

# Writing For an Elsewhere: Author(ity) and Authenticity in the Texts of the First Franklin Expedition (1819-1822)

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STUDIES OF FRANKLIN'S first expedition inevitably revolve around the one central issue that first stimulated interest in the expedition and has sustained that interest to the present day. The central issue, of course, is the failure of the expedition and the loss of eleven of its members. As Richard Davis illustrates in his introduction to *Sir John Franklin's Journals and Correspondence: The First Arctic Land Expedition, 1819-1822*, the reasons for this failure are manifold.<sup>1</sup> The expedition was plagued with supply problems, weaknesses in organization and planning, dissension between the English officers, and the early onset of winter in the fall of 1821. All of these problems, however, are as nothing when compared to the one overriding weakness of the expedition: the inability of its English officers to adapt to the demands of a new landscape. Vilhjalmur Stefansson first commented on this inability in his hugely popular text, *Unsolved Mysteries of the Arctic* (1938). The English, he argued, had "minds inhibited by the outlook of their time and service" (115). He directly attributes the failure of both Franklin's first expedition and his last expedition to "cultural," rather than logistic, reasons (Stefansson 106). Had the officers adapted themselves to local conditions, respected the advice of the native peoples, and adopted the native way of life, Stefansson argues, both expeditions would have succeeded. While we cannot prove this last claim, Stefansson's own travels in the Arctic certainly substantiate his belief that such adaptation is the only successful method of Arctic travel.<sup>2</sup> Regardless, however, of the accuracy we ascribe to our hindsight, debate over the expedition's failure has moved beyond the question of whether or not such flexibility would have saved the expedition, and on to what seems a much more interesting question: why, in the face of such a new and

overpowering landscape, were the English unable — or unwilling — to change their methods?

Such a question thrusts the expedition into the centre of the debate over New Historicism. Strongly influenced by Michel Foucault and, more recently, by Stephen Greenblatt, who first coined the term, new historicists see individuals as products of various social institutions and social codes. To them, “autonomous self and text are mere holograms, effects that intersecting institutions produce” (Veeseer xii). As subjects of the “interwoven network of practices, procedures, institutions, disciplines, knowledges and truths” of a particular epoch (Grumley 192), individuals act in ways that are directly attributable to the forces that shape them.<sup>3</sup> Thus, in order to explore an individual’s role in history, the new historicist addresses the institutions and codes determining an individual’s behaviour within his or her epoch. According to such an approach, the officers of the First Arctic Land Expedition could not be expected to see beyond the virulent Eurocentrism of their era, and could not be expected to act in any radically adaptive manner. As Richard Davis remarks:

The pervasive ethnocentric grasp of nineteenth-century Britain . . . made it virtually impossible for Franklin to respect the traditionally-evolved wisdom of Yellowknife Indians and Canadian voyageurs . . . Franklin was as much a victim as he was an exponent. (*Journals* xlv)

The weakness of such an historicist approach, however, lies in the fact that the spectre of individual will, though exiled, remains to haunt the scene. Frank Lettrichia captures the essence of the historicist dilemma:

The central commitment of historicists, old and new, is to the self as product of forces over which we exercise no control — the self as effect, not origin: that commitment makes historicists what they are. The central, unacknowledged, and perhaps unacknowledgeable desire of historicism . . . is to avoid the consequences of that central commitment, to find a space of freedom and so free us from a world in which we are forced to become what we do not wish to become. (241)

Davis illustrates this dilemma in a somewhat inverted fashion. First he exonerates Franklin for his actions: “his behaviour was appropriate within the historical context of his time and place” (*Journals* lxxxiii). Then Davis is forced to acknowledge that Franklin himself was part of the problem: “it becomes difficult,” he writes, “to speak well of his leadership” (lxxxvi). Davis concludes by noting that “whatever admirable qualities Franklin possessed, he was no genius” (xciii). This, clearly, is new historicist

equivocation. Had Franklin been a genius, one is left to presume, he would have been able to lift himself above the constraints of his age and act in a more flexible manner. But such a characteristic — albeit implicit — new historicist presumption rests on shaky logic and is ultimately unsatisfying. I believe we can utilize a Heideggerian perspective to explain the inflexibility of the English in a much more consistent manner.

To a certain degree, Heidegger was also a historicist. Indeed, it is more than likely that Foucault — who credited his “entire philosophical development . . . [to] the reading of Heidegger”<sup>4</sup> — first found inspiration for his own “archaeological” investigations in Heidegger’s work. There is, however, a distinct difference between Heidegger’s and Foucault’s conception of the individual within his or her society. Heidegger argues that the everyday state of individual existence (*Dasein*) is given over — “thrown” over, as he terms it — to the dictates of the society within which one exists.<sup>5</sup> For Heidegger, however, our very awareness of this fact offers compelling proof that this “thrown” conception of existence does not encompass all the possibilities of Being open to humankind. Hence, Heidegger’s work on the question of Being is not so much an examination of the customs and institutions at work in a particular society as it is an examination of the interplay between an individual and the world to which he or she belongs. By examining the assorted texts of the First Franklin Expedition from a similar perspective, we can catch a glimpse of the interplay between the members of Franklin’s expedition and the European world to which they belonged. And the more we delve into this interplay, the clearer it becomes that the fact that Franklin and his officers did not seem to learn from their experiences has more to do with a quite conscious exercise of will than with the myopia of a specific epoch. To these men, the Arctic was only useful as an ideological and textual construct. They came to the Arctic intent on proving the mettle of a nineteenth-century ideology, and they came to the Arctic very much concerned with the British reading public and the progress of their own careers. Instead of writing for the Arctic, instead of allowing it to disclose something of its own Being, they were intent on writing for an elsewhere. Hence, the records of the expedition are a study in control, with the explorers constantly attempting to over-write the Arctic in the terms of their own discourse. Even in the official *Narrative*, however, the land itself seems to resist such a strategy, giving rise to what Barbara Belyea describes as “a tension or dissonance” (22). This tension is most notable in a series of negotiations which the explorers are forced to make with the land and its peoples. These negotiations are particularly revealing because they

function as small, intense crucibles, concentrating and firing the conflicts of vision, freedom, and will which emerge throughout the accounts of the expedition.

