

Beyond Parochialism: a “more dynamic engagement between space, place, and history” in the Arctic?

Adriana Craciun. *Writing Arctic Disaster: Authorship and Exploration*. Cambridge Studies in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2016. Pp. 306. \$150.00hc, \$57.00pb.

For the reason explained in the note attached to this asterisk,* much of the content of Adriana Craciun’s book may be regarded as beyond the scope of publications of interest to many readers of *Canadian Poetry*. Only an ample definition of poetry could countenance a review of it in these pages. “Found poetry” is perhaps the necessary term for considering most of the writing about Arctic Canada by those who explored the region for either a thoroughfare through or treasure in it. Occasionally, “texts” did take the form of verse, and past issues of *Canadian Poetry* have included discussions of poetry written about and/or in the Arctic. Two are cited in the notes to this review. In September 1857, “Making a garden of the desert wide / Where Parry conquer’d and Franklin died” was Charles Dickens’s choice of tenor and vehicle for the poetic impulse to cultivate or exploit what he termed “the vast Profound” of the North American Arctic, the region of today’s Canada about which more books were published before 1860 than any other (Hogarth and Dickens 418). From Thomas James’s poems in his *Strange and Dangerous Voyage* (1633) to Al Purdy’s in his *North of Summer* (1967), for more than three centuries Arctic poetry traces a discontinuous line through Canadian literature. Dickens’s hopeful figure notwithstanding, whether in prose or poetry, the British experience in the Arctic was commonly written in epic and/or elegiac tones.

Writing Disaster in the British Arctic would have been an accurate title for essays that comprise an effort “to represent a more dynamic engagement between [*sic*] space, place, and history” (13) than Craciun thinks studies in the humanities of this portion of the Arctic have hitherto contributed. In calling for an examination of “the shaping force of different forms of authorship (across textual forms, disciplines, and spaces) in exploration writings at particular times” (22), specifically 1570–1870, Craciun argues that the secrecy of the Company of Cathay and the Hudson’s Bay Com-

pany, and the strictly controlled publishing process that Admiralty Second Secretary John Barrow and John Murray II operated between 1818 and 1845 conspired to suppress an accurate portrayal of the Arctic. Further, she criticizes her predecessors' work for "parochialism." For her, it neglects "the Arctic's dynamic engagements with global developments and modernities" (11). In clearing space for her own scholarship, she has cast her net widely, with the result that she has caught some fish worth catching while exaggerating the need for and the value of her foray. No one with a passing appreciation for New Historicism's thickening contribution to scholarship would quarrel with her statement that "the more carefully we consider earlier cultures of exploration, the more unpredictable become our histories of Arctic exploration" (232). While other reviewers have found this a "strikingly original" (Pittock) and "richly interdisciplinary" approach "employ[ing] an array of theories and methodologies" (Parker 349), a more compelling presentation of Craciun's own contributions would have issued from some flexibility in her assumptions and a willingness to thicken scholarship rather than displace it.

Craciun's strategy for displacement begins with her exposing the force and the myopia of the "gyre" (22) of what she disapprovingly names "library navigation." She proposes doing so by "unraveling the identity of voyage and narrative, and of explorer and author." Library navigation's myopia, she contends, stems from its adherence only to the words found in published narratives (20). This alternative agenda involves an emphasis on space over time, and it prompts her to work backwards from Victorian times to Elizabethan. A long introduction of critical and theoretical space-clearing is followed by a "demystification of [British explorer Sir John] Franklin's legacy" (231) and a concentration on inscriptions of the region before, during, and just after his explorations that remained either not widely known and/or unpublished in their authors' lifetimes. Although one gains the impression of eating through an emmental (emphasizing relics over words, "site-specific inscriptions of Arctic voyages that circulate outside the metropolitan publication networks that give shape to our exploration histories" [123], is novel but hardly thorough), Craciun contributes some sound scholarship of her own. This lies in her search for meaning more in texts that were left/kept unpublished in their authors' lifetimes or, in the case of the post-Napoleonic Royal Navy, were published outside the polar print juggernaut that Barrow and Murray II operated. But texts for her also comprehend a wider body of records, for example, Inuit maps, which she does not read particularly effectively, or in the word "Victory"

that the carpenter of Sir John Ross's second voyage (1829–1833) carved into a prosthesis for an Inuk (117).

