain*, in the Preservation and Welfare of our *American Colonies*, is so well

version, such as that of the Company ship's Captain William Coats, who remarked that, "what Mr. Dobbs has thought fitt to call a description of Hudson's Bay, is so erroneous, so superficial, and so trifling, in almost every circumstance. So contrary to the experience and concurrent testimony of every person who have resided on that Country..."<sup>31</sup>

However, these opposing viewpoints were not available to the public in the 1740's, and being both the most current and scientifically up-to-date work on the region, Dobbs' perspective commanded considerable currency in Britain.<sup>32</sup>

By the spring of 1746, Dobbs finally managed to organize a second, privately funded voyage led by one of Middleton's former officers, William Moor. Tensions with France meant that the voyage was obliged to depart in convoy under naval protection.

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understood, and the present Juncture for promoting and securing that Interest so favourable, that I could no longer defer this Impression, the Contents of which being largely set forth in the following Sheets". Given his unfavourable opinion of Hudson Bay and the prospects of trade there, it is hard to believe that Dobbs' promotional activity spurred him to act at this juncture. More likely, he is referring to the sharply declining popularity of Walpole's policy of non-aggression in the late 1730's, and rising sentiments of expansionism and imperial patriotism which resulted from reports of Spanish harassment against British Merchants in the West Indies. Before the end of 1739, England had declared war on Spain (the War of Jenkin's Ear). While Oldmixon was a staunch Whig, he was also a strong advocate for the American colonies, which had received less attention under Walpole's cautious administration. This rapid progress of events may have invigorated the aging Oldmixon to finally update his book, which was released only one year before he died. See Oldmixon, *The British Empire in America*, 1: v; Pat Rogers, "Oldmixon, John (1672/3–1742)", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/20695>, accessed 16 Nov 2009], and Stephen Taylor, "Walpole, Robert, first earl of Orford (1676–1745)", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/28601>, accessed 16 Nov 2009]

Regarding Oldmixon's relative marginality with regard to the growing public debate about the Bay-side conditions, Moodie says: "Although the 1741 edition of *The British Empire in America* was timely in terms of the growing controversy about the Company's lands, Oldmixon's views on this subject were not incorporated into the public debate. Possibly this was because his work remained obscure *vis-à-vis* the other publications, which were associated directly with the popular free trade movement and public interest in a North West Passage. It is more likely, however, that this was owing, on the one hand, to the Company's failure to defend itself publically and, on the other, to the circumstance that many of Oldmixon's opinions were not in accord with those of the Company's critics." D.W. Moodie, *An Historical Geography of Agricultural Patterns and resource appraisals in Rupert's Land, 1670-1774* (unpubl. Ph.D. thesis, Univ. of Alberta, 1972), 113-114.

<sup>31</sup> William Coats quoted in Barr and Williams, *The Voyage of Christopher Middleton*, 248.

<sup>32</sup> Barr and Williams, *The Voyage of Christopher Middleton*, 248; D.W. Moodie, "Science and Reality: Arthur Dobbs and the eighteenth-century geography of Rupert's Land," *Journal of Historical Geography*, vol 2. no. 4 (1976): 297-301.

Similar to the 1741 expedition, the voyage entered the Bay late, and after only preliminary investigations along the west coast they headed south to prepare for winter, this time at York Factory, even further south than Middleton's wintering. The following June they headed north and, using the longboats to a much greater degree than in previous expeditions, they probed a number of notable inlets, including Pistol Bay, Rankin Inlet, Chesterfield Inlet and Wager Bay, for signs of a Passage. To their dismay none was found, and they returned in defeat to England in October 1747.<sup>33</sup>

Upon their return, Dobbs sought every means possible to blame the captains and council for the expedition's failure, and there is some indication he sought to organize another voyage to further investigate Chesterfield Inlet. Dobbs was not alone in this. A young gentleman named Henry Ellis had accompanied the voyage as ship's hydrographer, mineralist, draftsman, scientific observer, and agent of the Northwest Committee (the organization representing the voyage sponsors). By August 1748 Ellis published a book, *A Voyage to Hudson's Bay, by the Dobbs Galley and California, in the Years 1746 and 1747*, recounting his experiences and suggesting that a Passage might still be found. Ellis had been made a Fellow in the Royal Society the February after his return from the Bay, and was subsequently granted an audience with the Prince of Wales, to whom his narrative was dedicated. Ellis' version quickly came to be seen as the 'official' account. As an eyewitness natural history, his account was more complete and detailed than Middleton's brief presentation, bringing the authority of the eyewitness author that Dobbs' *Account* lacked. His attitudes on the climate and potential of the region were much in line with those of Dobbs, and he provided detailed descriptions as

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<sup>33</sup> William Barr and Glyndwr Williams eds., *Voyages to Hudson Bay in Search of a Northwest Passage, 1741-1747: Volume II, The Voyage of William Moor and Francis Smith, 1746-1747* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1995), 48-66.

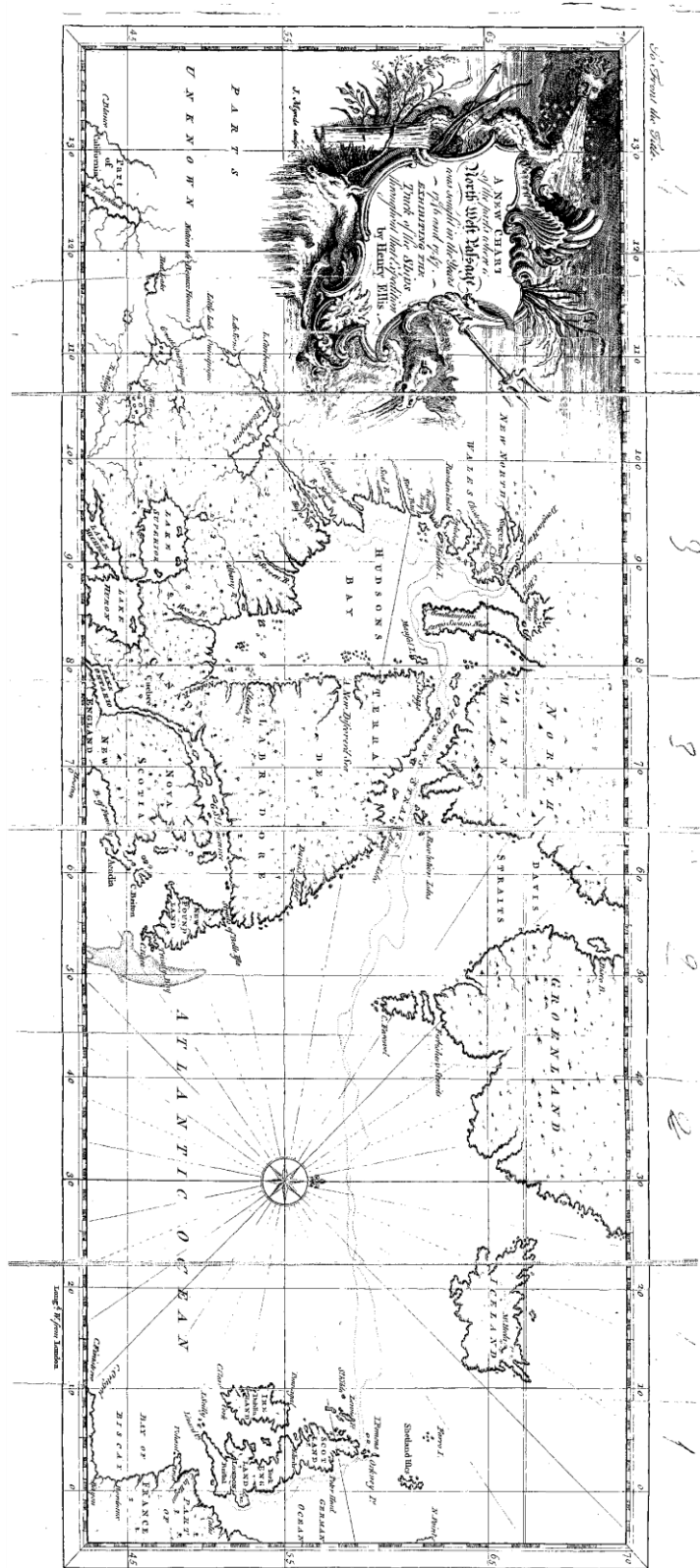


Figure 3: Map of the 1746 expedition's route to Hudson Bay, from Henry Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson's Bay*, 1748.

well as illustrations of the flora, fauna, geography, climate and inhabitants of the region, focusing in depth on their wintering at York.<sup>34</sup>

In May of the same year, the first volume of another narrative of the voyage, *An Account of a Voyage for the Discovery of the North-west Passage*, was printed; this one by the clerk of the *California*, likely Theodore Swaine Drage.<sup>35</sup> As with Ellis' account, Drage offers a natural history of the region, though often in much greater depth. While there are numerous similarities in the narratives, they also disagree on a number of points and it is evident from Drage's second volume (February 1749) that he harboured bitterness towards Ellis for stealing the public eye.<sup>36</sup> It is notable given the recognition Ellis received that Drage criticizes him for sloppy methods and disingenuous representation, at the same time stressing his own meticulous process of evidence collection and note taking. However, this only served to make Drage's account seem all

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<sup>34</sup> Barr and Williams, *The Voyage of William Moor and Francis Smith*, 70-73, 311-313, 360-363.

<sup>35</sup> There is some dispute about the exact identity of this author. The published book's title page cites the author simply as "the Clerk of the *California*". In York Factory Governor James Isham's Journal, the clerk is called Drage or Dragg, but studies in 1949 and 1950 by Howard Eavenson argue that the *California*'s clerk was not Drage at all, but Charles Swaine, who went on to command two Philadelphia-based explorations into Labrador and Hudson Strait in the early 1750's. Though Eavenson maintains that Swaine is a different person from Drage, historian Percy Adams suggests they are the same person, properly called Theodore Swaine Drage, who used different names depending upon whether he was in England or America. Though the Library of Congress, in 1999, still named the clerk and author of *Account of a Voyage* Swaine, in the edited collection, Williams and Barr use the name Drage. I will follow their lead and use the name Theodore Swaine Drage (Drage) when discussing the clerk of the *California*, author of the *Account of a Voyage*. See Barr and Williams, *The Voyage of William Moor and Francis Smith*, 358-360, and Percy Adams, "The Man Who Married Hannah Boyte, and other cases from the files of a scholar detective," *Soundings*, vol.82 no.1-2 (Spring/Summer 1999): 183-203. For Eavenson's alternative perspective see Howard Eavenson, *Map Makers and Indian Traders* (Pittsburg: U of Pittsburg Press, 1949), and Howard Eavenson, *Swaine and Drage/A Sequel to Map Makers and Indian Traders* (Pittsburg: U of Pittsburg Press, 1950).

<sup>36</sup> Barr and Williams, *The Voyage of William Moor and Francis Smith*, 357-363. This bitterness extended beyond the recognitions Ellis received, and Williams and Barr point out that the Journal of York Factory Governor James Isham describes these authors as having been rivals throughout the wintering at York, to the point where "threats of murder" were exchanged. The implications of this, and other omissions from the published narratives will be taken up in chapter two. See Barr and Williams, *The Voyage of William Moor and Francis Smith*, 56-57.

the more “pedantic, disputacious, [and] dogmatical” to certain later readers such as John Barrow, secretary of the Admiralty in the early nineteenth century.<sup>37</sup>

With the failure of the voyage to find the Passage, the North West Committee’s finances were in shambles, forcing Dobbs to turn his efforts elsewhere. Along with a number of prominent politicians and merchants, Dobbs organized a petition and manifesto to challenge the Company’s monopoly and seek a charter for the North West Committee to trade in the region. These were presented to the Privy Council and Law Officers, but were rebuffed. Dobbs also attempted to raise the matter in Parliament, but this too was opposed, leading him to withdraw from the public eye. However, anti-monopoly sentiments were prevalent in public opinion, and the free trade movement had its own impetus by this point. Due to the efforts of a core group of merchants, in 1749 a committee was appointed by the House of Commons to evaluate trade in Hudson Bay.<sup>38</sup> During the two-month public inquiry, all of the Company’s efforts at secrecy were foiled and innumerable details regarding its operations laid bare.<sup>39</sup> At the same time, the environmental conditions and natural resources of the Bay region took on a new importance to Members of Parliament, and became subjects of public dispute. The merchants expressed reluctance to continue financing searches for a Passage while prohibited from engaging in trade in the region. The Company did not offer substantial defence for its inactivity in exploration and expansion of trade, rather emphasizing the stability of their trade, their efforts to explore the coasts, and the fact that independent voyages had not found a Passage either. To Dobbs’ great dismay, the parliamentary committee decided in the Company’s favour: the operation of the Hudson Bay trade was

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<sup>37</sup> Barr and Williams, *The Voyage of William Moor and Francis Smith*, 360.

<sup>38</sup> Barr and Williams, *The Voyage of William Moor and Francis Smith*, 311-314.

<sup>39</sup> Barr and Williams, *The Voyage of William Moor and Francis Smith*, 318.

considered too expensive and too fragile to leave open. This decision effectively neutered any future attempts to privately finance explorations for the Passage.<sup>40</sup>

Dobbs did not immediately give up his quest to open the Hudson Bay trade. In the early 1750's, he devised several new schemes to challenge the Company monopoly and open trade in Labrador or nearby regions, but none amounted to anything.<sup>41</sup> However, he did secretly conspire to produce a book with Joseph Robson, a former Company employee and witness during the 1749 inquiry, who had spent much time on the Bay-side as a mason and factory servant. Dobbs' involvement in producing Robson's *An Account of Six Years Residence in Hudson's-Bay, From 1733-1736, and 1744-1747*, was unknown until Williams uncovered the evidence in 1959,<sup>42</sup> but his text attacks the Company at every juncture, presents the inland regions in an extremely favourable light, and emphasizes the benefits to be gained by opening trade and settling the Bay region. Robson also discusses conditions on the Bay-side in greater detail and with more authority than Dobbs' *Account*, with many similarities to other natural history narratives in highlighting details about the geography, climate, animal and plant life, living conditions and inhabitants of the region. Though Dobbs continued to hope a Passage would be found right up to his death in 1765, this was the last time he brought public attention to the cause of the Hudson Bay region. For by the time Robson's book was

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<sup>40</sup> Barr and Williams, *The Voyage of William Moor and Francis Smith*, 314-316. See also Williams, "The Hudson's Bay Company and its Critics," 162-163.

<sup>41</sup> Williams, "The Hudson's Bay Company and its Critics," 163-164.

<sup>42</sup> Williams, "The Hudson's Bay Company and its Critics," 165-166. See also Glyndwr Williams, "Arthur Dobbs and Joseph Robson: New Light on the Relationship between Two Early Critics of the Hudson's Bay Company," *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 40 no. 2 (1959): 132-6.

published in 1752, Dobbs had already been made Governor of North Carolina, and within a year he moved across the Atlantic to fulfill his appointment.<sup>43</sup>

It should be evident by now that during the 1740's (and early 1750's) there was an exceptional level of British activity and interest in Hudson Bay, especially when compared with previous interest. Perhaps the most significant result of this flurry was the emergence of a body of literature representing the Hudson Bay region, its climate, flora, fauna and inhabitants in greater detail than ever before seen by the British reading public. Despite the failed efforts to find a Passage, and Dobb's inability to disrupt the Hudson Bay Company's monopoly, the publication of these accounts – Middleton's short presentation, Dobbs' natural history, the narratives of Ellis and Drage from the 1746 voyage, and Robson's subsequent account of his time in the region – collectively constitute a considerable amount of new, supposedly first-hand, information about the Bay region in the 1740's. And not only was much of the content of these writings new, they also employed relatively new ideas and techniques for seeing, writing about and engaging with the natural world in comparison to how the region had been so far represented.

Before proceeding, I will briefly examine some of the most significant studies of this body of literature. Of the 1746 expedition itself, E.E. Rich claims that "the expedition really achieved nothing".<sup>44</sup> He is speaking specifically of geographical exploration here, and he qualifies the point later, remarking that Dobbs "had both roused a general interest in the affairs of Rupert's Land and had published a great deal more information (not

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<sup>43</sup> Barr and Williams, *The Voyage of William Moor and Francis Smith*, 318-320; Clarke, *Arthur Dobbs Esquire*, 104-105.

<sup>44</sup> Rich, *Hudson's Bay Company*, 581.

always accurate) about the fur trade than had hitherto been available.”<sup>45</sup> Rich’s assessment of the narratives of Ellis and Drage is less generous, noting the inaccuracy and prejudice of the authors’ reports. He cites the damning but unpublished review of Ellis’ book by York Factory Governor James Isham, “a man who really knew the country, the trade and the people, incensed by the superficial ease of Ellis’ writing”,<sup>46</sup> to prove their marginal significance.

Whether these accounts are accurate or not, Glyndwr Williams and William Barr have a higher opinion:

Whatever else the expeditions of 1741-2 and 1746-7 accomplished, the publicity given to their explorations brought a greatly increased interest in Hudson Bay and its hinterland. This interest was not always accompanied by accurate and dispassionate information; but a comparison of the knowledge available about the geography, trade and native inhabitants of the Bay area at the time of the Parliamentary enquiry of 1749 with the ‘closed book’ situation before Middleton’s voyage marks a breakthrough in British perceptions of the Canadian sub-Arctic.<sup>47</sup>

In their two volume edited collection of the documents relating to the 1741-42 and 1746-47 voyages, *Voyages in Search of a Northwest Passage 1741-1747*, Williams and Barr provide detailed summaries of the events of the voyages and overwintering, the regions and inhabitants encountered, the political and economic context and agendas of the participants, and the many ways in which the various sources contradict one another.

Williams also published a more accessible study of this period in *Voyages of Delusion: The Northwest Passage in the Age of Reason*, which presents many of the observations

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<sup>45</sup> Rich, *Hudson’s Bay Company*, 583.

<sup>46</sup> Rich, *Hudson’s Bay Company*, 579. Of Ellis’ book, Isham’s journal says “I observe it’s a common Rule with some persons that writes a history of Voyages &c. for want of a proper and just Subject to make a complete Book; they Enlarge upon things which is neither consistant with truth, Justice, nor honour”. He thought slightly better of Drage’s narrative, remarking: “As to mr. Dragg’s Last Book, itt wou’d be only a Repitition of the same thing over again, I therefore do not think it Reasonable to make any Remarks upon itt, more than I can but Observe he is more particular as to the truth than the aforemention’d Author’s.” James Isham, “Notes and Observations on a Book entitled *A Voyage to Hudson Bay in the Dobbs Galley & 1746 & 1747*, wrote by Henry Ellis,” in *Isham’s Observations and Notes 1743-1749* (London: The Hudson’s Bay Record Society, 1949), 199, 238.

<sup>47</sup> Barr and Williams, *The Voyage of William Moor and Francis Smith*, xi.

from the edited collection. While these studies provide essential groundwork for understanding the content and context of these sources, their emphasis is much more on description, summary, and the history of geographical exploration than cultural analysis. At times they provide interesting clues about the meanings that contemporary audiences might have found in these texts. For example, Williams writes:

There is a passage in Drage's austere account of rigours endured and discipline observed that one suspects might have a more general application than he admitted. Once the hunters and wooders had returned from their day's efforts, he wrote, 'the Tent Door was made up, Dinner got, afterwards a good Fire which made the Tent impenetrable to all Cold; and, as every Man was allowed half a Pint of Brandy a Day with proportionable [*sic*] Sugar, they made Spruce Beer, Flip, most generally, with which they smoked their Pipes, and about eight o'Clock to Bed'.<sup>48</sup>

Here Williams insinuates rather than directly addresses the significance and meaning of the author's efforts to replicate the comforts of home in such a foreign land. Such an approach is characteristic of these studies, and leaves generous space for a student of cultural history to examine these sources with questions about perceptions of landscape and climate, strategies of representation and processes of identity formation. In fact, by virtue of the complexity of the documents and their shortage of space, Williams and Barr have left entire angles of analysis largely unexplored, claiming that "[much] has had to be omitted: ...[including] those passages in both accounts on the Native Americans which, it is clear, relied on existing publications rather than on direct observation".<sup>49</sup>

The third set of studies to examine the 1740's Hudson Bay accounts in detail is by D.W. Moodie, who completed an extensive analysis of the perceptions of agricultural potential in the Bay region leading up to, during and after the 1740's. Moodie engages in depth with Dobbs' assessments of the Hudson Bay environment, and he describes how these authors, particularly Middleton, Dobbs, Ellis and Robson, deployed scientific

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<sup>48</sup> Williams, *Voyages of Delusion*, 172-173.

<sup>49</sup> Barr and Williams, *The Voyage of William Moor and Francis Smith*, xii.

practices of the day to present their accounts as authoritative. Moodie also provides important information about the persistence of Dobbs' image of the Bay (and by proxy Ellis and Robson's) right up to the end of the eighteenth century. However, Moodie qualifies the limitations of his analysis: "perception of the environment, in consequence, [comprises] an integral part of the attempt to explain the agricultural patterns and ideas of the period. Environmental perception in itself, however, is not an objective of the thesis, but is considered only insofar as it furthers an understanding of the agricultural endeavors and appraisals of the time."<sup>50</sup> While this study engages with Moodie's work in important ways, particularly in the first chapter, I will extend the analysis by focusing on the broader trends in environmental perceptions based on representations of the region beyond agricultural potential. Similarly, apart from a few passing remarks, Moodie does not delve into the ways climate and landscape are attributed racial and cultural significance, nor does he delve deeply into questions of landscape and identity formation, topics which I explore in detail.

Building on these approaches, my study works in a qualitative mode of textual analysis. I focus upon the body of published literature that emerged in the 1740's as natural history writing, emphasizing the texts' roles in presenting these little-known regions to British metropolitan audiences in new ways. I investigate the representations of these foreign lands and peoples in order to uncover the attitudes and values of the British authors in regard to the relationships between climate, landscape and culture. Scholarship on natural history writing has, for the most part, focused on writings about Central and South America, Africa and more recently the United States and Australia, with little attention given to the writings depicting marginal areas of colonial activity,

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<sup>50</sup> Moodie, *An Historical Geography*, xii-xiii. See also Moodie, "Science and Reality," 293-309.

such as the northern parts of North America. My research intends to address this lacuna, bringing the methods of analysis developed to study the literatures about these better-known regions to my study of writings on Hudson Bay. Similarly, by applying cultural historical approaches to the historiography of the Northwest Passage, Hudson Bay, and to a lesser extent the Hudson's Bay Company, I hope to show how certain culturally embedded ideas influenced the region's development and exploration. I also draw attention to the ways the region and its occupants were imagined, understood, experienced and represented. In pursuing this line of questioning, my research is guided by Mary Louise Pratt's study of the ways through which travel, exploration and scientific literatures acted to produce "the rest of the world" – or in this case, Hudson Bay – for British reading audiences. I will follow her lead to focus on how these writings about "the rest of the world" produced Britain, or British subjects, and to demand how these representational practices "encode," "legitimate" and "betray" the British "aspirations of economic expansion and empire".<sup>51</sup>

This study analyzes the transforming English and British representations of Hudson Bay's climate and landscape in travel literature and natural history writing. Using methods of historically contextualized discourse analysis I will demonstrate how portrayals of climate and landscape are embedded within discourses of colonialism. I will draw attention to the ways that representations of geography, flora, fauna, and indigenous peoples are structured by metropolitan assumptions and agendas, and reveal important details about changing notions of Britishness at the edges of the civilized world.

My discussion takes three separate but interrelated lines of analysis. Chapter one begins by charting the archive of northern representation based in classical scholarship

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<sup>51</sup> Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 5.

and exploration that influenced eighteenth century perceptions. Oldmixon's cynical portrayal of the North and its inhabitants culminates this tradition, only to be ousted by Dobbs' ideology of improvement and his newly optimistic vision of the Hudson Bay region. Dobbs' portrayal of familiar, temperate paradises in Hudson Bay was embedded in landscapes oceans away, but this helped open a new discursive space in which the North could be described and colonized. At the same time, however, Dobbs was unable to confront the reality of an improvable cold, Subarctic Bay-side and thus his portrait simply shifted the line that demarcated temperate from Arctic, restricting the Subarctic transition zone to the river mouths.

Chapter two assesses the influence of Dobbs' 'improving' vision of the Bay region by examining the eyewitness texts that emerged as a result of and after the 1746 voyage of discovery. I examine the important distinctions that are made by explorers between the unimprovable treeless barrens to the North, and the fertile, habitable woods of the southern Bay, highlighting how responses to difficulties in these distinct realms are seen to embody, even amplify, central principles and features of eighteenth-century British culture and identity, and underscoring notions of British mastery in these foreign terrains. Yet these attempts at environmental domestication are riddled with cracks and fissures. Within the texts and in their silences, the narratives display a profound anxiety about the success of their efforts to include this land in the book of empire.

Chapter three examines the descriptions of indigenous peoples within these texts, focusing primarily on the first-hand accounts of Ellis, Drage and Robson. I consider how ideas about climate and geography carried over to influence representations of peoples and cultures, drawing particular attention to the ways that climate and latitude was used

as a basis for hierarchical evaluations of social development. The result is that British designs upon more favourable climates significantly influenced representations of inhabitants. By examining this body of literature from these three perspectives, I will demonstrate how representations of climate and landscape constituted a malleable discourse of colonialism which sought to maintain the superiority of British subjects over the perceived threats of hostile climates and more well adapted indigenous populations, all the while confronting, in imagination or in reality, environments that were radically foreign to them.

## Chapter 1: From “Arctic Tempests” to “North benign”:<sup>1</sup> Natural History Writing, Improvement and the Transformation of the North

In the history of Hudson Bay 1741 was a momentous year. It marked the publication of the second edition of John Oldmixon’s authoritative two-volume historical and political treatise, *The British Empire in America: Containing the History of the Discovery, Settlement, Progress and State of the British Colonies on the Continent and Islands of America*. By this time Oldmixon, a prominent writer and Whig pamphleteer, was in his late sixties and in ill health, and the updating of his original 1708 text was among his last writings to reach print during his life.<sup>2</sup> At the time of publication, Oldmixon’s history contained the most authoritative and up-to-date account of the history, geography, climate and inhabitants of Hudson Bay available to the British reading public. However, the region was not considered very favourably by Oldmixon, as illustrated by his oft-quoted passage describing the Bay and British activities there:

Hudson’s Streights, which being the most Northerly should have been treated of first, and put at the head of the other Settlements; but . . . there being no Towns nor Plantations in this Country, but two or three poor Forts to defend the Factories, we thought we were at Liberty to place it where we pleased, and were loth to let our History open with the History of so miserable a Wilderness, and so Wretched a Colony. For as rich as the Trade to these Parts have been, or may be, the way of Living is such that we cannot reckon any Man happy, whose Lot is cast upon this Bay.<sup>3</sup>

While many points warrant attention in this passage, most important to this study is the overwhelming pessimism and disdain that saturates these words. Despite the “rich” trade that this region offered, the forts were “poor” and life on the Bay is presented in no

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<sup>1</sup> James Sterling, *An Epistle to the Hon. Arthur Dobbs, Esq; in Europe. From a Clergyman in America*, (London, 1752), 8, 64.

<sup>2</sup> Pat Rogers, “Oldmixon, John (1672/3–1742)”, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/20695>, accessed 23 March 2009]

<sup>3</sup> John Oldmixon, *The British Empire in America, containing the history of the discovery, settlement, progress and present state of all the British colonies, on the continent and islands of America*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 2 vols. (London, 1741), 1: 542.

uncertain terms, as “wretched,” “miserable” and unhappy. The author unsubtly hints that the lot of those “cast upon” its shores was not so different from that of a castaway.

Oldmixon’s representation of life on the Bay might be derogatory, but was hardly unique. Most geographers and compilers of the first half of the eighteenth century painted the region in a similar light. One author describes it brusquely, as “a Country but little known, and probably of no great importance”,<sup>4</sup> and another goes further to say that it is a “cold inhospitable country ... but thinly populated with Indians, and the only Part of it that was ever thought worth planting was the Bottom and the West side of Hudson’s Bay, where the English have four or five little forts”.<sup>5</sup> Characterized by a climate and geography that was seen to barely support its indigenous inhabitants, let alone any further settlement by the British – as only “four or five little forts” had managed to cling to the best lands the Bay had to offer – a lack of knowledge about the region was not seen as a significant loss.

The lack of information about the Bay region was no coincidence. With the conclusion of the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, territories seized by the French during the War of the Spanish Succession were restored to Britain. These included a number of factories returned to the Hudson’s Bay Company, some of which had been in French possession for over a decade.<sup>6</sup> A result of this period of French-British tension was the Company’s subsequent enforcement of a strict policy of secrecy, prohibiting publication or dissemination of any and all information about the region and activities there. They were so effective in maintaining secrecy that when Oldmixon completed his second

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<sup>4</sup> B. Le Stourgeon, *A Compleat Universal History, of the Several Empires, Kingdoms, States &c. Throughout the Known World* (London, 1732-38), 890.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Salmon, *Modern History: or, the Present State of all Nations* (London, 1738), 343.

<sup>6</sup> Glyndwr Williams, *Voyages of Delusion: The Northwest Passage in the Age of Reason* (London: Harper Collins, 2002), 4.

edition, the chapter on Hudson Bay was virtually unchanged from the 1708 original, despite pleas to the Company for new details. The wider impact of this policy was that most authors of geographies and atlases were forced to either profess ignorance of the region, as in the first of the examples above, or repeat Oldmixon's findings from 1708 with little alteration alongside even older accounts of the region.<sup>7</sup>

The 1741 publication of the second edition of Oldmixon's authoritative *British Empire in America* is significant, not for presenting new information about the Bay region, but in that it clearly demonstrates the paucity of knowledge about the area, well into the 1740's. It reaffirms and upholds as authoritative what could be described as the most unsympathetic and acerbic characterization of the Hudson Bay region in print. Moreover, while Oldmixon's version may be considered severe, it cannot be written off as unrepresentative. His portrayal, with all of its spleen, represents the culmination of a current of thought about the relationship between climates, culture and landscape that was not limited to the eighteenth century at all, but had deep roots in English culture and in antiquity.

However, 1741 was a momentous year for another reason as well. Since the early 1730's, the energetic and indefatigable colonial promoter and Irish parliamentarian Arthur Dobbs had been campaigning for the British government to sponsor an expedition

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<sup>7</sup> A comparison between the sections on Hudson Bay in the *Atlas Geographus: or, a compleat system of geography, ancient and modern. Containing what is of most use in Bleau, Verenius, Cellarius, Cluverius, Baudrand, Brietius, Sanson, &c. With the discoveries and improvements of the best modern authors to this time*, 5 vols. (London, 1717), 5: 770-774, and Oldmixon's 1708 text will find numerous similarities and repeated text. To Oldmixon's findings the *Atlas* adds a complete version of the account of Captain Thomas James' 1633 voyage of exploration and wintering on the Bay, a feature common to many late 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century histories as his account was deemed the most notable of its kind, for reasons that will be described later.

into Hudson Bay to search for the elusive Northwest Passage.<sup>8</sup> After more than ten years of campaigning and lobbying, his labours finally came to fruition: in the spring of 1741 Christopher Middleton captained the Bomb Ketch *Furnace* out of the Thames to inspect the west coast of the Bay for signs of the fabled Passage. Despite Middleton's failure to find the Passage, his 1741-1742 voyage returned Hudson Bay to the public eye, sparking a ten year public debate resulting in the virtual dismantling and re-creation of public knowledge about environmental conditions in the Bay region. In 1744, Dobbs published a natural history of the region, *An Account of the Countries adjoining to Hudson's Bay in the North-west Part of America*, replacing Oldmixon's unhappy vision with an entirely different set of ideas about the relations between climate, culture and landscape:

These Countries, tho' most of them are in cold Climates, yet these coldest Parts, even North of the Polar Circle, are inhabited by the *Eskimaux Indians* ... and if the Trade was laid open, would be of vastly greater benefit to Britain, by affording a considerable Market for our coarse Woollen and Iron Manufactures; and by forming proper Settlements in healthy and shelter'd Situations, out of Swampy Grounds, there might be comfortable Settlements made in most Places, and very Tolerable, even in the worst and coldest Parts of that Continent, which are the Northeast and Western Sides of the Bay; but in the Southern and Western Sides of the Bay, there might be as comfortable Settlements as any in *Sweden, Livonia*, or the South Side of the *Baltick*; and farther into the Country south-west, the Climate is as good as the Southern Part of *Poland*, and North Part of *Germany* and *Holland*; nothing being wanting to make it so but the building convenient Houses with Stoves, such as are used un the same Climates in *Europe*.<sup>9</sup>

The departure from Oldmixon is clear: Dobbs' descriptions are optimistic about the Bay's potential for British settlement, proffering strategies to develop even the most inhospitable parts. What Dobbs seems to offer is both a new way of looking at the Hudson Bay landscape and an entirely new landscape.

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<sup>8</sup> William Barr and Glyndwr Williams eds., *Voyages to Hudson Bay in Search of a Northwest Passage, 1741-1747: Vol. 1, The Voyage of Christopher Middleton, 1741-1742* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1994), 1.

<sup>9</sup> Arthur Dobbs, *An Account of the Countries adjoining to Hudson's Bay in the North-west Part of America* (New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1967), 2. Note: the authors under discussion regularly italicise proper names and other significant nouns. A number of times I will draw attention to key words in quotations, using italics, but these will be noted specifically in the citation.

This chapter will examine the imaginative transformation in detail by drawing attention to the evaluations and descriptions of geography and climate employed by authors of this period. I will emphasize the underlying cultural attitudes and systems of value that enabled this metamorphosis. I say metamorphosis because I contend that Dobbs' vision did not totally destabilize the older climatic associations found in Oldmixon's text. Instead, by employing the more optimistic discourse of improvement, Dobbs' writing presents the region in a more favourable light, emphasizing certain aspects, such as resource potential, while minimizing the significance and extent of other, less favourable, aspects of the landscape and climate. The effect was Dobbs' ability to perform something of a geographic sleight of hand, representing the region in what seemed to be an entirely new light, while in fact many of the ideas that motivated earlier characterizations were still quite active, operating largely unchallenged.