Before we turn to these negotiations, however, we should examine that which *was* given to the explorers — the way in which the land first disclosed itself to them. The explorers arrived with a very specific, European perspective, and their freedom in the New World was based on their decision to either maintain, modify, or even abandon this perspective. Over the past fifteen years a debate has been waged over the various preconceptions and biases which the English brought with them to the Arctic.<sup>6</sup> While it is certainly possible to examine each of these preconceptions and illustrate their assorted effects, it seems more profitable to investigate the one overriding preconception which guided the efforts and decisions of Franklin and his men: the explorers' belief that the Arctic was not a *place*, a landscape unique in itself,<sup>7</sup> but simply a "blank" space on a map. A place, in Heideggerian terms, is more than a random, reified intersection of two axes on a grid. Spatiality is not objective; rather, one's sense of near and far is closely linked to the same source of meaning that defines one's sense of the foreign and familiar. Moreover, because the places, the regions, within which one exists exert an influence on the constitution of one sense of meaning, the relationship between an individual and these regions does not take the form of a constituent subject and an infinitely malleable object. One need only speak to a fisherman, or a farmer, or an inner-city dweller to gain some appreciation for the way in which place exerts its own thrust upon the constitution of its inhabitants. Indeed, it is from the foundation of those places in which we predominately exist that humans assume the Truth of their world, the Truth that sets the stage for beings to reveal themselves.<sup>8</sup> Hence, one's home place, one's home region, assumes a particular importance because it founds one's relationship with *all* beings and *all* other places. Heidegger argues that "in a certain manner, factically existent Dasein always knows its way about, even in a 'world' which is alien" (*Being and Time* 407), which is simply to say that humans, with varying degrees of certitude, carry a sense of significance, of Truth, far beyond the environments within which that Truth is founded. The English, for example, certainly "knew" their way about the Arctic: on the disastrous return from the Arctic Ocean, until he was too weak to do so, Midshipman Hood walked behind the man "breaking trail" and, like the good sailor he was, he kept the expedition on the proper compass heading. As Rudy Wiebe has pointed out,<sup>9</sup> however, it was the explorers' reliance on such strict naval modes of travel which

contributed to their final difficulties. Indeed, the explorers' mode of travel — overland in a straight line, oblivious to the seasonal patterns of the animals they depended on for food — merely illustrates how alien the English were to the landscape. But this, of course, is Heidegger's point: one can always find one's way in a new and alien world, but only in the terms of the world that has been left behind. A more accurate, more primordial knowledge of the Being of a new world is much more difficult to grasp. The English had no interest in attaining such a knowledge of the Arctic world. They arrived with a set conception of the land, and when it came time to interpret that conception they were not prepared to let the land exert a "counter-thrust"<sup>10</sup> of its own. And the reason they were not prepared to let the land exert such a counter-thrust, the reason they viewed the land in terms of the sublime, or the picturesque, or in constant terms of absence, finds its foundation in their metaphysical belief that the land itself was simply space, mere *substantia* in need of European *forma*.

Justification for this claim appears in the opening pages of Franklin's *Narrative*. Within these pages Franklin reproduces Admiral Barrow's instructions to the expedition. The central purpose of the expedition, Barrow writes, is "to amend the very defective geography of the Northern part of North America" (Franklin xii). There is a certain logic to this statement if one maintains a strict division between the human science of geography and the physical form of the landscape. It becomes more problematic, however, if the two subjects are conflated; and it would seem, from various statements in the expedition records, that the English were not averse to treating the two as one and the same. Perhaps the best indication of this is found in Midshipman Back's description of the expedition's departure from Fort Enterprise in June of 1821: "the positions and dress of the officers as well as the deep contrast between the perpetual silence of the place, and the animation of the party — afforded a most perfect view of a voyage of discovery" (Houston, *Arctic Artist* 129). The officers, we are told, are standing on a raised promontory. Their uniforms (or, more accurately, the remnants thereof) identify them as stalwart representatives of the world's greatest navy. They are the active agents in this scene, while Back's evocation of the "perpetual silence of the place" effectively marginalizes and reifies the land, justifying and even ennobling the strenuous efforts of the party. Clearly, where we might be tempted to describe the expedition as simply the outworking of a rapacious colonialist discourse, Back's "perfect view of a voyage of discovery" is one in which the nobility of the enterprise stems from the fact that it is the activity of the explorers that redeems the land from a "silence" which is akin to non-

existence. Midshipman Hood reflects the same sentiment when he discusses the loss of the Red River Colony: “the extermination of a colony,” he writes, “is no ordinary offence against mankind” (Houston, *To the Arctic* 36). For both men, exploration and colonization are acts of creation. Such a belief maintains, as its basic premise, the essential formlessness of the lands and the peoples being “discovered” and/or colonized. As John Moss writes: “Mapmakers were passionate men; they made a place for things to happen. This is not without irony for the indigenous peoples they discovered” (6).

Exploration and colonization are closely linked with yet another method for “amending the geography” of the land: the cultivation of its soil. As Hood remarks: “It is gratifying to contemplate the successful efforts of cultivation on this hitherto neglected land” (Houston, *To the Arctic* 45). And Franklin repeats this refrain upon the expedition’s return to Cumberland House in 1821: “We perceived many improvements since our last visit, but there was none that gave me greater satisfaction than to witness the increased attention which had been paid to Agriculture and farming” (Davis, *Journals* 260). Throughout this sequence of exploration, colonization, and cultivation the same fundamental theme predominates: it is only through European activity that the land can be redeemed from nothingness. Indeed, the Arctic is not even a location until the explorers can map it, and it cannot lay claim to being a place until it becomes a clone of European civilization. Thus, it is this preconception of the land’s emptiness that circumscribes the possibilities of its disclosure to the English. One could certainly argue that had the land *not* resisted such a preconception, the English could have come and gone without ever having visited the Arctic at all. But, as we shall see, the land *did* resist such a false conceptualization, and we are left once more with our original question: if the English failed to respond to the “counter-thrust” of the landscape because, in accordance with their colonialist discourse, they dismissed it as empty, formless space, then why, when the land itself resisted such a conceptualization, did the English cling so tenaciously to this point of view?