But her eclectic choice is indeed altogether an emmental: it misses much that might have helped mount a convincing argument and perhaps have moderated her criticism of existing scholarship. This includes a recognition of what the British-rooted tradition of scholarship has attained. That tradition essayed to perfect if it did not initiate armchair travel/library navigation. And this was especially the case in the nineteenth-century British Arctic. By 1860, in books of exploration and travel, the Arctic was considerably better represented than any region of what is now Canada (MacLaren, "English" 34). Despite discussing Defoe at length and mentioning his *Compleat English Gentleman* (1729), Craciun fails to note that, as has been discussed in reference to exploration and travel literature generally, it was Defoe who, probably following Awnsham and John Churchill's introductory pronouncement in their *Collection of Voyages and Travels* (1704), contended that voyaging in words completed the formation of a gentleman, who could "make the tour of the world in books[; thereby,] he may make himself master of the geography of the Universe in the maps, atlases, and measurements of our mathematicians. He may travel by land with the historian, by sea with the navigators . . . and know a thousand times more in doing it than all those illiterate sailors" (225–26; Churchill and Churchill, ed. I: lxiii).

And modern editions have often corrected whatever intentional or unintentional sins of omission or commission library navigation committed. For example, while Craciun aims to demystify Franklin, she does not note that existing scholarship has already demystified the euphemistic Barrow/Murray version of how Franklin suppressed the threatened mutiny by voyageurs 13 August 1820, during his First Arctic Land Expedition (1819–1822). The *Narrative* published by Murray has the persona of Franklin state, "I, therefore, felt the duty incumbent on me to address them in the strongest manner on the danger of insubordination, and to assure them of my determination to inflict the heaviest punishment on any that should persist in their refusal to go on, or in any other way attempt to retard the Expedition" (Franklin 217). The manuscript record includes Franklin's mention of the threat of "Severe punishment" (Davis, ed. 41), but the writings of Midshipman George Back, one of the expedition's four officers, quote Franklin's having "told them we were too far removed from justice to treat them as they merited – but if such a thing occurred again – he would not hesitate to make an example of the first person who should come forward – by 'blowing out his brains'" (Houston, ed. 81). The quotation

marks in the fair copy of Back's journal, which, like Franklin's, has been in print for more than twenty years, are telling.

While some of the discussions lack originality (examples being her treatments of James Isham, Henry Kelsey, and Luke Foxe), a major exception is Craciun's discovery that Sir John Richardson, a British naval physician and naturalist who first explored with Franklin and subsequently searched for him, had apparently read *Frankenstein* before sailing to York Factory on the First Land Expedition in 1819, and referred to it when writing a letter 9 June 1821 to Back on the eve of the disastrous events that befell Franklin's men. This discovery, which, as she notes (xii), she published first in 2011 in an issue of *Nineteenth-Century Literature* ("Writing") and repeats herein, is strong evidence of an occasional seepage by different sorts of writing into what could – and should – be called Big Science, the dominant discourse of Britain's imperial Arctic in the Romantic period (and indeed dominant still today in academic research about the Arctic). It is substantive that, when in 1867 Richardson's letter was published for the first time, a clerical relative elided the reference to Shelley's novel for reasons that, as Craciun compellingly argues, had to do with bur-nishing its author's reputation (94–95).

Craciun dwells interestingly on the relation of Hearne's posthumously published book to Franklin's first expedition but overlooks the call for Hearne's book to be published. In 1784, John Douglas issued it in his introduction to his edited narrative of Cook's Arctic voyage (Douglas, ed I: lxvii). (Although, as she had in another fine essay, in 2013 ["Oceanic" 180], Craciun notes that the narrative of Cook's third Pacific voyage was issued by the British publisher, William Strahan, who enjoyed royal printing privileges [89], she does not discuss the voyage's disaster or the implications for nineteenth-century British disasters of its encounter with impenetrable ice along Alaska's Arctic coast in both 1778 and 1779. The voyage has received considerable scholarly attention of late [Nicandri and Barnett, eds.], but, given her chance only to mention Ted Binnema's *Enlightening Zeal* [2014 (258n55)] and Keighren, Withers, and Bell's *Travels into Print* [2015 (237n101)], it probably came after her book was completed.) In 1836, British Navy surgeon and naturalist John Richardson published the mid-century view that Hearne's posthumously published *Journey from Prince of Wales's Fort* [1795] was also prepared for publication by Douglas (Richardson 147). This also goes unnoted. The post-Napoleonic Admiralty's general snubbing of fur traders' and whalers' narratives, published or unpublished, also receives no discussion. In the scholarship that Craciun displaces it has been noted that Barrow scorned

both the latter and, in his *Chronological History of Voyages into the Arctic Regions* (1818), the former (MacLaren, “John” 25–7). Therein, he gave voice to doubts he assigns to others that Hearne even reached salt water. How could an emphasis on the Hearne-Franklin connection neglect this or other matters, such as Edward Finden’s engraving of Bloody Fall? Presumably, it is worked up from one of Back’s unlocated sketches. The inclusion in its foreground of four skulls and other human bones derive, as the published text on the facing page (350) of Murray’s edition of Franklin’s *Narrative of a Journey to the Shores of the Polar Sea* (1823) avers, from the massacre that Hearne witnessed there fifty years before, in July 1771.