Representations of landscapes often seem self explanatory when in fact they are motivated and influenced by multiple currents of thinking, including inherited prejudices and systems of value often only vaguely defined and frequently contradictory. Ideas about landscapes and climates are culturally specific, embedded in long traditions that reflect changing values and life-ways accumulated over generations.<sup>10</sup> In order to decode the metamorphosis that the Bay region's image underwent in the British imagination during the 1740's, this chapter will attempt to reconstruct the most significant streams of thought and behaviour that influenced Oldmixon and Dobbs' portrayals of the Hudson Bay region.

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<sup>10</sup> Barbara Bender, "Landscape – Meaning and Action," in *Landscape Politics and Perspectives*, ed. Barbara Bender (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1993), 1-3.

### **Imagining the North: the Classical and Medieval Inheritance**

To fully explain the metamorphosis from Oldmixon to Dobbs, it will first be necessary to develop an historical context for British ideas about northern regions in general, and climates, landscapes and people in particular. Oldmixon's rendering of Hudson Bay as a picture of misery was not based solely on the negative experiences of a few English explorers. Rather, the reports of northern waters and lands that reached England during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were coloured by a tradition of assumptions about northern regions, with roots in the philosophical and geographical writings of the ancient Greeks. The texts of Aristotle, Strabo, Eratosthenes and others did not reach the early modern British in their original cultural context; instead, these ideas had undergone centuries of re-interpretation, accumulation and distortion during the late classical and medieval periods. Sixteenth-and seventeenth-century explorers thus set out with assumptions about these regions, and very often they took most note of features which fulfilled their expectations. Upon return home, it was these same features which were most often reported on in travel narratives and geographic tracts. In this way, the picture of the North that lasts well into the eighteenth century was in many ways the result of a continually self-affirming discourse – an “archive of information.”<sup>11</sup> I intend to unpack some of the roots of that discourse here.

Perhaps the most long-lasting and influential feature of northern representation involves the negative characterization of the region due to its severe climate. While there

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<sup>11</sup> Edward Said puts forward the notion of an archive of information in discussing how the West represented the East throughout history. He argues that “In a sense Orientalism was a library or archive of information commonly and, in some aspects, unanimously held. What bound the archive together was a family of ideas and a unifying set of values proven in various ways to be effective.” I contend that a tangible archive of ideas has also formed about the North, ideas that continue to influence the perception of this region in important ways. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 41-42.

is something self-evident in this, at the same time a classically-influenced tradition of geographic knowledge known as cosmography has made a point of essentializing this quality and extrapolating further conclusions from it. This set of ideas, articulated in the writings of Aristotle, though not original nor limited to him, separated the regions of the world into “sublunary zones – temperate, torrid, frigid – that had different properties because different astral bodies affected them. Plants, animals, minerals, and people differed according to climate.”<sup>12</sup> The frigid zones occupied the northern and southernmost limits of the Earth, while the equatorial latitudes were known as the torrid zone. These extreme climatic regions were characterized by their most hostile geographies and climates and were considered dangerous or even fatal for humans: the torrid regions for their parched, barren and scorching deserts, and the polar regions for their ever-present and impenetrable fogs, barren expanses of snow and ice, boiling oceans, and cold that burned like fire.<sup>13</sup> The temperate zones existed in the intermediary space between these two extremes, where the balance of heat and cold, dry and wet was seen as perfectly suited to accommodate and encourage civilized society. Barbarians and unsavoury peoples of various sorts populated the more unpleasant fringes of habitable land.<sup>14</sup> Thus, depictions of climates and landscapes were not simply given neutral

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<sup>12</sup> Joyce Chaplin, *Subject Matter: Technology, the Body, and Science on the Anglo-American Frontier, 1500-1676* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 43.

<sup>13</sup> See Eric G. Wilson, *The Spiritual History of Ice: Romanticism, Science, and the Imagination* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), 143-152; for further discussion of the classical and medieval roots of depictions of the polar regions. It is worth noting that not all Classical geographers were convinced that the polar extremes were wastelands. Both Cicero and Eratosthenes argued at times that the polar regions might instead be paradises. These images endured to influence eighteenth century adventures into Antarctic waters in search of El Dorado. However, in terms of general influence, the negative associations tended to hold more currency with the medieval geographers who emphasized the inhospitable cold of the frigid zones, often imagining them to shelter numerous varieties of demons and monsters. See Wilson, *The Spiritual History of Ice*, 146-149.

<sup>14</sup> Chaplin, *Subject Matter*, 43-44.

descriptive labels; instead they functioned as both an indicator and an example of cultural difference.

Roxann Wheeler explains how this connection between climate, geography and culture was rooted in a longstanding and influential understanding of human physiology based on the notion that four fluids, or humours, coursed through the body – blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile – and that the relative quantities of these fluids determined one’s emotional and physical qualities. Humoral theory posited that the human body was highly porous and susceptible to environmental influences and cultural habits. It was commonly thought that prolonged exposure to foreign climates or consuming unfamiliar foods could influence one’s humoral mixture, altering one’s temperament and potentially even one’s physical appearance.<sup>15</sup> Thus, climates and geographies thought of as particularly hostile were feared due to the profound and direct manner in which they were understood to impact the human body.

Literary scholar Eric Wilson points out how early Christian writers inherited and passed on these classical ideas about the relationship between geography and culture. The Venerable Bede (673-735) depicted northern and southern extremes as uninhabitable due to the severe cold. It was common for medieval maps to populate these unknown regions with hosts of strange and aberrant denizens – monsters, giants, demons or anthropophagi – epitomizing the antithesis of civilized humanity.<sup>16</sup> Wilson argues that medieval Christian depictions of the northern and southern extremes symbolized “a persistent

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<sup>15</sup> Having their roots in ancient East Indian cultures, these ideas were developed and adapted in Greece and Rome, and then transmitted to Europe by medieval scholars, into areas such as Aristotelian natural philosophy and Galenic medicine. See Roxann Wheeler, *The Complexion of Race: Categories of Difference in Eighteenth-Century British Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 2, 21-22.

<sup>16</sup> Wilson, *The Spiritual History of Ice*, 147-150.

Western fear of the loss of meaningful distinctions and stable hierarchies.”<sup>17</sup> The amplification of the ‘otherness’ of the polar regions, the hostility of the wintry climate and the unnaturalness of the inhabitants, affirm E.G.R. Taylor’s point that “the human mind ... tends to exaggerate what is strange and unusual, while remaining almost unaware of what is common and familiar.”<sup>18</sup> While travel and geographic literature from the early modern and modern periods tends to assimilate and domesticate landscapes to the familiar, Stephen Greenblatt suggests that in the medieval imagination:

[T]he experience of marvels seems to lead precisely to a sense of dispossession, a disclaimer of dogmatic certainty, a self-estrangement in the face of strangeness, diversity and opacity of the world. The medieval sense of the marvellous, Jacques Le Goff has suggested, expressed perceptions of nature potentially or actually inimical to the transcendental being and providential authority of the Christian God and His servant the Church.<sup>19</sup>

Wilson goes on to suggest that to medieval Christians the representation of polar extremes as threatening and inhospitable to humans, an abode for the monstrous, recalls the horrifying imagery of hell, which in turn confirms the orderliness and stability of the known world and reaffirms the centrality of their faith to the world order.<sup>20</sup>

Medieval Christian travel writings were more allegorical and didactic than they were accurate geographical representations, such that “the geographical setting [was] a means of bringing out the courage of travellers in the face of danger, rather than a realistic description of actual places.”<sup>21</sup> So in accounts like the legendary voyage of Saint Brendan, reputed to have sailed far into the North in the sixth century, the appearance of a sea monster in the cold northern ocean took on instructional significance, proving the

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<sup>17</sup> Wilson, *The Spiritual History of Ice*, 150.

<sup>18</sup> E.G.R. Taylor, *Late Tudor and Early Stuart Geography, 1583-1650: A sequel to Tudor and Stuart Geography*, 1485-1583 (New York: Octagon Books Inc., 1968), 85.

<sup>19</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 74.

<sup>20</sup> Wilson, *The Spiritual History of Ice*, 150-151.

<sup>21</sup> Louis Rey, “The Evangelization of the Arctic in the Middle Ages: Gardar, the ‘Diocese of Ice,’” *Arctic*, 37, no.4 (December 1984): 325.

need for devotees to submit to the will of the Divine. Similarly, a passage describing a landing on the coast of Iceland was used to affirm the existence of hell on earth and the truth of an earthly paradise – their much longed-for but ever elusive destination:

The island is very steep and rocky, covered with slag, without trees or grass and full of glowing forges. Flaming rocks are hurled into the sea and fall spitting into the waters which start to steam ... thousands of evil beings were moving around their hearths and hurling incandescent rocks ... the sea boils like a cooking pot full of meat on the fire.<sup>22</sup>

Reports such as this were both influenced by and further buttressed the view of the North as an unnatural and threatening region. Brendan's hell, a northern nightmare characterized by a rocky coastal wasteland lacking vegetation – an unnatural juxtaposition of hot and cold extremes, populated by strangers with evil intent – strongly resonates with the reports that would be brought back to England by Martin Frobisher, Henry Hudson, Jens Munk and Thomas James a thousand years later.

As these medieval travel narratives were incorporated into the traditions of geographical thinking, northern regions and cultures continued to be stereotyped in disparaging and often hostile ways. Since medieval scholars treated classical and Christian sources as the highest authorities on worldly matters, the truth of their writings was taken as self-evident. The sporadic and infrequent contact between northern regions and much of southern Europe for most of the early medieval period exacerbated this trend, allowing negative stereotypes to endure, harden and take on a more generalized significance for northern realities and inhabitants. It was with this inherited vision of the North that mid-sixteenth-century English navigators began to first venture into Arctic waters in search of a Northwest Passage.

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<sup>22</sup> Rey, "The Evangelization of the Arctic in the Middle Ages," 325.

## New Landscapes and Old Eyes: Writing Northern Travel in Early Modern England

As England's position and authority in Europe grew during the sixteenth century, one of the key ideas that English scholars wrestled with related to their own status as a northern nation. In the sixteenth century, the boundaries of the world were rapidly expanding, and scholars sought explanations for the distribution of the Earth's lands and waters in the writings of classical authors. However, what was found was not always what was sought, and English scholars were forced to confront their historical representation as northern peoples in the classical sources:

Ancient writers from the Mediterranean region had originally designated Britain a northern climate and its people of a cold and moist constitution – hence people with strong bodies and a fierce spirit who were prone to excessive drinking and were dull-witted. Conventionally, the barbaric people from the northern region, such as Britain, were believed to be phlegmatic, or sluggish in disposition; they were perceived as good for producing hardy laborers as well as fine mechanical and manual arts. Their chalky white complexion signified this mix of characteristics.<sup>23</sup>

Climatic and humoral theories continued to function as commonsensical logic to explain cultural differences well into the early modern period; therefore, the prejudices and assumptions that characterized northern peoples and regions continued to have currency. This stereotype was directly in conflict with the image England sought for itself as a nascent maritime empire in the mid sixteenth century.

Joyce Chaplin characterizes the English preoccupation with climate theory from the sixteenth century onward as having grown from their “need to defend their reputation as a northern people.”<sup>24</sup> As northern nations grew in influence and power the location of ‘civilization’ shifted northwards, requiring a re-interpretation of the climatic/humoral signifiers that differentiated the civilized from the rest of the world: “In some versions,

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<sup>23</sup> Wheeler, *The Complexion of Race*, 23.

<sup>24</sup> Chaplin, *Subject Matter*, 44.

Britain became part of the temperate zone; in other versions, Britain remained in the northern regions but shed its negative traits.”<sup>25</sup>

Perhaps the key factor that prompted England at least nominally to embrace its association as a northern nation resulted from Spain and Portugal’s 1494 decision to divide the discoveries of the new world between them to avoid further conflict. Under the doctrine of *Mare Clausum*, or closed sea, this law gave the Iberian powers a monopoly on navigation and colonial activity in the southern portion of the Atlantic.<sup>26</sup> Still an emergent power in the early sixteenth century, England was incapable of contesting the Iberian hegemony except through licensed piracy – a dangerous activity at best – for England was mostly excluded from the lucrative trade with the West Indies that was making Spain and Portugal so wealthy. Given these limitations, English promoters began to reassess the potential of the northern regions during the sixteenth century, and from the mid century onwards English traders and explorers began to probe the waters and coasts of northern Europe, Greenland and North America in an attempt to find sources of overseas wealth. For the purposes of encouraging investment in these adventures, it was necessary for promoters to reassess the prevailing negative image of northern regions.

From the 1550’s, England’s Muscovy Company had developed a lucrative fur trade with northern Russia via the White Sea, and by the end of the sixteenth century English ships had a fledgling whaling industry in the waters of Northern Europe. Prominent promoters of Elizabethan exploration such as John Dee, whose personal fixation was on cosmographic speculation regarding the potential existence of a northern route to the fabled wealth of Cathay, continued to advocate for northern voyages. The

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<sup>25</sup> Wheeler, *The Complexion of Race*, 23.

<sup>26</sup> Bo Johnson Theutenberg, “Mare Clausum et Mare Liberum,” *Arctic* 37 no. 4 (Dec. 1984): 485.

decades spanning the end of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the next saw an ever increasing number of expeditions into the northern waters of Europe and North America for commercial and exploratory purposes. Dee's nationalistic bent and preoccupation with England's maritime supremacy attached particular significance to this project. In *Synopsis Repulicae Britannicae*, Dee advanced the idea that England's island geography lent it a natural role "as Mistress of a Northern Empire, based on the command of the seas".<sup>27</sup> Dee advised many of the key figures in these enterprises, such as Richard Chancellor and Stephen Borroughs, merchant captains for the Muscovy Company, as well as explorers Martin Frobisher, Henry Hudson and John Davis.

One of the most significant results of the early voyages into the North American Arctic during the late sixteenth century was the challenge to commonly held assumptions that the northern regions were totally inhospitable and their waters impossible to navigate. When Martin Frobisher's 1576 expedition returned to England, it was evident that the American Arctic was indeed navigable and clearly inhabited. The Inuit inhabitants were discovered to possess surprising skill in making tools, clothing and boats, which were particularly adapted to the rigours of their strange environment – a realization that challenged European ideas about their own assumed technological superiority and status as a culture of inventors.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, their habitation of a severe climate, seemingly devoid of vegetation and fertile soils, which remained cold and dark for many months of the year, was unsettling to the English visitors reliant on farming and

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<sup>27</sup> Taylor, *Tudor Geography*, 105.

<sup>28</sup> For a treatment of how the assumptions of Frobisher's crew about their own technological superiority created a sense of anxiety in the face of the Baffin-land Inuit's superior adaptation to their Arctic environment, see Paul DePasquale, "'Worth the Noting': European Ambivalence and Aboriginal Agency in Meta Incognita, 1576-1578," in *Reading Beyond Words: Contexts for Native History*, eds. Jennifer Brown and Elizabeth Vibert (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2003), 5-38. Chaplin argues that the negative portrayals of the Inuit in future accounts seem to reflect the inability of the English explorers to come to terms with their technological inferiority in the Arctic. See Chaplin, *Subject Matter*, 56.

the domestication of herd animals. The question of how the Inuit survived in such a harsh environment with no plant resources for food, fuel or building materials became a preoccupation. At first, the men of Frobisher's crew turned to deeply rooted ideas about the unnaturalness of northern peoples to explain the Inuit's perceived strangeness:

George Best accused them of witchcraft and some of Frobisher's men even examined the feet of a woman they kidnapped to see if they were cloven like the devil's.<sup>29</sup> Others concluded that without proper houses the Inuit could not possibly live year-round in the north, supposing instead that they must head south to warmer climates for the winter.<sup>30</sup>

In the face of this confusion of new information and older suppositions, a radical shift occurred as Frobisher prepared for his third voyage to the Arctic in 1578. In light of the possibility that these lands, dubbed *Meta Incognita* – the unknown frontier – by Queen Elizabeth I upon Frobisher's return in 1577, might carry substantial deposits of gold ore, English commercial interest exploded and plans were set in motion to establish a permanent mining colony of one hundred men on Baffin Island.<sup>31</sup> Over a dozen ships and close to four hundred men mobilized to accomplish this feat. The size and complexity of this operation speaks to both the scale of the reward the English were seeking as well as the scope of the difficulties they expected to face. They brought with them a pre-fabricated frame house to set up on location, significant stores of wood and food, German stoves for heating and cooking, as well as seeds and grains, in hopes that, during the long summer days, the region might prove more 'temperate' than previously

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<sup>29</sup> Chaplin, *Subject Matter*, 54-56.

<sup>30</sup> Chaplin, *Subject Matter*, 52-55. This idea persisted well into the eighteenth century as shall be seen in Theodore Swaine Drage's description of Hudson Strait in chapter two.

<sup>31</sup> The possible presence of gold is significant because gold was understood to be a product of heat and sun. This offered a substantial challenge to established ideas about climate, invigorating Britain's willingness to adopt aspects of Northern-ness into its national identity. (Chaplin, *Subject Matter*, 49-50.)

assumed. These items point to a considerable degree of caution and anxiety about establishing a colony in this severe landscape; however, they also display an intriguing optimism that this region might prove to be less foreign than previously believed. It is clear that the possibility for English subjects to survive in the Arctic climate was being put on trial, with Frobisher and his crew the guinea pigs.<sup>32</sup>

The results of Frobisher's third expedition were not straightforward. It is clear that many preconceived ideas about this northern region had been substantially challenged leading up to the expedition; however, others were affirmed. The climate and weather proved far more "straunge" and "daungerfull" than the English mariners expected or were prepared for, and ordinary traffic, let alone discovery, was exceptionally difficult. The English found themselves "in contynuall daunger of thize [the ice], and also subject to Calmes and contynuall fogges."<sup>33</sup> The failure of the English colony before it was even established was largely due to the separation of the fleet at sea and the loss of important stores during a horrific storm.<sup>34</sup> Most disastrously, the sea ice did not seem to follow any evident or natural rhythm: it clogged the 'straits' in midsummer when all reports from the previous year and common sense said it should have been clear. Their inconvenience was compounded by sudden tempests that turned these floating islands of ice into "daungerfull perils."<sup>35</sup> Much like Saint Brendan's account centuries before, the published narratives of the era repeatedly emphasize

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<sup>32</sup> Chaplin, *Subject Matter*, 45-50. Chaplin demonstrates how observations that grains could grow in Newfoundland bolstered these ideas about the potential fertility of the soils on Baffin Island.

<sup>33</sup> Edward Fenton, quoted in James McDermott, "Frobisher's 1578 Voyage: Early Eyewitness Accounts of English Ships in Arctic Seas," *Polar Record*, 32 no.183 (1996): 332.

<sup>34</sup> The colony failed primarily because the ship that carried the house and supplies was separated from the rest of the group. The mining operation continued for that summer on Kodlunarn Island, removing 1300 tons of rock to bring back to England, but no people were intentionally left behind to spend the winter; even the convicts who were supposed to be left behind refused to stay. Chaplin, *Subject Matter*, 51-57; McDermott, "Frobisher's 1578 Voyage," 330-334.

<sup>35</sup> Fenton quoted in McDermott, "Frobisher's 1578 Voyage," 332.

religious values in the face of danger – as Protestants they pronounced their survival as an act of God’s providence. One of the accounts tells how a chaplain, in a blowing tempest and beset by ice, moved the despairing crew to prayer and reflection on the appropriate manner in which to meet their end. As the storm seemed to abate the beleaguered crew took it as a sign of God’s mercy and struggled on.<sup>36</sup>

Despite these calamities, a surprising amount of optimism for settlement persisted. Before leaving Baffin Island, the ship’s carpenter Edward Fenton took the time to build, with stone, “a little watche Tower ... this I did to prove what the vehemencie of winde and weather would do therwith this winter, to thende, that if the nexte yere habitacion shoulde be performed there, that then by this little experiment should given how we shoulde deale in building greater howses.”<sup>37</sup> The foundations of “Frobisher’s House,” as it is now called, are still visible on the Island, standing as a testament to the aspirations of the English and the significant degree to which their ideas about the region changed during this period. A poem originating from Frobisher’s own pen prefaced one of the published narratives and points to the degree to which landscapes are as much a product of the imagination and desire as they are of experience:

A pleasant ayre, a sweete and firtell soile,  
 A certain gaine, a never dying praise:  
 An easie passage, voide of loathsome toile,  
 Found out by some, and knowen to me the waies...<sup>38</sup>

Frobisher’s depiction of a “pleasant ayre” and a “sweete and firtell soile” in the far North not only contrasts starkly with the inherited ideas about the region leading up to his expeditions, it also seems distinctly at odds with his own experiences in *Meta Incognita*.

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<sup>36</sup> McDermott, “Frobisher’s 1578 Voyage,” 330-331.

<sup>37</sup> McDermott, “Frobisher’s 1578 Voyage,” 333.

<sup>38</sup> Martin Frobisher, quoted in McDermott, “Frobisher’s 1578 Voyage,” 334.

In this way the poem anticipates Dobbs' optimistic representations of the Hudson Bay region a century and a half later.

Frobisher was not alone in his optimism for the North; subsequent explorers also brought back hopeful images of the region. John Davis' account of his explorations in the waters between Baffin Island and Greenland during the 1580's suggests that the region was not the hostile wasteland that it was made out to be. He argues that the "Polar 'air' or climate... did not preclude life, or even comfort, for there were vigorous peoples, numerous birds and animals, besides huge whales, all living in the Arctic."<sup>39</sup> Rather than focusing on the six months of cold and darkness that blanketed the Poles, he points out that the converse six months of light lent the region especial "dignity." In his book, *The Seaman's Secreates*, Davis attempts to dispel many of the difficulties perceived in navigating these strange realms, such as the problem of converging meridians and the difficulties of magnetic variation near the Pole. However, by the last decade of the century, interest in the Arctic waned considerably. Davis' great patron in northern exploration, Francis Walsingham, Principal Secretary to Elizabeth I, died, and the defeat of the Spanish Armada significantly decreased the threat in southern waters.<sup>40</sup> Further, hindsight gave pessimistic perspectives of the region more weight as reports of tragedies and terrors accumulated. Importantly, the most notable of these less favourable reports came from voyages into Hudson Bay itself. Three very significant early voyages into the Bay, those of Henry Hudson, Jens Munk and Thomas James, marked the first experiences of Europeans wintering in the northern parts of North America, and their expeditions were marked with betrayal, tragedy and misfortune.

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<sup>39</sup> Taylor, *Tudor Geography*, 38.

<sup>40</sup> Taylor, *Tudor Geography*, 37-38.

It is interesting that in the eighteenth-century compilations, such as those of Oldmixon and John Churchill, Hudson's fate as the victim of a mutiny and exposure at sea along with eight others is described as a result of his dogmatic pursuit of northern exploration at all costs. Oldmixon describes Hudson's end as having resulted from the decision to pursue further discovery after wintering, at which point he and his companions were "seized ... put into an open Boat, and committed to the Mercy of the Waves and Savages."<sup>41</sup> Churchill, on the other hand, uses a literary comparison: "it is likely that his boldness having some relation to the presumption of Icarus, his wings were render'd useless by the cold, as the other's were by the heat of the sun, and so met with the same fate of perishing in the sea."<sup>42</sup> Thus, in the hands of eighteenth-century compilers, Hudson's story served as a warning about the dangers and hubris of northern navigation.

Another account that formed a more concrete example of the threats presented by this strange environment was that of the Danish navigator Jens Munk in 1619. Although two ships and sixty-five men set out, only Munk and two sailors survived their torturous winter ordeal to present their story. The narrative reached England a few decades later and was edited by Churchill for inclusion in his 1732 collection. As with Frobisher's account, Munk's narrative stresses the "violent tempests and vast ice-shoals"<sup>43</sup> that were encountered on both ends of the voyage, but even more importantly, the strange and otherworldly qualities of the region and dangers the climate presented to the sailors

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<sup>41</sup> Oldmixon, *The British Empire in America*, 1: 543.

<sup>42</sup> Awnsham Churchill and John Churchill, compilers, *A collection of voyages and travels, some now first printed from original manuscripts, others now first published in English. In six volumes. With a general preface, giving an account of the progress of navigation, from its first beginning. Illustrated with a great number of useful maps and cuts, curiously engraven.*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. vol. 2 (London, 1732), 422.

<sup>43</sup> Churchill, *A collection of voyages and travels*, 423.

during their wintering at Nelson River. In passing Cape Farewell – the southern tip of Greenland – Churchill comments that the Danes surmised the reason for this name as being “that such as go beyond it, are passing into another world, and take a long farewell from this part of it.”<sup>44</sup> Churchill also notes the sailors’ reports of unexplained and portentous celestial phenomena, such as their witnessing of “three distinct suns in the firmament, tho’ it was a very thick and gross air”.<sup>45</sup> On another occasion they observed “an eclipse of the moon ... and in the same night, they saw for two hours together, the moon surrounded by a very bright circle, with a cross in it, dividing the whole body of the moon into four parts. This meteor seem’d to be the fore-runner of the ensuing miseries.”<sup>46</sup> Churchill’s recounting of Munk’s narrative emphasizes how the environment conspired with the firmament. Celestial events were interpreted not simply as strange or unknown, but as foreboding of the dramatic illness that would afflict sailors during their long, cold, dark and hungry winter on the Bay.

As the winter cold increased beyond what was imaginable, so too did the sickness and emaciation of the sailors, and these were accepted as cause and effect. What Churchill thought most strange, however, was that this illness did not abate with the warming of the weather at springtime. The malady is described variously as a “violent looseness” and a “bloody flux,” and “their bodies did decay visibly day by day, turned livid and black at last, no otherwise than they had been beaten with sticks, and some of them lost their arms and legs by the violence of the cold.” Churchill then goes on to comment that “[this] is properly nothing else than the highest degree of scurvy, a

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<sup>44</sup> Churchill, *A collection of voyages and travels*, 423.

<sup>45</sup> Churchill, *A collection of voyages and travels*, 424.

<sup>46</sup> Churchill, *A collection of voyages and travels*, 424.

distemper very common, and sufficiently known in the northern parts of the world.”<sup>47</sup>

Thus, even with knowledge of this illness and of its prevalence throughout the English colonies, Churchill still did not disentangle this bodily sickness from the threatening northern climate.<sup>48</sup> In an effort to find food when their supplies ran low the sailors were forced to dig for berries under the snow, as the animals did. Even when the birds returned in the spring, the sailors were too weak to catch them to replenish their dangerously low rations. Receding snows did not ease their pains: “the summer season and rainy weather brought ashore such vast quantities of gnats, that they were not able to abide there.”<sup>49</sup>

Tragically, with bodies so wounded and warped from the ‘distemper’ that they could not even reap the bounty offered by the landscape, and afflicted by the merciless denizens of the landscape itself, the dangers and hostilities of northern environments seemed to go beyond the cold itself, affirming the unnatural hostility of this inhospitable landscape. The relation of these details, both in Munk’s original narrative and in Churchill’s 1732 compilation, points to a resurgent association of the Hudson Bay region with the older negative representation of northern environments.

Perhaps the most significant and lasting portrayal of Hudson Bay can be found in the published journal of Captain Thomas James, whose exploration of the Bay region resulted in wintering in James Bay in 1633-1634. It is clear that the image he presents was both influenced by and itself influenced further pessimism towards the Bay region as a whole. The first first-hand account published of an English expedition over-wintering in Hudson Bay, James’ journal presents the Bay in greater detail than had hitherto been

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<sup>47</sup> Churchill, *A collection of voyages and travels*, 425.

<sup>48</sup> See J. Watt, “Some Consequences of Nutritional Disorders in Eighteenth-Century British Circumnavigations,” in *Starving Sailors: The Influence of Nutrition upon Naval and Maritime History*, eds. J. Watt, E.J. Freeman, and W.F. Bynum (Bristol: National Maritime Museum, 1981), 51-62.

<sup>49</sup> Churchill, *A collection of voyages and travels*, 425.

available, and his representation emphasizes both the severity of the climate and weather, as well as the unpredictability and unnaturalness of this strange and alien realm. His detailed attention to the behaviour of ice and the effects of cold drew the interest of scientist Robert Boyle, who quotes James liberally when investigating the phenomenon of cold in 1665.<sup>50</sup>

One of the most curious aspects to capture James' attention was the region's excessive cold in the winter as compared to similar latitudes in Europe. This latitudinal understanding of climate was a recent, but by the 1630's, commonplace assumption based on attempts to systematize and adapt the inherited cosmological idea of climatic zones. James' description of the seemingly unexplainable fluctuations in spring temperatures points to his difficulty reconciling experiences in the North with the accepted theories of climate: "The season here in this Climate, is most unnaturall; for in the day time, it will be extreme hot: yea not indurable in the Sunne ... In the night again, it will freeze an inch thicke in the ponds, and in the tubs about and in our house."<sup>51</sup> This phenomenon of hot and cold extremes in a single location confirmed the region's unnatural and hostile qualities in comparison to the known climates of temperate latitudes. Indeed, the phenomenon of polar extremes had become something of a trope. MacLaren notes that only thirty five years later, in *Paradise Lost*, Milton employed this same device in describing the "Frozen Continent" on the other side of Hell's river Lethe:

the parching Air  
Burns frore, and cold performs th'effect of Fire.  
Thither by harpy-footed Furies hail'd,  
At certain revolutions all the damn'd  
Are brought: and feel by turns the bitter change  
Of fierce extreame, extreame by change more fierce,

<sup>50</sup> Ian S. MacLaren, "'Zealous Sayles' and Zealous Sales: Bookings on the Northwest Passage," *Princeton University Library Chronicle*, 64 no.2 (2003): 268-269.

<sup>51</sup> Thomas James, quoted in MacLaren, "'Zealous Sayles' and Zealous Sales", 266.

From Beds of raging Fire to starve in Ice  
 Thir soft Ethereal warmth, and there to pine  
 Immovable, infixt, and frozen round,  
 Periods of time, thence hurried back to fire,  
 They ferry over this *Lethean* Sound  
 Both to and Fro, their sorrow to augment...<sup>52</sup>

Like fire, the cold burns; and as James' experiences of the "unnatural" climate are "not indurable", so the "sorrows" of the "all the damn'd" are augmented by their alternation between these "fierce extreams". MacLaren even suggests that it might have been James' experiences in the North that inspired Milton to depict hell as frozen and burning.

Clearly, the trope of extreme variations in temperature as unnatural and aberrant, even evil, was firmly embedded in the public consciousness.<sup>53</sup>

As the season warmed, James and his crew were assaulted from a new direction by "an infinit abundance of bloud-thirsty Musketoos".<sup>54</sup> Despite their best efforts to cover themselves, these pests "would finde wayes and meanes to sting us, that our faces were swolne hard out in pumple, which would so itch and smart, that we must needs rubbe and teare them."<sup>55</sup> Indeed, "these flyes, were more tormenting to us, then [*sic*] all the cold we had heretofore indured".<sup>56</sup> MacLaren explains that in seventeenth-century England, the Devil was frequently depicted as a fly, or as lord of the flies, and the injury and irritation these flies inflicted highlights how James' narrative consistently portrayed the North as a series of trials to test his faith in God – not dissimilar from the narratives of both Saint Brendan and Frobisher. MacLaren goes on to say that the "Iconography of the

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<sup>52</sup> John Milton, quoted in MacLaren, "Zealous Sayles' and Zealous Sales", 273.

<sup>53</sup> MacLaren, "Zealous Sayles' and Zealous Sales", 271-274; Ian S. MacLaren, "Arctic Exploration and Milton's 'Frozen Continent,'" *Notes and Queries*, 31 (1984): 325-326.

<sup>54</sup> Thomas James, quoted in MacLaren, "Zealous Sayles' and Zealous Sales", 266.

<sup>55</sup> Thomas James, quoted in MacLaren, "Zealous Sayles' and Zealous Sales", 266.

<sup>56</sup> Thomas James, quoted in MacLaren, "Zealous Sayles' and Zealous Sales", 266.

North as the mutinous, fallen Lucifer's domain was sufficiently well known to Bible readers of James' day as to be taken for granted."<sup>57</sup>

James' narrative might readily have faded into obscurity. He contributed virtually nothing in terms of new exploration and the negative report did little to encourage the project of northern discovery taken on by England. However, the attention he devoted to the details of wintering in fact set in motion a new trend in Arctic literature that significantly emphasized the representation of the geography of the north.<sup>58</sup> This factor, combined with the recognition that scholars such as Robert Boyle accorded to his work, meant that James' narrative was seen as particularly significant by later compilers and geographers, and was often given much more space than the records of other explorers.<sup>59</sup> Thus, James' narrative both built upon and further reinforced assumptions about the "strange and dangerous" nature of Northern geography and climates, and his narrated experiences solidified characterizations of Hudson Bay through this tinted lens for the coming century.

It is worth noting that such negative characterization of the North in general, and of Hudson Bay in particular, was a broad trend, rather than a specific assessment, and does not imply that individual navigators did not find landscapes worthy of favourable commentary. D.W. Moodie explains this ambiguity in accounts by differentiating between the 'cold and hostile' portrayal of the Bay's marine environment, and the lack of any clear understanding of the region's resource potential, which held right into the

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<sup>57</sup> MacLaren, "'Zealous Sayles' and Zealous Sales", 266-275..

<sup>58</sup> MacLaren, "'Zealous Sayles' and Zealous Sales", 263-264.

<sup>59</sup> James' narrative was given generous space in most of the early eighteenth century compilations so far cited, including the *Atlas Geographus*, Oldmixon's *The British Empire in America*, Churchill's *A collection of voyages and travels*, and Harris' *Navigantium atque itinerantium bibliotheca*. MacLaren explains it was published at least once a decade from the 1750's until 1818. It was then heavily criticized by Sir John Barrow, secretary to the Admiralty, in large part for its failure to evince any significant geographical discovery. See MacLaren, "'Zealous Sayles' and Zealous Sales", 264, 281-287.