Clearly, one of the reasons was that the English expected and even welcomed such resistance. The struggle between themselves and the land was viewed as a necessary sacrifice. It was the patient labour which made the victory — in this case, the classification and delimitation of a new world — a victory. To the explorers, exploration was a noble struggle for the cause of knowledge. Hood, for example, completes a lengthy description of the torment of North American mosquitoes with the following apology:

To such annoyance all travellers must submit, and it would be unworthy to complain of that grievance in the pursuit of knowledge, which is endured for the sake of profit. This detail of it has only been made as an excuse for the scantiness of our observations on the most interesting part of the country through which we passed. (Houston, *To the Arctic* 117)

Simultaneously, such “annoyance” is ultimately to the benefit of the explorer as well. As Sylvia Van Kirk notes in her examination of fur traders’ journals: “tales such as *Robinson Crusoe* contained their [the journals] moral precepts: the wanderings of the hero were meant to test and temper his courage and virtue, to bring him to a better understanding of God’s grace and the human condition” (116). A belief in the spiritual benefits of suffering for a noble cause is evident not only in the journals of this expedition but also throughout the exploration journals of the nineteenth century. Sir Clements Markham, in his *The Lands of Silence: A History of Arctic and Antarctic Exploration* (1921), captures this philosophy well:

The Polar regions . . . [are] of surpassing interest and importance. Here we meet with examples of heroism and devotion which must entrance mankind for all times . . . there are dangers to be encountered and difficulties to be overcome which call forth the best qualities of our race. (qtd in Bloom 120)

In addition to the influence of such a philosophy, the explorers’ reaction to the difficulties of exploration was also mediated by their perception of their role as explorers. The explorers saw themselves as active imperial agents, and it is their very activity which sets them apart from the landscape. The key word in Back’s description of the expedition is “animation” — the animation of the expedition in the face of the quiescent land. As Wiebe notes, the explorers are defined by their “motion” (43), but their desire to keep moving is itself only an expression of the dichotomy they establish between a passive, reified landscape and their constructive agency as explorers. I. S. MacLaren writes:

the Englishman ‘passed . . . through’ and passed through with a purpose: to fulfil the high-minded quest of adding to the English geography of the globe . . . This worthy, not to say noble, sacrifice of self for geographical knowledge serves in the narrative register to demarcate and to insist upon a hierarchy in the characterization of the explorer and the explored. (“From Exploration” 44)



Yet another reason the explorers were not disconcerted by the land's resistance was that such resistance actually fed into their masculinist discourse. Masculinist discourse holds gendered values and activities as natural consequences of the differences between the sexes.<sup>11</sup> Males are active and virile; females are passive and fertile. Exploration, throughout the entire course of the nineteenth century, came to be viewed as the perfect male activity because it was seen as the best place — outside of a battlefield — for men to exercise their “masculine” virtues. Lisa Bloom writes: “The difficulty of life in desolate and freezing regions provided the ideal mythic site where men could show themselves as heroes capable of superhuman feats . . . . The polar explorer represented the epitome of manliness” (6). Two factors ensured that the English were particularly susceptible to such a discourse: first, they were entering a land in which ostensibly male virtues such as courage and stamina were highly regarded; and second, as “pork-eaters,” newcomers to the land, they had yet to prove that they possessed these virtues. Back writes: “there is a pride amongst old ‘voyageurs’ which considers freezing oneself as clownish — and only excusable in a ‘Pork-eater’ or a peasant just come from Canada” (Houston, *Arctic Artist* 107). Hood observes a similar value system at work amongst the Coppermine Indians, and his observation also provides a glimpse of the explorers’ ineptitude in the bush: “I was bewildered for several hours in the woods, when I met with an Indian, who led me back at such a pace, that I was always in the rear, to his infinite diversion. The Indians are vain of their local knowledge, which is certainly very wonderful” (Houston, *To the Arctic* 57). It was Back, however, more than the other officers, who felt it necessary to continually prove himself against the rigours of the land. Upon the completion of his arduous voyage for supplies in the winter of 1820-21, he remarks:

The gentlemen of both parties [the NorthWest Co. and the Hudson's Bay Co.] were much surprised at the shortness of the journey with loaded trains — stating that it had never been performed before, and that they had not thought it possible — during the passage there was not an article damaged in the smallest degree. (Houston, *Arctic Artist* 114)

Significantly, Back's journal provides the reader with enough detail to appreciate the difficulty of this trek, but not so much that the reader is led to question the wisdom of travelling in the middle of a Subarctic winter. Back's intention seems to have been to establish his “manliness” without impugning his (or Franklin's) judgement. Back also gives no



indication that reasons other than the welfare of the expedition impelled him on this journey, though evidence from other sources indicates that tensions within the party may have played a role in Franklin's decision to send Back.<sup>12</sup>

