

Report on the Popular Science Symposium
“Greenland – the coveted island”
Department of Scandinavian Studies, Institute of German
Philology, University of Wrocław, Poland,
online, May 23rd, 2022

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“Greenland – the coveted island”, hosted by the Department of Scandinavian Studies at the University of Wrocław, was the first in the series of popular science symposia titled “Wrocław talks about the North”, devoted to the culture and the languages of Nordic countries. The employees of the Department of Scandinavian Studies have been actively engaged in popular science events in Poland and abroad since the mid-1990s as lecturers, as well as event organizers.

The purpose of the popular science symposium “Greenland – the coveted island”, which was held online on May 23rd, 2022 on the Microsoft Teams platform, was to popularize knowledge about Greenland. The event attracted Polish-speaking audience, scientists as well as students, from various locations.

The symposium featured contributions from Radosław Łazarz, lecturer of ethics at the Wrocław branch of the Academy of Theatre Arts in Cracow; Agata Lubowicka, literary translator from Danish to Polish; Ilona Wiśniewska, literary reporter and photographer; Emiliana Konopka, art historian; Tomasz Archutowski, lecturer of Danish at the University of Gdańsk; Michał Smulczyński, associate professor of German and Danish at the University of Wrocław; Janusz Stopyra, professor of German and Danish at the University of Wrocław; Józef Jarosz, professor of German and Danish at the University of Wrocław; Mateusz Strzelecki, professor of geography at the University of Wrocław. All sessions were held in Polish.

The symposium was officially opened by Łukasz Bieniasz, associate professor and deputy head of the Institute of German Philology at the University of Wrocław.

Professor Józef Jarosz delivered the introductory speech about the idea behind the symposium. The title of the symposium is a reference to various publications both in Polish and German media. The term *coveted* is hardly a scientific one. It does, however, adequately describe the importance of Greenland in various contexts and indicate the interest in the island over the centuries around the world. This interest has been so strong that it has led to the desire to own Greenland. Therefore, the organizers decided to give the audience the opportunity to see the potential of this undeniably unique island.

The symposium was divided into two sections: “Literature and Art” was followed by “Language and Society”.

The first section, “Literature and Art”, started with a lecture by Radosław Łazarz, who discussed the image of Greenland and Greenlanders in European and North American films, focusing on such titles as “Nanook of the North” (1922), “Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner” (2001) and the third season of “Borgen” (2022). He also talked about the current state of the Greenlandic film industry. The rising numbers of films produced in Greenland were the reason behind the foundation of film.gl – an organization aimed at professionalizing the Greenlandic film industry and drawing international attention to Greenlandic cinema.

Agata Lubowicka’s presentation was devoted to Danish literature about Greenland and Greenlandic literature in Poland. She started by introducing and clarifying the difference between **grønlandslitteratur** and **grønlandsk litteratur** – two terms which are crucial when talking about Greenlandic literature and literature about Greenland. That helped to avoid confusion when following Lubowicka’s speech, as she talked about the literary merit of Knud Rasmussen’s “The New People” (1906), the criticism of the colonization of Greenland in Kim Leine’s “The Prophets of Eternal Fjord” (2012), Greenlandic identity in Niviaq Korneliussen’s “HOMO Sapienne” (2014) and award-winning “Flower Valley” (2020).

The third presenter, a Polish literary reporter and photographer Ilona Wiśniewska, joined the symposium from Tromsø, Norway, where she is currently based. Ilona Wiśniewska talked about the image of Greenlanders in her newest book “Migot. Z krańca Grenlandii” (‘Flicker. From the Edge of Greenland’) (2022). In the book, the author depicts the day-to-day life of the inhabitants of North Greenland. Ilona Wiśniewska spent three months in Qaanaaq and Siorapaluk, Greenland’s northernmost settlements. The Inuit live according to the rules set by nature and their ancestors, so Ilona Wiśniewska had a unique chance to observe how history and the complicated relationships with the rest of the world affect the everyday life of the local population.