1740's.<sup>60</sup> Moments of optimism pepper accounts, such as Captain Luke Fox's frequently repeated description of the coast just north of Churchill River from his voyage in 1633:

This land bore from me to the S.E. by E., and was gentle descending down to the Seaside, the greenest & best like I have seene since I came out of the river of Thames, and as it were inclosed with thick rowes of Trees betweene one meadowe and another, distinct as it were Barnes Elmes, nere London, and at sight hereof I did thinke of them; and if there be any keeping of tame Deere of other beasts, or tillage, in all that cuntry, I should think it to be there.<sup>61</sup>

This imaginative portrait is reminiscent of Frobisher's optimism that Baffin Island could support settlers. It also speaks to the early modern shift toward seeking out/inventing the familiar, a means of appropriating landscape. However, Fox's description of the fertile shores of the Nelson River, though favourable, hints at problems:

it is also thicke as can stand, of Firre and Spruce-trees, but small ones, for there is no ground for the wood to take roote in the earth, but grow up, and fall down and rot... (where wee landed) me thought the vallies was good grasse, store of wood and here we gathered black-berries, ... with straw-berries, goose-berries, and vetches, with several sorts of small shrubs & trees, & upon the shore we found the broad footing of Deere.<sup>62</sup>

Here, even the most favourably portrayed landscape is unable to provide adequately for their needs for, despite the fertility of the forests, "I have not found a tree that will make a Mayne yard."<sup>63</sup> Additionally the woods, though promising when compared to the bleak shores of the northern coasts, reminded visitors of the indigenous inhabitants of the land, and while explorers generally sought favourable contact, they were also constantly wary of attack.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> D.W. Moodie, *An Historical Geography of Agricultural Patterns and resource appraisals in Rupert's Land, 1670-1774* (unpubl. Ph.D. thesis, Univ. of Alberta, 1972), 114.

<sup>61</sup> Luke Foxe, excerpt from ed. John Warkentin, *The Western Interior of Canada: A Record of Geographical Discovery 1612-1917* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1964), 14; See also Moodie, *An Historical Geography*, 114.

<sup>62</sup> Luke Fox, *North-West Fox, or Fox from the North-west Passage*, London, 1635, 216

<sup>63</sup> Fox, *North-West Fox*, 217. A yard is defined as: "A wooden (or steel) spar, comparatively long and slender, slung at its centre from, and forward of, a mast and serving to support and extend a square sail which is bent to it." "Yard, n.2", *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1989. OED Online. 16 Oct 2009 [http://dictionary.oed.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/cgi/entry/50288747?query\_type=word&queryword=yard&first=1&max\_to\_show=10&sort\_type=alpha&result\_place=3&search\_id=h2Do-soTHtl-7567&hilite=50288747]

<sup>64</sup> Fox, *North-West Fox*, 216.

Indeed, while most explorers reported finding berries or woods, deer or fowl, it seems clear that these were rare deviations from a norm most aptly framed by James: “I found this Island, utterly barren of all goodnesse: yea of that which I thought easily to have found: which was Scurvy-grasse, Sorell, or some herbe or other, to have refreshed our sick people.”<sup>65</sup> This short account of hopes dashed aptly sums up both the English search for the Northwest Passage leading into the mid eighteenth century, and the picture of the region as it evolved during this time. The re-imagining of England as a northern nation, the reconfiguration of the northern peoples, Frobisher’s hopeful hallucinations of gold and grains on Kodlunarn Island, and Davis’ rational arguments for a more scientific understanding of the North all were dashed on the rocks of Hudson Bay in that open boat with Hudson himself. This event was followed quickly by the ‘strange and dangerous’ narratives of Munk and James, whose unnatural extremes and devilish flies tormented the imaginations of the English public as they were swept into the eighteenth century.

The largely undifferentiated and unpleasant portrayal of Hudson Bay in English culture during the first half of the eighteenth century was the result of two key factors: an inherited antipathy towards northern climates and peoples, and a two-hundred-year history of hardship and struggle in northern voyages. However, while these narratives conveyed a generally unpleasant picture of the Bay region, their authority as a canon was not immediately evident at the time. Luke Fox was the first to assemble alongside his own narrative a history of northern exploration, beginning with accounts of the journeys of King Arthur. It was almost as if he was offering a regionally specific collection, such as those of Hakluyt or Purchas, or a canon of saintly explorers to mimic the religious

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<sup>65</sup> Thomas James, *The Strange and Dangerous Voyage of Captaine Thomas James* (Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum Ltd., 1968), 31.

writings of John Fox's *Act's and Monuments*. In the eighteenth century, compilers and explorers would follow in Luke Fox's footsteps and present their accounts within a lineage of northern exploration. This tableau of unfortunate experiences was concretized and unified under Oldmixon's austere brush.

### **Old Prejudices and New Improvements: the 1740s Reconsidered**

Despite the momentary observations of favourable landscapes, the conventional stereotype of the Bay region leading up to the eighteenth century was of an unimproveable region. Both Oldmixon and Dobbs embodied the optimism and fervour of the burgeoning Enlightenment era. Yet Oldmixon persisted in depicting the Bay region unfavourably, whereas Dobbs focussed on its potential. This discrepancy highlights a number of important features about the notion of improvement and its ability to re-imagine regions in new ways, as well as the values that were ascribed to significant geographic and climatic features.

In order to understand the significance and extent of the transformation that Dobbs presents in his 1744 natural history, I will provide a more in-depth analysis of the work to which he was responding. As has been seen, Oldmixon did not look fondly on either the Hudson Bay region or English attempts to settle and trade there. However, while his book was both an history and political commentary on British activity in the American colonies, its politics were not subtle and the premise was plain at the outset: "to show the character and great natural resources of the American Colonies, and the advantage that they would be to England."<sup>66</sup> Moodie comments on this curious disparity between Oldmixon's promotional program and his unfavourable depiction of the Bay

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<sup>66</sup> Oldmixon, *The British Empire in America*, 1: xiv.

region. However, where Moodie roots Oldmixon's antipathy in his unfavourable descriptions of experiences on the Bay, I connect these to the older trends of northern representations.

Every inch the eighteenth-century armchair geographer and natural historian, Oldmixon never travelled to the territories that he wrote about, instead relying on eyewitness accounts to guarantee the authenticity of his reports – many attained through family contacts in the colonies.<sup>67</sup> However, as a sceptic and a critic, he did not always take first-hand accounts at face value. His biases are apparent when he comments: “[Some] enlarged on the advantages of their respective Settlements to England, the Fruitfulness and Charms of the Country they lived in, the Riches to be gotten there ... Would not the impartial reader have been surprised to have found *Hudson's-Bay* preferred to *Carolina*, and *Providence* to *Barbadoes*?”<sup>68</sup> In depicting the region unfavourably despite first-hand reports to the contrary, Oldmixon demonstrates his willingness to subordinate eyewitness accounts to generally accepted knowledge. Additionally, the reliance of later compilers upon his depiction of the Bay region points to his role in fashioning public opinion. Oldmixon's text clearly straddled the line between forming public opinion and affirming already established fact.

Thus, both Oldmixon and his readers approached these texts with an inherited antipathy towards Hudson Bay and northern regions. Early on in his history of the region, Oldmixon describes the northern seas which Henry Hudson explored in 1607: “Henry

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<sup>67</sup> Oldmixon, *The British Empire in America*, 1: xi; Rogers, “Oldmixon, John (1672/3–1742)”.

<sup>68</sup> Oldmixon, *The British Empire in America*, 1: viii. To compare, Oldmixon describes Carolina briefly as being “most convenient for Trade, its Coasts pleasant and safe, not stormy or frozen in the Winter”, Oldmixon, *The British Empire in America*, 1: 508; and of Barbados he says “The Country in general is gradually rising, level in some Parts, and in others, some high Hills affording the most lovely Prospects all over the island, with a continual Verdure”. (Oldmixon, *The British Empire in America*, 2: 97.)

Hudson discover'd as far as 80 Degrees 23 Minutes; at the Mention of which, the Reader will almost freeze as the Writer does; for that country is so prodigiously cold, that Nature is never impregnated by the Sun; or rather, her barren Womb produces nothing for the subsistence of man."<sup>69</sup> By appealing to his readers directly, Oldmixon draws them into common cause with him, asserting that the far North is insufferable. His frightful image of the northern landscape as a barren woman – laying the cause of infertility directly in the lap of barren nature/woman, rather than the impregnating sun/man – touches deeply rooted anxieties about the unnaturalness of infertility. Interestingly, while this bleak passage follows a brief account of Davis' voyage into the strait that bears his name, Oldmixon does not specify that Hudson's 1607 voyage was actually along the east coast of Greenland and in the area of Spitzbergen, and not in the region of Hudson Bay at all. While it is impossible to say whether this error was deliberate, it reveals the extent to which the entire North was characterized by its most dreadful and severe qualities.

In the more southern regions of the Bay, Oldmixon portrays English traders as living a diminished and pathetic existence, "within their Forts, in little Houses, or Huts, wherein the builders consider nothing but to defend them from the Cold and Rains; though they are not so much disturb'd by the latter as by the former."<sup>70</sup> Settled in "forts" instead of towns, since the regional resources were considered insufficient to support the indigenous population let alone any more substantial occupation by its English visitors,<sup>71</sup> Oldmixon's motif of settlers besieged by weather continues into his recounting of

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<sup>69</sup> Oldmixon, *The British Empire in America*, 1: 543.

<sup>70</sup> Oldmixon, *The British Empire in America*, 1: 546.

<sup>71</sup> Oldmixon, *The British Empire in America*, 1: 548-550, 555. Moodie builds on this point, commenting how the author explicitly avoided any hint at, and even challenged the common trope of the Indian as a "noble savage living at one with nature" in his writing. This topic and Oldmixon's place in it will be developed further in chapter three. See Moodie, *An Historical Geography*, 113.

Governor Charles Baily's preparations for their first winter on the Bay in 1670: "Now Mr. *Baily* and his little Colony fell to patching up their Cabins, and prepare for the Enemy, and they had nothing to fear but the Season."<sup>72</sup> The earliest English residents were forced to endure the winter in "huts" with "no covering for them but Moose-Skins."<sup>73</sup> According to Oldmixon, these "huts" were not only a poor defence against the "Enemy" (winter) but also a clear indication of the reversion to savagery in this "barbarous clime, where Barbarity herself is at the Heigth [*sic*] of Empire".<sup>74</sup>

This state of winter siege was not simply due to severe weather – it also was the region's inability to support the Englishmen nutritionally and materially that forced a life of military occupation. Indeed, the insufficiency of the natural produce rendered the settlers into soldiers, in combat with the environment itself in order to eke out a living: "so long had these poor Men lived in this Desert, holding a precarious Being by their Guns and fishing Tackle."<sup>75</sup> Their subsistence was limited to supplies the ships could bring once each year, supplemented by whatever hunting, fishing and gathering they could manage to fight off scurvy over winter. And this natural produce is portrayed by Oldmixon rather pathetically. Taken as evidence that the region could not be 'improved', the soil is described as bearing "no manner of Grain." Oldmixon mentions Fox's discovery of "Some Fruits, Gooseberries, Strawberries, and Dew Otter-berries, ... about Prince *Rupert's* River",<sup>76</sup> but these are not given significant narrative weight. His presentation of the Company's efforts to establish an agricultural base in the southern part of the Bay suggests failure was inevitable:

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<sup>72</sup> Oldmixon, *The British Empire in America*, 1: 550.

<sup>73</sup> Oldmixon, *The British Empire in America*, 1: 549.

<sup>74</sup> Oldmixon, *The British Empire in America*, 1: 548.

<sup>75</sup> Oldmixon, *The British Empire in America*, 1: 556.

<sup>76</sup> Oldmixon, *The British Empire in America*, 1: 547.

The Company always enjoined their Governors to endeavour to save the great Charge they were at in sending constant Supplies of Provisions, by planting Corn and other Grain there. But alas! Though the Climate by its Distance from the Sun should be as warm as ours, yet it is so cold and frosty that it kills almost all Sorts of Roots in the Ground which are sown there; and those Plantations so often recommended by the Company were chimerical and impracticable.<sup>77</sup>

For one who advocated the benefits of the “great natural resources of the American Colonies”, Oldmixon was quick to judge this region beyond hope, not least worth the toil.

Oldmixon depicts hunting as subject to the vagaries of unforgiving seasons. The most significant harvests available to the factory workers were transitory, such as migratory geese in autumn (whose departure was a “terrible sight”).<sup>78</sup> And while the arrival of winter partridges was celebrated, hunting them could be dangerous, as “the Governor’s Boys Feet and Face were spoiled by the Frost, in catching of Partridges.”<sup>79</sup> The cold was even seen to penetrate the men’s senses, altering their perceptions of the country produce. Normally, the flesh of Moose was considered an “indifferent Meat; however the Air was sharp, to make it relish as well as Venison”.<sup>80</sup> The rigours of the region evoked deeply embedded ideas of northern realms as threatening and inhospitable landscapes that were particularly unsuited to English bodies and ways of living.

Oldmixon consistently describes the entirety of Canada, including the St. Lawrence River region and what was known of the Great Lakes, as a “cold, barren province”,<sup>81</sup> while Newfoundland is “in Truth one of the most uncomfortable Places in the habitable World. As it is scarce tolerable to the *English* by the seasons”.<sup>82</sup> Like Hudson Bay’s rich trade, Newfoundland’s vast wealth from commercial cod fisheries and

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<sup>77</sup> Oldmixon, *The British Empire in America*, 1: 561.

<sup>78</sup> Oldmixon, *The British Empire in America*, 1: 550.

<sup>79</sup> Oldmixon, *The British Empire in America*, 1: 550.

<sup>80</sup> Oldmixon, *The British Empire in America*, 1: 549.

<sup>81</sup> Oldmixon, *The British Empire in America*, 1: xxvi.

<sup>82</sup> Oldmixon, *The British Empire in America*, 1: 17.

abundant natural resources such as timber and animal products are seen favourably.<sup>83</sup>

However, the seemingly unnatural climates of these northern lands and their inability to support agriculture carry greater weight for Oldmixon, who rejects them for settlement.

Newfoundland is described in terms strongly resonant of the characterization of the Bay:

The Inhabitants have no Corn, nor any other sort of Provision or Necessaries, except *Fish, Venison* and *Wild Fowl*, but what is sent them from *Europe*. The Island is full of Mountains and impracticable Forests. Its Meadows are like Heaths, and are covered with a Sort of Moss instead of Grass. The Soil is good for nothing, being a Mixture of Gravel, Sand and Stones.<sup>84</sup>

Oldmixon also stresses the severity of Newfoundland's climate: "[V]ery hot in the Summer and cold in Winter: The Naturalists solve this by the bleak Winds that come off from the Mountains of Snow and Lakes of Ice on that Continent... The Snow lies on the Ground 4 or 5 Months ... this Cold is represented almost as intense as Fire".<sup>85</sup> The Bay-side climate was even more anomalous and inexplicable by conventional understandings: "The Air even at the Bottom of the Bay, though by the Latitude 'tis nearer the Sun than *London*, being but in 51 Degrees, is excessive cold for nine Months, the other three Months very hot, but on a North-West Wind."<sup>86</sup> Here the trope of extremes of hot and cold emerges again, this time alongside contemporary climatic rationalities, proving them entirely insufficient to explain this strange realm. As Moodie points out Oldmixon is unable to offer any convincing explanation to replace current theory.<sup>87</sup> The similarity of these descriptions suggests that Oldmixon's unhappy depiction of the Bay was not solely due to its inability to produce resources that could sustain British subjects, but also to a climate that was presumed to signify a resistance to improvement, based on its representations as dangerous, hostile and unnatural. To Oldmixon, then, it was fated to

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<sup>83</sup> Oldmixon, *The British Empire in America*, 1: 17-19.

<sup>84</sup> Oldmixon, *The British Empire in America*, 1: 16.

<sup>85</sup> Oldmixon, *The British Empire in America*, 1: 16.

<sup>86</sup> Oldmixon, *The British Empire in America*, 1: 547.

<sup>87</sup> Moodie, *An Historical Geography*, 112.

failure: “Such was the state of this Infant Settlement, and it has not mended much since, for Want and Cold have every year endangered the Lives of all that have been there.”<sup>88</sup>

Soon after the publication of Oldmixon’s second edition, there was a new interest in the Bay region. Upon his return home from Hudson Bay in October 1742, Captain Christopher Middleton presented a paper to the Royal Society, *Captain Middleton’s Account of the Extraordinary Degrees and Surprizing Effects of COLD in Hudson’s-Bay, North America*.<sup>89</sup> In the midst of learned reflection on magnetism and the relationship between latitude and climate, Middleton’s paper underscores the dangerous and uncertain nature of northern winters. He calls attention to a number of strange northern phenomena such as the explosive effects that frost could have on ice and stored liquids, as well as on “the Rocks, Trees, Joists and Rafters of our Buildings, [which] are burst with a Noise not less terrible than the firing off a great many Guns together.”<sup>90</sup> Similarly, he observes and tries to explain the vicious effect of strong winds on perceptions of cold, now known as wind chill. His description of this effect goes beyond physics to imbue the weather with a decidedly sinister quality:

Fogs and Mists that are brought here from the Polar Parts, in Winter, appear visible to the naked Eye in Icicles innumerable, as small as fine Hairs or Threads, and pointed as sharp as needles ... striking more forcibly in a windy Day, than in calm Weather, thereby penetrating the naked skin, or Parts but thinly covered, and causing an acute Sensation of Pain or Cold.<sup>91</sup>

To Middleton, even the soil seemed to resist human efforts: “The Frost is never out of the Ground, how deep we cannot be certain. We have dug down 10 or 12 feet, and found the Earth hard frozen in the two Summer Months; and what Moisture we find five or six Feet

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<sup>88</sup> Oldmixon, *The British Empire in America*, 1: 557.

<sup>89</sup> Middleton’s paper was published in its entirety in his book, *A Vindication of the Conduct of Captain Christopher Middleton* (London: Jacob Robinson, 1743), 193-206. The paper was printed again in the *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society*, XLII (1742-43): 157-171.

<sup>90</sup> Middleton, *A Vindication*, 194.

<sup>91</sup> Middleton, *A Vindication*, 198-199

down is white like Ice.”<sup>92</sup> Though trying to understand and explain these strange phenomena, Middleton’s focus on these details followed the well-worn path of highlighting the foreignness and severity of northern climates. His conclusion that “The dreadful long Winters here may almost be compared to the Polar Parts, where the Absence of the Sun continues for six months; the Air being perpetually chilled and frozen by the northerly Winds in Winter, and the cold Fogs and Mists obstructing the Sun’s Beams in the short Summer we have here,”<sup>93</sup> did not encourage further attempts at settlement.

Middleton, like Oldmixon, recognized that the Hudson Bay cold presented not only a physical problem, but also conflicted with climatic theory of the day and, being of a scientific mind, he went to great lengths to understand why. He describes how it “is not a little surprising to many, that such extreme Cold should be felt in these Parts of *America*, more than in Places of the same Latitude on the Coast of *Norway*.”<sup>94</sup> In Hudson Bay, he explains, “we have constantly every Year nine Months Frost and Snow, and unsufferable Cold from *October* till the Beginning of *May*.”<sup>95</sup> In his analysis of Middleton’s voyage, Glyndwr Williams notes that in the 1740’s, the Northern hemisphere was in the most severe years of a climatic shift known as the “Little Ice Age.”<sup>96</sup> He points out that the temperature in early October at Churchill had “dropped to

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<sup>92</sup> Middleton, *A Vindication*, 195.

<sup>93</sup> Middleton, *A Vindication*, 197-198.

<sup>94</sup> Middleton, *A Vindication*, 199.

<sup>95</sup> Middleton, *A Vindication*, 199.

<sup>96</sup> After a thousand years of slow global warming, culminating in the Little Optimum (900-1250), temperatures gradually and sporadically began cooling in what is called the Pacific Climatic Episode (1250-1550). This was followed by a rapid cooling across the globe, known as the Neo-Boreal Climatic Episode, or the Little Ice Age. Conditions were at their most extreme during the First Maunder Minimum (1645-1715), a phase of diminished solar radiation. For more on this phenomenon and its impact, see Renée Fossett, *In Order to Live Untroubled: Inuit of the Central Arctic, 1550-1940* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2001), 64-67.

the level of the great frost in England two years earlier, when the Thames froze so hard that fairs and houses were built on the ice.”<sup>97</sup> So it would be fair to say that the British crew was unused to the climate they encountered in preparation for wintering in Hudson Bay.<sup>98</sup> However, in contrast to Oldmixon, Middleton attempts to explain the climatic phenomenon by suggesting the northern winds had been chilled by blowing over high snow-covered mountains to the north. He also attributes the warmer climate of Norway to westerly Atlantic winds.<sup>99</sup> While his picture of the region is not significantly more favourable than Oldmixon’s, his account carried the weight of scientific authority.

Middleton’s chilling picture supported established knowledge and was upheld by scientific evidence; however, it did not remain uncontested for long. In 1744 Arthur Dobbs published his opus, *An Account of the Countries Adjoining to Hudson’s Bay in the North-West Part of America*, which presents a detailed natural history of the region, emphasizing the potential of the Bay for future English settlement. In addition to drawing from the known narratives of exploration and compilations, such as Oldmixon’s, Dobbs incorporates details from numerous new sources. Through Middleton he gained access to a number of Company documents that had been hitherto unavailable, which he supplemented with several informative and lesser-known French accounts, including a report on the state of Hudson Bay by Nicolas Jeremie, Lieutenant and subsequently

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<sup>97</sup> Glyndwr Williams, *Voyages of Delusion: The Northwest Passage in the Age of Reason* (London: HarperCollins, 2002), 87.

<sup>98</sup> Williams also points out that relatively few sailors who worked aboard the *Furnace* on Middleton’s voyage were volunteers, and thus many began the journey with little sailing experience, likely no experience in the north, and in rather poor health. This likely contributed to the difficulties encountered during their winter stay at Churchill Factory. (Williams, *Voyages of Delusion*, 71.)

<sup>99</sup> Moodie, *An Historical Geography*, 109.

Governor of Fort Bourbon (York Fort) from 1697-1714, during the French occupation;<sup>100</sup> the *Histoire de l’Amerique septentrionale*, by the historian De la Potherie;<sup>101</sup> and first-hand reports from some Company employees and a French fur trader, Joseph La France, who travelled overland from Montreal through the Great Lakes waterway, west to Lake Winnipeg, and then north along the drainage basin to York Factory.<sup>102</sup>

Building on his unshakeable conviction that the future of British trade lay in the discovery of a trade route to the Pacific through the northern regions of North America, Dobbs’ natural history laid the foundation for an all-out assault on the Hudson’s Bay Company’s misuse of its monopoly rights in the region. One of the most interesting aspects of this document is the way in which Dobbs mobilizes ideas about geography and images of the unknown landscape in the interior to buttress his argument for exploration and settlement. He contends that all of the Bay-side regions carry important resources that could be harnessed for trade; and furthermore, he describes the regions inland in greater detail than was previously possible, presenting them as extremely favourable to British settlement.<sup>103</sup> Moodie notes that, for Dobbs, the inland was far from inhospitable:

[The inland] areas of potential colonization and agricultural settlement were depicted ... as well wooded and fertile. Scattered throughout his descriptions of these lands, however, Dobbs made a number of references to natural meadows which, if taken together, convey an impression of a zone of woodland punctuated with the areas of grassland that extended across the southwestern interior.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Jacques Rousseau, “Jeremie, Nicolas”, *Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online*, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2000; 20 Oct. 2009, [http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?id\_nbr=868&interval=25&&PHPSESSID=9af7ec4v6kvqsrlis7sja793n4]

<sup>101</sup> Leon Pouliot, “Le Roy De La Potherie, Claude-Charles”, *Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online*, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2000; 20 Oct. 2009, [http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?id\_nbr=947&interval=20&&PHPSESSID=9af7ec4v6kvqsrlis7sja793n4]

<sup>102</sup> Dobbs, *An Account*, 3, 4-49.

<sup>103</sup> Moodie, *An Historical Geography*, 89-91.

<sup>104</sup> Moodie, *An Historical Geography*, 98.

Dobbs also emphasizes the presence of spontaneous grains such as oats or rice, the potential for fruit trees to flourish, and wild oxen, all of which are taken to indicate the suitability of lands to agriculture and livestock.<sup>105</sup>

In presenting this imagined geography, however, Dobbs was in something of a quandary. While he could easily accuse his critics of complicity with the Company, arguing that it had an interest in perpetuating a negative perception of the region to protect its monopoly, he could not completely ignore the significant data about the Bay-side region from observers such as Middleton. His answer was to reaffirm Middleton's observations concerning the colder Bay-side climate, but attribute them to an unnaturally cold littoral rather than the climate of the entire region. It was the cold air from the Bay that rendered the coast so unpleasant, but just a short distance inland, he argues, the climate improved considerably. This explanation allows Dobbs to apply the conventional latitudinal understanding of climate while still remaining faithful to existing evidence.<sup>106</sup> Moodie points out how this deft manipulation of the available evidence allows Dobbs to argue persuasively that the inland regions were much warmer than had been imagined. In doing so, he employed the most current scientific thinking of the time to construct a comprehensive description of the entire region.<sup>107</sup>

In presenting his account of the Bay region, however, Dobbs, like most other British at the time, was unable to imagine the cold Subarctic climate of the Bay-side as conducive to settlement. His imagination was locked in the old prejudices that equated cold northern regions with desolation and barrenness, and so in his call for settlement of

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<sup>105</sup> Moodie, *An Historical Geography*, 92, 98-99, 101.

<sup>106</sup> Moodie, *An Historical Geography*, 105-107.

<sup>107</sup> Moodie, *An Historical Geography*, 106, 110.

the Hudson Bay region, he describes and promotes landscapes that are far from Subarctic.

Instead, he represents the Subarctic as a temperate paradise:

The Factories at present on *Moose* River, in Lat. 51°.28'. and in *Albany*, in Lat. 52°. on the South-west of the Bay, are at present in a very tolerable Climate, being the same with these already mentioned, but would be in a vastly better Climate, if they were fixed some Miles higher up, at some Distance from the chilling Winds of the Bay. Where it appears all Sorts of Grain and Pulse would grow to Perfection, and most kinds of *European* Fruits. Horses, Cows, Sheep, and all other domestick Animals, here being excellent Grass, and very good Hay may be made of it, which would improve by feeding and cutting it for their Use in Winter; and all Sorts of Grain may be had for their Use, as well as for the Inhabitants, wild Oats or Rice growing in abundance spontaneously farther up the Rivers to the Southward, at some Distance from the Bay.<sup>108</sup>

The Moose and Albany posts were the two most southerly Bay-side posts existing at this time, and thus of all the Company posts on the Bay, they were situated in the most favourable climate possible. Nevertheless, Dobbs is uncomfortable with their Bay-side location, exposed as they were to the “chilling winds” of the Bay, and he immediately suggests the move farther inland to “vastly better Climates.” His descriptions of the inland region, on the other hand, sound more like Europe; for example, the beasts and fruits presented were not indigenous to the region. His description illustrates how he imagined a region styled after ideas of English agricultural improvement – over and above any realistic assessment of the Subarctic.

Though Dobbs’ writing emphasizes the tolerability of the climates at the southern-most Bay-side Company posts, he is careful to distinguish between the coastal climate in general and the specific landscapes where these posts were situated. He argues that “at present the Situation of the Factories of Moose and Albany are very unhappy, being placed in the Swamps, at the mouths of the Rivers for the Company’s chief Aim being Trade, they don’t regard the Soil, Aspect or Situation, where they fix them.”<sup>109</sup>

Moodie points to this trend, arguing that “[Dobbs] shrewdly maintained that climatic

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<sup>108</sup> Dobbs, *An Account*, 51.

<sup>109</sup> Dobbs, *An Account*, 52.

conditions at the Company's settlements were more severe than those generally along the coast."<sup>110</sup> This positioning of the Company posts in the worst of the worst landscapes highlights Dobbs' assumption that there were superior landscapes located elsewhere, away from river mouths (without having to identify their locations). The passage also illustrates Dobbs' assumptions about the hierarchy of landscapes, which seems to leave swamps – a most unimproveable landscape – well at the bottom. In hindsight, this view is ironic, as Governor James Isham's journal passage on attempts to set up an inland post at Henley House would later affirm. While the lowland marshes regularly yielded huge amounts of geese and other water fowl to supplement the diets of the factory men, the inland forests proved difficult for hunting and returns were scanty in comparison.<sup>111</sup> What is clear, however, is that in his depictions, Dobbs found himself unable to adequately confront the harshness of the northern Subarctic coast. The image that Dobbs painted for his British readers of the Hudson Bay region was instead a familiar, temperate paradise. With respect to the colder regions, he had not varied much from the standard view. Dobbs had simply moved the line that delineated temperate from Arctic, restricting the Subarctic transition zone to the river mouths where the Company happened to have conveniently placed their factories.

Indeed, where Dobbs does discuss the more adverse geographies of Hudson Bay, he regularly associates these not with British settlement, but with resource extraction. To be sure, a discussion of the ubiquity of resources did not necessarily indicate a high appraisal of a region. Oldmixon was generous in his appraisal of the furs that could be brought out of the Bay region, like the timber and cod of Newfoundland, but these

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<sup>110</sup> Moodie, *An Historical Geography*, 106.

<sup>111</sup> Moodie, *An Historical Geography*, 203.

attributes did not make life there easy or pleasant. Dobbs also frequently mentions that the colder regions of the Bay-side offer significant resources for trade, but in doing so he emphasizes the limited role of British subjects in these endeavours:

The North-west Part of the Bay, beyond the *River of Seals*, in Lat.60°. is most incapable of Improvement, there being little Wood to be had there near the Bay; nor is it necessary to have any Settlements there, unless one should be made for convicted Felons, by way of Punishment or Banishment, as is practiced in Muscovy, by sending Criminals to Siberia, or by the Danes lately to their Settlements in Davis Streight, upon the Coast of Greenland: But tho' there are few Woods there, yet there is Plenty of Game, Rain-Deer in great Numbers, Hares, Buffaloes, Foxes, and many other Beasts, whose Skins and Furs are valuable.<sup>112</sup>

Here lack of trees signals the inability to improve the region, and despite Dobbs' claims about the tolerability of the coast, the most hostile northern reaches are assumed to be the preserve of the condemned rather than proper British subjects. This characterization of the northern Bay areas continues in his discussion of the indigenous populace, who play an important role in Dobbs' imagination in exploiting the region's mineral, animal and aquatic resources. As Dobbs goes on to state:

[T]he Natives there might be employed in Hunting and Fishing, and also in the Mines, there being a fine Copper Mine already discovered on a Streight or Arm of the Sea in that Country. Whale-fin and oil may be had in abundance, from the Number of Whales seen there, as also Seals, white Bears, and Sea-Horses... and this Trade would increase by employing the Eskimaux Indians, who are already so dextrous as to strike and kill them with Harpoons made of Bone, and must improve, by furnishing them with our Harpoons and Lines, and other Implements of Iron, and Fire Arms to such as would be reclaimed and civilized.<sup>113</sup>

Similarly, along the fertile southern rim of the Bay, Dobbs repeatedly suggests that the Lowland Cree should shoot geese in the swamps that the British settlers avoid.<sup>114</sup> These landscapes and occupations were not for British folk, according to Dobbs; others were better adapted to their rigours and it should be those people who were employed therein. The contemporary discourse of improvement internalized the values of older prejudices

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<sup>112</sup> Dobbs, *An Account*, 59.

<sup>113</sup> Dobbs, *An Account*, 59-60. The representations of the Indigenous Peoples in these accounts will be addressed in chapter three.

<sup>114</sup> Dobbs, *An Account*, 3, 24, 52, 53.

based in climatic and humoral paradigms, emphasizing the dangerous and invasive effects of climates on persons, and transferring those effects into a new language of development and geographically-based cultural hegemony. The improvements that Dobbs advocated were rooted in transplanting a picturesque, temperate and agricultural England, with rolling meadows, pastures, parklands and orchards, onto the wildlife and swampy soil of the Hudson Bay wetlands, where “dextrous” “Natives” diligently laboured under the watchful eye and guiding hand of their British masters.

Dobbs’ seemingly radical vision of the Hudson Bay region did not fully escape the inherited paradigms of northern landscapes as inhospitable and dangerous to British subjects, yet he did offer a newly optimistic perspective of its resource potential in ways that Oldmixon’s cynical portrayals could not. However, Dobbs’ overwhelming desire to imagine British landscapes in the wilds of Hudson Bay impeded him from presenting any pragmatic strategies for adapting to the environmental rigours of the Subarctic climate of the Bay-side littoral, let alone its colder Arctic fringes. What is most intriguing, then, is that only two years later Dobbs organized yet another voyage to the region in search of the Passage. The optimism that his distorted vision fostered allowed those explorers wintering on the Bay to offer a substantially new vision of British life in the cold reaches of Hudson Bay. Thus, Dobbs’ portrayal, while embedded in landscapes thousands of kilometres away, helped open a new discursive space in which the North could be described.

## Chapter 2: “Limit the Fury of the Lawless North”:<sup>1</sup> Writing a Colonial Geography of Hudson Bay

In the 1740’s, two separate voyages set out to explore Hudson Bay to discover a Northwest Passage. However, the accounts from the different expeditions portray the region in drastically different ways. As I will explore, the discrepancies between these accounts are closely related to the gulf that separates John Oldmixon’s cynical portrayal from Arthur Dobbs’ optimistic vision, as discussed in chapter one. However, unlike Oldmixon and Dobbs, the authors of these accounts actually visited the region. I will begin with a juxtaposition of the initial reports from these voyages, which will serve as a reconnaissance into the wider themes that this chapter will explore.

In the autumn of 1742, after an absence of more than a year exploring the remote reaches of Hudson Bay in search of the Northwest Passage, the ships *Furnace* and *Discovery*, under command of Captain Christopher Middleton, returned to England. The expedition reached the mouth of the Thames on October 2 and the first published account of the expedition appeared in the November issue of *The Gentleman’s Magazine*.<sup>2</sup> This account consists of two letters written by John Lanrick, a young gentleman who accompanied the voyage as a volunteer on the recommendation of Irish Parliamentarian Arthur Dobbs. He details an expedition rife with danger in a foreign and hostile land.<sup>3</sup> As

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<sup>1</sup> James Sterling, *An Epistle to the Hon. Arthur Dobbs, Esq; in Europe. From a Clergyman in America* (London, 1752), 22.

<sup>2</sup> William Barr and Glyndwr Williams eds., *Voyages to Hudson Bay in Search of a Northwest Passage, 1741-1747: Volume 1, The Voyage of Christopher Middleton, 1741-1742* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1994), 108, 221. This was the first published account of the voyage, but not the first account to reach an English audience. Middleton presented a paper to the Royal Society on October 28<sup>th</sup>, which won him the medal of the year on November 30<sup>th</sup>. This paper was later printed in *A Vindication of the Conduct of Captain Christopher Middleton* (London: Jacob Robinson, 1743), 193-206; and in the *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society*, XLII (1742-43), 157-171.