While Back uses the journey to showcase his "masculine" virtues, the fact that he feels compelled to do so indicates a certain insecurity and perhaps even a feeling of inferiority — and in this respect Back was not alone. While his winter trek is perhaps the most glaring example of this masculinist discourse, it surfaces again and again in the journals of the other officers and frames one significant episode in the *Narrative*. The episode revolves around the expedition's arrival on the shores of the Arctic Ocean. As Franklin notes, the voyageurs "[are] terrified at the idea of a voyage through an icy sea in bark canoes" (358), and with good reason: not only are the canoes too weak for such use, the materials to repair them are conspicuously absent. The explorers, on the other hand, are simply happy to have finally reached "an element which [is] more congenial with [their] habits than the fresh-water navigations" (Franklin 362). Indeed, upon discovering the voyageurs' misgivings, Franklin notes that the "officers endeavoured to ridicule their fears" (Franklin 358). Both Davis and Wiebe find this behaviour, and Franklin's account of this behaviour, extremely hard to explain, particularly as the voyageurs' misgivings prove correct.<sup>13</sup> In the terms of a masculinist discourse, however, the actions of the expedition's officers are not so inexplicable. After years of voyaging in a new and alien environment, always eager to prove themselves equals and yet undoubtedly aware of their own inadequacies,<sup>14</sup> the English must have felt that their return to a saltwater environment heralded the one occasion in which they could finally hold the upper hand. Franklin, for example, was certainly not loath to describe, on a later occasion, "the unskilfulness of the Canadians in their Management of the Sail" (Davis, *Journals* 262). The influence of such a state of mind — a combination of a sense of welcome familiarity and a renewed sense of authority and control — certainly helps explain both this aspect of the explorers' behaviour and their determination to continue exploring the coast long beyond the point at which they could have safely returned to Fort Enterprise.

Thus, in the terms of a masculinist or a colonialist discourse, we can draw two significant conclusions about the proceedings of the expedition: first, because Franklin and his men, for various reasons, *needed* the struggle between themselves and the land, they felt no need to adapt themselves to it; second, because they viewed the land as formless, they felt free to impose upon it a colonial form. But questions still remain. Most nota-

bly, there is evidence indicating that one cannot simply discount the explorers' own knowledge and manipulation of these forms of discourse. Before we examine such evidence, however, we should establish the broadened grounds of our investigation. Ironically, in order to do so we first turn to a new historicist, Stephen Greenblatt. Greenblatt, in the third chapter of his *Marvellous Possessions*, begins with "the most famous of beginnings" (52) — Columbus's landfall in 1492. Upon landing, Greenblatt observes, Columbus enacts a curious ritual of possession. He unfurls the royal standard, assembles Spanish witnesses, and "officially" takes possession of the land for the Spanish sovereign. As Greenblatt observes, though the scene is certainly familiar to most of us, we should not lose sight of its absurdity. Indeed, the most interesting question about the entire episode is how the Spanish could observe what seems like such a hollow ceremony with perfect sincerity. They could do so, Greenblatt argues, because the ritual had nothing at all to do with a beach in the New World. Instead, Columbus's "actions are performed entirely *for a world elsewhere*" (56). Greenblatt's point is sound. Indeed, not only is his conclusion sound, I would also add that such acts were a common occurrence throughout the discovery of the New World. By the time Samuel Hearne's journal is published in 1795, Hearne (or his ghost-writer) could note that "*for the sake of form* . . . he erected a mark, and took possession of the coast, on behalf of the Hudson's Bay Company" (qtd. in MacLaren, "From Exploration" 44; emphasis added). Moreover, circumstances, in this case, make it absolutely clear that such an act was "performed" entirely for the journal's readers: as Ian MacLaren observes, Hearne makes no mention of this act in his field notes ("From Exploration" 44).

But even if it is the case that such acts of possession were enacted entirely for a European audience, what, one might ask, does this have to do with the journals of the officers of the first Franklin expedition? To put it simply: the journals themselves were written — *from their very inception* — for the same elsewhere. This may sound like a rather mundane observation, but it provides the grounds for some interesting conclusions. The first of these is that the difference between an explorer's field journal and the final published journal is perhaps not as significant as recent work by Davis and MacLaren would suggest.<sup>15</sup> While the final publication almost invariably shows signs of editorial revision, the difference between field notes and published manuscripts is not simply a matter of comparing an unadulterated text with one that has been altered to meet the demands of the explorer's audience. Rather, the difference between the two texts is one of degree — the final editing of the field journals

merely adds the final touches to a work which was almost entirely constructed a continent away. Thus, the whole question of authorial and editorial intent is a broad issue which involves more than just the comparison of two texts. Davis notes that “many explorers were conscious of the possibilities of literary manipulation” (“History” 104), but he does not take this conclusion far enough. Bruce Greenfield’s observation — that “the ‘discovery of America’ was not simply the location of a previously unknown land mass but rather a series of events that occurred as much in language as in a canoe” (25) — brings us further. I would add the following observation: we should be extremely conscious of the difference between the experience of “discovering” the New Land and the relation of that experience. This is not to say that the explorers were dishonest; indeed, according to the dictates of a propositional truth, the explorers were, in general, fairly honest men.<sup>16</sup> As Heidegger argues, however, the sense of truth itself is based on the prior revelation of the Truth of a whole world of significance.<sup>17</sup> Hence, particularly from a twentieth-century perspective, the assorted “truths” of these journals all too often turn out to be “lies.” There is more to this issue, however, than historical relativism. The explorers did not simply obey the Truth of their European world while describing their experiences in the New Land. They were also very aware of their world — and its concerns — and the expression of their experiences was constantly addressed to that world. However one regards this — as dialogics or deception — between the Old World text and the New World experiences a fascinating “subtext” of tension, or resistance, arises.

We first see this tension in the first of the explorers’ forced negotiations in the New Land: their involvement in the liquor trade. The English were well accustomed to the use of liquor as a medium of exchange. As Davis notes, “on British ships the men were rewarded morning and night with a ration of ‘grog’” (*Journals* lxxxiii). When they arrive in the New Land they bring alcohol, along with tobacco and ammunition, as one of their chief articles of trade. What they do not adequately foresee, however, is that trading in alcohol presents some serious moral difficulties. These difficulties arise from the way the explorers view the Indians and from the way alcohol affects the Indian way of life. First of all, the explorers view the Indians as subordinates. In Back’s first encounter with them he pities the “poor creatures” (Houston, *Arctic Artist* 5); Hood can only note: “I am unable to add fresh interest to a subject [the Inuit] which is almost exhausted” (Houston, *To the Arctic* 14). According to their English ideology, the treatment of all subordinates, of all races, follows