Emiliana Konopka’s presentation – “Greenland seen through the eyes of a Danish artist – exotic Ultima Thule or a colony at the edge of the world?” – was certainly of special interest to art lovers. First, Konopka talked about Carl Rasmussen – a 19th century Danish maritime painter, and presented some of his works – among others, she

discussed “Grønlanderdreng i kajak ud for kysten” (‘A Greenlandic boy in a kayak off the coast’) (1870). The second artist who Konopka drew the audience’s attention to was Harald Moltke who participated in four arctic expeditions as a draftsman. The third part of the session was devoted to Ludvig Mylius-Erichsen and Harald Moltke’s expedition to West Greenland, known as the Danish Literary Expedition (1902–1904), and their book, “Grønland” (‘Greenland’) (1906), with its 30 unique portraits of Inuits.

The second section of the symposium, “Language and Society” was opened by Tomasz Archutowski, who guided the audience through the complex topic of the historical relations between Denmark and Greenland, and presented the relationship between the two countries today. The session started with a controversial question of whether Greenland used to be a de facto colony in the past. This question was raised in “Information”, a Danish newspaper, on March 10th, 2018, and was followed by a series of debate articles. Archutowski introduced the audience to the disagreements between several Danish historians, such as Thorkild Kjærgaard and Jens Heinrich, and presented his own opinion, which he formed on the basis of his research on the history of Danish-Greenlandic relations. He divided it into two parts: before and after the year 1721, which was when Hans Egede reached Greenland and christened one of its islands “the Island of Hope”. The last part of the session offered an interesting insight into how Danish-Greenlandic relations might develop in the future.

The topic of the uneasy fate of the local Greenlandic population was continued by Michał Smułczyński who talked about the undoubtedly dark moment in Danish history – the social experiment of 1951. The Danish government sent 22 Greenlandic children to Denmark with the aim of re-educating them so that they would serve as role models for their peers once they are back in Greenland. The Danish government admitted that the experiment left the participant suffering from mental illnesses. In March 2022, the survivors received an official apology from Mette Frederiksen, the Prime Minister of Denmark, who promised they would be compensated for what they went through.

Another education-related matter was raised by Janusz Stopyra in his presentation “Educational opportunities of Greenlandic children as seen by MA students at the Institute of German Philology, University of Wrocław”. Based on the research conducted by one of the students, Stopyra presented the educational system in Greenland with a specific focus on the role of the Danish language in the school curriculum.

Józef Jarosz’s session on the languages of Greenland was a smooth link between the educational and the geographical part of the section “Language and Society”. Mastering Danish is crucial for Greenlanders as it paves the way to good education and is necessary for functioning in a society where all administrative work is done in Danish. However, only 15% of the population is bilingual. About 70% of Greenlanders speak only their mother tongue, **kalaallisut**, the local term for Greenlandic. The language has three dialects: **avarsuaq**, **tunu** and **kitaa**. Written kalaallisut is mostly based on West Greenlandic kitaa, although elements of other dialects can also be

found. Surprisingly, Polish is also present in Greenland. If we look at the map of the island, we will find 23 examples of places which got their names during the Polish polar expedition of 1937. Some of the examples are Benedykt Dybowski Lake, Mount Wawel and Polonia Glacier.

The last session of the symposium was devoted to the important and relevant topic of climate change in the Arctic. Mateusz Strzelecki, a coastal geomorphologist and the head of the Stanislaw Baranowski Polar Station in Spitsbergen, explored the reaction of the Arctic coastal zone to shifts in climate conditions. During the session, he talked about the tsunami of 2017, which was triggered by a massive landslide and was powerful enough to destroy the infrastructure in Nuugaatsiaq in western Greenland, impact the coastal landscape, and cause four deaths. Considering the continued warming of the climate, which causes landslides, tsunamis are very likely to happen more and more often in the future, which will affect the functioning of coastal communities and landscapes.

The symposium was closed with Józef Jarosz's speech, in which he acknowledged the participation of all speakers and thanked the Royal Embassy of Denmark in Poland for its honorary patronage. The series of popular science symposia "Wrocław talks about the North" will be continued in the near future.

By gathering prominent scientists within the field of Greenlandic studies, the organizers of the symposium provided the audience with a unique opportunity to get an insight into the geographical, cultural and linguistic potential of Greenland, and shed light on the history of the island, which still isn't very well known in Poland.

ZITIERNACHWEIS:

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