Is this not a terrific example of precisely the sort of inscription on and of Arctic space that Craciun wants foregrounded? But then she ignores bones, generally, and the “text” that masses of them along the western shore of King William Island comprised for Franklin searchers – first Inuit, then Britons – when they reached them, together with the effort to read in them, given how they were strewn, the fate of the 1845 expedition. They should, one would have thought, have occupied a study of writing Arctic disaster. Bones of Empire, from those of Hudson and his companions in James Bay (1611), to those of fifty-nine of the sixty-two men of Jens Munk’s voyage to Hudson Bay (1619–20), to those of James Knight’s lost voyage in Hudson Bay (1720–21), and even to Cook’s in Kealakekua Bay and those stolen and whisked inland on the island of Hawai’i on Valentine’s Day 1779 after his search for a northwest passage through Bering Strait the previous August, are left *in situ*, some unmentioned, all unread by her. The same holds for the “found poetry” of the balloon messages sent aloft by Franklin searchers (Wordie); Craciun alludes to them (120) but does not study them, and she refers her reader to the second (“Caxtons”) but not the first (“Shipboard”) of Elaine Hoag’s pair of seminal studies of shipboard newspapers.

One also finds no consideration of the diabolical question about which edition of Hearne’s *Journey* – the heavy first, quarto London (1795) or the lighter second, octavo Dublin (1796) – was carried by Franklin’s officers as they hauled their starving selves across the Barrens in Fall 1821 towards expiration, murder, or rescue by Dene. Depending upon whether they had the first or second edition, which, owing to an erratum, have Hearne walking in different directions near the widening of the Coppermine River probably now known as Point Lake (although this identification is uncertain), the route of Franklin’s party straggling to Fort Enterprise might have been shorter and, thus, fatal to fewer of the eleven of twenty men who succumbed or were cannibalized. Or perhaps they had the first edition’s map

and the lighter second edition with its inferior map. Franklin's expedition could find only open water when it reached the Coppermine River at Obstruction Rapids, upriver of Point Lake, and the delay involved in fashioning a teacup of a shallop to ferry men across imperiled those still alive. Taking up this question would have wonderfully abetted Craciun's effort to spatialize what she regards as her predecessors' tyrannical temporal concentration on the Arctic.

Objects and their inscriptions that come under her discussion do not include two Old Testament verses. Craciun notes that the surviving bibles and prayer books from Franklin's 1845 voyage, while annotated and underlined, "are so damaged by their ordeal as to be illegible" (53–54), but the naval documents found in the cairns on King William Island, as well as Peglar's scribblings, do not constitute the entire inscriptions on Arctic space of the Franklin expedition of 1845. At Beechey Island were found the headboards marking the graves of the three sailors, John Torrington (d. 1 Jan. 1846), John Hartnell (d. 4 Jan. 1846), and William Braine (d. 3 Apr. 1846), who died during the voyage's first winter in the ice. Into the headboard of Hartnell's is chiseled the text of Haggai 1:7: "Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Consider your ways"; the headboard of Braine's bears a portion of the text of Joshua 24:15: "choose you this day whom ye will serve" (KJV). Any modern effort to come to terms with the explorers' motives, including how they and most Victorian Britons at home would have understood death, must understand how prominently Judeo-Christianity figured in their lives. Dead sailors they are, but Hartnell and Braine might well have been surprised to find that history has seized on their deaths to the exclusion of all else about them. The great test awaiting these men was not likely the extreme conditions that their Maker had created in the high North, but their Maker Himself.