a paternal pattern. This is illustrated most clearly in the explorers' relationship with the voyageurs. The voyageurs are seen as thoughtless, appetite-driven children who can neither restrain themselves from complaining in times of need nor exercise the foresight to avoid such privation. "These thoughtless people," Franklin writes, "would, at any time, incur the hazard of absolute starvation at a future period, for the present gratification of their appetites" (362). Or, as Back notes in his typically succinct manner: "In short Canadian voyageurs must be treated and humoured exactly like children — that is when you are short of provisions — for as long as the article lasts — you may lead them anywhere" (Houston, *Arctic Artist* 151). Thus, it is the role of the explorers to act as the curb of a more mature reason on the uncontrolled urges of their subordinates. The explorers provide the guidance, foresight, and dedication to metaphysical vistas that channels the more immediate and physical interests and energies of those below them. Furthermore, while Wiebe writes that the voyageurs, to the explorers, "are little more than thoughtless hirelings of burden" (24), he underestimates the complexity of the relationship between the voyageurs and the explorers. As with their conception of the land, the explorers view the voyageurs as both malleable and in need of shaping hands. And just as a good steward cares for his land, so too do the explorers feel an obligation to the voyageurs that takes the form of a paternal interest in their well-being. This sense of obligation surfaces in Franklin's dedication to the fulfilment of his contracts with the voyageurs.

But if the explorers feel some obligation to the Indians because, as with the voyageurs, they view the Indians as subordinates, this sense of obligation is augmented by the fact that the character of the Indians is viewed as a complete *tabula rasa*. Perhaps influenced by Rousseau's vision of the "noble savage," the explorers view the Indians as pure, raw potential, primitives whose "faint glimmerings of infant reason" (Houston, *Arctic Artist* 62) are particularly open to both the vices and virtues of European society. As Franklin writes: "They are capable of being, and I believe willing, to be taught; but no pains have hitherto been taken to inform their minds" (65). The Indians, however, *have* been taught, and they have taught themselves. They have learned two things: first, that interaction with Europeans almost invariably takes the form of a trade; and secondly, that alcohol is one of the more desirable articles of trade. Franklin fumes over the canny trading of Akaitcho, the Coppermine "chief" who negotiates agreements between the explorers and his tribe,<sup>18</sup> and he is shocked at alcohol's effect on the lifestyle of the Indians. Alco-

hol, he writes, is “productive of an increasing deterioration of the character of the Indians” (84). Hood is more specific: “The deleterious effects of spiritous liquors have transformed the inoffensive and independent Indian into the slave of debilitating vice” (Houston, *To the Arctic* 85). Hood’s attempt to rationalize the situation is founded on a basic premise which, by now, is growing familiar:

the fur trade would be ruined, or would undergo a suspension equivalent to it, if spirits were withheld . . . *The original adventurers were not bound to improve the natives*: it formed no part of their charter, and by what other code could they have been expected to govern their conduct? (Houston, *To the Arctic* 86; emphasis added).

Clearly, while Europeans are either explorers, colonials, or “adventurers,” the Indians — like the land — are simply a potentiality whose actualization depends solely on whoever “discovers” them first. The introduction of alcohol into the native way of life is not seen as a threat to a hitherto autonomous people, but rather as a pitfall along the Indians’ path to civility.

Accordingly, the Indians’ adoption of a European vice is particularly troubling to the explorers because they see it as a flaw in the “redemption” of the Indians and the land. They do not wish to trade alcohol to the Indians because they are fully aware that such trade is detrimental to the Indians’ character. Franklin notes: “I do not wish to give them more of the baneful liquor than the stipulated quantity” (419). As Franklin’s statement implies, however, in spite of the explorers’ abhorrence of the liquor trade, they are forced to participate in it. And they are forced to trade liquor to the Indians because the image of the explorers which emerges from the *Narrative* and the journals, as commanding and purposeful imperial agents, is *completely incompatible* with the reality of their situation. Hood’s journal provides the first inklings of this contradiction: “On the 30th, two Indians arrived, one of whom, named the Warrior, was well known at the house. We endeavoured to prevail upon them to set out in quest of moose, which they agreed to do, on receiving some rum” (Houston, *To the Arctic* 54). As with Hood’s earlier description of being lost, this passage illustrates the explorers’ total dependence on the efforts of their Indian companions, a dependence which Hood underscores in a later, singular admission: “It was impossible . . . for us to subsist without hunters” (Houston, *To the Arctic* 147). In order to keep these hunters in their employ, in order to maintain their status as munificent discoverers, the explorers are forced to trade in the very substance which corrupts the high-minded aims of their colonialist discourse. Thus, almost as an after-

thought, Hood notes that the Indians agree to hunt only upon “receiving some rum,” while Franklin’s official version of such exchanges is even more coy: “announcing that he [one of the hunters] had killed a large moose, [he] immediately secured the reward which had been promised” (171). Here, then, two conclusions present themselves: first, the explorers were perfectly aware of — and entirely uncomfortable with — the moral and ideological inconsistencies involved in the trading of liquor; and second, they attempted to minimize the appearance of these inconsistencies in their accounts of the journey. Thus, while providing an essentially faithful account of such exchanges, the explorers downplay the fact that the expedition was entirely dependent upon them. Ironically, within the language itself, within the explorers’ own accounts, something of the original exchanges holds itself back, and it is this holding-of-itself-within-itself, this resistance, that speaks, almost two hundred years later, for a new aspect to the experience.