<sup>3</sup> John Lanrick, *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, XII (November 1742): 586-587, in Barr and Williams, *The Voyage of Christopher Middleton*, 221-224.

the ships neared the aptly named “Island of Resolution”, marking the eastern entrance to the forbidding waters of Hudson Strait, “thick Fogs” obscured the dangerous and poorly mapped coasts and shoals of their approach. Once clear of these initial hazards, the party travelled through the Strait where they encountered “a great many Islands of Ice, some of them 50 Fathoms perpendicular above Water, and three Times as much under”. Later, “a large Cake or Field of Ice, which from the Top mast Head we could not see over”,<sup>4</sup> blocked their passage for more than three days. The shifting fogs, migrating icebergs and floes, unseen dangers lurking below the waterline, and unsettling emptiness of the floating frozen fields emphasize the perilous, changeable and disquieting qualities of the Arctic passage.

The explorers wintered in a familiar location in the southern region of the Bay, below the tree line, at the Hudson’s Bay Company post on Churchill River. Nonetheless, Lanrick’s report of their wintering again emphasizes the harsh wintry climate, blanketed by unending snow and ice from early September through to the following June:

[But] it is impossible to give a just Idea of the Severity of the Weather, to those who have never personally seen or felt its Effects; it generally freezes to such a Degree, that no Man whatsoever is able to face the Weather with any Part of his Body naked or exposed, but in the shortest Space of Time he is exposed, in such a Manner, that the Part turns whitish and solid like Ice, and when thaw’d, blisters like scalding or burning.<sup>5</sup>

Lanrick’s appeal to personal experience is poignant given the dearth of available first-hand information about the region at the time.<sup>6</sup> However, by suggesting a comprehensive understanding of the weather would be “impossible” to relay, and instead resorting to a description of the terrible and, to British readers, unnatural effects of the cold on the human body, Lanrick allows readers to indulge in imaginative and terrifying

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<sup>4</sup> John Lanrick, in Barr and Williams, *The Voyage of Christopher Middleton*, 221-222.

<sup>5</sup> John Lanrick, in Barr and Williams, *The Voyage of Christopher Middleton*, 222.

<sup>6</sup> See chapter one for a discussion of this topic.

speculations. Indeed, while his portrayal of the region as hostile and inhospitable both conformed to and confirmed negative appraisals found in atlases, geographies and historical texts of the period,<sup>7</sup> his emphasis on the ways that the region defied categorization and description, both visually and experientially, serves to heighten the sublime and terrible nature of the Arctic regions. This characterization would haunt later explorers seeking to represent the region in quite different terms.

It may not at first seem prudent to speak of the Arctic as sublime in 1742. As a literary term and tradition, the sublime is most often treated as a phenomenon of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As Francis Spufford explains, however, the term was loosely employed in a variety of manners and meanings during the first half of the eighteenth century. Edmund Burke's seminal book on the sublime, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*, marks the beginning of a more systematic understanding of the term, but would only be published in 1759.<sup>8</sup> Burke defines the term to mean "[w]hatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling."<sup>9</sup> Most often, eighteenth and nineteenth century authors used 'sublime' to refer to

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<sup>7</sup> See chapter one.

<sup>8</sup> See Francis Spufford, *I May Be Some Time: Ice and the English Imagination* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), chapter two, pp 18-20.

<sup>9</sup> Edmund Burke, *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (Menston: The Scolar Press Limited, 1970), 58-59. There are important similarities between these discourses of the sublime, and those of the wonderful and the marvelous that Stephen Greenblatt puts forward, mentioned in the previous chapter. Both wonder and the sublime emphasize the overwhelming qualities of aesthetics - the inability to fully grasp things understood to be different. Greenblatt describes wonder as "thrilling, potentially dangerous, momentarily immobilizing," which is not dissimilar from the description of the sublime as "productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling." According to Greenblatt, wonder is specifically conversant of that which is "new". In classical and

the vast expanses and powerful forces of the natural world, qualities that both inspire wonder and threaten danger. Treacherous mountains and chasms, vast prairie or ocean, violent winds, storms and seas all exemplify the sublime in nature, but Burke cautioned that sublimity must be appreciated from afar; in proximity its raw and terrible aspect would overwhelm any sense of wonder.<sup>10</sup>

The notion that polar regions exemplified the sublime is due to the alarming and surreal depictions of Arctic terrors by romantic authors such as Coleridge and Shelley, as well as the Arctic narratives that emerged out of the debacle of Franklin's disappearance in the mid to late nineteenth century, culminating in the terrifying tales of Shackleton and Scott in the early twentieth.<sup>11</sup> The word sublime rarely occurred in the literature of the 1740's yet, the idea of the sublime, as defined by Burke, is particularly relevant to the way that the literature of the 1740's represented the Arctic well before the concept's systematization as an aesthetic category. Lanrick's description of the cold he and his crew experienced suggests the kind of aesthetic difficulty that Burke discussed. By emphasizing the need to experience the cold to comprehend its "Severity", it is evident that the threat of the cold was too immediate for him to indulge in the sensation of

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medieval Christian thinking, wonder precedes both morality and knowledge, conferring upon the marvelous a "striking indeterminacy [which] made it ... the object of a range of sharply differing uses." The sublime shares this malleability and flexibility. Spufford claims that the sublime described "a whole heterogeneous group of sensations that all, in their different ways, seemed to go *beyond* the rules and systems that were supposed to govern good taste." However, while an experience of sublimity can surely be related to the surprise of an unexpected encounter, it depends less on novelty and more on exceeding boundaries and expectations, or combining opposing sensations such as "wonder mixed with fear," or "a pleasurable encounter with a forbidding landscape". Nonetheless, both wonder and the sublime can be embedded in acts of appropriation or colonization. Where the sublime highlights the terrifying qualities of nature, it also in turn uplifts the significance of human struggles in and often over the natural world, frequently presenting humans as conquering nature in one way or another. According to Greenblatt, in the discourses of the discovery of the New World, wonder similarly functioned as an "aestheticizing supplement to a deeply flawed legal ritual of appropriation." On wonder, see Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 20, 13-25. On the sublime, see Spufford, *I May Be Some Time*, 18, 16-40.

<sup>10</sup> Ian S. MacLaren, "The Aesthetic Map of the North, 1845-1859," *Arctic* 38 no. 2 (June 1985): 90, 97.

<sup>11</sup> For further discussion on this topic, see Spufford, *I May Be Some Time*, ch1-3.

wonder that a truly sublime experience required. And yet, his description of the experience offers his readers the sublimity he was denied. Describing the cold first as unimaginable, and then more personally through a terrifying description of its effects on the body, his narrative allows the reader to indulge in their worst fears while remaining separate, safe and warm.

Nevertheless, Lanrick's account is rather brief and matter-of-fact when compared to the writings of the eighteenth-century romantics and Arctic narratives. Moreover, Spufford points out a key passage from Burke's earlier writing: "[the sublime] fills the mind with grand ideas, and turns the soul in upon herself."<sup>12</sup> That is to say, it is the response that the sublime evokes, the self-reflection forced by such an encounter, which is at the heart of sublimity. Appreciation of the sublime is a proof of genteel sensibility. In this respect, while much of the negative writing about northern regions prior to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries stresses the harshest qualities and seemingly unnatural landscapes and climates – sublime material indeed – this process of self-reflection is often absent. It is the indulgence in the representation of terrors that marks the sublime in literature, and in Lanrick's short narrative there is a tentative step into this realm. However, accounts from the subsequent voyage to Hudson Bay show a significant effort to shift representation of this region in a different direction.

Less than five years after the return of the *Furnace* and *Discovery* in 1742, a second voyage, by the *Dobbs Galley* and the *California*, returned to England after a prolonged, and similarly futile, exploration of western Hudson Bay for signs of the elusive Passage. As with the previous attempt, the 1746 expedition wintered on the Bay, and upon its return an account of the voyage was shortly published, this time in *The*

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<sup>12</sup> Burke, quoted in Spufford, *I May Be Some Time*, 19.

*British Magazine*. Most likely penned by Edward Thompson, a veteran of Middleton's 1741 expedition and surgeon on board the *Dobbs Galley*,<sup>13</sup> a brief note summarized the struggles and frustrations of the voyage in a lamentably terse manner compared to Lanrick's detailed and personal account. Of their attempts to find the passage, he writes: "after all our fatigues and hardships, we are come home, without having at all effected what we went about".<sup>14</sup>

However, where Lanrick concedes defeat, admitting "there was no such thing as a Passage into the Western Ocean",<sup>15</sup> Thompson remains optimistic, arguing that the search should continue: "not that we are yet without hopes that a passage will be discovered, tho' we have missed it. . . . a passage must be attempted another way, and will probably yet succeed".<sup>16</sup> Indeed, Thompson suggests that his voyage had been something of a success. In support of sending future ventures, he opines: "nor need future attempts be afraid to venture, for we have not found the cold nearly so intense, as it might be the interest of a certain gentleman to represent it, who did not desire that any body should succeed in an attempt he had fail'd in".<sup>17</sup> In light of their inability to locate the passage, observations that the region's climate was more amenable than Lanrick and Middleton reported were timely, conveniently buttressing proposals for future expeditions.

Furthermore, Thompson's veiled attack on "certain gentlemen" is directed at Christopher

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<sup>13</sup> Edward Thompson, *The British Magazine* (November 1747): 497-498, in William Barr and Glyndwr Williams eds., *Voyages to Hudson Bay in Search of a Northwest Passage, 1741-1747: Volume II, The Voyage of William Moor and Francis Smith, 1746-1747* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1995), 321-322. Barr and Williams suggest that the unidentified author was most likely Edward Thompson due to his mentioning of an illness which was noted in James Isham's journals, see page 321, footnote 2.

<sup>14</sup> Edward Thompson in Barr and Williams, *The Voyage of William Moor and Francis Smith*, 321.

<sup>15</sup> John Lanrick, in Barr and Williams, *The Voyage of Christopher Middleton*, 224.

<sup>16</sup> Edward Thompson in Barr and Williams, *The Voyage of William Moor and Francis Smith*, 321.

<sup>17</sup> Edward Thompson in Barr and Williams, *The Voyage of William Moor and Francis Smith*, 321-322. This accusation was directed not at Lanrick, but Captain Middleton, whose paper, "The Extraordinary Degrees and Surprising Effects of Cold in Hudson's-Bay", was presented to the Royal Society in October 1742. The paper included great detail on the uncommonly cold climate compared to countries of similar latitudes in Europe. Thompson's attack on Middleton's character further corroborates his authorship of the letter.

Middleton, which would not have been surprising to the contemporary reader. In 1743, Middleton was publicly accused by Dobbs, Thompson and some of Middleton's former shipmates of taking bribes and falsifying data to hide evidence of a Passage in order to protect the Hudson's Bay Company's monopoly.<sup>18</sup> This accusation further destabilised the notion that the region was terrifying, impenetrable – in a word, sublime. In one fell move, Thompson discounted the longstanding image of the region as dangerously cold and inhospitable by presenting this image as merely the product of an elaborate ruse to dupe the public.<sup>19</sup>

The contrast between these two impressions of the Hudson Bay region highlights how the British who visited this little-known corner of the empire represented it in substantially different terms than previously after the publication of Arthur Dobbs' *Account of the Countries Adjoining to Hudson's Bay* in 1744. Thompson's letter was but the tip of the iceberg. Within a year of the return of the *California* and the *Dobbs Galley* in 1747, two book-length accounts of the voyage reached print. The official account was written by the draughtsman of the *Dobbs Galley*, Henry Ellis, followed by a second narrative by Theodore Swaine Drage, the clerk of the *California*. Shortly after, another author published on this topic. In 1752 Joseph Robson's account of his six years living on the Bay-side reached print. As this chapter will generally focus on the 1746-47 voyage, Robson's account will not be given much space here. His narrative offers many similar insights to those of Ellis and Drage, which do not require repeating, but in some notable

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<sup>18</sup> Most of the controversy focused on Middleton's explorations around Wager inlet, which he argued was simply a river, while Dobbs and others predicted it to be a passage to the South Seas. See comparisons of maps 1 and 2 (Middleton's map vs Wigate's map)

<sup>19</sup> For further reading on the details and extent of this public debate, see Glyndwr Williams, *Voyages of Delusion: The Northwest Passage in the Age of Reason* (London: Harper Collins, 2002), 73-124; E.E. Rich, *Hudson's Bay Company 1670-1870*, Vol.I:1670-1763 (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1961), 556-586; and D.W. Moodie, *An Historical Geography of Agricultural Patterns and resource appraisals in Rupert's Land, 1670-1774* (unpubl. Ph.D. thesis, Univ. of Alberta, 1972), 82-87.

instances his perspective is unique and illuminating and so I will bring his account into the discussion. These texts offered an enormous amount of new, first-hand information about the northern parts of North America, its landscape, climate, inhabitants, flora and fauna, to the British public.

The ways that these later authors re-imagined the region, and their own place within it, tells much about their evolving cultural priorities and agendas, deep-seated fears and desires, and senses of identity. In this chapter I will explore these concepts, arguing that a key thrust of these texts is to articulate what it means to be British in the farthest, most forbidding reaches of empire. Dobbs' discourse of improvement and his newly optimistic vision of the Bay vitally influence these texts, re-configuring British identity in this strange land. But at the same time, as demonstrated in chapter one, Dobbs' inherited assumptions about the cold prohibited him from viewing the chilly shores of the Bay favourably. First I will demonstrate how Ellis and Drage, employing techniques of natural history writing and equipped with an "improving" vision, offer not only a substantially more favourable picture of the Bay region, but also narrate a domestication of the landscape to British mastery and discipline. Despite these efforts, ongoing tensions and anxieties persist, and exploring these will be integral to my inquiry. One critical and overarching tension involves how Ellis and Drage distinguish their representations of the treeless lands to the north (the Arctic) and the forested lands in the southern Bay. This juxtaposition will provide the structure for the remainder of the chapter.

### **Natural History, Improvement and the Domestication of Nature**

Following Dobbs, all of the authors who actually visited and then wrote about the Bay region in the late 1740's represented it in a more favourable light than their predecessors, in particular emphasizing the natural resource potential. Ellis explicitly discusses the prospects for establishing settlements in the country as well, a topic of paramount importance for Dobbs. However, Dobbs shies away from confronting the actual implications of travel and settlement in such a cold climate by offering platitudes and vague, ambiguous advice. On ice, Dobbs writes that "[where] Captains are careful in the Ice, there is not much Danger", and on temperature, that "it appears that the Cold is tolerable even at these disadvantageous Settlements at present in the Bay, and upon passing only five or six leagues up the Rivers into the Country, the Climate is so altered, as to be equal to those of the same Latitudes in Europe."<sup>20</sup> Dobbs' optimism that the exigencies of this foreign climate and geography would not thwart reasonable expectations of British progress and expansion exemplifies the kind of faith that buoyed the imaginations of enlightenment armchair geographers. In contrast, Ellis and Drage actually confronted the dangers presented by the Arctic and Subarctic climates in the region. And yet, unlike Lanrick, they maintain that the climate would not inhibit safe travel and habitation.

A principal feature of this new literature is the emphasis placed on detailed description of the flora, fauna, geographic, hydrological and climatological phenomena they encountered. This surveying of nature is woven into the accounts in a way that renders the experiencing and assessment of physical geography and climate a narratable

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<sup>20</sup> Dobbs, *An Account*, 67.

event. Mary Louise Pratt calls this literary weaving of travel writing, scientific exploration and natural history an ‘anti-conquest.’ She notes the tendency of this kind of writing to present itself as a benign, even utopian enterprise contributing to the global stock of knowledge – in spite of the clear connection between scientific travel and systems of colonial exploitation and resource extraction. More broadly, Pratt argues that this kind of writing “asserted an urban, lettered, male authority over the whole of the planet; [elaborating] a rationalizing, extractive, dissociative understanding which overlaid functional, experiential relations among people, plants, and animals.”<sup>21</sup> It is this “rationalizing, extractive [and] dissociative” function of natural history writing that I examine here.

Ellis and Drage’s natural history approach allows them to distance themselves from their own sense of unfamiliarity and unease in the foreign landscapes and climates of the North. Instead, they meticulously survey their surroundings, emphasizing details that were most aesthetically and culturally familiar or significant. Ian S. MacLaren explains that, in the representation of landscapes, employment of culturally accepted taxonomies allows an author “to describe foreign natural scenes in terms of or in contrast to landscapes familiar to him and his readers.”<sup>22</sup> This appeal to the familiar is not so significant on its own; in fact, it is a rather inescapable cultural tendency. But MacLaren points out how such techniques can be used to transform the ways that landscapes are perceived and apprehended.<sup>23</sup> In a landscape and climate dominated by an inherited

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<sup>21</sup> Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 38.

<sup>22</sup> Ian S. MacLaren, “Samuel Hearne and the Landscapes of Discovery,” *Canadian Literature*, 103 (Winter 1984): 28.

<sup>23</sup> MacLaren is here speaking specifically of the late eighteenth century use of the categories of the sublime and the picturesque to contain and represent Arctic landscapes here, with respect to what he terms the emergence of an picturesque sublime in the writings of Samuel Hearne, but the concept can be seen to

perception of terrors, Ellis and Drage represent the region through a new ideology of optimism and improvement. By focusing on its features in ways that mitigate the apparent severity of their environment, they emphasize their relative mastery of methods for traversing its dangerous waters and coasts, and domesticating its lands and resources. However, this ideology was not impervious to opposing influences. At times counter notions surfaced to shatter the authorial aloofness, either through experiences of extreme danger or sublime anxiety in these unfamiliar locales.

Perhaps most significant is the degree to which Ellis and Drage embrace the implicit assumption that “the naturalist naturalizes the bourgeois European’s own global presence and authority.”<sup>24</sup> These authors sought to represent foreign locales to metropolitan publics as first-hand empirical observers, meticulously surveying the natural worlds they encountered. Their role as ‘observers’ legitimized their presence in these new and distant lands. Indeed, their empirical attention to the features of the natural world, a narration of geography, re-created these unfamiliar geographies in text. This strategy offered to readers the sense that they could legitimately understand distant landscapes from afar, and implicitly allowed an assumption of familiarity, security and authority in and over these remote environments. The authors employed literary techniques whereby foreign landscapes were rendered domestic terrain in two distinct but related ways.<sup>25</sup>

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apply to more than this particular situation. (MacLaren, “Samuel Hearne and the Landscapes of Discovery,” 28, 38.)

<sup>24</sup> Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 28

<sup>25</sup> For further discussion on the relationship between landscape, imperialism and representational practices such as cartography and topographical description see W.J.T. Mitchell, “Imperial Landscape,” in *Landscape and Power*, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 5-34; J.B. Harley, and Denis E. Cosgrove, “Maps, knowledge and power,” in *The Iconography of landscape: essays on the symbolic representation, design, and use of past environments*, eds. Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p.277-312; and Daniel W. Clayton, *Islands of Truth: The Imperial Fashioning of Vancouver Island* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000).

First, in writing on the Arctic – the treeless coasts and islands of Hudson Strait and northern Hudson Bay – their careful laying out of strategies for navigating the icy waters and meticulous inventorying of the meagre but potentially useful natural resources minimized the ever-present threats posed by icebergs and floes, fogs, storms and cold. Second, they attribute special significance to the tree line as marking a divide between landscapes suitable for settlement and those deemed irrevocably inhospitable. Unlike the barren Arctic, wooded regions were surveyed and valued for their plentiful useful resources. And, viewing these regions as habitable, they focussed on strategies for living in and adapting to the rigours of this new environment. This emphasis on habitation and the matter-of-fact narration of daily activities of British subjects on the Bay-side shifted the discourse on the entire Bay region to such an extent that hardy British adventurers could be seen as uniquely suited to the endeavour of adapting to and domesticating its wild nature.

### **Domesticating the Arctic: Narrating Ice and Barren Shores**

This section will discuss how Drage and Ellis' accounts of the 1746 expedition represent the treeless northern regions during the journey. Both are characterized by careful and detailed descriptions of encounters with ice and methods of navigating through dangerous waters. Similarly, both provide thorough surveys of the meagre soils, flora, fauna and fresh water on the coasts and islands, forming a narrative map of the route into Hudson Bay. These narratives seem to discursively transform the hostile, ice-choked and barren Arctic passage into a safe, domestic waterway, and to render the sublime terrors of the North into the familiar rigours of a colonized space. I say 'seem to

transform' rather than simply 'transform' because these authors clearly experienced moments of crisis in their Arctic travels – crises of the imagination and physical endangerment – that were vitally related to the sublime landscapes and seascapes they encountered. In these crises, their attempts at discursive re-imagining were overwhelmed. However, Drage and Ellis each represent their crises differently, and these divergences highlight how colonial discourses could be adapted and transformed when confronting geographies and experiences that were truly foreign. It is in these instances of crisis that the frayed edges of colonial identity, the limits of discursive convention and the emergence of new forms of making meaning in unfamiliar contexts are displayed.

Drage's account begins with an apology for the tedious daily weather reports, but maintains "nothing is more inquired after in a Voyage of this kind, than the temperature of the Climates which are passed."<sup>26</sup> Of the sea ice he states:

By giving a Particular Account of the Ice met with in the Voyage, of the Method of managing a Ship, when amongst it, and by inserting what is observable out of other Voyages in to these Parts relating to the Ice, everyone will have a clear Idea of the Nature of the Ice in such Passages, and from whence the Ice proceeds, by which Ships that make this Voyage are so much obstructed.<sup>27</sup>

In his assiduous attention to the signs of the sea and wind and his documentation of the movements and character of the ice, Drage clearly saw himself as participating in a long and cumulative project of knowledge gathering; his task was to transform what was unknown and dangerous into the known and the familiar.

As the *Dobbs Galley* and *California* crossed the North Atlantic, Drage's narration of the ships' early encounters with sea ice exemplifies his interest in familiarizing readers with the unique northern seascapes:

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<sup>26</sup> Theodore Swaine Drage, *An Account of a Voyage for the Discovery of a North-West Passage by Hudson's Streights, to the Western and Southern Ocean of America*, vol. 1 (New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1968), ii.

<sup>27</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: iii.

[S]oon after [we were] falling in with what is termed heavy Ice, consisting of many large and high Pieces, some equal in Height to the Ship's Deck, and some few higher. Being surrounded by Ice and passing in narrow Streights, between these Hills of White and Azure, the Roar and Rush of the Sea heard on all Parts, the Fog confining our View to a very narrow Distance, and presenting continually fresh objects, although it could not but raise our Attention to the Novelty of the Scene, yet it afforded no Occasion to raise our Fears, there being no real Danger. The Lieutenant ahead comes to, or directs the Man at the Helm how to steer, and to avoid any Piece of Ice ... and if the Ship cannot go clear, but must engage with such Piece, then by a proper Management of the Fore and Main-topsails which only are out, her Motion is so stopped that she may go gently up to it, and the Piece is pushed off with ashen Poles of 18 Feet long, shod with Iron, which from their Use are called Ice-Poles.<sup>28</sup>

With their view confined by shifting fogs, surrounded by tall hills of “White and Azure” ice that floated in and out of visibility, and subject to the strange “Roar and Rush” of this imposing landscape, Drage’s depiction stresses the beauty, variety and novelty of this imposing scene, downplaying the palpable peril the alien seascape presented. Indeed, his account suggests that admiration is a more fitting response than fear, for the ice presented “no real Danger.” This unexpected reversal suggests that the captains and crews, through the “proper Management” of sails and ice-poles, were in supreme command of the situation. Drage’s narrative acts to mentally and physically prepare readers for encounters with the ice, continually stressing preventative strategies such as how to recognize indicators of the onset of sea ice and how to sail safely amidst it, resulting in an overall impression of safety through preparedness.<sup>29</sup> Yet the sense of confidence that opens Drage’s narrative does not continue for the entire journey. A pivotal moment occurred early in the voyage, as the ships neared Resolution Isles, which marked the entrance to Hudson Strait. His response shapes the manner of his ensuing narration significantly.

July 8, 1746 was a cold, damp and foggy night, during which the ropes “froze with Ice hanging on them”, with “the Sea setting twenty Ways.”<sup>30</sup> The captains deduced they were approaching the entrance to the Strait and brought the ships to a halt, to await

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<sup>28</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 9-10.

<sup>29</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 8-9.

<sup>30</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 20-21.

the arrival of clearer weather before attempting to pass the Isles. In the morning the fog cleared enough to show that over night the ships had come perilously close to the islands. As Drage relates, the “Swell sat us very fast with little Prospect of clearing it, though our boats were hoisted out to tow, and all other Endeavours used to prevent; with the Addition to our Misfortune of the Dobbs being seemingly nearer, so in greater Danger than ourselves.”<sup>31</sup> It is revealing to compare Ellis’ version of these events:

[F]or had those Fogs continued but a little longer, it is highly probable we had gone a-shore, and our Vessels broke to pieces upon the Rocks. As it was we did not get clear but with great Difficulty, for the Wind falling, and the Sea tumbling in on the Shore, we were forced to have recourse to the Ship’s Oars, and by the help of these, and the Boats towing a-head, we made shift to deliver ourselves from this danger.<sup>32</sup>

Where Ellis attributes both the fortunate timing of the fog’s departure and the crew’s efforts with the boats and oars to their avoiding the crisis, Drage gives credit to neither. Unable to pinpoint precisely how catastrophe was avoided, he turns instead to morbid description of the fate that was narrowly escaped:

Had both Ships went Ashore, the most the People might have expected was to save their Lives, and to little Purpose, as they would have been almost under absolute Certainty never to be taken off, in want of all Subsistence, nothing there to erect a Tent with, no Place of Shelter to retire to, but must remain exposed to the open Air, in so uncertain and severe a Climate. To be assured of being without Subsistence and Refuge is not only the Case upon any Accident (such as the Ship’s going Ashore, or striking upon the Rocks) happening at Resolution, but it will be the same, if such Accident happen in any Part of Hudson’s Streights, or in the Bay to the Northward: In which respect these Voyages are more dangerous than any other that are undertaken.<sup>33</sup>

According to Drage, voyages in this region are “more dangerous” than any other; barren of aid, subsistence and shelter, even surviving a shipwreck is “to little Purpose”. It is to

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<sup>31</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 21.

<sup>32</sup> Henry Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson’s Bay, by the Dobbs Galley and California, In the Years 1746 and 1747, for Discovering a North West Passage* (New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1967), 158.

<sup>32</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 131.

<sup>33</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 21-22.

safeguard against this terrifying prospect that Drage's account painstakingly narrates the crew's strategies for ensuring safety.<sup>34</sup>

Yet it is intriguing that in this most poignant case of near disaster, Drage highlights the region's poverty, emptiness and inability to sustain life. Both authors assert that it was not by pure carelessness that they were nearly stove on the rocks of Resolution Isles, nor solely by their own strength and ingenuity that they survived. However, where Ellis is more willing to credit their survival to fortune and perseverance, Drage emphasizes the ghastly fate they barely avoided. This difference highlights Drage's difficulty in admitting that meticulous attention to detail – the overwhelming focus of his entire account – was insufficient to prevent catastrophe. Here is the crux of Drage's conflict in representing the Arctic: the region's climate was so different from England, they had to learn to safely traverse it. Thus, Drage took it upon himself to document strategies that would aid in providing safe passage; unfortunately, it was clear that these were insufficient given the unpredictable dangers the environment presented.

The result is an unsettling anxiety in Drage's account. Where Drage spends over fifty pages narrating in meticulous detail the arduous three-week passage through Hudson

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<sup>34</sup> Shipwreck occupies an important place in English literature and imagination, with long traditions and tropes of its own. Julie Sievers demonstrates how shipwreck was a primary feature of what she calls sea providence narratives, a popular genre between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. Most often found in edited collections, these stories employed shipwreck in a variety of manners and for a plethora of means, but religious instruction, religious evangelization, and fostering religious and national identities were prominent themes in this literature. While the narratives of Drage and Ellis are clearly lacking in the religious dimension that is central to these stories, the important role that shipwreck (for Drage in particular), and narration of their struggles at sea have in these texts is intriguing, and it would be illuminating to examine these texts, and other Enlightenment natural histories concerning sea voyages, in the context of this longer tradition of writings about the sea in order to discern other, less evident similarities and differences in their methods of representation. See Julie Sievers, "Drowned Pens and Shaking Hands: Sea Providence Narratives in Seventeenth-Century New England," *William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 63, no. 4 (2006): 743-776.

Strait, Ellis covers it in only a dozen.<sup>35</sup> Drage's desire to explain safe methods for navigating these hazardous waters translates into an exhaustive narration of their dangers, creating a sense of mounting anxiety. For instance, on the night of July 25, a berg with a sharply protruding spear of very hard, light blue ice below the water line, called a "tong", drove alongside the *Dobbs*; the "Tong ran under [the] Ship, and by lifting her, brought her almost on her Careen, or almost laid her abroad-side."<sup>36</sup> This description was intended as a caution to others, for, he explains, tongs could easily escape notice and pierce a ship's hull, from which "proceeds the greatest Danger among the Ice. They should be carefully look'd for, and at all Times avoided."<sup>37</sup> However, in this instance it is made clear that their survival was due more to good fortune than a watchful eye.

Similarly, the erratic behaviour of sea ice baffled Drage's attempts to narrate order in the changing seascape. One day he witnessed ice moving very strangely in a calm patch of water: the ice would "shoot swiftly forward a hundred Yards, and then return with an equal Agility to the Spot it went from, and there remain still. And this with little Perturbation of the Water."<sup>38</sup> At odds with the understood movements of currents, this mixture of calm and sudden unpredictability was disconcerting, and prefigured a series of more unsettling events over the next few days.

A day later, the ships became separated by more than a mile of solid ice. Three men from the *California* crossed the ice sheet to the *Dobbs Galley*, observing only a few narrow crevasses along the way. Less than half an hour after they arrived, the "Ice was

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<sup>35</sup> The bulk of Ellis' account of the passage is focused on descriptions of the Inuit they encountered, which will be explored in the next chapter. Williams and Barr point out that in comparison to the three weeks the *Dobbs Galley* and *California* spent navigating the ice of Hudson Strait, Middleton passed through the Strait in only six days. Similarly, the Hudson's Bay Company ships made the very same passage much faster. (Barr and Williams, *The Voyage of William Moor and Francis Smith*, 48-50.)

<sup>36</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 52.

<sup>37</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 52.

<sup>38</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 49-50.

opened by the Tide, forming an infinite Number of Islands, and so wide a Channel between the two Ships, in the very Part just before walked over”.<sup>39</sup> The ever-present instability of the geography confined the crews to their ships much as to a prison. Despite their best efforts the ships often found themselves surrounded by ice with little room to manoeuvre. At one point they were “intirely enclosed in Ice”.<sup>40</sup> They spent the day grappling to the various bergs of their floating prison in an attempt to find a purchase that would see them through the press.<sup>41</sup> A day and a half later found them in worse straits: “[the] Ice inclosing us on all Sides without the least Water to be seen, and one of the largest Pieces of Ice seen since entering the Streights, being as high as our Deck, sat close upon our Bow, not without putting us under some Apprehensions, for fear the Piece would upset, or break, and so do the Ship Damage.”<sup>42</sup> Despite their efforts to chip away the dangerously sharp points of ice with handspikes and hatchets, and tow the ships out of the encircling bergs with boats, they remained locked in the press. It was only with the change of the winds that they found their way into clear sea.<sup>43</sup> For Drage, these experiences unearth deep tensions between his desire to educate readers about the region and the reality that while knowledge and skill were valuable, they were insufficient: sea and ice were fickle and erratic things. That Drage began this prolonged account of the ice in the Straits by relating the struggles of Henry Hudson is even more intriguing:

It becoming soon after the Ship’s grappling a close Body of Ice, with only small Spots of Water here and there, for Leagues round, and farther than the Eye could carry from the Mast-head; the same on all Sides; a melancholy Prospect was it not known that in a few Hours the whole Scene might

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<sup>39</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 52.

<sup>40</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 53.

<sup>41</sup> Drage explains this procedure in exhaustive detail, see Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 41. See also Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson’s Bay*, 142.

<sup>42</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 53.

<sup>43</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 53-54.

change. Such Circumstances as those we have last related, lead Mr. *Hudson* into Despair, fearing he never should get out of, but perish amongst the Ice.<sup>44</sup>

Given Hudson's legacy, Drage is clearly issuing a warning to maintain hope against despair in these strange waters. However, in suggesting that the changing seascape itself could be a pillar to which they could tie their hopes, Drage highlights the uncertainty of his own project to recount a safe passage through the Arctic waters.

It is evident that despite his emphasis on narrating strategies for safe navigation, Drage was terrified of shipwreck in these treacherous waters. His solution was an almost absurd attention to inventorying the meagre resources of the coasts and islands along the route to Hudson Bay. The descriptions of the emptiness of the most northerly regions are repetitive in their detail. The shores of the Strait are described as being "bounded by high, ragged, mountainous Rocks, having Snow almost at all Times lying on them, and no Wood, Grass, or Earth to be seen on the Parts next the Water."<sup>45</sup> Virtually identical to his portrayal of Greenland, Drage's portrait stresses the unnatural presence of snow in the summer and the paucity of vegetation, underscoring the forbidding, sublime quality of the Arctic.<sup>46</sup>

Drage's descriptions of the presence or absence of vegetation, soils and fresh water indicated to future mariners the locations of potentially lifesaving resources. While some islands, such as the grassless Mansell's Isle, were found to be "entirely barren",<sup>47</sup> others, like Nottingham Isle, were noted for the presence of grasses and the availability of

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<sup>44</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 45.

<sup>45</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 68.

<sup>46</sup> Greenland was similarly described as being "very high and ragged, full of great Mountains all covered with Snow ... no Wood, Grass or Earth to be seen", Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 12.