The two passages, elevated to verse in this commemorative context, speak eloquently and sternly of Judgment Day. They align well with a point Craciun *does* make, that is, the large number of commanding officers who, like Franklin, were Christian evangelicals (104). Towering over the Arctic in an apocalyptic register for worshipping Christians, they are reminiscent of some of the poetic meditations on mortality written by Cyrus Wakeham, clerk aboard HMS *Griper*, a quarter-century earlier, during the first voyage under the command of William Edward Parry (1819–1820). (These and other renderings of the Arctic, by both geographical explorers who wrote poems as well as by poets, are discussed in MacLaren, "Poetry" and "Tracing.") For some readers, they may resonate with Thomas James's remark to his crew in 1631, when they overwintered in James Bay. Com-

forting his men, he alluded to More's *Utopia* (1516): "If it be our fortunes to end our dayes here, we are as neere heauen, as in *England*; and we are much bound to God Almighty for giuing vs so large a time of repentance, who as it were dayly calls vpon vs, to prepare our soules for a better life in heauen" (55). In just the synchronistic way that Craciun is promoting, these codex and other inscriptions helped give the British Arctic its solemn, sublime cast, and it retains it today for many non-natives, Craciun's reproach of which and her call to "unlearn" it notwithstanding (9–10). In the seventeenth century, as goes unnoted, they were shaded by the spectral presence in Arctic space of those cast by mutineers into oblivion in June 1611: Henry Hudson, his son John, Arnold Ladley, John King, Michael Butt, Thomas Woodhowse, Adame Moore, Philip Staff, and Syracke Fanner.

The scholarship that Craciun faults has discussed these matters and others that a chin-out study concentrating on manuscript/non-codex and other inscriptions on the land ought to have addressed. I am unpersuaded that her discussions more than occasionally win her argument that a larger synchronic range of inscriptions, as she characterizes them, transforms what editions of narratives published in their day or since have yielded and continue to yield. I am unpersuaded, as well, by her spurning of the catastrophic cast that Arctic studies have long deployed (27): although not from Inuit perspectives, from a British perspective perhaps the greatest tragedy about the disappearance of the 1845 Franklin expedition was the vanishing of its written record. Only a few more words were salvaged than lives lost. If absence can inflict a scar, here is no better example at the level of an entire society. This point was made in one of the three documentary films produced a decade ago about the Franklin disappearance.

Craciun is correct, if not original, in stating that the Hudson's Bay Company conducted its business in clandestine fashion for centuries, but she neglects to consider the Arctic expedition it sponsored and publicized in the late 1830s, the one that netted George Simpson, its promoter and the company's inland governor, a knighthood. If she had examined the inscriptions issuing from this expedition, her thesis could well have been advanced. For example, the journal of Peter Warren Dease, left to molder in Victorian times but published fifteen years ago (*From Barrow to Boothia* [2002]), could have provided Franklin's lost expedition of 1845 with valuable information about the availability of native hunters, animals – food – on the continental coastline opposite King William Land. The details of such content were unavailable in *Narrative of the Discoveries on the North Coast of America* (1843), the account of the expedition by

Thomas Simpson, which was available two years before Franklin sailed. Dease kept a regular daily record of which men hunted what animals successfully. Only his reader gains a cumulative index of when in the season animals were seen, and when the men had food to eat. How valuable would this information have been to Franklin's men! It certainly would have lent a providential assistance to the sailors still alive in April 1848, when they abandoned HMS *Erebus* and *Terror* and shaped their desperate course to the mainland, some reaching it before expiring (see MacLaren, "HBC's"). This intriguing example would have helped sustain Craciun's exhortation to range more widely, specifically in the manuscript history of the British Arctic.

When the book moves backward through time in Chapter 3 to consider disasters of the eighteenth century and earlier, the discussion of the tragic James Knight expedition (1720–21) is engaging and original (i.e. not previously published), as well-researched discussions of manuscript culture often are. When Craciun returns to the Franklin era in Chapter 5, her discussion of its representation of their forebears surprisingly does not return to Barrow's *Chronological History* (1818), surely one of the monumental histories that Craciun has in mind when deploying that term. In it, the second secretary denounced Thomas James and his *Strange and Dangerous Voyage*, which incurred his ire surely because, as has been argued, it left open no possibility of there being a northwest passage along the western shore of Hudson Bay. Barrow's darling project suffered no explorer who committed this blasphemy against the imperial cast of his theoretical cartography.

Also striking is no discussion of James Anthony Froude's rather famous nomination of Hakluyt's *Principall Navigations* as the "prose epic of the modern English nation" ("England's" 34). It appeared in print first in 1852, that is, after the establishment of the Hakluyt Society in 1846 but prior to Charles Francis Hall's discovery of Frobisher remains in 1861 and the publication in 1867 by the Hakluyt Society of Franklin searcher Richard Collinson's edition of *The Three Voyages of Martin Frobisher*. In that year, as well, Froude republished his remark in his *Short Studies on Great Subjects* (296). The society's decision to republish Hakluyt's compendium was surely more readily reached by Froude's pronouncement. Why this topic is left untreated in the book's discussion of what imperial Victorians made of explorers during the reign of Elizabeth I is bemusing.