We witness a similar resistance in the relation of the second of these forced negotiations. This negotiation takes place between the explorers and Akaitcho, and it occurs on the shores of what is now known as Winter Lake. The explorers’ plan upon arrival on the shores of the lake is to “leave men employed in building a winter abode while [they descend] the Coppermine River, in two canoes, to the sea” (Houston, *To the Arctic* 134). But Akaitcho, who had agreed to the substance of such a plan while originally negotiating with the explorers, suddenly changes his mind and argues that it would be folly to proceed to the Arctic Ocean so late in the season. This is a crushing disappointment for the explorers, and it causes Hood to note: “if this undertaking can claim no other preeminence, it is at least distinguished by the most tedious and vexatious delays that have been incurred in the whole progress of discovery” (Houston, *To the Arctic* 148). Franklin, however, carefully and logically outlines Akaitcho’s argument and writes that he “came at length, most reluctantly” (Davis, *Journals* 52), to agree with Akaitcho’s assessment of the situation. As Franklin relates in the *Narrative*:

he [Akaitcho] began by stating that the very attempt would be rash and dangerous, as the weather was cold, the leaves were falling, some geese had passed to the southward, and the winter would shortly set in. (225)

Franklin then writes that “it was far from our intention to proceed without considering every argument for and against the proposed journey” (225). Franklin’s characterization of his own reasonable nature and his generous relation of Akaitcho’s argument constitute an extremely signifi-

cant rhetorical strategy, for it is the only occasion in the *Narrative* (or in Franklin's journal) that an Indian, and an Indian's ability to reason, is elevated to the same level as the explorers. Why, one wonders, does Franklin suddenly adopt this strategy? There are two reasons, neither of which has anything to do with the argument on Winter Lake.

Franklin's first motivation stems from his very clear perception of the demands of Admiral Barrow and the Royal Navy. He has orders to explore the coast, and he knows that the more closely he appears to conform to these orders the more he will be rewarded for his efforts. Thus, when he becomes aware that it is impossible for the expedition to proceed to the Arctic Ocean in the summer of 1820, he carefully relates Akaitcho's argument in order to make it seem as if he is still in complete control of the situation, as if both Akaitcho and he have reached this decision together. Based on Franklin's account, one might presume that the entire argument was conducted between two English-speaking individuals over tea. The fact that these are Akaitcho's words in translation, and the fact that language difficulties are entirely glossed over, should not be forgotten. We should always be aware that Akaitcho's argument is much more of a mediated construction than Franklin allows. And Franklin constructs Akaitcho's argument as carefully as he does because he realizes that, according to the terms of a colonialist discourse, it is improper for the decisions of an English officer to be unduly affected by the opinions of his subordinates. Dr. Richardson certainly illustrates such a knowledge when he describes the voyageurs' later discontent and Franklin's subsequent decision to abandon further exploration along the coast:

This conduct of the crew is not mentioned as influencing Mr. Franklin's determination, for it had been long evident to the officers that the time spent in exploring what has been since named Accession Gulf with its extensive branches, Arctic and Melville sounds and Bathurst Inlet had precluded every hope of getting round to Repulse Bay and that in order to insure a fair prospect of a safe journey across the barren grounds, our voyage along the coast must speedily terminate. (Houston, *Arctic Ordeal* 111)

Franklin also adopts this strategy because it neatly sidesteps the central issue of the "argument": regardless of the substance of Akaitcho's reasons, the expedition is helpless without the aid of the Indians, and thus entirely dependent on Akaitcho's decision. Indeed, Back reveals that Franklin and his officers had actually decided to ignore Akaitcho's advice, but were brought up short by Akaitcho's retaliatory decision to withhold aid:



In vain did we argue on our knowledge of the weather — on the accuracy of our instruments and the caution that would be taken for the prevention of any unpleasant circumstance — it was all useless... We had fully determined to go before notwithstanding his remonstrances to the contrary — but his last sentence [in which Akaitcho claimed that he would then withdraw his aid] which would very soon have been put into execution — stopped us at once. (Houston, *Arctic Artist* 85)

Again, the implications are clear: while the expedition is entirely dependent on the Indians, the explorers' desire to appear in control means that they must actively over-write some of the aspects of this relationship. Greenfield notes a similar process in the journal of Samuel Hearne: "Hearne had to make many compromises with his companions and the northern environment, and his account of his journey struggles to represent this process of adaptation without appearing to have betrayed the European motivations of his journey" (42). Hearne, admittedly, was even more dependent on the Coppermine Indians than Franklin and his men, but his authorial "struggles" certainly match those of the later explorers. In both situations, the explorers struggle to reduce a new environment and a new world to the terms of an alien discourse. But the land and its peoples resist such a reduction, and they do so in the very terms, in the very language, of the explorers themselves.

The expedition's third and final negotiation takes place on the long march back from the Arctic Ocean. There are two prominent features to this march: the officers' gradual loss of authority over the voyageurs, and the actual negotiation itself, which takes the form of a deadly decision. Midshipman Back, after having survived the march, and after the voyageurs have undoubtedly saved his life, makes an interesting comment which sheds some light on the nature of the relationship between the explorers and the voyageurs on this final leg of their journey. He writes:

The former [St. Germain, the expedition's Métis interpreter] was to be discharged there [at Fort Simpson] according to his agreement — but more particularly for the line of conduct (his exceeding bad conduct — which increased rather than diminished) he had thought proper to follow during his service with us — on this head I have been almost silent with respect to him — and perfectly so with the others — happy to escape so unpleasant a task — though to say the least no set of men could have behaved worse. (Houston, *Arctic Artist* 202)

This observation is little short of astounding, especially considering the debt Back owes to the voyageurs who died carrying English goods. It is

even more jarring, however, if one reads this passage in comparison with the *Narrative*. To be sure, the *Narrative* also mentions the misbehaviour of the voyageurs, but the *Narrative's* tone differs from that of Back. Nowhere is this more clear than in Franklin's oft-cited relation of the voyageurs' uprising at Dissension Lake. The *Narrative*, for example, informs us that Franklin had "to address . . . [the voyageurs] in the strongest manner of the danger of insubordination" (217). It is Back, however, who describes the precise nature of Franklin's "manner": "Mr Franklin told them . . . he would not hesitate to make an example of the first person who should come forward — 'by blowing out his brains'" (Houston, *Arctic Artist* 81). Again, Franklin's diplomacy seems to stem from his desire to appear as if he and his officers are in complete control. After all, to admit that such threats were necessary would be tantamount to admitting that his hold over the voyageurs was tenuous at best.