<sup>47</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 77. Moodie provides an extended discussion of the various significances and historical debates surrounding the 'barren,' but there is unanimous consensus that the word specifically and most often refers to a lack of trees. This term, often alongside or replaced by the phrase "no-wood," was frequently used by both Drage and Ellis to describe the terrain north of the tree line. (Moodie, *An Historical Geography of Agricultural Patterns*, 180-189.)

good harbours for shelter from the frequent storms.<sup>48</sup> In describing the flora on Digg's Isles, which marks the western limits of the Straits, Drage notices that "[in] some Hollows or Vallyes within Land, there is a shallow Soil, producing Scurvy-Grass, Sorrel and other small Herbs with Grass, and Moss, but no Wood, Underwood, or any kind of Shrub".<sup>49</sup> Green grasses and herbs were understood to be useful in combating scurvy and the knowledge where such vegetation grew could be useful to stranded and ailing crews.<sup>50</sup> He also draws attention to the presence of fresh water on Digg's Isles and in the pools of melt-water on top of ice sheets, from which crews could replenish their supplies.<sup>51</sup> By indicating where fresh water, vegetation and safe harbours could be found, Drage's natural history sought to turn the hostile Arctic into known and commercially navigable terrain. Yet the resources he catalogues were meagre at best, and by his own account insufficient to sustain any stranded Britons. Thus, rather than highlighting the success of his efforts at domestication, Drage's strategic survey of Arctic nature underscores the trifling nature of his attempts to exert control over this alien land.

### **Domesticating the Arctic: Narrating Sublimity**

In many ways, Ellis' account resembles that of Drage. He also carefully detailed strategies for sailing in sea ice, and his descriptions of the lands and islands were likewise attentive to the presence of resources such as grasses, fresh water and safe harbours. However, there are significant differences between their narratives, primarily in their responses to the sublimity they encountered. Glimpses of this difference are evident in

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<sup>48</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 55-58.

<sup>49</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 68.

<sup>50</sup> Thomas James, *The Strange and Dangerous Voyage of Captaine Thomas James* (Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum Ltd., 1968), 31.

<sup>51</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 42.

the ways these two authors responded to the initial threat of shipwreck at *Resolution Isles*. An examination of Ellis' crisis on the barren shores of the western Bay the following year, as his party searched for the Northwest Passage, offers a more poignant example of the difference between these two accounts.

During the exploration of *Wager* inlet, which was at the time still thought to be a strait due to Dobbs' theories of tidal flux, Ellis and a number of the crew went ashore to discover the source of "a very loud unaccountable Noise, resembling the Sound of a vast Cataract, or prodigious Fall of Water." The shore, however, "proved excessively rocky and steep." The difficult terrain and onset of darkness prohibited them from reaching the "Top of the Eminence"<sup>52</sup> to view the source of the noise. The terms and techniques Ellis uses here are not accidental. Traditions of landscape viewing, a distinctly upper-class phenomenon that was newly emerging in the mid-eighteenth century, taught that proper viewing of a landscape required a moderate rise. The notion that the scene should be carefully composed was of paramount importance. Picturesque landscape viewing sought to reinforce notions of harmony in the natural world. Scenes composed of a variety of natural elements, balancing the opposing elements of the sublime and the picturesque, emphasized and upheld this ideal.<sup>53</sup>

Ellis' failure to view the landscape from the appropriate vantage resulted in his being trapped amidst the features of the scene, ensnared in sublimity rather than separate from it. He gives significance to the situation far beyond the landscape itself:

I cannot help, however taking Notice, that in ascending these Mountains, we had at once as great, as gloomy, and as awful a Prospect, as perhaps ever astonished mortal Eyes. While we walked along the Beach, the ragged Rocks above seemed pendant over our Heads: In some Places there were Falls of Water, dashing from Cliff to Cliff; from others hung prodigious Icicles in Rows, one behind

<sup>52</sup> Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson's Bay*, 253-254.

<sup>53</sup> Ian S. MacLaren, "The Aesthetic Map of the North, 1845-1859," *Arctic* 38 no. 2 (June 1985): 90. See also Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), 265-266.

another, like the Pipes of a vast Organ. But the most tremendous Part of the Scene were the shattered Crags which lay at our Feet, and appeared plainly to have burst from the Mountain Tops, thro' the expansive Power of the rigorous Frosts, and so rolled with inexpressible Fury down the sides, till they reached those Places where their Ruins now lay: I call them Ruins; for such they properly were: And if there is something that deeply affects us, when we behold either the Waste of War, or the Devastations of Time, it may easily be conceived, that something much more terrible must be felt from the Sight of these amazing Relicks of the Wreck of Nature.<sup>54</sup>

Ellis' vivid portrayal of the terrors of the landscape pulls the viewer along the route with him, under ragged rocks, dashing waters and rows of icicles, and across a beach strewn with the corpses of mountains. His imagination gives agency to the climate with its "rigorous Frosts," and furious emotion to the falling rocks. The scattered boulders are not simply geographic features; they are a graveyard. Ellis views them as "Ruins," remnants of the dangerous power that the climate can exert, even over mountains. Vast, ancient and hazardous, mountains are sublime things themselves, rendered more terrifying in their death. MacLaren describes how the ruins motif functioned as "a literary and artistic device" dating at least from picturesque painterly landscape conventions of the seventeenth century; "ruins lent to a scene a romantic effect by juxtaposing a present visual chaos with the suggestion of a past beauty of secular, religious, or mythical import."<sup>55</sup> But where ruins in a landscape painting would be balanced by familiar scenes of trees, fields or villages, the ruins viewed by Ellis were buttressed only by ominous ranks of icicles and precariously balanced rocks. The party's failure to reach the eminence and discover the source of the noise signified more than a failure of topographical survey. Ellis uses this failure to indulge in the terrors of the landscape, revelling in the romantic meanings that he drew from imagining the depredations of time, climate and geology. His exaggerations of the terrors of nature had the twin effect of

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<sup>54</sup> Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson's Bay*, 254-255.

<sup>55</sup> Ian S. MacLaren, "Samuel Hearne and the Landscapes of Discovery," *Canadian Literature*, 103 (1984): 31.

shrinking the significance of his endeavours while also elevating his own struggles in this awful land. That this event shortly preceded the final climax of the expedition was no coincidence.

Only three days later, the crews were ashore again, mounting yet another set of hills to view their imagined strait:

The day no sooner broke, than we went a-shore, and from the Hills that were but a very small distance from the Coast, we had the Mortification to see clearly, that our hitherto imagined strait ended in two small unnavigable Rivers; one of which plainly fell into a lake, which lay at some Miles Distance to the South West. Thus all our Hopes vanished, and we had nothing to console us for the Pains we had taken, the time we had spent, and the Dangers we had run, but the Satisfaction of having done in this Respect, all that could be looked for from us.<sup>56</sup>

Ellis' considerable skill at landscape description was not employed in this moment of truth. He lends no imagery to the scene; instead his ruminations fall upon their struggles. There is almost a sense of disappointment in the landscape, beyond Ellis' own destroyed expectations, as if the site of their sublime failure should itself have been sublime. Given this disappointment it is the last line that sums up Ellis' message: they had done their best. Here, at the crux of the voyage, Ellis turns inward to reflect on struggles overcome by dauntless perseverance. This reflective device is employed more poignantly on their return voyage, when Ellis finds occasion to connect the threads of his moral together:

[M]any of our People began now to relapse into their old Distemper the Scurvy, which was the more unfortunate at this juncture, as we were then in the most dangerous Navigation of all those Seas, occasioned by the Narrowness of the Straits, the Want of Soundings, huge Mountains of Ice, which may be very well compared to floating Rocks, and the dismal dark Weather, which renders it so very difficult to avoid them. Yet frightful and shocking as these circumstances are, it is not long before they become so familiar as not to affect us much, and the Danger is so far lessened by keeping a constant Watch, and proper Discipline amongst the Seamen, that one seldom hears of any melancholy Accident. This is the more manifest from a Fact, the Truth of which is indisputable; and that is, the *Hudson's Bay Company's* Ships, returning Year after Year without any Disaster; from whence perhaps we may infer, that where constant and continual Danger excites perpetual attention, it thereby alters it's Nature, and becomes, if I may be allowed the Expression, the Cause of Safety.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson's Bay*, 258.

<sup>57</sup> Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson's Bay*, 282.

The pathos of his account, combining the crew's deepest moment of physical suffering with their darkest trials at sea, is juxtaposed against the indomitability of British discipline and perseverance. Against the sublime terrors of the Arctic waters and the terrible suffering brought on by scurvy, Ellis' account holds up the constancy of British shipping in the region. Here he turns the normal fear of foreign climate on its head: instead of "continual Danger" wreaking havoc, as conventional climatic assumptions went,<sup>58</sup> Ellis suggests that the danger brings out the positive quality of discipline and perseverance in British subjects, which not only facilitates adaptation to the rigors of this region, but also manifests a degree of domestication and control over its sublime nature.

Thus, while both Drage and Ellis found ways to narrate mastery in the treacherous Arctic waters and barren lands, the differences in how they confronted sublime dangers are illuminating. Drage's response to the crisis on the rocks of Resolution Isle suggests a deep-seated anxiety about the ability of navigators to systematically understand and predict the vagaries of the Arctic waters. And yet his dogged perseverance in surveying the meagre coastal resources demonstrates unwavering faith in these methods. Moreover, his meticulous narration articulates a clear goal to domesticate this unfamiliar environment. Ellis, on the other hand, demonstrates a much stronger desire to indulge in the sublime and terrible qualities of the Arctic, which in turn serves to highlight his unswerving faith in British discipline as a means of surmounting impossible odds. Ellis aesthetically appropriates the sublimity of the Arctic for his own ends, transforming the terrors of the Arctic into a site of colonial conquest.

What is most significant about both Ellis and Drage's representations of the North is how they are juxtaposed against depictions of the more southerly regions of the Bay

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<sup>58</sup> See chapter one.

where the crews wintered. For these authors, who struggled to find ways to represent the Arctic optimistically, the well-wooded and watered landscapes of the Nelson River easily fit within their categories of habitable geography. It was this fundamental contrast, between treeless and treed geographies, that made the southern regions of the Bay seem so pleasant to the explorers. Their narratives are filled with meticulous descriptions of how to live in the region and why British subjects in particular were uniquely suited to domesticating it.

### **Domesticating the Subarctic: Adaptation and Colonization**

Upon reaching the area near Nelson River, Drage described the treed landscapes he encountered as “extremely pleasant; and the barren Views we had so long entertained with, greatly contributed to make the Land, which we now lay about a Mile and a Half off, to look more agreeable. Low Land, with Woods, at some Distance from the Shore, looking pleasantly green.”<sup>59</sup> Drage’s account emphasizes both the aesthetic and resource value of the more fertile southern region. In contrast to “barren Views” and “no wood”, here was game and wood, and the likely presence of “Home Indians”, the local Lowland Cree, to help with winter hunting.<sup>60</sup> Scholars such as Moodie, MacLaren and Thomas have noted the pragmatic and aesthetic importance of trees to explorers and settlers, as a resource for fuel and shelter and marker of familiarity. This double meaning lent the tree line particular significance to Ellis and Drage.<sup>61</sup> Interestingly, Middleton’s travel account

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<sup>59</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 113.

<sup>60</sup> Indeed, these factors prompted the captains to winter at York Factory rather than Churchill, where Middleton had his gruelling experience. See Drage, *Account of a Voyage*, 1: 110.

<sup>61</sup> See MacLaren, “The Aesthetic Map of the North,” 34; Moodie, *An Historical Geography*, 185-186; and Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, 192-241. Timber was also a crucial resource for shipbuilding, and in the imperial age the British were generally on the lookout for such resources. However, in these texts woods are never mentioned in conjunction with plans for export or naval use. Dobbs, on the other hand,

lingers on the southern region's Arctic qualities, failing to mention the pleasant landscapes that Drage and Ellis saw. This contrast did not escape Ellis:

It is not at all to be wondered, that Captain *Middleton's* Men suffered very great Extremities and Inconveniencies from the Cold, when he wintered at Churchill, in the Year 1741, considering his Situation, which was upon a small bleak Isthmus, surrounded with a vast Extent of Ice; besides his People wore no other Clothes than what they commonly wore in other Voyages; whereas had they been furnished with large Beaver Coats, and had built Lodges in the Woods, they would have suffered very little in Comparison to what they did.<sup>62</sup>

Here is a crucial difference in how Drage and Ellis interpret the landscape compared to Middleton. Barren and treeless Arctic landscapes posed insuperable challenges, even to hardy Britons. Wooded landscapes provided sufficient resources not only for survival, but also for a happy and thriving existence. Middleton's folly was less his attempt to winter in Hudson Bay, than his poor preparation and choice of location. Drage and Ellis' accounts present the southern regions more favourably, but only in contrast to their experiences in the frozen, treeless Arctic. Their attempts to narrate an improveable Arctic inspired this dichotomy, leading them to view the more fertile southern limits of the Bay region in a much more positive light. Ellis and Drage both note the difficult winter climates on the Bay, but instead of stressing its insurmountable severity, they point to a variety of strategies they developed to adapt to the hostile climate; for example, wearing proper winter attire, building and maintaining adequate heating and housing, maintaining discipline and order, and engaging in regular physical activity. Robson's text presents a similar perspective, portraying the region favourably and pointing to strategies for adaptation, but his emphasis is less on the contrast with the Arctic and more on challenging conceptions and representations which influence prejudiced portraits of the

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discusses such a prospect, even suggesting that the timber in north-eastern Hudson Bay and Labrador might be more tough and durable, due to having grown with a closer grain in a colder climate. (Arthur Dobbs, *An Account of the Countries adjoining to Hudson's Bay in the North-west Part of America* [New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1967], 4-5.)

<sup>62</sup> Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson's Bay*, 177-178.

Bay-side. Perhaps most importantly, the articulation of these challenges, strategies for adaptation and misrepresentations reveals important details about what it meant to be British at the edges of the civilized world.

### **Adaptation and Colonization: Staying Warm in a Cold Climate**

One of the most significant details that Middleton reports on is the winter clothing he and his men wore to combat the effects of unceasing cold:

For our Winter Dress we make use of three Pair of Socks of coarse Blanketing or Duffield for the Feet, with a Pair of *Deer-skin* Shoes over them; two Pair of thick *English* Stockings, and a Pair of Cloth Stockings upon them; Breeches lined with Flannel; two or three *English* Jackets, and a Fur or Leather Gown over them; a large Beaver Cap, double, to come over the Face and Shoulders, and a Cloth of Blanketing under the Chin; with Yarn Gloves, and a large Pair of Beaver Mittings hanging down from the Shoulders before, to put our Hands in, which reach up as high as our Elbows; yet notwithstanding this warm Cloathing, almost every Day, some of the Men that stir abroad, if any Wind blows from the northward, are dreadfully frozen; some have their Arms, Hands, and Face blister'd and frozen in a terrible manner, the Skin coming off soon after they enter a warm House, and some have lost their Toes.<sup>63</sup>

Middleton's emphasis on the mixing of English with local materials in their winter garb is curious because he never explicitly mentions learning from the local inhabitants. This will become more significant in comparison with the descriptions from the 1746 expedition. However, Middleton's unhappy picture is thrown into sharp relief when upon realization that, despite its inclusion in this description, the crew were actually forced to face the winter cold without the "Fur or Leather Gowns" worn as overcoats by the Hudson's Bay Company men. Made of beaver pelts, these coats were considered standard issue for Company men wintering at the factory. James Isham, governor of Churchill factory at the time, did attempt to procure extra coats for Middleton and his men from the

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<sup>63</sup> Middleton, *A Vindication*, 196. Duffield is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as "a coarse woolen cloth having a thick nap or frieze". "Duffield," *Oxford English Dictionary*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1989 OED Online, 12 March, 2009, <[http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50070608/50070608spg1?single=1&query\\_type=misspelling&queryword=Duffield+&first=1&max\\_to\\_show=10&hilite=50070608spg1](http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50070608/50070608spg1?single=1&query_type=misspelling&queryword=Duffield+&first=1&max_to_show=10&hilite=50070608spg1)>

post at Albany River, their very distant neighbours. However, there were none to spare.<sup>64</sup>

Middleton's failure to mention this inadequacy prompts one to wonder exactly how well dressed the men were during that long cold winter.

Middleton sidesteps this problem by representing their ill health as essentially caused by climate, not dress. As he goes on to describe, the best way to stay healthy was to stay active:

Now their Lying-in for the Cure of these frozen Parts, brings on the Scurvy in a lamentable manner. Many have died of it, and few are free from that Distemper. I have procured them all the Helps I could, from the Diet this Country affords in Winter, such as fresh Fish, Partridges, Broths, etc. and the Doctors have used their utmost Skill in vain; for I find that nothing will prevent that Distemper from being mortal, but Exercise and stirring abroad.<sup>65</sup>

However, the most assured way to become ill was to go abroad when the wind blew from the North. To complicate matters further, he says of the winds: "If the Wind blows from the southern Parts, the Air is tolerably warm, but insufferably cold when it comes from the northward, and it seldom blows otherwise than between the north-east and the north-west, except in the two Summer Months"<sup>66</sup> Thus, for Middleton, regardless of its provenance, warm winter clothing was at best inadequate protection for British bodies against the severe winters at Churchill Factory.

Ellis depicts the conditions of the 1746 wintering in starkly contrasting terms:

We likewise began about this Time to put on our Winter Dress, which consisted of a Robe of Beaver Skin, with the Furr on, which reached to our Heels, and two Waistcoats under it, a Cap and Mittens of the same, lined with Flannel, a Pair of Indian Stockings, over our Yarn ones, made of Broad Cloth or Leather, which reached up to the mid Thigh, with Shoes of soft-tanned Moose or Elk-Skin, under which we wore two of three Pair of Blanket, of thick Duffil Socks to prevent our Feet freezing, which is a thing that nevertheless frequently happens ; a Pair of Snow-Shoes, about five Feet long, and eighteen Inches wide, to hinder us from sinking in the Snow, completed the Dress. This is, properly speaking, the Garb of the *Indians* of this Country, who have taught it to the *English*; and than which nothing can be better contrived, both for Convenience and Use. For when

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<sup>64</sup> Williams, *Voyages of Delusion*, 83-87.

<sup>65</sup> Middleton, *A Vindication*, 196.

<sup>66</sup> Middleton, *A Vindication*, 198.

we were thus equipped, we were able to stand the keenest Cold, (except only for a few Days) that happened during the Winter.<sup>67</sup>

While the clothing described closely resembles the items listed by Middleton, there are some key differences. Ellis, like Middleton, emphasizes the English materials of flannel and Duffield, yet he acknowledges the reliance on indigenous technology, commenting that the Lowland Cree “taught” the English the proper dress for the region. He claims that their hybrid winter attire was entirely sufficient to protect them from the winter cold.

Drage’s description elaborates on this, describing not only the clothes, but the correct manner of wearing them, for example:

Over these Socks [the factory people] wear a Shoe made of Mouse [Moose] or Deer-skin, of the Indian dressing, soft and pliable, much like to Wash-Leather (for if the Feet are in any Way confined they immediately Freeze) ... The Stocking is made like a Spatterdash, only hangs loose about the Ancles, not fitting close as a Spatterdash does; for, being loose, the Snow shakes off the easier; and if close, the Snow lying there must freeze the Leg.<sup>68</sup>

From this attention to detail, one might deduce that adaptation to climate was not an inherited trait, but a matter of correct tools (clothes) and proper technique (how to wear them) – techniques the factory workers, the British crews, and even Drage’s readers could easily learn from the indigenous inhabitants.<sup>69</sup> These latter accounts seem to imply that the suffering of Middleton’s crew was due to their lack of skill and knowledge in preparing for the cold. Drage even contends that with proper attire, one might stay out of doors “all Night without Harm, and comfortably,”<sup>70</sup> which he and his party did on winter

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<sup>67</sup> Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson’s Bay*, 158. It is notable that, Robson’s description of his winter clothing is more in line with Middleton’s as he does not mention any borrowing or learning from the Lowland Cree. See Joseph Robson, *An Account of Six Years Residence in Hudson’s-Bay, From 1733-1736, and 1744-1747* (New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1965), 26-27.

<sup>68</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 163.

<sup>69</sup> This brings to mind Roxann Wheeler’s argument that dress and other consciously assumed markers in the early modern period were more important than “changeless” factors like skin colour. See Roxann Wheeler, *The Complexion of Race: Categories of Difference in Eighteenth-Century British Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 17-19.

<sup>70</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 164.

hunting trips, with only a fire and “Barricado,” or hedge of branches, to buffer the wind.

Drage even suggests that the customary winter dress was not always required:

From the Use of so warm a Dress, it may be easily imagined, that there is no Subsisting without such a Dress; some of the Factory Servants themselves only wear Coats made of Leather, or Mouse [Moose] Skin, dressed by the Indians, which are loose and long, something like a Banyan. Blankets, and even a good great Coat, will do as to the Body; the principal care being as to the extreme Parts, as to the Feet and Legs, Arms and hands, these must be secured, as also the Head, and these Parts the Indians take principal Care of, both as to themselves and their Children.<sup>71</sup>

The combination of appropriate clothing, care, knowledge and experience, Drage claims, was sufficient to avoid all but the most minor of accidents due to cold during their stay at York Factory. Thus, where Middleton seems to argue that the severe cold of the Bay-side was too great to bear, these accounts provide a substantially revised image of the viability of British survival on the Bay.

A similar pattern is seen in depictions of living accommodations. Middleton spent the 1741-42 winter in a stone fort at Fort Prince of Wales provided by the Governor of Churchill Factory, James Isham. Middleton’s crew wintered in a separate house built on the site of the “Old factory”, but his Royal Society report only details his own housing:

Four large Fires are made in great Stoves, built on purpose, every day; As soon as the Wood is burnt down to a Coal, the Tops of the Chimneys are close stopped with an Iron cover: This keeps the Heat within the House (though at the same time the Smoke makes our Heads ake, and is very offensive and unwholesome); notwithstanding which, in four or five Hours after the Fire is out, the Inside of the Walls of our House and Bed-places will be two or three Inches thick with Ice, which is every Morning cut away with a Hatchet.<sup>72</sup>

Additionally, despite maintaining a fire in his room for “the major Part of the 24 Hours,” Middleton states that “all this will not preserve my *Beer, Wine, Ink, &c.* from freezing.”<sup>73</sup>

In contrast, Drage and Ellis do not downplay the severe effect of the cold on their living accommodations, but they do praise this strategy of heating for holding off the

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<sup>71</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 164. Robson makes the same points as Drage in his account; see Robson, *An Account of Six Years*, 26-27, 78-79.

<sup>72</sup> Middleton, *A Vindication*, 196. See also Williams, *Voyages of Delusion*, 79, 91.

<sup>73</sup> Middleton, *A Vindication*, 196.

winter cold. Drage describes in detail their method of maintaining the stove, claiming that “by such Means the Heat is confined to the House, and it will be warm some Hours.”<sup>74</sup> In portraying their success in combating the cold, he says that “The Stove which was first erected... warmed the House to that Degree as to to [sic] melt the Candles, and not to admit the Lying covered a Bed ; and with the other Stove, if duly lighted, those in the House could have no Sense of the Cold.”<sup>75</sup> However, this heating is not seen in a wholly positive light. Ellis reports that when the fire was ablaze the heat indoors frequently made them sweat, and that the interior and exterior temperature differential was so great, those arriving from outside would often faint upon entering. He also notes that when the fire was left to go out over night, bedclothes would freeze to the walls, liquids would turn solid and the noises of the cooling timbers were “little inferior in Noise to the Report of Musquet.”<sup>76</sup> Drage suggests ways to manage the fire to avoid the ill effects of the smoke that Middleton described, but Ellis is less sanguine in describing the “sulphurous, suffocating Smell” that the stoppering of the chimney occasioned.<sup>77</sup> It seems that British attempts to create an artificial ‘climate’ within the house were not as successful as their personal clothing was claimed to be. The extremes of hot and cold that these authors describe are reminiscent of the “unnatural” weather fluctuations that Thomas James experienced on Charleton Isle in springtime of 1633. However, while the heat created inside the house is represented as extreme, and the smoke irritating, their abode was still a success in combating the winter cold of the exterior. And given the massive quantity of

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<sup>74</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 135.

<sup>75</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 135. Drage explains that the stove that warmed the house is “a brick Stove begun with Mortar and Bricks, with which we were supplied by the Governor, who also sent the Brick layer to the Factory to build it”. Ellis is more precise, saying it “was build of Brick, six Feet long, two wide, and three high”. (Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson’s Bay*, 174.)

<sup>76</sup> The fire was left to go out over night to conserve wood, for the stove consumed a “Horse Load of Wood, at least, at a Time”. (Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson’s Bay*, 174-175.)

<sup>77</sup> Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson’s Bay*, 174.

timber required for construction and heating, the well wooded Subarctic climate of the southern Bay-side was much more amenable to British habitation than the Arctic barrens to the North. Moreover, despite their difficulties in creating a temperate environment in the cold winter, these authors demonstrate that the seemingly “unnatural” climate lent itself well to maintaining British systems of order and discipline.

### **Adaptation and Colonization: Discipline and the Social Order**

Drage and Ellis’ treatment of their winter stays show that they placed a strong emphasis on efforts to maintain the hierarchy, routines and division of labour that were an essential part of shipboard life. This suggests a generalized but significant concern that the severe climate of Hudson Bay presented a danger not only to the health of the British crew, but also to their moral order and systems of self government. Roxann Wheeler argues that, during the eighteenth century, great importance was attached to the connection between England’s felicitous climate and its thriving political and civil institutions. These institutions structured society into various ranks, professions and classes, which in turn were seen to encourage industry and a sense of civil and national spirit among the populace. So it was with some trepidation that Britons travelled and settled in foreign climates, which were seen to bear risk of detrimentally affecting the values at the core of their civil society.<sup>78</sup>

One of the most important ways these systems of social rank and routine were maintained was in the structure of their house, called Montague House, at

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<sup>78</sup> Wheeler, *The Complexion of Race*, 5.

York Factory.<sup>79</sup> At first the captains intended to build two separate houses, one each for ship and crew, but lacking sufficient bricks to construct two stoves, they were required to share a single house, though, as will be discussed further on, quarters for the crews and officers were, of course, separated.<sup>80</sup> Ellis' description of building the house leaves no doubt about the significance it carried for the crews. It is a "grand Business," he says, "building a House for the Captain and Officers to dwell in."<sup>81</sup> The site reflected this lofty goal, and they chose it for both pragmatic and aesthetic reasons: "[the] Situation we chose for it, was equally pleasant and convenient; it was on an Eminence surrounded with Trees".<sup>82</sup> For convenience, it lay but a half mile from both the river and the ships, and "on the South West", he makes sure to relate, "we had a handsome Bason of Water, called Beaver Creek, about 150 Yards distant in Front, which looked like a grand Canal, in Prospect; and thick and tall Woods protected us from the North and North-east Winds."<sup>83</sup> This illustrates how closely ideas about social order and landscape were intertwined. The house's location on a rise, fortified from the frigid northern winds by a bastion of tall trees and with a notable view, once again reveals the important influence of upper-class traditions of landscape viewing.<sup>84</sup> It is with some irony and not a little pathos that the familiar aesthetic conventions of waterways and canals found their expression in the lowly "Beaver Creek."

Nevertheless, Ellis' portrayal of Montague House and its surroundings stamps a

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<sup>79</sup> The house was named after the Duke of Montague, one of the voyage subscribers. (Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson's Bay*, 157-158.)

<sup>80</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 133.

<sup>81</sup> Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson's Bay*, 155.

<sup>82</sup> Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson's Bay*, 155.

<sup>83</sup> Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson's Bay*, 155.

<sup>84</sup> Ian S. MacLaren, "The Aesthetic Map of the North, 1845-1859," *Arctic* 38 no. 2 (June 1985): 90. See also Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, 265-266.

piece of England onto the landscape of Hudson Bay, ensuring the captains could continually reaffirm their attempted dominion over the landscape, regardless of the conditions outdoors.

This assertion of moral order went beyond the aesthetics of Montague House and surroundings; it dictated the entire structure of the building, which, in turn, helped dictate how the men's lives were organized. The house was built "to have two Stories, the lower one to be six, and the upper seven feet high; the Captain and some of the principal Officers were to lie above, and the Remainder below, as also the Subalterns and Servants."<sup>85</sup> The upper floor was the only place in the house with windows, so essential for landscape viewing, one in each of the captain's rooms and one at either end of the hallway which ran the length of the building. Across the hall lay "a Row of Cabins for the Officers of both Ships, half to one, half to the other."<sup>86</sup> Drage reports the organization of their dwelling:

The lower Story, in the middle of which was the Stove, was also divided, one side belonging to one Ship's Company, and the other to the other. In this Story the Surgeon had his Cabin; the Mate, the Carpenter, the Cook, the Captain's Servants, and others whom it was necessary to have, for sawing the Wood for the Stove, lighting the Stove, and other necessary Jobs, were also lodged here. ... This story had no light, but what came in by the Doors (as the upper one had) was floored, and each Captain had a Cellar underneath the Floor.<sup>87</sup>

The house measured less than thirty by twenty feet. With something like thirty people residing in such a small space, the dedication of an entire floor to officers, and the restriction of windows to captains' rooms and the upper hall, signified a substantial

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<sup>85</sup> Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson's Bay*, 155-156.

<sup>86</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 134.

<sup>87</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 134.

commitment to the maintenance of the command hierarchy.<sup>88</sup> This hierarchy in turn served to embody the preservation of moral order amongst the ships' crews.

The division between crews was maintained in all tasks, from heating the house to cooking and even hunting. Each crew maintained its own woodpile outside, alternating weekly the substantial duty to maintain the fire. Each crew also had its own log tents separate from the main house. Cook tents were located near the house, where the cooks and their assistants worked and were housed. As well, a number of log tents were built at a distance from the main house from which the men could hunt and trap game throughout the winter to supplement their daily ration with fresh meat. It was in these log tents that the other half of the crews, those not living in Montague House, were boarded, and their routines were even more rigorous and active than those at the house.

While life at the house was presented in less than ideal terms, both Ellis and Drage suggest that this discomfort was mitigated by outdoor activity. The authors insist that the best way to endure winter was *not* to hide away indoors, suggesting that this kind of indolence was the surest route to scurvy and sickness. Though Drage and Ellis disagree with Middleton on many points, on this one they agree, asserting that the prospect of a winter spent outdoors engaged in wooding, hunting and trapping was the best method to successfully endure the difficult Hudson Bay winter.

The log tents were located up to six miles from the main house, near creeks and in "Sporting Country ... all in pleasant Situations, surrounded with Woods".<sup>89</sup> Their

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<sup>88</sup> The descriptions of the measurements of the house differ between Ellis and Drage with the former claiming the plan to have been 28' by 18', and the latter presenting the house to measure 20' by 16'. Drage claims that fourteen of twenty eight in the *California's* crew boarded in the house, not including the captain, and likely a similar number lived there from the *Dobbs Galley's* crew of thirty eight. See Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 133-134; Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson's Bay*, 155-156; and Williams, *Voyages of Delusion*, 142.

<sup>89</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 137.

location in woods and along creeks afforded them access to fuel, game and easier routes for travel. Living arrangements in these tents were more arduous than those enjoyed at Montague house. They slept on tall bundles of pine needles laid out on the ground, their blankets often covered with ice in the morning as the fire burned low.

The seven men who shared each log tent were assigned a rigorous and active routine of cutting and sawing huge quantities of wood, going out to hunt, checking traps for game, and cooking and maintaining their lodging.<sup>90</sup> Indeed, Drage emphasizes how the rationing system was structured to encourage this level of activity:

Once every Week they fetched their Provision from the House where the Captains resided; but were only allowed five Days Dinners; ...two Days the People must provide for themselves. This was intended to make the People exercise themselves in Hunting, to provide themselves for those two Days; and that it would also be two Days in a Week for fresh Provision; and was a Saving of the other Provision.<sup>91</sup>

This rigorous style of life is presented as not only encouraging better diet and health, but also fulfilling a significant need in terms of defining and maintaining the ideals of British masculinity and culture. As Drage explains, “there is a kind of Property which follows on the Erecting of every Tent; no Man having Right to cut a Stick within such a Distance of that Tent, as any one in that Tent can carry Home a Stick from on his Shoulder without resting.”<sup>92</sup> By associating the menial duties of collecting and chopping wood with the cultural priorities of private property rights and masculine feats of strength, Drage makes a strong argument to naturalize the connection between survival in northern climates and British cultural ideals. In 1690, John Locke stated that “Government ... has no other end but the preservation of property.”<sup>93</sup> By the eighteenth century, private property and the

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<sup>90</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 168-174.

<sup>91</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 172.

<sup>92</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 138.

<sup>93</sup> John Locke, quoted in Douglas Hay, “Property, Authority and the Criminal Law,” *Albion’s Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in Eighteenth Century England* (London: Allan Lane, 1975), 18.

accumulation of wealth had come to take a preeminent place in British law, over and above concerns such as “peace or justice or charity.”<sup>94</sup> Blackstone, the eminent eighteenth-century jurist and constitutional scholar, universalized the notion of the inherent right to property, declaring it to be not only a British quality, but one rooted deep in human nature: “there is nothing which so generally strikes the imagination, and engages the affections of mankind, as the rights of property; or that sole despotic dominion which one man claims and exercises over the external things of the world in total exclusion of the right of any other individual in the universe.”<sup>95</sup> Blackstone’s concepts are embedded in Drage’s text, where the “despotic dominion” which the tent men claimed over their timber territory is affirmed as an example of British industry and vigour in making the cold landscapes and climate of Hudson Bay their own.

### **Adaptation and Colonization: Acclimatization as Value**

Drage and Ellis similarly saw the trials of hunting in the Hudson Bay winter as a challenge that brought out the industry of the British crewmen. “As in every Country,” Ellis observes, “different Seasons produce, or rather direct Men to different Employments; so in this our utmost Skill was shewn, and industry exerted, in killing Rabbits and Partridges, which is the chief Game to be met with at this Season.”<sup>96</sup> While rabbits and partridges were not the ‘manliest’ of game, they had long been prey for English hunters; moreover, they provided much needed fresh meat for the crew. Ellis seems to associate their success in hunting with the long tradition of English hunting, an activity historically limited to the upper class, to legitimize their domination of this

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<sup>94</sup> Hay, “Property, Authority and the Criminal Law,” 18.

<sup>95</sup> Blackstone, quoted in Hay, “Property, Authority and the Criminal Law,” 19.

<sup>96</sup> Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson’s Bay*, 159.

landscape and its beasts.<sup>97</sup> This is made more poignant when compared to Drage's description of the achievements of the few "Home Indians" assigned to help them in hunting: "as they were neither extraordinary Sportsmen, or remarkably industrious, they killed no great Quantity of Birds."<sup>98</sup> Here the British men are presented as possessing superior survival skills to even the indigenous occupants of the land. This claim is less credible when one takes into account the numerous instances where Drage and Ellis point to their indebtedness to indigenous knowledge, skills and technology for their survival on the Bay. The claim is complicated further by the sharp differences in the ways that the "Home Indians" living at the posts are represented as compared to those who lived inland and came down to trade. The complexities of these representations will be dealt with at length in the next chapter. Suffice to say that these examples demonstrate not only how British subjects could survive Hudson Bay winters, but also how their responses to difficulties in the region were seen to embody, and even amplify, central principles and features of eighteenth-century British culture.

