

of Antarctica's seabirds and seals (and indeed other wildlife) through informed debate and the regulation of human activity. They conclude that what is needed now is the will of all nations involved in activities that have a 'footprint' in the Antarctic to work to the spirit (and not just the letter) of the existing regulatory framework. This is likely to become progressively more important in the future as climate change and increased human activity in the Antarctic lead to greater risk of disease introduction or transmission.

This volume set out to provide an up-to-date overview for a broad audience. Such a task is a 'tall order'; however, this book does not disappoint and offers a comprehensive primer and source of reference for both scientists and policy advisers alike. It brings together a comprehensive set of contributions and an important bibliography that I for one, will consult well into the future. (P. Tratham, British Antarctic Survey, High Cross, Madingley Road, Cambridge CB3 0ET.)

TRACING THE CONNECTED NARRATIVE: ARCTIC EXPLORATION IN BRITISH PRINT CULTURE, 1818–1860. Janice Cavell. 2008. Toronto and London: University of Toronto Press. Studies in Book and Print Culture. xi + 332 p, illustrated with plates, hard cover. ISBN: 978-0-8020-9280-9. UK £40. doi:10.1017/S0032247410000057

When John Ross returned, miraculously, from the Arctic in 1833 he was embraced by a vibrant print culture. Long before an official narrative was published, newspapers and periodicals energetically circulated his story. Across the country, songsters hailed his endeavours, theatre impresarios mounted melodramas in his name, and panoramic shows and grand outdoor spectacles tempted the public to dig into their pockets to experience the wonders of the Arctic icescape. His admirers courted him. The explorer-hero found himself honoured in verse and ridiculed in satirical prints, such was the currency of his celebrity. He was, by all accounts, albeit for just a moment, the most well-known man in Britain, the lion of the season. He was certainly the most written about, and 'read about', polar explorer yet seen. His reputation was malleable, retelling the expedition allowed editors to increase their share of a rapidly expanding readership or articulate their patriotism by associating with his successes. For some he was a champion of self-improvement and religious conviction, others took pride in his nautical daring, whilst most of the public thought the spectacle of an expedition to the Arctic just mildly interesting, if not an utter waste of time.

Surprisingly, the drama of Ross's expedition in the 1830s does not command much coverage in this book. Cavell's focus on Arctic exploits as represented in periodical culture is drawn more, as one might expect, toward the machinations of Sir John Barrow, the all consuming tragedy of Sir John Franklin's final expedition, the often cited journalism of Dickens, and newspaper reports following the search for the missing party, culminating in the celebrated return of Leopold McClintock in 1859. This is a satisfying, but frustrating mix.

Within a wealth of source material, Cavell discovers wide ranging similarities in the presentation of explorers, what she calls 'the connected narrative', which apparently united the disparate elements of society to a common interest in their exploits. She borrows a neat turn of phrase from *The Illustrated London News*, the editor of which encouraged his readers to follow his list of polar stories to be found in its pages during 1854. Cavell's examination of exploration as a textual exercise performs a similar function, this is much more than a list, of course, but as a compilation cast within a 40 year gaze it necessarily directs attention to some aspects of Arctic history, whilst leaving many others aside. Which books to review, which polar explorers to focus upon, which readers to bring

forward? Exploration aroused mixed responses that often defy easy categorisation. An equal measure of naval fortitude and indecision during this period was matched by intense public excitement and governmental indifference. Yet, Cavell points to the evolution of an 'Arctic metanarrative', an imagining that conditioned the way people thought of, spoke for, debated against, perhaps even dreamed about explorers. Readers can neither be considered as generic and passive, nor circumstances and contexts generalised, else they become meaningless. One feels wary to ascribe an overarching narrative to such variety.

There are omissions. A book of this length, yet with its ambition of detail, could not hope to be definitive, but there are also some errors that injure an otherwise well considered textual foray. The major missing feature of this examination of the literary landscape is that of visual culture, for one aspect cannot operate in isolation from the other. Although there are a few familiar portraits and the odd plate from a published narrative, there is little or no detailed interpretation of the images that we find within books themselves or, in fact, any reflection on the idea that images are themselves *texts*, to be translated, scrutinised, given a history, as much as the printed word.

If one strays a little from the familiar then one can discover an overwhelmingly bright visual culture that frequently cast the dryly written, lengthy, not to mention expensive, official tomes into the shade. One feels that illustrations in Cavell's book, and her analysis more generally, ought to have engaged this material, for a major premise here is that exploration was as much read about during this century, as it was viewed and encountered in theatres, lecture halls and society soirees. Her definition of print culture is too narrow. There is little or no discussion of popular ballads, magic lantern shows and theatrical entertainments. There is not much on the buoyant illustrated press or juvenile literature, nor is there any coverage of the many panoramas and other Arctic entertainments that generated, and in turn fed from, the popular interest in explorers and their adventures.

A useful example of this mistake is embodied in the image chosen to adorn the front cover of Cavell's book. It is a defaced detail from a handbill for a magic lantern spectacular in 1875, as the Navy was turning its attentions to the Arctic once again with an expedition under George Strong Nares. I can only assume this was chosen for the eccentric beauty of its typesetting, for she makes no mention of it in her book. This particular performance, by veteran showman Edward Bennett, featured his 'brilliant diaphanic diorama' of the perils of Arctic exploration, a lecture accompanied with maps, portraits, photographs, and various mechanical and pyrotechnic effects including a 'luminous' aurora and the beauties of the polar night. Bennett urged his audience to look forward to future success amongst the ice: 'A GLORY GREAT AS THAT OF TRAFALGAR, viz, the DISCOVERY OF THE NORTH POLE!'. To concentrate solely

on book reviews in journals, to the neglect of the many polar spectaculars during this period is a shame indeed.

