

Voyaging the Gap: Scandinavian Sagas of Migration to New Zealand, 1860–1890

Session G4

Recently, while looking for examples of Scandinavian themes and motifs in New Zealand literature, I encountered a cache of mostly out-of-print nonfiction books written about the voyages of these hardy settlers to New Zealand in the nineteenth century. I have a personal interest as part of my own family story is in one of these texts, *Johanna's World*, by Oystein Andressen.

In several of the books—some written for local rural New Zealand communities, others translated into English from Norwegian and Swedish, Danish and Finnish—the usual colonial themes of privation, struggle, poverty and hardship prevail. However, the books often go beyond historical record and the original documents and letters upon which they are based, to bridge the gap between history and imagination, as the authors articulate how their subjects feel and what motivates many of their decisions and responses—topics upon which most settlers had been stoically silent for a century. It is now over 40 years since Lee Gutkind gave us the term Creative Nonfiction, where writers immerse themselves in the field of research or write about their own experience, and yet these authors write about history subjectively, using documentation to recreate the ordinary lives of those who lived through historical events rather than making them.

This paper will consider the fictional devices, narratological and rhetorical, by which the texts cross the threshold between fiction and nonfiction.

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