Even in the official *Narrative*, however, it soon becomes apparent that the English lost even the semblance of authority on the trek back from the Ocean. Early in the journey Franklin makes the first admission of difficulties: "Our men now began to find their burdens oppressive" (400). Significantly, he still refers to the voyageurs as "our men" — a practice he neglects as relations become more strained. The voyageurs, meanwhile, must carry two canoes, in addition to their sizable packs, while "the officers [carry] such a portion of their own things as their strength would permit" (398). Understandably, the voyageurs begin to do a little negotiating of their own. Franklin writes that "they . . . threatened to throw away their bundles, and quit us" (415). He then notes, on the very same page, that "Dr. Richardson was obliged to deposit his specimens of plants and minerals" (415). Despite the proximity of these observations he does not acknowledge any connection between the voyageurs' threats and the fact that Dr. Richardson was "obliged" to abandon his samples. Once again Franklin seems to skew the emphasis of his relation of events in order to assert some narrative control.

As the situation worsens Franklin's tone begins to take on some of the frustration he feels over his inability to control the proceedings of the expedition. When the expedition is blocked at Obstruction Rapids the explorers and the voyageurs disagree over how to cross the river. Franklin describes this disagreement with the voyageurs (who certainly knew more about crossing rapids than Franklin did) in almost petulant tones: "both these schemes [regarding the construction of rafts] were abandoned, through the obstinacy of the interpreters and the most experienced voyageurs, who declared that they would prove inadequate to the convey-

ance of the party” (419). The growing distance between the English explorers and the voyageurs is also reflected in the almost paranoid tone of his observations. There is, for example, a strange inconsistency in his account of the fate of the two canoes which the voyageurs were forced to carry across the tundra. In the *Narrative* he writes that “the canoes became a source of delay, by the difficulty of carrying them in high wind” (399). In his journal he is more specific about the reasons for this delay: “These poor Men [the voyageurs] Could not Support themselves or manage their unwieldy burdens against the more violent Squalls and often fell down” (Davis, *Journals* 174). When the last surviving canoe finally succumbs to this rough treatment he notes that “the canoe was unfortunately broken” (413). In his journal, however, he notes that the voyageurs “deeply lamented their folly and impatience in breaking the canoe” (Davis, *Journals* 192). Clearly, we will never know exactly what happened to such a crucial piece of equipment. Davis notes that Franklin “seemed only capable, like most people, of blaming the difficult circumstances on someone else” (*Journals* lviii). And indeed, when the situation gets really desperate, Franklin accuses the voyageurs of “stealing” the officers’ food: “We subsequently learned that the hunters often secreted the partridges they shot, and ate them unknown to the officers” (423). This accusation provides some insight into the complexity of the situation. The officers are completely helpless without the voyageurs. They cannot carry their own belongings, let alone any of the expedition’s supplies, and they are completely reliant on their men for food. The expedition separates into two parties and, in a letter to Back, Franklin reveals the true insecurity of this situation, an insecurity which he struggles to keep out of his journal and the *Narrative*. Back writes:

Bellanger arrived with a note from Mr. Franklin — which informed me that the men were in a state of mutiny — and had commenced throwing away their loads to follow me — that the canoe was broken to pieces and left the day before — and that affairs could not be worse. (Houston, *Arctic Artist* 177)

Clearly, the truly surprising aspect of this last trek is not that the English officers lost control of the expedition, but rather that they managed to maintain any control at all.

The reason they managed to maintain some control over the expedition, however, lies in their last negotiation with the land. One could certainly argue that the voyageurs continued to carry their loads and follow the officers’ commands because they themselves came from a highly

regimented society. As contracted members of a lower class, they were expected to perform certain duties, and, for the most part, they did so. As Heidegger observes, however, “The present-at-hand, as Dasein encounters it, can, as it were, assault Dasein’s Being; natural events, for instance, can break in upon us and destroy us” (*Being and Time* 193). Events had certainly reached such an impasse on this march — so why did the voyageurs not forsake their role, their Being as porters, and leave the Englishmen to starve? They may very well have done so, but they could not because only the English officers knew how to plot the return course to Fort Enterprise. Back illustrates the officers’ awareness of this fact: “the men [were] threatening to leave their small loads, and save themselves by flight — which resolution would have been put into execution — had they possessed a guide to have led them” (Houston, *Arctic Artist* 175). Since the voyageurs do not have a guide, they do the only thing they can do, which is to “urge... [Franklin]... to allow them to throw down their loads, and proceed to Fort Enterprise with the utmost speed” (431). But Franklin cannot allow them to do this because he is fully aware that without the weight of their loads the voyageurs would soon leave the officers behind. He writes: “the men were totally ignorant of the course to be taken, and none of the officers, who could have directed the march, were sufficiently strong to keep up at the pace they would *then* walk” (431; emphasis added). Davis writes that the explorers could not abandon their equipment because “to leave the instruments and equipment behind would mean abandoning a way of thinking about the universe” (*Journals* xiv), but Franklin’s decision, his last negotiation, clearly has little to do with the forms of discourse or social codes ostensibly governing the explorers’ conduct. Franklin’s negotiation, faithfully — if marginally — recorded, reads like an admission of surrender. It abrogates every tenet of a masculinist or a colonialist discourse. It illustrates that the explorers could, and did, adapt quite radically to severe circumstances. And it seems clear that Franklin deliberately minimized this negotiation in order to avoid undermining the ideological structures of the world to which he was writing — but for the addition of a “then” the substance of the entire negotiation would have been lost.

This last negotiation then, like the previous negotiations, illustrates that the inflexibility of the English was both an unconscious *and* a conscious decision. Because the explorers were fully aware of the inconsistencies of their situation, and because they chose to minimize these inconsistencies in deference to the “they,” the public world to which they were writing, their response to the Arctic was fundamentally *inauthentic*.