These reservations withstanding, there is much here that is insightful. Overall, this study may have broad interest to cultural and historical geographers, and the increasing number of literary historians who are engaging these appealing, imaginative realms. Examining the reading experience of a range of nineteenth century audiences is no longer a *terra incognita* however (author's words). For the polar regions, particularly, this approach is not as novel as she claims, Beau Riffenburgh, Francis Spufford, Robert David, Ian MacLaren, Russell Potter, Max Jones, Jen Hill and Michael Robinson have all considered writing *about* polar exploration with varying success elsewhere, and Cavell employs the work of other scholars throughout, whilst positioning her own findings. Many sections read like a doctoral thesis too quickly rushed into print, as was perhaps the case. She borrows from the late Richard Altick, whose *English Common Reader*, remains a print culture classic. She looks for material from authors and theorists old and new, from Carlyle, Froude and Samuel Smiles to Foucault, Norman Vance, Jonathan Rose, Linda Colley, and that fine anthropologist, the late Greg Denning, to enhance her interpretation of this unique polar source material.

At other moments the depth and novelty of her research is impressive. I know of no other in recent times who, for the sake of following the trail of these explorers, has journeyed through periodicals such as *Bentley's Miscellany*, *Black Dwarf*, *Leisure Hour*, the *Mirror of Literature*, the *Eclectic Review*, *Littel's Living Age*, and the innumerable journals of Messrs. Fraser, Sharpe, Tait and Macmillan, and many more besides. It is an exhausting approach that yields much that is new to modern readers. Nineteenth century explorers acted within an energetic and pervasive culture of print, and Cavell is right to tackle it. In newspapers, magazines and reviews, radical editors, established authors, hack writers, and eager members of the public heaped praise on explorers, their expeditions and their books, but they also questioned, criticised, protested and speculated from a huge range of ideological and literary viewpoints. It is in this daunting public sphere of journalism and reader response that a more sophisticated understanding of Arctic exploration as a cultural phenomenon is to be found.

There is a great deal here that I admire. Based at the historical section of Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada, Cavell's work has a feel of fresh independence about it, which is a surprise, and other papers have begun to build her reputation as a scholar with a valuable contribution to make. In one useful article in *Polar Record* (Cavell 2009), for example, drawing upon periodical and newspaper coverage, Cavell reconsidered public attitudes during the Franklin search. She hoped to diffuse much of the quasi-academic commentary that has appeared in recent years, bitter writing which invented a debilitating cultural prejudice among English explorers, a naive caricature at best, dooming them to failure in the Arctic while all around them Inuit peoples flourished in some sort of indigenous, intuitive polar idyll. Yet historical antagonisms such as these are not always simple, nor are opposing interpretations irreconcilable.

There must always be room for differing approaches. Cavell's work, more than anything, teaches us to look widely at primary and secondary sources and to be as accurate as we are sensitive in interpreting the information we have before us.

Cavell's work, like that of some scholars before her, urges us to be aware that explorers mean many things to many people. Attitudes range considerably over time, to be re-made and re-imagined by those who look again at the historical record, moving selectively through its cultural detritus. As historians we are part of this process, but caution and an awareness of our own limitations is required. As Cavell admits, there is still much work to do to understand the complex processes through which the discourse of polar heroism took shape. Franklin, for example, was a man of his time, excellent, limited, ambitious, innocent of our standards. We sometimes read about him now and find a career made fatuous, a figure transformed into a bungling pantomime villain by some scholars, especially Canadian revisionists revelling in the false superiority of hindsight. He was a ripe target for this uneven modern critique, perhaps, elevated as he was by a host of Victorian admirers, but an endless and reductive anti-hagiography is injurious to the historical record. British explorers have suffered long enough under this re-interpretive gaze.

Cavell is in tune with this call for nuance and balance when scrutinising the heroes of the past. 'What the story meant to Franklin himself and his contemporaries', she writes, 'is a question rarely explored in any depth. The explanation usually given is brief and stereotyped'. Popular historians, journalists and novelists have done wonders to reinvigorate general interest in Arctic exploration history, but there is risk in soundbite and simplification. Equally, the desire for academic theorising cannot replace interpretation based upon evidence. Multi-disciplinary approaches to polar history, however they are espoused, however innovative they may claim to be, must pass this first step if they aim for credibility: they must be based on solid factual research, not merely speculative jargon dressed with historical detailing, cherry picked from already published works. Cavell, thankfully, aims her talents in the direction of considered research. As Professor Andrew Lambert summarises, in his elegant recent study of Franklin's reputation, '... behind every bronze hero is a human being, an urgent, flawed life in pursuit of some fragment of immortality. We should listen, not judge, because our ancestors were human, and in seeing their humanity we might recall our own before the lights go out for ever' (Lambert 2009: 351). (H.W.G. Lewis-Jones, Scott Polar Research Institute, University of Cambridge, Lensfield Road, Cambridge, CB2 1ER.)

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