It is useful to turn to Robson's account at this point, as he approaches this matter from quite a different perspective than Ellis and Drage. He claims that men consistently misrepresent the severity of the Bay-side environment, "magnifying the distresses they have undergone". Robson suggests their motives: either they are "embittered and full of resentment" from "ill usage" at the hands of the Company, or they seek to "establish a

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<sup>97</sup> For details on the place of hunting in English history, see John M. MacKenzie, *The Empire of Nature: Hunting, conservation and British Imperialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 16-24, and Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, 69, 71, 148, 183-184, 200-201. Thomas notes the longstanding roles of hares and ground fowl in English hunting practices. The texts make clear that it was largely the crew who hunted, not the officers or captains. For further analyses of the changing place of hunting in England, and the shifting tastes of the upper and middling classes, see John Tosh, "The old Adam and the new man: emerging themes in the history of English masculinities, 1759-1850," *English Masculinities* (London: Longman, 1999), 221, and Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, 152-154, 160-165, 183-184.

<sup>98</sup> Drage, *Account of a Voyage*, 1: 178-180. The identity of the "Home Indians" will be discussed in further detail in chapter three.

character for capacity and resolution, [and] do it at the expence of truth.”<sup>99</sup> In the latter case, Robson elaborates:

A man in Hudson’s-Bay has not much opportunity for signaling himself: his sphere of action is confined within the very narrow limits of carrying large logs of wood, walking in snow-shoes, setting traps, hunting and fowling. The being a dextrous hunter, and travelling well in snow-shoes, are esteemed the chief points of honour; they, therefore give the most romantic accounts of their journies, magnify every little difficulty into a more than Herculean labour, and endeavour to convince their hearers, that nothing could have carried them through. Less than the most consummate strength of mind and body: hence people have imagined, that it must be the last distress that can drive a man to a country, where he has so few chances not only for comfortable subsistence but for life itself.

By arguing that the portrayals of the Bay-side rigours are inflated, Robson emphasizes the significance these men placed on their struggles against adverse conditions. The portrayal of “Herculean” labours in Hudson Bay is shown to have enhanced the men’s reputation for “capacity and resolution,” and “strength of mind and body”. That Robson’s account denigrates such embellishments does not diminish this point. Instead, it shows that these manly attributes were highly prized, such that men would exaggerate and lie to lay claim to them. More importantly, Robson’s argument suggests that the Bay-side was commonly seen as a place where such valorised masculine virtues abounded.

Yet Robson does not present conditions on the Bay-side entirely favourably. Hauling heavy loads across rough, snow-covered terrain, overland travel in winter is shown to be laborious and slow: “though the distance between one tent and the next is not eight miles, it would have required near eight hours to have performed it in”.<sup>100</sup> Not unlike the men he criticizes, Robson boasts to his readers, challenging them to best his feat: “If the reader is still doubtful of the fact, let him make the experiment himself in any

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<sup>99</sup> Robson, *An Account of Six Years*, 40-41.

<sup>100</sup> Robson, *An Account of Six Years*, 29.

pathless piece of coppice, marsh, or heath”.<sup>101</sup> However, unlike the men, Robson suggests a new perspective on the region is warranted:

It must be acknowledged indeed, that upon his first arrival in the Bay, an Englishman makes a very disadvantageous comparison between the appearance of that country and his own; and it may be a year or two before he is thoroughly reconciled to the climate and the manner of living; but it is an indisputable fact, that those who have staid there their full term, and have lived tolerably under the governor, had rather go back again than enjoy the same advantages in their native country; I myself am an instance of this; ... This inclination, therefore, to return to Hudson’s-Bay, when thus founded upon an experimental knowledge of the country, is surely a much stronger proof of its being very habitable, than all the stories which have been propagated by the idle or the interested are of the contrary. For my own part, if I had paid the least credit to the frightful tales I heard upon my arrival, I should not have ventured six miles from my place of residence.<sup>102</sup>

Despite the seemingly “disadvantageous” rigours of this alien climate, with time and inclination British subjects can be “thoroughly reconciled to the climate and the manner of living”. The climate is “habitable,” but one requiring adaptation and an “experimental knowledge of the country” – a phrase strongly reminiscent of Baconian science.

This notion of adaptation is at the heart of these texts. Returning to the 1746-47 expedition, in these descriptions of how the ships’ crews engaged with life on the Bay, (in particular through wooding and hunting), Ellis and Drage present a complex argument and strategy for what Wheeler terms the “seasoning” of British subjects on the cold shores of Hudson Bay. Wheeler explains how the concept of “seasoning” developed as a response to deterministic ideas about the relationship between climate and human variety, which posited that humans would not flourish outside the climatic region where they lived. Based on the experiences of early English colonists, who often settled in climatic regions quite different from those of their birth, “seasoning” emerged as a concept to explain the process by which people, though “possibly best suited to their native climates

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<sup>101</sup> Robson, *An Account of Six Years*, 29.

<sup>102</sup> Robson, *An Account of Six Years*, 41-42.

... could adapt gradually to a new one with a change in diet, habits, and clothing”.<sup>103</sup>

While the pictures that Robson, Drage and Ellis paint of Hudson Bay may have been favourable, it is significant that they did not attempt to sidestep the region’s harsh climate in their representations. For the climate had been a significant barrier to the English conceiving the region as truly worthy of settlement. Ellis sums up this sentiment:

From this long Account of the Severity of their Winter, it is natural for my Readers to conclude this Country, the most uncomfortable in the World, and it’s [*sic*] Inhabitants the most unhappy. But in fact however, they are very far from it. If the Weather is cold they have Abundance of Beaver-Skins to clothe them, and many other Conveniencies, that put them in some Measure, at least, on a Level, with those who live in a milder Clime.

But what in this Respect will appear much more extraordinary, I dare assert, that People from Europe, who have lived here for some Years, prefer it to all other Places, and when they leave it, and come Home with the Ships, they grow tired in a few Months, of a more moderate Climate, and wish with Impatience for the proper season, that may give them an Opportunity of revisiting these frozen Regions.<sup>104</sup>

Thus the difficulties of the climate, which were real and dangerous, are not seen as insurmountable, nor are they seen as significantly impeding efforts at settlement by British subjects. In fact, the process of climatic adaptation is presented as something not to be feared but embraced, for the differences in landscape and weather could enhance certain skills and qualities valorised in British culture.

In presenting these strategies for survival on Hudson Bay, Robson, Drage and Ellis were not simply suggesting it possible for humans to live in cold climates: this had been proven by Frobisher’s voyages. Instead, they were attempting to counter a long history of inherited knowledge that associated life in climatic extremes with a breakdown or absence of complex society. Their descriptions of life on the Bay specifically emphasize how key characteristics and values of British society – order, government, discipline, rank, and good health – need not be lost in foreign climates. As well, they

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<sup>103</sup> Wheeler, *The Complexion of Race*, 263. For further discussion of seasoning, see Karen Kupperman, “Fear of Hot Climates in the Anglo-American Colonial Experience,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 1, no. 2 (April, 1984): 215-216.

<sup>104</sup> Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson’s Bay*, 180-181.

carefully reconfigure the cultural significance attributed to the landscapes and climate of the Bay region, portraying the wooded Subarctic regions as beneficial to the constitution, social and moral order of British subjects. This optimistic rendering of northern landscapes is in stark contrast to their portraits of the more forbidding and treeless regions in the Arctic.

However, the published accounts of the 1746 voyage tell only one part of the story. The journals and letters of the Governor of York Factory, James Isham, present a significantly different perspective on the ships' wintering at York Factory. Isham's journal describes how violent rivalries erupted between crew members, officers and even the authors, Drage and Ellis. Glyndwr Williams' summary of the situation is revealing: "[by] Christmas, relations between the officers at Montagu House were such that Moor was guarded by four men with drawn swords, while Smith begged to be allowed to take refuge at York Factory. By the end of the month, Ellis and [Drage] were involved in the exchanges, with threats of murder in the air."<sup>105</sup> Neither of the published accounts mentions these disputes, suggesting that they were trying to emphasize a particular perspective of wintering on the frozen shores of the Bay – one free from conflict, and instead orderly, disciplined and even pleasant (though not without difficulties). Drage and Ellis' accounts seek to affirm that in this severe climate, the strengths of British civil society and discipline could prevail. By suppressing evidence of these conflicts, they purposefully distance their experiences from the history of mutiny and loss of moral order that characterized earlier voyages, particularly that of Henry Hudson. This hints at a deep-seated anxiety about the influence of northern climates on British subjects. They present a sanitized version of the events, knowing too well the important role that their

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<sup>105</sup> Barr and Williams, *The Voyage of William Moor and Francis Smith*, 56.

published accounts would play in constructing the image of what it meant to be British in this hostile land so far from civilization.

Building on the optimistic discourse of improvement Dobbs put forward in 1744, Drage, Ellis and Robson found ways to narrate the severe landscape and climate of the Bay region in a much more positive light than previously. By emphasizing techniques for navigating the perilous floes and bergs of ice and surveying the resources of the barren northern islands and shores, the authors from the 1746-47 voyage attempt to narrate a safe passage through the hazardous waters of the Arctic. In the more fertile southern regions, they offer careful advice on how to adequately clothe and house oneself, suggesting techniques to maintain good health over the cold, dark winters. Through all of this, they stress the British explorers' control and mastery in this foreign landscape. At sea and on the land, the accounts portray the region as domestic terrain, under the authority of hardy Britons ready and willing to adapt to its rigours and call it their home. Yet these attempts at discursive appropriation are riddled with cracks and fissures. Within the texts and in their silences, the narratives display a profound anxiety about the success of their efforts to include this land in the book of empire. Perhaps what is most notable, then, is that while these authors were ultimately less successful than they would have liked in their ability to domesticate this wild region, they were in no doubt as to their superiority over the original inhabitants. In the descriptions of the indigenous inhabitants of the Bay region it is evident that Ellis, Drage and Robson are compensating for their inadequacy at discursively colonizing the Hudson Bay wilderness. These portrayals flip logic on its head, characterizing the ways the indigenous peoples meet the rigours of their homeland as limitations instead of achievements.

### Chapter 3: “Nor would exchange their native Clime, or Modes”:<sup>1</sup> Climate, Landscape and the Representation of Indigenous Peoples of Hudson Bay

In John Oldmixon’s *The British Empire in America*, released in 1708 and then again in 1741, it is immediately clear that his opinion of the inhabitants of the Hudson Bay region is as unsympathetic as his opinion of the region itself.<sup>2</sup> Following his initial description of the tenuous British presence in the region, the unfavourable climate and paucity of resources along the Bay-side, he goes on to describe the Lowland Cree inhabitants in this way: “As to the *Indians*, their Manners, Customs, Language, Government and Religion, are the same with the *Canadans*; and *La Hontan* has described them very naturally, excepting that he has raised Nature, and made her too polite in this barbarous Clime, where Barbarity herself is in the Heigth [*sic*] of her Empire”.<sup>3</sup> His reference to and disagreement with the writings of Baron de Lahontan shows how closely he believed that climates and cultures were reflective of one another.

Lahontan’s book, *The New Voyages to North America* (1703), tells the story of his travels and adventures among the inhabitants of the Great Lakes region. Glyndwr Williams observes that Lahontan “fused his personal experiences and commercial instincts into a book which was at once a panegyric to the simple life of the Indian, and a bitter attack on the vices and follies of European society. His Indian, living without laws,

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<sup>1</sup> James Sterling, *An Epistle to the Hon. Arthur Dobbs, Esq; in Europe. From a Clergyman in America*, (London, 1752), 65.

<sup>2</sup> See chapter one, for discussion of Oldmixon’s views of the Hudson Bay Region

<sup>3</sup> John Oldmixon, *The British Empire in America, containing the history of the discovery, settlement, progress and present state of all the British colonies, on the continent and islands of America*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 2 vols. (London, 1741), 1: 548.

kings, property or priests, was truly a happy man.”<sup>4</sup> Lahontan’s portrayal of the indigenous North Americans in 1703 emphasizes the natural freedoms that came with a life untied to notions of property, wealth, government and agriculture. He stresses the healthiness and manliness of a life of hunting and travelling in the forests, and underscores the inherent generosity and sense of justice of these peoples in contrast to the culture of acquisitiveness and tyranny that he saw in Europe. Lahontan’s depiction of the indigenous North Americans tapped into, articulated and fostered a popular critique against the institutions and politics that dominated Europe; *The New Voyages* enjoyed significant popularity across Europe and particularly in England, becoming one of the most notable French sources on the region and its inhabitants at the time.<sup>5</sup>

Williams demonstrates how representations of indigenous North Americans in England tended to favour perspectives from one of two extremes – noble and ignoble savage. This began with the experiences and narratives of contact in New England during the seventeenth century, hardening under the pens of prominent thinkers, writers and travellers over the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Lahontan’s romantic portrait of indigenous people is representative of one extreme, and its intellectual roots can be traced to the writings of de Las Casas (1552). The opposite extreme, notably articulated by John Locke (1690), presents indigenous peoples as primitive, impoverished and miserable. Considered socially and intellectually undeveloped, often classed with “children, idiots and illiterates”,<sup>6</sup> indigenous peoples were said to live in a wandering state of existence, without property, government, or agriculture, and subsist only off the

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<sup>4</sup> P.J. Marshall and Glyndwr Williams, *The Great Map of Mankind: Perceptions of New Worlds in the Age of Enlightenment* (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 1982), 200.

<sup>5</sup> Marshall and Williams, *The Great Map of Mankind*, 199-202.

<sup>6</sup> Marshall and Williams, *The Great Map of Mankind*, 192

wild fruits and beasts of the land. They were thought to lack adequate housing, food, and clothing, living by the vagaries of their harsh environment, in a similar manner to “the first ages in Asia and Europe.”<sup>7</sup> Unlike Lahontan, Locke clearly does not see in the indigenous North Americans a model for Europe to emulate.<sup>8</sup>

While Oldmixon was willing to accept Lahontan’s descriptions of the culture and society of the “*Canadans*” in his discussion of the “*Indians*” of Hudson and James Bays,<sup>9</sup> Oldmixon’s perspective was much closer to that of Locke. He is unable to allow Lahontan’s conclusion that such proximity to wilderness could produce a polite and civilized culture, straying a good deal from Lahontan’s idealized version. Emphasizing the positive effect of contact with Europeans, he describes the Lowland Cree around Rupert’s River and along the Bay-side as “more simple than the *Canadans*, who have had longer Commerce with the Europeans.” The systems of property, authority and religion of the more northerly indigenous peoples are depicted in a thoroughly disdainful manner.<sup>10</sup> As well, he suggests that the Lowland Cree were regularly in danger of starvation as a result of the dearth of resources in the region, which influences his evaluation of their society: “this County being such a miserable Wilderness, that it affords no sufficient Subsistence

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<sup>7</sup> John Locke, quoted in Marshall and Williams, *The Great Map of Mankind*, 192.

<sup>8</sup> Marshall and Williams, *The Great Map of Mankind*, 191-193; Ronald Meek, *Social Science and the Ignoble Savage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 20-23.

<sup>9</sup> The term “Canada” generally referred to the area of northern North America under or in proximity to French control, i.e. New France, including the St. Lawrence gulf and valley, and eastern parts of the Great Lakes Region. However, Lahontan claims that geographically the lands of Canada stretch from “the south side of Lake *Erie*, to the North side of *Hudson’s Bay*, and ... from the River *Missisipi*, to Cape *Rase* in the Island of New-*Foundland*.” Baron de Lahontan, *The New Voyages to North America: Containing an account of the several nations of that vast continent*, vol. 1 (London, 1703), 206. When Oldmixon writes about the inhabitants of Hudson Bay, as opposed to the “*Canadans*”, he is generally referring to the Lowland and Upland Cree as well as Northern Ojibway, based around the Hudson and James Bay regions. Lahontan’s “*Canadans*” seems to refer to the Southern Algonquin, the Huron, and the peoples of the Confederacy of Five Nations.

<sup>10</sup> Oldmixon, *The British Empire in America*, 1: 548.

for the wretched Inhabitants.”<sup>11</sup> In all respects he seems to suggest that the life of these people in this unpleasant land was characterized by misery and want.

Located farther to the north along the borders of Hudson Strait, the Inuit, or “Nodways” as Oldmixon calls them, are described even more pejoratively than the southerners, as “a wild and barbarous People”.<sup>12</sup> His only source of information on these people is that of Charles Baily, the Governor for the Hudson’s Bay Company post, who recounts instances of their waging war on the Lowland Cree, and intimidating the British Fort with threats of violence.<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, Oldmixon feels solid enough in his evidence to make the generalized claim that “The *Indians* on the *New Severn* River are as poor as the *Eskimoes*, and indeed all the Northward *Indians* are more beggarly and brutal than the Southward.”<sup>14</sup> This straight equation of northerly latitudes with poverty and ferocity is a common stereotype, readily perpetuated by Oldmixon.<sup>15</sup> He sums up his opinion of North American indigenous peoples in one unrelenting burst:

Let the Learned say all the fine things that Wit, Eloquence and Art can inspire them with, of the Simplicity of pure Nature, the Beauty and Innocence, these Wretches are an Instance, that this Innocence is downright Stupidity and this pretended Beauty a Deformity, which puts Man, the Lord of Creation, on an equal Foot with the Beasts of the Forest.<sup>16</sup>

For Oldmixon they were stupid, even bestial: clearly of little account.

Only three years after Oldmixon, Arthur Dobbs published his natural history of the Hudson Bay region. In premise, Dobbs is in literal agreement with Oldmixon that the Lowland Cree were “simpler than those of *Canada*”, and that the Inuit were “wild and

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<sup>11</sup> Oldmixon, *The British Empire in America*, 1: 555.

<sup>12</sup> Oldmixon, *The British Empire in America*, 1: 548. It is possible that Oldmixon is here confusing the Inuit with the Iroquois, however, as the Iroquois were often called the Nottaways as they raided deep into Lowland Cree territory in the seventeenth century by travelling down the Nodway, or Nottaway river. For more on the Iroquois raids see Victor P. Lytwyn, *Muskegowuck Athinuwick: Original People of the Great Swampy Land* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2002), 74-77.

<sup>13</sup> Oldmixon, *The British Empire in America*, 1: 550-551.

<sup>14</sup> Oldmixon, *The British Empire in America*, 1: 555.

<sup>15</sup> See chapter one.

<sup>16</sup> Oldmixon, *The British Empire in America*, 1: 548.

barbarous.”<sup>17</sup> However, where he differs is on their potential for improvement. In the same manner that lands could be improved upon by cultivating the soils and constructing proper houses to withstand the elements, Dobbs advocates that cultures, particularly those understood as primitive or savage, could be improved through contact and interaction with more advanced societies.

Calls for improvement of peoples could take a number of different forms, from religious conversion to adoption of British ideas of polite society, gender relations, clothing, dietary practices and technology, to participation in a global trade economy and a British system of labour relations. However, the kinds of improvements advocated for a particular group in a particular place say much about what an author considers lacking in that culture, as well as about his or her particular agenda for improvement. While the barren Arctic north was not, in Dobbs’ view, suitable for settlement and colonization, it nonetheless possessed valuable animal, mineral and maritime resources that would prove useful to the British; thus, he advocated employing the indigenous inhabitants in these industries. In particular, Dobbs suggests developing the northern whale-fin and oil trade:

[T]his Trade would increase by employing the *Eskimaux Indians*, who are already so dextrous as to strike and kill (Whales, Seals, white Bears, and Sea-Horses) with Harpoons made of Bone, and must improve, by furnishing them with our Harpoons and Lines, and other Implements of Iron, and Fire Arms to such as would be reclaimed and civilized, which the Benefit they would have by a free Trade would very much contribute to.<sup>18</sup>

Dobbs emphasizes the improvements to be made by substituting British technologies (harpoons, iron tools, guns) for Inuit. Indeed, technology, labour relations and trade were intertwined discourses of improvement for Dobbs. These superior British tools should be made available to those who “would be reclaimed and civilized.” Participation in a

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<sup>17</sup> Arthur Dobbs, *An Account of the Countries adjoining to Hudson’s Bay in the North-west Part of America* (New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1967), 12. Here Dobbs uses precisely the same wording as Oldmixon; see Oldmixon, *The British Empire in America*, 1: 548.

<sup>18</sup> Dobbs, *An Account*, 60.

commercial fishery for trade with the British was thus a key step in the civilization of the Inuit, and the “benefits” of trade were understood to be reciprocal: civilizing the Inuit and bringing wealth to the British. Such confidence in the civilizing influence of trade and British goods is a predominant theme in Dobbs’ writing.<sup>19</sup> With respect to the southern regions, he writes:

What an immense Trade might be begun and carried on from these Countries; for the natives, being numerous and of a humane disposition, inclin’d to trade upon having an equitable Trade with us, would soon be civilized and become industrious, in such rich, industrious climates? What a Vent might be had in those Countries for our Woollen, Iron, and other Manufactures, may be easily conceived: So that by opening the Trade, and settling these Countries, the French in time would be confined to the Rivers which fall into the River St. Laurence, and be deprived of all their North-western Trade.<sup>20</sup>

Here is the fullness of Dobbs’ vision: trade as a motor of progress to foster mutual prosperity, British settlement, the expansion of metropolitan markets (these northern territories become a “Vent” for British textiles and industrial goods) as well as the “civilizing” and developing of the entire trade network of Cree, Chipewyan, Northern Ojibway and Assiniboine, and the eventual dissolution of French influence in the region.

Most interesting in these passages is the distinctive way in which climate and environment influenced Dobbs’ representation of indigenous peoples and how they could be “improved.” Not only does Dobbs begin with divergent sets of assumptions about different indigenous peoples, emphasizing the “humane disposition” of the southerly peoples on the one hand and the “dextrous” skill of the northern Inuit on the other, he also presents different programs of trade and civilization for these groups. Dobbs offers a new and highly optimistic discourse for improving Hudson Bay and its inhabitants. His

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<sup>19</sup> Dobbs’ views on trade as the apex of civilized behaviour anticipate the emerging stadial pronouncements of prominent Enlightenment thinkers such as Adam Smith. The similarities between the themes in these texts and the emergence of four stages theories will be discussed shortly.

<sup>20</sup> Dobbs, *An Account*, 59.

ideas immediately influenced a number of important books written shortly after his publication, and which were based on first-hand experience in the Bay.

Building on the discussion in chapter two, which dealt with the ways British authors represented their encounters with the climate and geography of the Hudson Bay region, this chapter will examine how the texts of Robson, Drage and Ellis that emerged during the mid 1740's and early 1750's,<sup>21</sup> influenced by Dobbs' vision, represent the indigenous peoples of the Hudson Bay region. By analyzing the portrayals of these peoples' modes of living, sustaining and sheltering themselves, as well as observations on their physical bodies and dispositions, clothing and technology, I will draw attention to the important role that ideas about climate and landscape played in shaping how the British perceived and represented these groups.

Perhaps the clearest trend in the texts of the mid 1740s and early 1750's is that, while the British are portrayed as being able to adapt to climatic or geographic conditions different from their own, as discussed in chapter two, the indigenous inhabitants are presented as having already adapted to their regional environments in ways which are seen to be limiting. In representing these peoples, the texts emphasize a variety of features – their social organization, habits, temperament, physical bodies, technology and clothing – in ways that are not solely negative in tone. In fact, the authors often recognize their reliance on indigenous groups either for trade and technological expertise or for

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<sup>21</sup> The main sources under analysis in this chapter are Henry Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson's Bay, by the Dobbs Galley and California, In the Years 1746 and 1747, for Discovering a North West Passage* (New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1967); Theodore Swaine Drage, *An Account of a Voyage for the Discovery of a North-West Passage by Hudson's Streights, to the Western and Southern Ocean of America*, vol. 1 (New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1968); Theodore Swaine Drage, *An Account of a Voyage for the Discovery of a North-West Passage by Hudson's Streights, to the Western and Southern Ocean of America*, vol. 2 (New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1968); and Joseph Robson, *An Account of Six Years Residence in Hudson's-Bay, From 1733-1736, and 1744-1747* (New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1965).

basic sustenance during their stays in unfamiliar geographies and climates. Specific methods and techniques of adaptation that indigenous inhabitants had achieved to thrive in their home environments are regularly portrayed as beneficial to the British visitors. Nevertheless, the authors almost universally represent the indigenous peoples' regional adaptation as a weakness, rather than a strength. They were convinced that, if left alone, indigenous peoples would never evolve or progress to the level of sophistication and advancement that the British supposed themselves to have attained. This discursive inversion turns the British, who were often at a disadvantage in these foreign lands compared to the indigenous inhabitants, into the dominant group. Improvement is seen as the primary advantage of the British; without improvement, the indigenous North Americans were unable to surpass the constraints of their environments – and to improve, they required British help.<sup>22</sup>

## **Narrating Difference: Migratory Hunters and Theories of Social**

### **Development**

A persistent prejudice held by the British towards the indigenous peoples of the Hudson and James Bay regions centred upon their way of life as migratory hunters. This stirred up the old and unfavourable assumptions that migratory hunting societies were

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<sup>22</sup> As this chapter is specifically focused on the role that climate played in representations of indigenous peoples the portrayals of the “Home Indians” in these accounts will not play a significant part in my analysis. The primary reason is that the distinctions that were made between the Lowland Cree described as “Home Indians”, and those who were not had little to do with ideas about climate. However, since depictions of “Home Indians” are relevant to broader representations of indigenous people, I will bring them into the discussion where applicable. Additionally, it is not clear that the “Home Indians” were actually a distinct group from the rest of the lowland Cree, particularly during the 1740’s and 50’s. In the literature under discussion it is more likely this name was given to any group of Lowland Cree who spent time at the factories in the course of their seasonal rounds while the British observers were visiting. The “Home Indians” or Homeguard Indians have played a consistently important role in the regular operations of the Factories, however, and as such they have generated a scholarly literature of their own. For further discussion on this topic, see Lytwyn, *Muskegowuck Athinuwick*; Toby Morantz, *An Ethnohistoric Study of Eastern James Bay Cree Social Organization, 1700-1850* (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1983).

intrinsically less civilized than settled societies, which is often explained as the result of a deep rift in the world views of peasant and hunting cultures.<sup>23</sup> This prejudice carried significant weight in eighteenth century European philosophy, so much so that in 1748 the French political theorist Charles-Louis Montesquieu specifically categorized ‘savage’ nations as living off hunting, whereas ‘barbarians’ were herdsmen, thereby essentializing the connection between savagery and hunting peoples.<sup>24</sup> By the mid 1750’s and early sixties this notion became a foundational element in a new model of social development that “dominate[d] socio-economic thought” in Europe for the rest of the century.<sup>25</sup> Four stages theory (or stadial theory), developed and promoted by a number of prominent enlightenment intellectuals including Adam Smith and Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot, held that:

[S]ociety ‘naturally’ or ‘normally’ progressed over time through four more or less distinct and consecutive stages, each corresponding to a different mode of subsistence, these stages being defined as hunting, pasturage, agriculture, and commerce. To each of these modes of subsistence ... there corresponded different sets of ideas and institutions relating to law, property, and government, and also different sets of customs, manners, and morals.<sup>26</sup>

Stadial theory thus built on the Lockean notion of the ignoble savage, judging migratory hunting societies to be the most primitive state of human society as opposed to Lahontan’s more favourable portrayal; from this stage all development was improvement. While stadial theorists’ writing was not early enough to influence accounts of the Hudson Bay that emerged during the mid 1740’s and early fifties, many of the core ideas that

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<sup>23</sup> Brody argues that the divide between peasants and hunters is deeply seated and longstanding, originating in their fundamentally different understandings about how society and its institutions function with regard to key issues such as “property, children, sexuality and social control”. In Brody’s assessment, these differences were perceived as alien and threatening to peasant societies, and as most of the major empires in Europe evolved from an agricultural heritage and social model, he roots the denigration and subordination of migratory and hunting ways of life in this ancient prejudice. (Hugh Brody, *Living Arctic: Hunters of the Canadian North* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1987), 13-15.)

<sup>24</sup> Meek, *Social Science and the Ignoble Savage*, 33-34.

<sup>25</sup> Meek, *Social Science and the Ignoble Savage*, 2. Meek points out that the influences of stadial theory carry well beyond the eighteenth century.

<sup>26</sup> Meek, *Social Science and the Ignoble Savage*, 2.

influenced these theorists were current to the Hudson Bay authors.<sup>27</sup> My analysis of the writings on Hudson Bay in the years leading up to the emergence of four stages theory will corroborate this point, and where the Hudson Bay writings differ from the theorists' later forms highlights the emergent quality of these ideas at this point in time.

The eighteenth-century British held strong opinions on the inherent relationship between settlement and civilization, with ideas about climate playing a key role in the ways that these qualities were assigned. The degree to which this opinion was ingrained is evident in the Northwest Committee's instructions for the 1746 voyage, where latitude is used as a benchmark for civilization and savagery: "If, upon passing those broken Lands on the North West of the Bay, you get more southerly than 60°, and find other Nations of Savages more civilized than the *Eskimaux*, such as the Northern *Indians*, endeavour to gain their Friendship more effectually with Presents".<sup>28</sup> The assumption is that as migratory hunting peoples, both the Keewatin Inuit and the Chipewyan must be savages. However, below this latitude there appeared a chance that people were more civilized.<sup>29</sup> The connection between savagery and mobility is further evidenced in the instructions requiring the captains of the *Dobbs Galley* and *California* to "take Possession ... in the name of his Majesty of *Great-Britain*, as first Possessor" of any lands that are

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<sup>27</sup> Meek, *Social Science and the Ignoble Savage*, 5-67.

<sup>28</sup> Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson's Bay*, 112.

<sup>29</sup> The assumption that the Chipewyan are more civilized than the Inuit likely has more to do with the historical representation of the Inuit as violent and unpredictable, based on accounts of Martin Frobisher and Henry Hudson's voyages, than it does with notions of mobility and settlement. This brings up the important point that ideas about civilization and savagery are multiple and layered, dependent upon various standards including clothing, food, religion and technology. This quote emphasizes that even peoples such as the Chipewyan, who were not tainted by the history of vilification like the Inuit, were still assumed to be savage based on their migratory and hunting-based society. While perhaps not *as* savage as the Inuit, they were not civilized. For a discussion of the early instances of violent contact between Inuit and the English, see Renée Fossett, *In Order to Live Untroubled: Inuit of the Central Arctic, 1550-1940* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2001), 33-55. See Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 58-63, for his impression of the Inuit involvement in the death of the mutineers during Henry Hudson's voyage.

found to be “uninhabited”.<sup>30</sup> While the exact meaning of “uninhabited” is left undefined, there are clues as to the manner in which the captains would have interpreted this command in the warning that follows. Should the captains meet with “civilized fixed Inhabitants”, they were to avoid acts of possession as these might be construed as hostile. “Fixed” inhabitants were not simply “more civilized than the *Eskimaux*”, they were assumed to *be* “civilized”. Being “Fixed” seems to be one of the most important criteria for “civilization”. The subsequent instruction brings together these assumptions about latitude, civilization and permanency:

In case you proceed successfully Southward, from 60° towards 50° and touch at any Port or River, where there are civilized Inhabitants, who reside in Towns and Villages, and do not lead an erratic Life, you must act with great Caution and Prudence, giving no Cause of Offense; and if they appear friendly, and desire Friendship, cultivate it by Presents, without putting yourselves in their Power.<sup>31</sup>

The underlying assumptions are clear: social development, patterns of mobility and settlement, and climate and latitude are correlated, making it possible to hierarchically categorize societies based on these criteria. As one proceeded south, the assumption goes, one left behind the “erratic” and moved into the realm of the “civilized.” The increase in anxiety over how the ships would be received and perceived by the more “civilized” sedentary peoples reveals the British writers’ assumptions about their own relative vulnerability to different societies. Knowing that this framework underpinned the assumptions of the Hudson Bay authors, it is intriguing to see how their “field” observations of indigenous peoples influenced their assumptions about the relationship between climate, geography and patterns of mobility.

In descriptions of the Arctic, Ellis, Drage and Robson emphasize the lack of vegetation and soil along the coasts of Hudson Straits and north of 60°. The prevailing

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<sup>30</sup> Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson’s Bay*, 113.

<sup>31</sup> Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson’s Bay*, 114.

barrenness combined with the short growing season suggests to British authors not only that the landscape was hostile, unable to support agriculture and settled society, but also that the very presence of the Hudson Strait Baffin-land Inuit was either irregular or unnatural.<sup>32</sup> Since British vessels only visited the far North between May and October, and given their difficulties in coping with the extreme winters in the southern Bay, it was not evident that these Inuit could winter in the Arctic. Drage was certainly influenced by this train of thought, revisiting older assumptions about the Arctic as an uninhabitable waste. He asserts that both the harsh climate and lack of vegetation along northern and southern coasts of the Strait prohibited the inhabitants from living there in winter: “the Shores of the Streights are barren and affording no Trade for want of inhabitants, (it being impossible for them to subsist for a Continuance, and [the Shores of the Straits] are only frequented in the Summer by the *Eskemaux* who come to hunt and Fish)”.<sup>33</sup> He muses that the people they met at Savage Island might travel as far south as the Labrador coast for their winter camps, a region that extends to 52°.<sup>34</sup>

Robson goes even further, suggesting that the Inuit’s situation in the far North was less a matter of choice or migration than the result of displacement. The British trade with the Lowland Cree, he explains, had provided these people with guns, allowing them to wage war on the Inuit. The resulting conflict was unequal, forcing the Inuit from the more favourable territories along the eastern and western coasts of the Bay, where they

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<sup>32</sup> For further discussion of the environment of Hudson Strait, see chapter two.

<sup>33</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 69.