This is not to say that their depiction of the Arctic was inaccurate (though it certainly was), but rather that they refused to present the Arctic as it appeared to their own eyes, as it emerged in their own embodied experience. They were *not* the blind disciples of Eurocentric forms of discourse, and therein lies the inauthenticity of their response. Their experience in the Arctic made it clear that many of the assumptions of the world to which they were writing were false, but instead of questioning these assumptions they helped perpetuate them. And there is a final example of this unctuousness in Franklin's description of the return from the Arctic Ocean. As events spiral completely out of control, Franklin increasingly addresses "the mercy of the Omnipotent, who alone could save and deliver us" (464). Again, this is a form of narrative control. Franklin makes this gesture for the benefit of his audience, and he does so because he is fully aware that according to English ideology God is the only being to whom he can officially relinquish control. Having framed his relation of the entire expedition around the presupposition that an English officer is master of all situations, he uses these references to the "Almighty" in order to avoid making explicit the obvious conclusion: that the Polar regions are not mere geography, and that *authentic* human will also involves the willing freedom to adapt to new worlds and new situations.

In 1823 Willard Wentzel, a clerk and guide to the explorers, wrote that "it is doubtful whether . . . an authentic account of their [the explorers'] operations will ever meet the public eye in England" (146). The concerns he expressed in 1823 are just as relevant now. Questions, myriads of questions, still shadow the "true" circumstances of the First Franklin Expedition. The irony is profound: Franklin's first expedition is arguably the most minutely recorded and widely read of all narratives of exploration, and yet the more accurately it purports to portray the New World, the more questions, details, simply slip past its narrative grasp. The final irony, however, is that all of our critical observations are based on the explorers' own self-serving texts. As Davis observes, Franklin's greatest and most inexplicable error may very well have been the fact that he did not edit the final *Narrative* enough (*Journals* lxxxvi). Davis argues that this is simply another aspect of Franklin's myopia, that Franklin simply could not see that he was implicating himself in the failure of the expedition. Perhaps, however, there are other reasons for Franklin's complicity; perhaps, as Heidegger might argue, it has something to do with the nature of language itself.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See pp. xliii, xliv, and xlv.

<sup>2</sup> Stefansson is certainly not the sole proponent of such a belief. Olivia Patricia Dickason, writing about the voyages of Henry Kelsey in 1690-92, notes: "Adapting the Amerindian expertise was a major factor in the success of later voyages; Hearne, for example, encountered only failure until he accepted the advice of his Chipewyan guide" (66).

<sup>3</sup> As Foucault observes: "the signifying chain by which the unique experience of the individual is constituted is perpendicular to the formal system on the basis of which the significations of a culture are constituted: at any given instant, the structure proper to individual experience finds a certain number of possible choices (and of excluded possibilities) in the systems of the society" (380).

<sup>4</sup> Heidegger, Foucault admitted, "has always been for me the essential philosopher" (qtd. in Prado 5).

<sup>5</sup> See Heidegger's *Being and Time*, 174-79.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example: I.S. MacLaren's study, "Retaining Captaincy of the Soul: Response to Nature in the First Franklin Expedition"; Barbara Belyea's "Captain Franklin in Search of the Picturesque"; Richard C. Davis's "History or His/Story? The Explorer Cum Author"; and Robert Stacey's "From 'Icy Picture' to 'Extensive Prospect': The Panorama of Rupert's Land and the Far North in the Artist's Eye, 1770-1830."

<sup>7</sup> For a complete discussion of the differences between landscape and geography, see John Moss's *Enduring Dreams: An Exploration of Arctic Landscape*, 3-27. See also Lorrie Graham's and Tim Wilson's Heideggerian interpretation of Moss's work in "Questions of Being: An Exploration of *Enduring Dreams*." For a discussion of the use of "blank spaces" as a discursive strategy in Western colonialist discourse, see Lisa Bloom's *Gender on Ice: American Ideologies of Polar Expeditions*.

<sup>8</sup> See *Being and Time*, 135-48; see also Heidegger's "Remembrance of the Poet," 256-58.

<sup>9</sup> See Rudy Wiebe, *Playing Dead: A Contemplation Concerning the Arctic*, 16.

<sup>10</sup> For a complete discussion of this term see *Being and Time*, 188.

<sup>11</sup> For a complete discussion of masculinist discourse see Arthur Brittan's *Masculinity and Power*.

<sup>12</sup> The evidence for these tensions within the party comes from Joseph René Bellot's *Memoirs*, in which Bellot writes that seaman John Hepburn, the only English seaman to accompany the expedition from beginning to end, was witness to a duel between Hood and Back over an Indian woman known as Greensleeves to the English. According to Bellot, Hepburn "drew the charges" on both men's pistols before the duel, and no one was hurt (253).

<sup>13</sup> See Davis, *Journals*, lxxxiv, and Wiebe, 31.

<sup>14</sup> As Hood notes in his journal (and Franklin appropriates for the *Narrative*): "the Canadians show great dexterity. Their simultaneous motions were strongly contrasted with the awkward confusion of the inexperienced Englishmen, deafened by the torrent; who sustained the blame of every accident which occurred" (Houston, *To the Arctic* 106).

<sup>15</sup> See MacLaren, "From Exploration to Publication: The Evolution of a 19th-Century Arctic Narrative," and Davis, "History or His/Story? The Explorer Cum Author."

<sup>16</sup> Franklin, for example, scrupulously honoured his contracts with the voyageurs, with Willard Wentzel (a clerk who acted as interpreter and guide), and, eventually, with the Coppermine Indians. As Franklin remarks at one point, "I would stake my life on the certainty of their [the Indians'] getting paid" (Davis, *Journals* 139). While the fairness of the

remuneration of these parties is certainly debatable, there is no question that Franklin acted in accordance with the contracts he negotiated.

<sup>17</sup> See *Being and Time*, 256-73; see also Heidegger's "On the Essence of Truth."

<sup>18</sup> "His Conduct," Franklin writes, "reminded me of the pettish freaks of a Spoiled child" (Davis, *Journals* 137). Davis observes: "One wonders if Franklin would have seen these same bargaining skills in a Scottish trader as canny, rather than deceitful or treacherous" (*Journals* cii).

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