But what the Victorians did to their Arctic explorers, they did to explorers of many parts of the globe. In fact, much of what Craciun treats can be found in the representation of other parts of the world than the Arctic, and

not just by Britons. Frequently, her argumentation and discussion echo scholarly considerations of the nineteenth-century and subsequent memorializations of Meriwether Lewis and William Clark. Consideration of the generation into print of Jonathan Carver's *Travels* (1778) would have helped, as well. It is a pity that her focus is not comparative. Indeed, lionizing Arctic explorers of other Arctic regions has been common to other cultures. One thinks of hero making in the Soviet era of Russia. I have long used Richard Vaughan's *The Arctic: A History* (1994, 2007) as a teaching text precisely because it treats the circumpolar Arctic entirely. That perspective does not bless this book, leaving it the pot calling the kettle black when it comes to parochialism.

Craciun mentions a film that has yet to be made (225) but not three documentary films produced last decade about the Franklin tragedy: *The Search for the Northwest Passage* (Osmond), *Finding Franklin/Revealed: Franklin's Lost Expedition* (Bate), and *Passage* (Walker). In the last, Dickens's great-great-grandson apologizes to Tagak Curley for the representation that his forebear meted out to Inuit in his debate with Hudson's Bay Company Factor and Arctic explorer John Rae in the pages of the novelist's periodical, *Household Words*. This oversight marks another hole in an emmental that claims to be "drawing on . . . traditional histories of British exploration, visual culture, and literary imagination, and on postcolonial, anthropological, and indigenous accounts" (33).

Although in the main thorough with what her medley *does* treat, Craciun errs in a few particulars. The Inuit name of Bloody Fall is given as Kugluktuk (100), but that is the name of the hamlet (formerly, Coppermine), which lies more than fifteen kilometers (nine miles) downriver from the fall. Martin Frobisher is twice called illiterate (221, 232); he was not. Contrary to her contention (125), Samuel Hearne's discovery of salt water at the mouth of Coppermine River 17 July 1771 did not have to await confirmation by Franklin's expedition before it began appearing on British government maps. Aaron Arrowsmith's *Map exhibiting all the new Discoveries in the Interior Parts of North America*, published first in 1802, shows the river mouth and bears the wording "seen by Mr. Hearne 1771," as it does Alexander Mackenzie's discovery 12 July 1793 of salt water in the Mackenzie River Delta, which Franklin's Second Arctic Land Expedition would visit in 1825. Regency-era narratives published by Murray under Barrow's watchful eye are presented as if they were the first about the Arctic to have multiple authors. This contention overlooks the narrative of Cook's third voyage to the Pacific and indeed fails to engage the imbricated nature of exploration and travel literature, generally, as mod-

eled in 2008 at the Hakluyt conference held in Greenwich and in 2011 in print (MacLaren, “In”).

Well written and originally structured, the book ends by casting into the future. The point made about Shell Oil seems more journalistic than scholarly. Because it does not align a multinational corporation’s ambitions for profit in the short term with the characterization of the British Arctic as El Dorado after the first Frobisher expedition’s fabricated discovery of gold, *Writing Arctic Disaster* sails past an opportunity for a comparison that extends over the five centuries it aims to span.

Notes

* In an email posting of 7 July 2017, Matthew Borushko, book review editor for *Studies in Romanticism*, invited me to write a review of this title and arranged for a hardcover copy to be sent to me after I accepted. Following submission of a slightly different version of the review than appears here, I was informed by Associate Professor Borushko in an email posting of 19 December 2017 that *Studies in Romanticism* had a policy of not reviewing works written by its editor: “it turns out that the journal is unable to publish your review because of an editorial policy specifying that the editor(s) of *SiR* cannot have work reviewed in the journal. The policy was not in place when I first contacted you, and I apologize for this situation.” According to its website, Professor Craciun, the author of the book here reviewed, took up the editorship of *Studies in Romanticism* in 2017. This verdict not only wasted two weeks’ worth of reading and writing but also imperils the ethics of academic reviewing, which, with the evaluation of submissions to journals and presses, is a cornerstone of academic integrity. Subsequent to this imbroglio, the editor of *Canadian Poetry*, in consultation with its book review editor, generously offered to consider publication of a revised version of the review in this journal. I am grateful to professors D.M.R. Bentley and Tracy Ware for extending this invitation, which protects the integrity of scholarly reviewing. I salute their commitment to it as I deplore all deviations from it.

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