<sup>34</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 33, 69. Fosset suggests that between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries there was no substantial change in the population, territories or ways of living of the Hudson Strait Baffin Inuit. She explains that it was not unusual for people on the southern coast to winter in Ungava Peninsula, where they would restock valuable resources more readily available on the mainland such as wood. She also points out that trade networks existed which linked Labrador to Ungava Bay, and Ungava Peninsula and Hudson Strait, but this is a far cry from Drage’s claims that Baffin Island was inhospitable in wintertime. Fossett, *In Order to Live Untroubled*, 91, 132.

apparently resided previously, “to be banished to Hudson’s straits on one side, and to Whale-cove on the other.”<sup>35</sup> His assumptions about the perceived value of climate and geography are evident in his claim that by negotiating an end to the aggressions of the Lowland Cree, the Inuit would be free to “extend at pleasure towards the bottom of the Bay, where they would find a milder climate and better country”.<sup>36</sup> Robson is unable to fathom the possibility that the Inuit might have inhabited, and adapted to, their home territory in the Arctic. Nor could he imagine that the conflicts between the Lowland Cree and the Inuit might not be about control of territory, assuming that, like him, they would seek to inhabit warmer climates wherever possible. It is intriguing that Robson inverts the more traditional understanding of the Inuit as the aggressors against their southern neighbours, which was discussed earlier in Oldmixon’s representation. However, one of Robson’s driving goals was to establish a whale fishery based on Inuit labour in the Bay, thus his descriptions must be read in the context of political and economic motivations.<sup>37</sup>

In contrast to the accounts of Drage and Robson, which focus on the climatic and inter-tribal forces that necessitated Inuit migratory strategies, Ellis’ narrative offers a brief but illuminating assessment of Inuit mobility in significantly different terms. He describes their mobility as a “Kind of vagabond Life, to which this whole Nation are addicted”,<sup>38</sup> suggesting this mode of living was an addiction, or a natural inclination. Additionally, in characterizing their migratory patterns as “vagabond”, Ellis highlights

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<sup>35</sup> Robson, *An Account of Six Years*, 64. The Lowland Cree did send war parties into Inuit territory during this period, and Victor Lytwyn affirms Robson’s claim that the Cree’s use of English firearms gave them a technological advantage. Lytwyn also confirms that the Cree attacks were forcing the Inuit northwards, but the motivations for these attacks are unclear. Evidence suggests that Inuit had sent similar attacks into the territory of the Lowland Cree prior to the English arrival, and so revenge is a plausible motivation. For further discussion see Lytwyn, *Muskegowuck Athinuwick*, 59-64.

<sup>36</sup> Robson, *An Account of Six Years*, 65.

<sup>37</sup> Robson, *An Account of Six Years*, 63-67, 69, 77.

<sup>38</sup> Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson’s Bay*, 139.

the important connection between depictions of nomadic peoples and depictions of the lower orders of British society current at the time. The association with vagabondage carried strong and unfavourable moral implications: an absence of a sense of, or respect for, property rights; an attitude of indolence and idleness towards work; a lack of forward thinking or planning for the future; and a drain on the resources of civilized society.<sup>39</sup>

Ellis' pithy comment is telling of his wider evaluation of these peoples. He assumes that their mode of subsistence was inferior, and included a set of ideas and customs that were also inferior. This assumption would soon become entrenched in the four stages theory.

In a manner similar to the portrayals of the Inuit, the migratory lives of the Lowland Cree are seen by these authors as illustrative of the difficulties presented by the climate, and treated as a platform from which to assess their culture and habits. Again, a central feature in the descriptions of the Lowland Cree mode of living was the issue of scarcity. However, where the Inuit are depicted as having to deal with shortage due to their meagre landscape, the Lowland Cree's relative poverty is represented more as a choice, for their landscape is described as much more abundant. Drage explains the lack of agriculture among the Lowland Cree: "because they live by the Chace, which causes a frequent Removal, and, being in single Families, have neither the opportunity to attend it, or Strength to cultivate it; for it cannot be attributed to the Climate; wild Corn being to be found even so high to the Northward as *Hay's Island*, by *York Fort*."<sup>40</sup> For Drage, the constant mobility and relative sparseness of the population that resulted from the decision to live as a hunting society were the primary reasons why the Lowland Cree never

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<sup>39</sup> See "Vagabond," *Oxford English Dictionary*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1989 OED Online, 4 November, 2009, <[http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50274312?query\\_type=word&queryword=vagabond&first=1&max\\_to\\_show=10&sort\\_type=alpha&result\\_place=1&search\\_id=HB41-QqU5p9-18013&hilite=50274312](http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50274312?query_type=word&queryword=vagabond&first=1&max_to_show=10&sort_type=alpha&result_place=1&search_id=HB41-QqU5p9-18013&hilite=50274312)>

<sup>40</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 214.

developed agriculture. He also suggests that a lack of ‘Strength’ contributes to this situation. It is difficult to believe that he means physical strength or stamina, given the emphasis he places on their hardiness, which will be discussed shortly, more likely he means strength of character or will to ‘settle’ and cultivate land.

However, this ‘migratory’ style of living is sometimes seen to offer benefits. Ellis suggests that it is because of these patterns of living that “they have no Body of Laws to regulate their Conduct; but are influenced in their Behaviour by a natural Rectitude of Disposition, that restrains them from all Acts of Violence and Injustice one to another, as effectively as the most rigid Laws could ... they may truly be called a free People.”<sup>41</sup> This is an example of how these authors straddle the dominant streams of representation rather than neatly siding with one or the other. This notion of noble primitivism brings to mind the representations of the Iroquois and Herons that Lahontan and others employed to critique the vices of contemporary society. Jean Jacques Rousseau, emphasizes similar qualities in the indigenous North Americans when he argued that inequality was not ‘natural’ to man but an effect of society.<sup>42</sup> In these texts, all three authors agree that a wandering mode of living, and lack of institutions, established hierarchy or strict notions of property allowed substantial freedom.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, Robson even makes the intriguing observation that “they call the Company’s servants, except the governor, slaves.”<sup>44</sup> Despite such observations, the authors were not using the Lowland Cree to broadly critique contemporary society. More likely, these kinds of depictions had become such

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<sup>41</sup> Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson’s Bay*, 181-182.

<sup>42</sup> Marshall and Williams, *The Great Map of Mankind*, 200-202; Meek, *Social Science and the Ignoble Savage*, 76-77.

<sup>43</sup> Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson’s Bay*, 181-182; Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 201, 228-231; Robson, *An Account of Six Years*, 49.

<sup>44</sup> Robson, *An Account of Six Years*, 49. Given Robson’s agenda to attack and dismantle the Hudson’s Bay Company, this statement, while potentially offering an intriguing insight into Indigenous notions of British labour relations, should nonetheless be taken with a grain of salt.

prominent tropes in the representations of “Indians” that they were seen as integral to any respectable text on the topic.<sup>45</sup>

Nonetheless, the migratory lives of the Lowland Cree are also shown to involve significant difficulties, challenging Lahontan’s picture of the noble savage in a beneficent state of nature. Eighteenth-century British authors tended to represent the housing of these people in an extremely unfavourable light, and saw the necessity of constant movement in pursuit of game to be a key factor in this regard. Drage describes their tents as “sufficiently wretched”,<sup>46</sup> and he emphasizes that the need to make them easily transportable, using poles leaning one upon another and skins for covering, results in a number of problems. Not only were the tents not large enough to stand up or walk around in, but with the thickness of only a single skin, Drage assumes that the tents were very cold in the winter, while in the “Summer their Tents are not habitable upon the Account of the Musketoos, unless they are full of Smoak.”<sup>47</sup> Additionally, hunters were often required to travel across vast landscapes, thus they were frequently forced to sleep away from their tents. In such cases they could rely for shelter upon the brush fences or “Barricadoes” described in chapter two, but the materials for making these were not always available: “if, as it sometimes falls out, they happen to be benighted upon some wild Plain, where no such Fence can be made for want of Wood, they are forced to lie down under the Snow, which proves some Defence from the Cold”.<sup>48</sup> The modes of

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<sup>45</sup> Robson does employ descriptions of the Lowland Cree at other points in his narrative to criticize the Hudson’s Bay Company, attacking the Company for neglecting to civilize the Lowland Cree or adequately develop their trade, and abusing them through exploitative standards of trade, but neither of these critiques is related to depictions of the Lowland Cree as “noble savages.” See Robson, *An Account of Six Years Residence in Hudson’s-Bay*, 82-83.

<sup>46</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 184.

<sup>47</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 184-185.

<sup>48</sup> Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson’s Bay*, 195. For descriptions of “Barricadoes” see also Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 186.

habitation dictated by the exigencies of migratory life did not meet the British authors' standards, which were exemplified in the construction of Montague House – the two-storey log-frame house built to house the captains and officers during the winter months, as discussed in the previous chapter. It is evident that it is against this model that these authors measure and judge the housing of the Lowland Cree.<sup>49</sup>

### **Narrating Difference: Climate, Diet and Scarcity**

Returning to the portrayals of the Hudson Bay Baffin-land Inuit, the accounts depict the occupants of the severe Arctic climate as left with little option but to accept and adapt to unsavoury practices. Drage explains how the common name of these people, “*Eskemaux*”, was derived from the language of the “*Abenaguies*” (Abenaki), the eastern peoples of New England and the western Maritime region. The term, he explains, signified the custom of eating flesh raw.<sup>50</sup> He discounts the old accusation that this name was given them because they were cannibals, or could not make fires, instead suggesting:

[the] Custom of eating raw Flesh was the Produce of Necessity, for when hunting, the Country could afford them no Fuel to dress it, they were also at a great Distance from their Tents; and the then Use of it might make raw flesh not quite disagreeable to them, at some other times when Hungry; But when at their Tents, they make a Fire of Sea-Weed dried ... and dress their Meat, preferring the Meat so dressed to their Eating it raw.<sup>51</sup>

Drage's observation that the diet of raw flesh was a practice adapted to circumstance, rather than an intrinsic difference between his people and the Inuit, carries two somewhat contradictory implications. On the one hand, it shows an admirable attempt at empathy and understanding for a practice that had hitherto been seen as a marker of savagery and often monstrosity. On the other hand, by demonstrating how survival in a hostile Arctic

<sup>49</sup> For my analysis of the construction of Montague House see chapter two.

<sup>50</sup> Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson's Bay*, 139.

<sup>51</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 33-34.

climate demands acceptance of this unsavoury practice, the observation affirms the notion that hostile climates could have a dangerous and degenerative influence on the people who inhabited them. Indeed, with vegetation and fuel lacking, the fruit of the Arctic was raw seal, “which taste at Times, however disagreeable to us, is yet useful to them, for if they can eat Seal, there is such a Plenty of them in all those Parts, that they may depend upon Food be their Voyage ever so long.”<sup>52</sup> While Drage is willing to recognize that eating raw meat was both a necessity and a virtue for survival in the barren North, the fact that he made no effort to emulate their model suggests that he had no desire to make a virtue out of necessity.

Ellis’s text is even more explicit in this regard, describing the Hudson Strait Baffin-land Inuit as “obstinately attached to their own Customs and Manner of Living”.<sup>53</sup> This suggests that Ellis saw Inuit habits as having more to do with natural inclination than circumstance. He recounts how some Inuit boys had been captured as prisoners by the Southern Indians and raised in the factories of the Hudson’s Bay Company, and yet still felt a longing for their “native Country.” “One of these,” he says, “after having been fed on *English* Diet, being present when one of the *Englishmen* was cutting up a Seal, from whence the Train Oil ran very plentifully, licked up what he could save with his Hands.” In doing so, the boy fulfilled the image of the unrestrained and unrefined savage for the British bystanders. But at the same time, Ellis’ account offers a rare glimpse of an Inuit voice in this moment. In defiance of the imposed British customs, the boy is quoted as saying: “*Ah! Commend me to my own dear Country, where I could get my Belly full of*

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<sup>52</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 30.

<sup>53</sup> Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson’s Bay*, 133.

*this.*<sup>54</sup> Unlike Robson's suggestion that the Inuit would readily settle and adapt to the "milder climates" of the southern reaches of the Bay if given the opportunity, Ellis observes that the dietary adaptation demanded by the Arctic impeded their successful adoption of British customs and dietary practices. Furthermore, the boy's response suggests they may not have wanted to in any case.<sup>55</sup> Such an inability to adapt beyond the strictures of their climate is seen as a sign of stagnancy and degeneration to the British authors. Drage expands on this view, suggesting the diet of the Inuit to be inadequate, even harmful to any Britons forced to subsist on it.<sup>56</sup>

In contrast with the Inuit's substantial reliance on seal and whale flesh, the Lowland Cree are shown to subsist on a much more varied diet, including numerous varieties of land mammals, migratory birds, fish from rivers and lakes, and in the more northerly regions, whales and seals from the ocean.<sup>57</sup> While they lacked the cultivated grains and vegetables that the British prided themselves upon, having, in Ellis' words "no Dependence upon the Fruits of the Earth for their Subsistence, living entirely on the Animals they take in Hunting or Trapping, at which they are very dextrous",<sup>58</sup> their diet

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<sup>54</sup> Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson's Bay*, 133.

<sup>55</sup> Robson, *An Account of Six Years*, 65.

<sup>56</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 98.

<sup>57</sup> Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson's Bay*, 182-186.

<sup>58</sup> Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson's Bay*, 182. This claim, which Drage corroborates by saying they employ "no manner of Corn, Pulse, or Roots in use amongst them", must be somewhat modified. Ellis and Drage both acknowledge that herbs and plants were collected by Lowland Cree for medicinal uses, and Drage also points out their subsistence upon tree bark in times of scarcity, of which more will be said shortly. See Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson's Bay*, 188; Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 214, 232-233. The strong emphasis most observers placed on hunting in their representations of indigenous peoples tended to overlook the important role that gathered plant foods played in their diets. Elizabeth Vibert makes this point explicit in her discussion of fur trader representations of Columbia Plateau peoples during the nineteenth century. She suggests that this tendency is largely related to the gendered division of labour in these cultures and the greater importance that male fur traders placed on the manly activity of hunting animals, ignoring the important work of women in these societies. While a number of older studies minimize or ignore the use of plant foods by the Lowland Cree, Victor Lytwyn suggests that they did utilize many different varieties of local plants for medicinal and consumptive purposes, particularly as emergency foods in times of scarcity. However, he makes it clear that plant foods were nonetheless much less important than the wide varieties of meat that were harvested from mammals, fowl and fish to their overall diet. See also

was shown to be much closer to what the British authors themselves found nourishing. In general, these authors describe the animals of the Hudson Bay region as very edible and often delicious – not only those that resembled animals familiar to the British, such as deer or caribou, partridge, geese, and duck, but also those that were more strange, like porcupines, beavers and buffalo.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, in the case of buffalo meat, while it was found to taste remarkably “of Musk, and the Heart especially so very strong, that few could eat it”, the British authors observed that it was extraordinarily nourishing and that the sick men were “surprisingly recovered”.<sup>60</sup> At the same time, the authors are not always impressed by the food of the Lowland Cree. Both Drage and Ellis emphasize the simplicity of these people’s methods for preparing meat – essentially, boiling it and drinking the broth. Drage adds that flesh was often roasted by simply “running a pointed Stick, like a Skewer through it, and sticking one End in the Ground close by the Fire”.<sup>61</sup> Descriptions of Lowland Cree food emphasize both the similarities to British diet, particularly when local foods were seen as suitable for British consumption, as well as their differences, to stress the primitive and uncultured methods. However, that their diet was provided by their migratory lives carries far greater implications in the eyes of these British authors.

The reliance of the Lowland Cree on animal products for food in a Subarctic climate meant that in large part their food sources were migratory. The passage of huge

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Lytwyn, *Muskegowuck Athinuwick*, 102; Elizabeth Vibert, *Traders’ Tales: Narratives of Cultural Encounters in the Columbia Plateau, 1807-1846* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996), 182-187. See also Morantz, *An Ethnohistoric Study*, 25-37; Robert R. Janes, “Indian and Eskimo Contact in Southern Keewatin: an Ethnohistoric Approach,” *Ethnohistory*, vol. 20, no. 1 (Winter 1973): 41-42; and James G. E. Smith, “Chipewyan, Cree and Inuit Relations West of Hudson Bay, 1714-1955,” *Ethnohistory*, vol. 28, no. 2 (Spring 1981): 135-137.

<sup>59</sup> See Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson’s Bay*, 42, 161, 185; Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 149-151, 178, and Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 2: 260.

<sup>60</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 260.

<sup>61</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 216; Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson’s Bay*, 185.

flocks of geese in the spring and fall garners significant attention in the British accounts; the spring migrations, in particular, signalled the end to a period of perceived shortage and were greatly anticipated. Dependant as both the Lowland Cree and the British visitors were on such events, the periods of hunting are portrayed as both frenzied and intermittent. These trends are evident from the journals of the 1746-47 overwintering, which stress the shortage of game and the dwindling food supply as winter progressed.<sup>62</sup> This pattern of abundance and shortage influenced the representation of the Lowland Cree themselves. Ellis' description is most informative in this regard:

The Condition of these poor People is melancholy enough, tho' it does not make such an Impression on them as one would expect; for tho' the best Part of their Life is spent in procuring Necessaries for the Subsistence of themselves and of their Families; yet they have no great Notion of Frugality, or providing against those Distresses, to which they are sure to be exposed every Winter, are very free of their Provisions, when they have Plenty, and except drying a little Venison and Fish, take no Care for Supplies, in a time of Dearth. It has sometimes happened that the *Indians*, who come in the Summer to trade at the Factories, missing of the succours they expected, have been obliged to singe off the Hair from thousands upon thousands of Beaver Skins, in order to feed upon the Leather. Yet in such Cases, they keep up their Spirits in a tolerable Degree, omit nothing that is in their power or procure wherewithal to support their Families, and when reduced to the greatest Extremities, undergo them with a kind of habitual and steady Patience, which it is much easier to admire than imitate.<sup>63</sup>

Living in a difficult environment where food was readily available only periodically, Ellis suggests that the "melancholy" condition of these people was a product of poor decision making coupled with their accommodation to the consequences of these decisions. Despite laudable efforts to secure reliable food resources and provide for their families, the inherent lack of a "Notion of Frugality" rendered the Lowland Cree unable to manage their food supply in preparation for times of scarcity. Indeed, their generosity with provisions in times of plenty (in Lockean terms, an undeveloped sense of property) is here portrayed as symptomatic of a chronically short-sighted culture, harkening to

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<sup>62</sup> See Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson's Bay*, 182-183, 185, 207; Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 173-174; and Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 2: 16, 17, 21-25, 29-31.

<sup>63</sup> Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson's Bay*, 194-195.

Locke's depiction of migratory indigenous people as "children, idiots and illiterates". It is notable that Ellis here is not accusing these people of idleness, though this trait is suggested elsewhere by Ellis, and more emphatically by others. Rather, he is pointing out that the efforts of the Lowland Cree were not directed with intelligence and forethought, which, Ellis believes, caused their ignorance and poverty. Instead of adapting more productive patterns of subsistence, Ellis suggests that the Lowland Cree's method of adaptation is "habitual and steady Patience" – a stoically optimistic endurance of hardship. This ability to accommodate and endure hunger sometimes resulted in extreme circumstances, and when their ability to fast reached its limit they are described in the texts as resorting to unsavoury behaviour, such as destroying pelts for food.<sup>64</sup>

Drage, on the other hand, offers a more sympathetic portrayal of Lowland Cree strategies for times of scarcity. He emphasizes that the cold climate offered the natural advantage of freezing provisions to keep them "sweet", holding off spoilage during the winter months. Unlike Ellis, Drage intimates here that the Lowland Cree did develop practices for storing food, but, like Ellis, he sees it as negative that, given their migratory mode of subsistence, when they were in possession of stores they would not seek out more. In addition to noting remarkable endurance for fasting, Drage describes a number of methods the Lowland Cree employed to nourish themselves in times of want, including eating the entrails of the animals they killed, slaughtering their dogs, which "is

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<sup>64</sup> Mary Black-Rogers suggests that the representations of starving indigenous peoples are more complex than is immediately apparent. Instances of indigenous peoples destruction of furs for food emphasize the often basic dilemma that faced these people between hunting for food and hunting for trade. The fact that Ellis claims they only destroyed their food when they arrived at the factories and were "missing of the succours they expected" affirms this interpretation, likely indicating that they were hunting for furs to trade for provisions, only resorting to eating the pelts when the expected provisions were not available. See Mary Black-Rogers, "'Starving' and survival in the Subarctic Fur Trade: A Case for Contextual Semantics," *Le Castor Fait Tout: Selected Papers of the Fifth North American Fur Trade Conference, 1985* (Montreal: Lake St. Louis Historical Society, 1987): 626-630.

reckoned at all Times a great Delicacy”, and eating the “inner Bark from Juniper and Firr Trees.”<sup>65</sup> Drage’s description of consuming dog flesh is enigmatic. Primarily thought of by the British as a pet, dog was not considered an acceptable meat; instead it was associated with desperate measures taken by the underclass in times of scarcity or turmoil.<sup>66</sup> Similarly, the consumption of offal carried a class-based prejudice and the eating of bark, not even considered a food to British eyes, would have been read as an act of desperation and savagery, despite the high nutritional content contained in the inner cambium and resin layers of some tree bark.<sup>67</sup> Likewise, Drage’s depiction of dog flesh as a “Delicacy” emphasizes the uncultured and unrefined eating habits of the Lowland Cree. His attention to these foods does point to the vital role certain foods hold for supplementing diets in times of want; however, it is also likely that Drage could only see such foods as ‘starvation’ foods, when they may have held a much more important place in Lowland Cree diets than presented here.<sup>68</sup>

Robson is not as sympathetic as Ellis or Drage in his evaluation of the Lowland Cree, emphasizing instead that recurrent scarcity grows out of a gluttonous tendency:

They eat as much flesh at a time, as will serve three or four Europeans; but then they can fast three or four times as long; and these habits of voraciousness and abstinence seem to be determined by their natural temper, and their taste of life; for they are lazy and improvident, lying in their tents and feasting upon their stock till they have not a day’s provision left; and if they are unfortunate enough to fail of a supply before their power of fasting is gone, they perish with hunger. This has given birth to many stories of their being reduced to eat the skins that cover them, and sometimes their children. Many families in their journey to the factories have been so near starving, that they have fainted by the way, and must have perished, if some among them had not been strong enough to come to the governors for relief.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 216-217.

<sup>66</sup> Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: A History of the Modern Sensibility* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), 54, 115-118.

<sup>67</sup> Vibert, *Traders’ Tales*, 182,

<sup>68</sup> For a more detailed discussion of Lowland Cree subsistence patterns see Lytwyn, *Muskegowuck Athinuwick*, 81-114. For a related analysis of starvation foods and British evaluations of indigenous foods in the Columbian Plateau, see Vibert, *Traders’ Tales*, 173-175, 182-186.

<sup>69</sup> Robson, *An Account of Six Years*, 50-51. The characterization of the Lowland Cree as lazy can generally be taken to mean “not hunting for furs.” Rather than implying they were doing nothing, it implies that, in the opinion of the author, what the Lowland Cree were doing was not economically and commercially

The characterization of the Lowland Cree as profligate but hardy suggests a stagnant culture. As in Ellis' account, faults are due to their "natural temper", rendering the Lowland Cree "lazy and improvident", and the result of this pattern was often starvation and possibly death. They are portrayed as unable to govern their natural impulses, reminiscent of certain middle and upper class assumptions about the lower classes in Britain. And the result of this behaviour, in both cases, is that the Lowland Cree are shown to be dependent upon the British for basic aid and sustenance: indeed, the British were forced to save them from themselves. It is noteworthy that all these authors describe situations of Lowland Cree in extreme distress where all other methods of subsistence failed, resorting to feed "on the Flesh of ... their Children."<sup>70</sup> While none of these authors depicts the Lowland Cree as cannibals generally, unlike much earlier travel literature's portrayals of 'savages', the fact that they are shown to have resorted to this practice out of necessity emphasizes their pitiful state; the Lowland Cree, like the stereotyped underclasses, are shown to be at the mercy of their difficult situation and poor management of resources rather than in control of their fate.<sup>71</sup>

### **Narrating Difference: Bodies and Temperament**

Being a scientifically minded gentleman not accustomed to the cold weather that he experienced during his travels in search of a North West Passage, Ellis ruminates at

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productive. The stereotype was a common one and would only become more prominent as the fur trade expanded in the coming century and a half. See Black-Rogers, "'Starving' and survival," 633-635. For further discussion of Cree perspectives on resource use and patterns of exploitation, see Morantz, *An Ethnohistoric Study of Eastern James Bay Cree Social Organization*, 157-158.

<sup>70</sup> Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson's Bay*, 194-196. See also Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 216-217; and Robson, *An Account of Six Years Residence in Hudson's Bay*, 50-51.

<sup>71</sup> For further discussion on similarities in the representations of indigenous peoples and representations of lower classes in England, see Vibert, *Traders' Tales*, 125-127.

length on the nature, influence and effect of the cold during his travels. One of his observations, made during his winter at York Fort, is particularly relevant to this discussion of representation of the Inuit in these texts:

Nature furnishes every Animal here with extraordinary Furs to resist the Cold, that gradually fall off as the warm Weather returns; and which is somewhat extraordinary; so it happens with Dogs and Cats brought thither from Europe. As in all the Parts of the Bodies of Animals, which are furthest from the Heart, such as Feet and Claws, and Tails, the Blood is colder, and Circulation slower, it happens from thence, that those Extremities are very apt to freeze. But it is very well worthy Notice, that few of the Animals of this Country have long Tails or Legs; for Instance, the Bears, Rabbits, Hares, American Cats, Porcupines, &c. have all short ones; and those that have long Tails, as the Fox, &c. have those Parts surprisingly protected by long bushy Hair, which keeps them from the Sense of the Cold.<sup>72</sup>

Ellis' observation is interesting not only because it pays close attention to the relationship between bodies and cold; more importantly, it attempts to explain the nature of this relationship. Even more intriguing is his application of the same logic to human bodies:

While we lay here [in Wager Strait], three *Indians* came aboard us in their Canoes, and appeared from their Manners, to be the same kind of People we had met with in other Parts of this Coast, but much lower in Stature; for it was observable, that in sailing north from *York-Fort*, everything dwindled and diminished, so that Trees shrunk into Brushwood, in the Latitude of 61°. and none of the human species appeared beyond the Latitude of 67.<sup>73</sup>

Here he assumes a connection between human stature and the effect of cold. The effect is correlated with latitude, following the same pattern found in the voyage instructions and the writings of Oldmixon and Dobbs. This time, however, the assumed effects of climate are not behaviours like “savage” (Oldmixon), or “barbarous”, “beggarly and brutal” (Dobbs); instead, the assumed effects are diminished proportions of the body itself.

Both Ellis and Drage's detailed descriptions of bodies reveal their presumptions of the influence of climate. Of the Hudson Strait Baffin-land Inuit, Ellis writes that “[t]hese People are of middle Size, Robust, and inclinable to be fat, their Heads are large, Faces round and flat, their Complexions swarthy, Eyes black, small and sparkling, Noses

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<sup>72</sup> Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson's Bay*, 178.

<sup>73</sup> Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson's Bay*, 256.

flat, Lips big, Hair black and lank, Shoulders broad, Limbs proportionable, but *Feet extraordinarily small*".<sup>74</sup> Their malproportioned extremities suggest bodies modified by climate – a rather unpleasant possibility for the British visitors, conjuring deeply rooted fears about the ways that extreme climates could deform the physical body.<sup>75</sup>

Additionally, scientific practices of physiognomy at the time reasoned that a person's temperament was intimately related to physical characteristics.<sup>76</sup> Ellis' description of the temperament of the Inuit illustrates the potential influence that climate and circumstance were thought to have on the character of a people. Ellis describes the Inuit as "cheerful and sprightly; but they seem to be very subtle, designing, cunning and deceitful, great Flatterers, much addicted to pilfer from Strangers, easily encouraged to a degree of Boldness, but as easily frightened."<sup>77</sup> He explains that the "Groenlanders", whom he suggests were "the same People" as the Hudson Strait Baffin-land Inuit,<sup>78</sup> were characterized in the same manner until Danish settlements established regular trade, causing the Greenland Inuit to abandon these unfavourable traits. Indeed, it appears that the Greenland Inuit's unsavoury qualities were only displayed towards foreigners; "amongst themselves they are strictly honest, chaste, temperate, and full of Compassion, but believing the rest of Mankind to be of another Race, and for that Reason naturally Enemies to them, they confine all their social Virtues to their own Nation, and look upon

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<sup>74</sup> Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson's Bay*, 132, [my emphasis]. Drage provides a very similar description: "Their Eyes are small and brown, Nose and Lips large, have very good Teeth, are tall, lusty rather than fat, straight-limb'd, their Hands and Feet small". (Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: pg 25.)

<sup>75</sup> See chapter one.

<sup>76</sup> Neil Cheshire, Tony Walden, Alison Quinn and David Quinn, "Frobisher's Eskimos in England," *Archivaria*, 10 (Summer, 1980): 36.

<sup>77</sup> Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson's Bay*, 132-133.

<sup>78</sup> Ellis's argument about the relation of the Hudson Strait Baffin-land Inuit to the Greenland Inuit relies upon the physical similarities in their both having beards and white skin colour, in contrast to the relatively hairless and darker coloured Lowland Cree, as well as the supposed similarities of their temperament, their predilection for eating raw flesh, and their migratory lifestyles, given the relatively short distance across Davis Strait. See Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson's Bay*, 139-140.

the rest of the World not as Strangers only, but Enemies.”<sup>79</sup> In regard to the Hudson Strait Baffin-land Inuit, Ellis emphasizes that a steady commercial relationship would go far in aiding to “abate of their Barbarity”.<sup>80</sup> So as far as Ellis is concerned, the barbarity that characterized both groups of Inuit – their “cunning,” “deceit,” “pilfering” and hostility – is shown to be a matter of their insulation and isolation from the civilizing influence of Europeans. A “constant Commerce”<sup>81</sup> would broaden the limited horizons of the Hudson Strait Baffin-land Inuit, as it did for the Greenland Inuit, helping them to escape the cold, dark boundaries of both their world and worldview.

In contrast to these Inuit groups, the authors describe the bodies and dispositions of the Lowland Cree as having been much more favourably influenced by their climate. Indeed, Drage’s portrayal of these people could almost be seen as an inverted image of the picture presented of the Inuit. He describes them as:

[S]tately, tall, well made People, in good Proportion, and of a vigorous Constitution, sprightly, strong, and active; no way inferior to the *Europeans* in the Make of their Persons, but have rather the Preference on their Side. They are People of good Understanding, or a lively Imagination, easy Conception, and good Memory; are not without the Sense of a Deity; condemn Vice; are kind, affable and humane to each other; pay a great Respect to the Aged amongst them, and a Deference to each other; conduct their Affairs with as much good Sense as the People of other Nations do theirs.<sup>82</sup>

This portrayal affirms the civilized qualities of the Lowland Cree – indeed, their superiority in some measure to Europeans. His observation of their “humane” disposition towards one another again suggests the trope of noble primitivism at work. The depiction of a healthy and refined people reaffirms the notion that this land was healthy and

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<sup>79</sup> Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson’s Bay*, 139-140.

<sup>80</sup> Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson’s Bay*, 140.

<sup>81</sup> Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson’s Bay*, 140.

<sup>82</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 182-183.

suitable for British settlement.<sup>83</sup> However, as has been seen already, the portrayal of these people as healthy and robust is also to some degree seen as the result of their adaptation to the colder climate of the Hudson Bay region, an evolved response to enduring hardship and scarcity. Drage develops this point further:

they have some Knowledge of Plants, with which they will do great Cures, though, probably the Constitution of the Patient used to Exercise, and unused to Delicacies, may greatly contribute. It is this their Exercise and Temperance that causes them to know few Disorders; and the most frequent Remedy they use, when ill, is Sweating.<sup>84</sup>

Drage, Ellis and Robson all describe the people's method of sweating similarly, emphasizing their purposeful exposure to extreme heat and cold as a "Cure for most of the Maladies in that Country."<sup>85</sup> Given the new emphasis placed on the ability of the British to adapt and succeed in the colder climate of the Hudson Bay region in the 1740s, the favourable depiction of Lowland Cree bodies – bodies adapted to cold climates – serves to reinforce the notion that the British themselves might readily thrive in this difficult environment. The failures in these people are not seen as intrinsic or physical; they are seen as cultural. These people did not starve because they were feeble or weak; they starved because they were strong and good-natured, and because as migratory hunters they had come to depend too much on stamina and optimism and not enough on their intellect. This logical leap left open a substantial discursive avenue for the British authors to assert the legitimacy of their own project of settlement and improvement.

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<sup>83</sup> See Karen Kupperman, "Presentment of Civility: English Reading of American Self-Presentation in the Early Years of Colonization," *William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 54, no. 1 (Jan., 1997): 1-3, for more on the correlation between representations of peoples and representations of environments.

<sup>84</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 232-233.

<sup>85</sup> Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson's Bay*, 188.

### **Narrating Difference: Clothing, Technology and Knowledge**

In contrast to sparse, negative, and otherwise unsympathetic images of indigenous peoples in Oldmixon's text, later authors – especially those who actually encountered these peoples – offer descriptions with substantially more nuance, attention to detail and even praise. One area that receives special attention from the British authors, principally Ellis and Drage, is the clothing and tools of the different peoples they encountered. The representations of the technology of the Inuit and the Lowland Cree, particularly in relation to whether the British could, or would, learn from them, points to the authors' underlying preconceptions about the influences of the different landscapes, and their own desires with respect to those landscapes.

Despite the fact that the 1746 expedition's encounter with the Inuit in Hudson Strait lasted only a short time, Ellis and Drage both devote substantial attention to describing these people, carefully emphasizing how their clothing met the particular needs of their environment. Drage is careful to immediately dispel any rumours of "nakedness," reporting that the Inuit were "cloathed [*sic*] all over, excepting Hands and Face".<sup>86</sup> Both Ellis and Drage draw attention to their use of skins instead of fabric, especially seal skin for outer layers, and Drage notes that they left the fur on but that it was "dressed so as to be soft and pliable."<sup>87</sup> The authors note numerous utilitarian details such as multiple layers of socks and boots to conserve warmth, as well as the careful construction of outer layers, including pants with drawstrings, pull-over jackets with attached hoods and sleeves, and oiled gloves. These details, the authors conclude, were a

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<sup>86</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 25. On the topic of nakedness and clothing, savagery and civilization, see Roxann Wheeler, *The Complexion of Race: Categories of Difference in Eighteenth-Century British Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 14-21.

<sup>87</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 25.

testament to the Inuit's efficacy in the cold and wet environment of the northern barrens.<sup>88</sup> The authors also describe how the women's clothing was designed to facilitate carrying children in the cold, with larger hoods for carrying children on the back, as well as wider and longer boots with rigid sticks of whalebone to hold the boots out, "because when they want to lay their Child out of their Arms, they slip it into one of the Boots, till they can take it up again."<sup>89</sup> Both Ellis and Drage draw attention to the Inuit's skill in sewing with deer sinew and ivory needles, making special note of the "Taste and Judgement discovered in the manner in which they adorn them with Stripes of different coloured Skins, sewed in the manner of Borders, Cuffs and Robings for their Clothes, which altogether look very tight, neat, and even elegant, or at least handsome as well as convenient."<sup>90</sup> While the clothing was clearly not that of civilized British subjects, the attention to the aesthetics of self presentation and the creative utilitarianism suggested to the British visitors that here was a developed society that had consciously adapted to the rigorous demands of the harsh Arctic climate.<sup>91</sup>

While these admiring descriptions are departure from the accounts of wild and barbarous Arctic savages in compilations like Oldmixon's, it is nonetheless telling to compare them with accounts of the Lowland Cree's clothing. In their texts, Ellis and Drage carefully distinguish between the summer and winter clothing of the Lowland Cree. Concerning the summer clothing, Ellis provides a very brief description that similarly emphasizes their reliance on animal skins. He draws attention to the sleeves of their coats, which were separable from the bodies, a feature presumably designed to

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<sup>88</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 25-27; Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson's Bay*, 135-136.

<sup>89</sup> Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson's Bay*, 136. See also Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 31.

<sup>90</sup> Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson's Bay*, 136-137; Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 25-27.

<sup>91</sup> For a related discussion on the ways that English/British observers interpreted indigenous clothing and ornamentation, see Karen Kupperman, *Indians and English*, 193-228.

accommodate the warmer summer temperatures. However, these coats were also worn in the winter; he claims that “their Arm-pits, even in the depths of Winter, are exposed to Cold, which they reckon contributes to their Health.”<sup>92</sup> Ellis’ interpretation of this feature reinforces his view of the Lowland Cree as physically well adapted to the rigours of their climate. While Drage disagrees with Ellis’ observation in this particular case, he nonetheless makes similar assumptions about their hardiness.<sup>93</sup>

Drage devotes nearly seventeen pages in his first volume, and an additional two pages in his second, to the clothing and ornamentation of the Lowland Cree he encountered.<sup>94</sup> His first sentence on the topic suggests a similar bent to Ellis, questioning whether it is decency or the cold climate that provokes the people of Hudson Bay to wear clothing: “Boys are admitted to go almost naked until they are ten Years old or more, the Girls wear a Frock ... quite from their infancy”. However, aside from this comment, Drage’s account generally sidesteps the stereotypes of nakedness and savagery, only mentioning it as an aside.<sup>95</sup> Instead he focuses on comparisons with ancient cultures, including Britons, Picts, Celts, Romans, and Greeks.<sup>96</sup> These comparisons draw attention

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<sup>92</sup> Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson’s Bay*, 186.

<sup>93</sup> Drage challenges Ellis’ conclusions about the Lowland Cree’s clothing, asserting that the arm holes were covered by both a frock and their outer coats or Tockies, so would not be exposed to the cold and thus are not considered to contribute to their health. Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 182-183, 232-233; and Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 2: 58.

<sup>94</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 186-202; and Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 2: 57-58.

<sup>95</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 186. Drage mentions nakedness in conjunction with sweating, and again in reference to childhood, see Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 182-184, 211, 232-233.

<sup>96</sup> Glyndwr Williams and Ronald Meek both describe how late seventeenth and early eighteenth century writers, most notably Joseph-Francois Lafitau (1681-1746), and Fontenelle (1657-1757), drew extensive comparisons between the portrayals of ancient Europeans from classical sources and the contemporary depictions indigenous Americans from travel accounts. One of the most significant aspects of this feature was that instead of attempting to prove how Americans were descendent from a particular group, a common practice at the time, these authors were suggesting that contemporary Americans and ancient Europeans were both exemplary of primitive stages of social development, from which contemporary Europeans had progressed. While these notions were only imprecisely defined by these authors, they were important to the development of stadial theories in the mid eighteenth century. Drage’s account was clearly influenced by the authors and this perspective. See Meek, *Social Science and the Ignoble Savage*, 27-28, and Marshall and Williams, *The Great Map of Mankind*, 204-205.

to perceived similarities in materials, styles and aesthetics between the Lowland Cree and the ancients. He emphasizes the utility and necessity of their using skins instead of fabric, observing that the Lowland Cree were skilled in making “the Skins soft and pliable”, and pointing out that even after the development of “Silks and Linnen, [the ancients] did nevertheless use Firs for a long Time amongst those very People who worked with Thread and Silk.”<sup>97</sup> He also describes their manner of dressing and methods of ornamentation, highlighting both utilitarian and aesthetic sensibilities; however, he observes that, at least in the case of the “Northern Indians”, the Chipewyan people, they made “no Distinction of Rank amongst them, being all equal”.<sup>98</sup> This emphasis on the similarities with the ancients, as well as the notion that they lived in a state of primitive egalitarianism, affirms Drage’s assumption that the indigenous peoples were not lawless savages but instead much like Europeans, with similar concerns and social norms, though perhaps farther behind in their social evolution:

I believe it will appear from what hath been said, that there is a great Uniformity in the Habits which the Indians use, and those which were used by the People of the earliest Times... but as the People became more polite as Kingdoms and Empires arose, and Arts and Sciences increased: From thence proceeded an Alteration, both in Custom and Dress, from the State of Nature to that which was more suitable to their present Circumstance. But, as this has not been the Case of these Indians, they have not made any considerable Alteration in the Manner of their Life, but trod in the Steps of their Ancestors; so they have had no Occasion either to change their Habit of Customs: as the Following them was most suitable with their Manner of Life.<sup>99</sup>

Here Drage firmly situates himself in accord with the emerging stadial theorists. Habits, customs, and manners are seen to evolve from the original “State of Nature” to the European model – the height of civilized society. However, to Drage’s eyes, the similarities between the Lowland Cree’s habits and those of the ancients suggest that the former have chosen to pause their march of progress, maintaining an ancestral “Manner

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<sup>97</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 186, 189.

<sup>98</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 187-188.

<sup>99</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 202.

of Life”. Drage’s portrayal displays a hardening of the idea of indigenous cultures as ‘frozen’ in time, ‘unchanging’. Interestingly, both Drage and Ellis were also making observations that the Lowland Cree wore more British apparel than previously, using blankets for jackets, cloth for stockings and lace or woollen caps. This adoption of European practices and materials was generally seen as a sign of improvement, moving away from savagery and towards civilization.<sup>100</sup>

Drage and Ellis both take a personal interest in the clothing that the Lowland Cree wore in winter, as was discussed in the last chapter. Their attention to detail is similar to that employed in describing Inuit clothing; however, with the Lowland Cree they go further, emphasizing the British reliance on indigenous knowledge, materials and techniques to survive the cold winters of Hudson Bay. The descriptions of how the crew and the factory servants dressed for the cold climate are meticulous, including the materials used, the different items and layers worn, and how to properly layer and secure clothing to keep out cold and retain warmth. Most notably, both Drage and Ellis stress that, dressed in this way, the Englishmen were well prepared for the difficult winter:<sup>101</sup>

“This is, properly speaking, the Garb of the *Indians* of this Country, who have taught it to the *English*; and than which nothing can be better contrived, both for Convenience and Use. For when we were thus equipped, we were able to stand the keenest Cold, (except only for a few Days) that happened during the Winter.”<sup>102</sup>

The authors regard the winter clothing of the Lowland Cree as useful, which exemplifies their selective learning from the indigenous inhabitants. The British visitors

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<sup>100</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 194. See Kupperman, “Presentment of Civility,” 223.

<sup>101</sup> See Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 162-166; Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson’s Bay*, 158. For a more thorough description of this attire, see chapter two.

<sup>102</sup> Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson’s Bay*, 158.

sought to learn only techniques and technologies to overcome the most significant obstacle to settlement: the winter cold. That the British texts mention no attempt to adopt the clothing of the Inuit reaffirms the stark distinction drawn between the Arctic and Subarctic regions. Inuit technology was specific to the Arctic climate, their methods not applicable to the environmental conditions and requirements along the southern shores of Hudson Bay where the British sought to establish a permanent presence. Thus they are seen only as curiosities, and not useful to the project of settlement. Similarly, the summer clothing of the Lowland Cree is not portrayed as worthy of emulation either.

A similar trend exists in the representations of the Inuit and Lowland Cree's tools and equipment. Hudson Strait Baffin-land Inuit kayaks and umiaks drew significant notice. Ellis draws particular attention to the Inuit's skill in handling them and the ingenuity and appropriateness of their manufacture: "They are very dextrous in the Management of their Canoes, which are of a Construction very suitable to their Occasions, easy of Carriage, and of very quick Motion".<sup>103</sup> Special attention is given to the use of local materials in construction, such as whalebone or wood for the frame, seals skins for the covering, and seal blubber to seal the seams. The authors also point out details like the use of knobs on the paddle to keep the cold arctic waters from running over their hands, "very unpleasant at Times in such a Climate as this,"<sup>104</sup> and the use of a "Skin laced about his Waist from the Rim [of the canoe], which effectually shuts out all Water".<sup>105</sup> Drage makes an additional clarification for his readers, who would have been more familiar with row boats, noting that the Inuit face forward when paddling, powering

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<sup>103</sup> Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson's Bay*, 133.

<sup>104</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 28.

<sup>105</sup> Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson's Bay*, 134.

their movement from their shoulders and arms rather than their torsos.<sup>106</sup> Ellis mentions the Inuit practice of hunting whales, seals, walrus and narwhals from their kayaks using harpoons, “at which they are very expert”, and the people are described as having “great Dexterity” with both bows and slings. He praises the quality of their equipment: “The same Spirit of Invention shews itself as much, or rather more, in their instruments for Fishing and Fowling; Their Darts and Harpoons are very well made, and answer their intentions perfectly well; but their greatest Ingenuity is shewn in the Structure of their Bows”. Given the dearth of high quality wood in the Arctic, he praises the Inuit’s methods of construction, using layers of juniper braced with threads of sinew to increase elasticity and strength, and dipping bows in water to contract the string and wood fibres to give “greater Force”.<sup>107</sup> The other Inuit invention noted is “snow eyes”, or a “Jocky Cap.” A narrow piece of wood with two slits for eye holes, Drage explains they are intended to prevent “Snow-Blindness, a very grievous and painful Distemper, occasioned by the Action of the Light, strongly reflected from the Snow upon the Eyes, more especially in the Spring, when the Sun is pretty high.”<sup>108</sup> Ellis equates this simple device to a telescope in terms of its usefulness for strengthening sight in that region, a considerable tribute from a man with a background in both navigation and astronomy.

In general, the Lowland Cree received a similar kind of attention; their methods and technologies for hunting and travelling are favourably described, emphasizing their use of local materials and adeptness in their home environment. Drage praises their ability to navigate long overland distances through difficult terrain, “[their] Passage being through large Tracts of gloomy Forests, and uncultivated savannas, and where the

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<sup>106</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 28.

<sup>107</sup> Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson’s Bay*, 134,138.

<sup>108</sup> Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson’s Bay*, 137; Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 30.

Inhabitants are but few in Number”.<sup>109</sup> He explains how, for these people, the land itself was a map that could be read: “[the] Trees of the Forest are by Nature Compasses to point out the Way, the shewing, by infallible Tokens, which is the North”.<sup>110</sup> He suggests that their skill in tracking is so much superior that “they perceive a Tract of a Foot, where a *European* would not imagine there was the least Sign of it.”<sup>111</sup> Indeed, the authors stress the substantial local knowledge of these people in areas such as hunting for pelts and sustenance, fowling, fishing, the medicinal uses of herbs and plants, the use of dogs for transporting their belongings, and the construction of canoes, snowshoes and even impromptu shelters or “Barricadoes,” for sleeping outdoors in the winter.

However, in contrast to the descriptions of the Inuit, the authors indicate their own reliance on the knowledge, skills and technologies of the Lowland Cree to a much greater degree. Due to the substantial reliance of the British upon beaver in the fur trade, the lengthy descriptions of the habits of beavers and methods of hunting them in both Drage and Ellis’ accounts suggest an increasing reliance on the Lowland Cree for both knowledge and labour in exploiting this valuable resource.<sup>112</sup> Similarly, Drage’s meticulous account of the canoes that these people utilize highlights not only their skill in construction and manipulation, but also the suitability of these vessels for negotiating the hazardous voyage from the inland lakes down to the shores of the Bay to trade with the British:

These are the only Vessels they can make use of in these long Voyages, for the Falls and Shoals would be a Hindrance to larger Vessels, and they would be difficult to manage in rapid Streams,

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<sup>109</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 2: 47.

<sup>110</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 2: 48.

<sup>111</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 2: 47.

<sup>112</sup> See Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 146-149; Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson’s Bay*, 160-161.

whereas the Canoes are so light, that they are easily managed ... and are easily transported from one Place to another.<sup>113</sup>

There are innumerable examples of British reliance upon indigenous technology and knowledge in these texts. The representation of the crews' experience during the winter at York Fort in 1746-47 is a prime example of their reliance upon the regional adaptations that the Lowland Cree had so well accomplished.

Perhaps the next most significant example of this reliance is the British visitors' use of snowshoes. Drage even remarks that, "without [snowshoes] it was almost impossible for them [the British crew and Factory servants] to go out and kill Game upon the Creeks which were level, and where the snow fell direct; the Snow was at no Time above a Foot thick, but on the Plains where there is high Grass, and Brush, the Snow lying light and hollow, upon every Step taken, you sink to the Knees."<sup>114</sup> He elaborates on the necessity of the snow shoes, explaining that the snow could at times accumulate in drifts up to fourteen feet, but that in most cases the shoes would not sink deeper than two to three inches: "There is no passing the Snow without such Shoes, for any length of the Way".<sup>115</sup> The British suffered a shortage of snow shoes due to their reliance on the indigenous peoples to make them, which was considered "the greatest Inconvenience".<sup>116</sup> Indeed, it may be that the exhaustive description that Drage provides of the snow shoes' construction was in some sense so that in the future, Britons could try their hand at making their own.

As with the representations of clothing, the British writers' accounts of Inuit technology, in contrast to their accounts of the technology of the Lowland Cree, suggests

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<sup>113</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 2: 39. For more information on canoes, see Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 2: 37-40.

<sup>114</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 166.

<sup>115</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 168.

<sup>116</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 166.

the Inuit tools and techniques were viewed more as a subject of curiosity, interest and wonder than something to be emulated. This difference in emphasis reflects the authors' aspirations to settle and colonize the southern coasts and inland countries of Hudson Bay as well as their longstanding antipathy for the dangerous Arctic passage into the Bay region. The lack of interest in learning more appropriate methods of survival and travel in the Arctic is intriguing, given all of the energy devoted to tracking the meagre supplies of scurvy grass and fresh water on the Arctic islands. It points to their emphatic desire to confront the Arctic on their own terms. The region is viewed as an unpleasant passage to be endured, at most a stopover to take on water and fend off scurvy.

Indeed, Ellis does not advocate settling in the country of the Inuit, as the Danes did in Greenland, because the British did not see the barren Arctic as a landscape that could sustain permanent settlement. Even the effort of civilizing the Inuit was an investment that would only be attempted if it produced fair returns: "It would be no difficult matter to civilize them, if their Trade was worth the labour, which at present is but inconsiderable; though it might be greatly increased, if they were encouraged, and supplied with proper Instruments for taking Whales, Seals, &c."<sup>117</sup> Thus, the project of 'civilizing the savages' was not altruistic evangelism, but a calculated trade policy. The praise Ellis heaps on Inuit hunting and fishing technology and prowess is actually qualified: their Canoes were "of a Construction very suitable to *their* Occasions", "Their Darts and Harpoons are very well made, and answer *their* intentions perfectly well".<sup>118</sup> The technology of the Inuit was highly regarded, but as far as Ellis is concerned, they had discovered ingenious solutions to problems that did not require solving: no British subject

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<sup>117</sup> Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson's Bay*, 133.

<sup>118</sup> Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson's Bay*, 138, [my emphasis].

could conceive of living in the Arctic. The Inuit are shown to have adapted so well to the specific demands of their environment – subsistence hunting and fishing and a migratory lifestyle – that they were held back from progressing and improving in ways that Ellis thought mattered, particularly the commercial fishing from which the British could benefit through trade.

Ellis was not the only author with an opinion on this matter. The establishment of a commercial whale fishery was a much higher priority for Robson, publishing five years after Ellis (1752), and thus he gives the Inuit much greater attention. But this attention was of a mixed sort. At first Robson defends the Inuit, “the most useful of all the natives,” noting that “a people do not easily lose their characteristic virtues: that art and industry for which the Eskimaux are distinguished, they still retain even in a state of flight and dispersion; and those that are scattered about the straits, kill whales, sea horses, seals, bears, &c. not only for common subsistence, but for trade, which they are very eager to carry on with our ships”.<sup>119</sup> And yet, this praise is followed by an appraisal more in line with Ellis:

And if this poor people can in their one-man seal-skin canoes, with such tackling as their little skill enables them to make of ivory, wood, and leather, kill so many whales in so short a time, and in so small a part of the Bay; there is no fixing the bounds to the profusion, if a fishery was carried on at all the rivers under proper direction and encouragement, and the natives furnished with harpoons, nets, hooks, and other tackling made in England, and prompted besides to exert their utmost art and industry by a kind and generous treatment.<sup>120</sup>

Robson’s admiration is as much pity as praise. What he admires in the Inuit is their potential; the quality that he admires most, in the repeated phrase “art and industry,” is their perseverance and ingenuity in the face of adversity, as opposed to any actual

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<sup>119</sup> Robson, *An Account of Six Years*, 64. “[F]light and dispersion” refer to Robson’s assumption, discussed at the beginning of this chapter, that the Inuit’s residence in the Strait is the result of being forced out of the southern regions by the southern Indians.

<sup>120</sup> Robson, *An Account of Six Years*, 66.

admiration for cultural or technological achievements.<sup>121</sup> He emphasizes that the Inuit were impoverished, fishing with “little skill”, in small vessels, using only local materials and no iron. These observations act to affirm the considerable skill, technology, knowledge and fishing techniques of the British, which he views as intrinsically more suitable and appropriate to this environment than those of the indigenous people. What their “art and industry” allowed, however, was the capacity to improve given the correct tools and model to follow: a commercial fishery for export using British boats, tools, and fishing practices. This, the British should have been eager to establish and supervise, in Robson’s perspective, and the Inuit should, in turn, have been extraordinarily grateful – working industriously in return for this generosity.<sup>122</sup>

On the other hand, the improvement that was advocated for the Lowland Cree was of a different sort:

There is no doubt, therefore, that if they were so inclined, they might easily teach these poor People the Use of Letters, the Principles of Morality, and the Doctrines of Religion; which would be equally charitable and generous; for if they were so instructed, they might not only live much better themselves, but their Trade also would turn to much greater Account; and it would infallibly imprint on their Minds, a very high Reverence, and a very tender Affection for the *British Nation*.<sup>123</sup>

While there is a similar emphasis on increasing their industriousness in trade, more significant is the interest in converting the Lowland Cree to British norms of behaviour and civilization. This relates back to the characterization of these people in the vein of noble primitives, who possess innate but unrefined tendencies in line with British values. The depiction of the Lowland Cree’s potential as civilized peoples thus added value to

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<sup>121</sup> This interpretation of Robson’s admiration for Inuit industry fits with older seventeenth century notions that connected lack of luxuries to industriousness in a culture: “an excess of commodities . . . make men idle,’ while ‘barrenesse’ made them ‘industrious, which is one of the best discoverers of a warlike people’”. (Thomas Palmer quoted in Anna Suranyi, “Virile Turks and Maiden Ireland,” *Gender and History*, vol. 21, no. 2 (Aug 2009): 245.)

<sup>122</sup> Robson, *An Account of Six Years*, 68.

<sup>123</sup> Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson’s Bay*, 197-198.

the work of the British colonial project by reaffirming the notion that in their chosen adaptive strategies the Lowland Cree had reached a developmental impasse.<sup>124</sup> Similarly, Robson adopts a more measured approach in discussing improvement. Instead of attacking the Lowland Cree's character directly, he suggests sympathy for their "ignorance":

The true character of the Inland natives is, that they are plain and ignorant, but very gentle, and disposed to receive any impression. Their chief vice is laziness: but all they have of ill may in great measure be removed, and all they want of good be supplied, by a proper and generous cultivation. They behave well to the English, but better to the French, because the French have taken more pains to civilize their manners, and engage their esteem.<sup>125</sup>

As is the case with all these authors, the emphasis is on how these efforts at cultivation and improvement will instil a sense of gratitude and indebtedness towards their benefactors, resulting in the adoption of British programs and ideals.

The great irony of this discourse of improvement is that the British already had a substantial amount of contact with the Lowland Cree of Hudson Bay, specifically those they called the "Home Indians." By the time Drage, Ellis and Robson met them, the "Home Indians" spent much of their time around the British Factories on the coast of the Bay, hunting and labouring for the British residents, or acting as guides, messengers and translators for seasons or years at a time, rather than returning inland to hunt and trap. However, far from providing a model for British improvement, the "Home Indians" are represented as "mostly a debauch'd corrupted People, stupid, idle, drunken, and guilty of all manner of Vice."<sup>126</sup> Indeed, their corruption is linked directly to contact with British

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<sup>124</sup> Karen Kupperman explains how the English/British depiction of indigenous populations as complex and developed societies which could be civilized through contact with the British (as opposed to being irreparably savage), was inextricably linked to the project of colonial expansion. She argues that depictions of indigenous peoples as irreparable savages would have reflected poorly on the landscape, provoking fears that the New World could not support English/British settlement. (Kupperman, *Indians and English*, 2-3.)

<sup>125</sup> Robson, *An Account of Six Years*, 53-54.

<sup>126</sup> Drage, *An Account of a Voyage*, 1: 183.

traders and the consumption of alcohol, which was exchanged for furs. Ellis makes it plain that his countrymen were to blame for this circumstance, which, he laments, negated many of the significant adaptations and advantages that the Lowland Cree had developed in response to their home environment:

Diseases are but few, and those chiefly those arising from Colds, taken after drinking Spirituous Liquors, which they buy from the *English*, contrary to the wiser Maxims of the *French*, who sell them none. The *French* esteem the drinking these Liquors, not only prejudicial to the Constitutions of the Natives, but also to their Trade; for as that depends upon their Hardiness, it must necessarily decline, as these Qualities are impaired. This is obvious also, in Point of Fact, amongst those *Indians*, who have an Intercourse with the *English*. The Inland *Indians* will not drink Brandy, from an Opinion of it's bad Effects; these are a healthy, tall, active and robust People, who bring down as many Furs as the Conveniency of the Carriage will allow, and leave many more behind. Whereas those *Indians*, who are addicted to Drunkenness, such as the Home *Indians*, or those who live in Places contiguous to the *Hudson-Bay* Company's Settlements, are a meagre, small, and indolent Kind of People, hardly equal to the Hardships of the Country, and subject to many Disorders. Besides, there is no Comparison in the Number of Furs that the one and the other bring into Trade; so that these latter are rendered more unprofitable and useless, than they would have been, if they had never known the Use of this pernicious Liquor.<sup>127</sup>

While Ellis is eager to accuse the Hudson's Bay Company of this neglect and abuse, and to mobilize increasing competition with the French overland traders as a reason for other merchants and settlers to intervene and redress the injustice, it seems that the Lowland Cree were, in this instance, seen as no more than pawns in an elaborate programme of colonization and international competition. The 'untainted' Upland Cree, who lived inland from the Bay, are used to exemplify successful adaptation to both environmental rigours and to the British economic and labour regime; they are seen to have made a step towards improvement. In contrast, the construction of the "Home Indians" as pathetic and unequal to the challenges of their climate and the labour of the fur trade furthers the legitimacy of British intervention for the sake of improvement – without any acknowledgement that this intervention has already failed to deliver on its promises.

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<sup>127</sup> Ellis, *A Voyage to Hudson's Bay*, 186-188.

## Conclusion

This study has analyzed the evolving English and British images of Hudson Bay's environment in travel literature and natural history writing. Relying upon methods of historically contextualized discourse analysis, I have shown how portrayals of climate and landscape are embedded within colonial discourses, drawing attention to the ways that depictions of geography, flora, fauna, and indigenous inhabitants are structured by metropolitan assumptions and agendas. My research has demonstrated how Oldmixon's unsympathetic portrayal of Hudson Bay in the first half of the eighteenth century emerged from a long history of fear and negative characterizations of northern regions and peoples. However, the ideology of improvement that Dobbs promotes optimistically re-envisioned the North in significantly new ways. Not only is the Bay-side landscape and climate portrayed more favourably, it is also seen as a suitable site for British settlement, agriculture, increased trade and resource extraction. However, an anxiety permeates Dobbs' depictions, and in the subtleties of his representational strategies it seems that he is unable to see the undeniably cold landscapes of the Bay-side as suitable for British settlement. To wit, Dobbs reconfigures foreign geographies to meet the demands of British colonial expectations.

Inspired by Dobbs' 'improving vision,' a discovery voyage visited Hudson Bay. My study investigated the reactions of these British visitors to the challenges they faced in the treeless Arctic and wooded Subarctic. In contrast to Dobbs' vision, these authors portray the colder Bay-side environment as hospitable, and with the substantial knowledge, skill and technology of the Lowland Cree aiding them the British are shown to be in command of their situation during the long wintering. Their accounts emphasize

how struggle in this foreign climate actually served to enhance important cultural values and ideals such as discipline, a sense of property and maintenance of the social order. Indeed, acclimatization is here shown to be a virtue which hardy British subjects embodied – untainted by the old fear of foreign climates. However, the published texts give only one part of the story. Alternate, unpublished sources, such as Governor James Isham's journal, describe evidence of feud, theft and threats of homicide amongst the captains and council. The omission of such details exemplifies how the sanitized versions were intended to play an important role in publicly stating what it meant to be British in this dangerous land so far from civilization.

Finally, given the emphasis in these accounts on depictions of indigenous peoples, I examined the role that ideas about climate and geography played in representations of Lowland Cree and Inuit. The accounts show tendencies in line with emerging theories of social development based on evaluations of patterns of subsistence, and the British authors emphasize that latitude serves as a complementary standard upon which to assess civilization and savagery, with the Inuit epitomizing both savagery and primitiveness. While depictions of these groups are at times favourable, more often portrayals underscore the supposedly arrested development of these peoples, structuring their successes in meeting the rigours of their environments as having contributed to their stagnation. This seems to be in stark contrast to the evidence of British reliance upon the technology, skill and knowledge of the Lowland Cree to survive the winters, but this too accentuates how British designs upon the more favourable southern climates significantly influence their divergent representations of these groups. The accounts highlight the benevolent subjugation of the Lowland Cree and Inuit to British visions of settlement,

labour relations and improvement in their home territories, highlighting the image of British mastery of the Hudson Bay environment that was illustrated in chapter two.

As an exploration of the intertwining of discourses of colonialism, climate and geography, and an investigation of British representational strategies of travel and natural history writing, my research suggests that these texts demonstrate significant anxiety on the part of the British authors/explorers as to their ability to succeed in the strange environment of Hudson Bay. The efforts to discursively re-configure the environmental conditions, to domesticate the landscape and to ‘improve’ the indigenous inhabitants betrays a threefold disquiet: a reluctance to confront the cold reality of this difficult climate, an apprehension about the unknown effects this foreign and potentially hostile climate might wreak, and a distinct unwillingness to confront their unpreparedness in this strange realm by, for example, accepting their reliance upon peoples seen as less advanced than they understood themselves to be. Nonetheless, this is not the image that persisted in the historical record.

Dobbs’ powerful, ‘improving’ vision of the Bay region persisted well after the period in which he was active, despite some important setbacks. With the publication of Ellis’ account in 1748, D. W. Moodie argues that “[on] the eve of the Parliamentary enquiry, there appeared in England for the first time a consensus of published opinion on the suitability of the Hudson’s Bay Company’s inland territories for settlement.”<sup>1</sup> This image was challenged almost immediately during the inquiry of 1749. Evaluations and testimony of the conditions on the Bay-side were a critical part of the process, and numerous witnesses attested to the ability of the Bay region to support agriculture and

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<sup>1</sup> D.W. Moodie, “Science and Reality: Arthur Dobbs and the eighteenth-century geography of Rupert’s Land,” *Journal of Historical Geography*, vol 2. no. 4 (1976): 301.

even settlement.<sup>2</sup> The Company's position, on the other hand, was to depict the Bay-side environment as "uniformly hostile to agriculture", claiming that "To settle this Country [i.e. the Bay-side] with Colonies from England, is conceived to be impracticable."<sup>3</sup>

Interestingly, Moodie notes that the picture of the Bay-side that the Company promoted was much in line with that of Oldmixon and Middleton. This was of great significance, for at stake was more than a right to trade, it was the image of Hudson Bay itself.

However, while notions of landscape figured prominently in this debate, they were not the deciding factor. Regardless of either the suitability of the region for British constitutions, or the adaptability of Britons to difficult climates, the cost of colonies was considered too high and could not promise worthwhile returns in the short run. More importantly, the Company's finances and operations were examined in detail and their expenses shown to be higher, and revenues much less, than had been argued by Dobbs. As a result, despite the overwhelming weight of opinion and evidence against the Hudson's Bay Company's image of the Bay region during the 1749 inquiry, Parliament ruled in its favour and maintained its monopoly. This not only effectively ended British efforts to seek the Northwest Passage for a time, but also disabled any other groups from settling in the Bay region, conveniently placing the public image of the Bay squarely in the hands of the Company again.<sup>4</sup>

With the emergence of Robson's book in 1752, however, this situation began to change. Dobbs' optimistic, 'improving' image of the Bay found centre stage and as in the period leading up to the 1740's, the Company kept a tight hold on its own information.

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<sup>2</sup> D.W. Moodie, *An Historical Geography of Agricultural Patterns and resource appraisals in Rupert's Land, 1670-1774* (unpubl. Ph.D. thesis, Univ. of Alberta, 1972), 115-136.

<sup>3</sup> Moodie, *An Historical Geography*, 117.

<sup>4</sup> Moodie, *An Historical Geography*, 135-136.

The result was a curious lack of alternative perspectives available to the public. The parliamentary inquiry's decision did not appear to carry much weight in the end. The virtues of Robson's book were universally praised, and the situation was such that by 1774 the *Universal Dictionary of Trade and Commerce* continued to describe the countries of Hudson Bay almost entirely based on the descriptions of Robson and Dobbs.<sup>5</sup> It wasn't until the 1790's when Samuel Hearne published his own narrative of a cross-country voyage, that an oppositional view became widely available, and this action was largely in response to the publication of an account by Edward Umfreville, in 1790. Umfreville's attacks on the Company's secrecy and trade were "in many ways reminiscent of the beginning of the Dobbs affair".<sup>6</sup>

However, perhaps the most notable impression of the "Dobbs' affair", and Dobbs' particular influence on ideas about the climate and geography of Hudson Bay comes from a more peculiar source. When word reached New England that the *California* and the *Dobbs* had failed in their search of the Passage, it was accompanied by the rumour that not only was Dobbs making plans for another voyage, but that he would lead this one himself. This prompted a Maryland Clergyman, James Sterling, to compose an epic poem in honour of Dobbs, the "Champion of Science"<sup>7</sup> and the "generous *Reviver* of that noble Design",<sup>8</sup> chronicling the endeavours of Dobbs and his forebears in search of the Passage. Like Dobbs' own writings, Sterlings' *An Epistle to the Hon. Arthur Dobbs, Esq; in Europe. From a Clergyman in America* (1752) extols the virtues of imperial Britain, patriotically recounting the history of exploration and colonial expansion, praising the

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<sup>5</sup> Moodie, *An Historical Geography*, 138, 149-150.

<sup>6</sup> Moodie, *An Historical Geography*, 155-158.

<sup>7</sup> Sterling, *An Epistle to the Hon. Arthur Dobbs*, 26

<sup>8</sup> Sterling, *An Epistle to the Hon. Arthur Dobbs*, iiv.

profits of trade, and attacking the nation's rivals. Unlike his contemporaries, Sterling's poetry is not limited to the confines of natural history, and he deftly plucks themes and images from more empirical literature to portray the Bay in all its imperial splendour. His poem offers a "dreamwork" of the Bay from the 1740's. Sterling's passages recall the older visions of Arctic terrors, and he heightens the dangers to increase the value of British struggle and mastery, "[t]aming the skies where arctic tempests rave".<sup>9</sup> And yet, like Dobbs, he turns the unfavourable appraisal of Oldmixon on its head, hailing a "*North benign! With various Bliss replete/Terror of dastards Plenty's solemn seat*".<sup>10</sup> Sterling embraced Dobbs' optimistic vision and saw the conditions on the Bay-side enhancing the suitability of the region: "[s]nows prolific warm the Seed's-man's toil/ Mature the Grain, and meliorate the Soil".<sup>11</sup> He shows the winds winging "Health" and "fresh'ning Airs/While Exercise restores what Sloth impairs",<sup>12</sup> emphasizing the value of both the supposedly felicitous climate, and the importance of British strategies of adaptation. The civilizing mission Dobbs sought to place on Britain's shoulders offered "glorious Hope" for "Mankind's Improvement",<sup>13</sup> as it carried the ability to "Reclaim the Savages of ev'ry Sort".<sup>14</sup> With little acknowledgement of the apprehension that underpinned these claims, it was this triumphantly optimistic picture of British domestication and improvement over the Bay environment, this "dreamwork" of Hudson Bay, that persisted into the last decade of the eighteenth century.

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<sup>9</sup> Sterling, *An Epistle to the Hon. Arthur Dobbs*, 8.

<sup>10</sup> Sterling, *An Epistle to the Hon. Arthur Dobbs*, 64.

<sup>11</sup> Sterling, *An Epistle to the Hon. Arthur Dobbs*, 64.

<sup>12</sup> Sterling, *An Epistle to the Hon. Arthur Dobbs*, 65.

<sup>13</sup> Sterling, *An Epistle to the Hon. Arthur Dobbs*, 92.

<sup>14</sup> Sterling, *An Epistle to the Hon. Arthur Dobbs*, 32.

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