

## The Aesthetic Map of the North, 1845-1859

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**ABSTRACT.** The aesthetics of the Sublime and the Picturesque comprised the perceptual baggage with which early nineteenth-century British explorers and travellers combed the globe. As important to their identification of space as measurements of longitude and latitude, these two schemata governed the ways in which the Canadian Arctic was described and depicted during the British search for a Northwest Passage from 1819 to 1859. During the last ten years of this period, when the majority of mariners travelled and resided in the arctic archipelago, more and more fanciful representations appeared on the aesthetic map that their writing and painting were charting. These more fanciful mappings opened a wider discrepancy between perception of landscape and environmental reality, which invited disastrous consequences for the searchers, but in the face of the growing realization that Franklin's crews had been consumed by arctic nature, the need to mask the terror of the realm by invoking modes of describing and depicting European nature became paramount. The adaptation by means of the genial Sublime and the Picturesque of the land, rather than the traveller, if it did not provide what can be considered a realistic picture of the North today, nevertheless fortified British optimism and morale sufficiently to see the search for Franklin through to a successful conclusion.

**Key words:** arctic exploration 1819-59, the Sublime, the Picturesque, aesthetic mapping

**RÉSUMÉ.** Les esthétiques du Sublime et du Pittoresque comprenaient le bagage perceptuel dont les explorateurs et les voyageurs de la Grande Bretagne au début du dix-neuvième siècle ratissaient la Terre. Aussi important que leur identification de l'espace comme mesure de longitude et de latitude, ces deux schémas, celui du Sublime et celui du Pittoresque, ont gouverné les moyens de décrire et de dépeindre l'Arctique canadien pendant la recherche britannique d'un passage du Nord-Ouest entre 1819 et 1859. Pendant la dernière décennie de cette période, quand la majorité des marins voyageait et demeurait à l'archipel arctique canadien, de plus en plus de représentations fantasques ont apparu sur la carte esthétique que leur écriture et que leur peinture portaient. La divergence entre la perception du paysage et la réalité de l'environnement était le résultat de ce mouvement et a invité aux conséquences désastreuses pour les marins eux-mêmes; Cependant, en se rendant compte que l'équipe de Franklin avait été la proie de la nature de l'Arctique, le besoin de déguiser la terreur de ce domaine en invoquant des manières de décrire et de peindre selon les schémas européens est devenu d'une suprême importance; l'adaptation du paysage plutôt que celle du voyageur, par les moyens du Sublime affable et du Pittoresque, si elle ne pouvait pas donner ce qui peut être considéré un vrai portrait du grand Nord d'aujourd'hui, a néanmoins renforcé l'optimisme et le moral des Britanniques suffisamment pour voir à ce que la recherche de l'expédition perdue de Franklin fut complétée.

**Mots clés:** l'exploration de l'Arctique canadien 1819-1859, le Sublime, le Pittoresque, la carte esthétique

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### INTRODUCTION

From 1818 to 1859 the British Admiralty waged a concerted campaign to discover a Northwest Passage. It was only one of a series of mammoth enterprises on the part of the British nation that were undertaken in order to know the world intimately. During the same period, of course, Charles Darwin sailed in HMS *Beagle* to South America, uncovering evidence that would lead to a new understanding of the history of life on the planet. David Douglas made his herculean trips on the Pacific slope of North America, discovering the mighty sugar pine and thousands of other species. Thomas Huxley sailed in HMS *Rattlesnake* to Australia and explored anatomical identities that would rend Victorian notions of a harmonious relation between natural processes and moral ends. David Livingstone would shed light on the interior of the earth's darkest continent.

The extraordinary feats of these great British explorers often overshadow the more modest travels of a great number of early nineteenth-century Britons. Tours to Europe had been viewed since Renaissance times as a vital part of any English gentleman's education, but toward the end of the eighteenth century the focus of the Grand Tour shifted slightly from the touring of continental art galleries and historical sites to the description and depiction of Europe's geographical wonders and beauties. Then, in the last decades of the century, continental hostilities kept most English tourists at home; consequently, tours around their own island became fashionable, with

numerous guidebooks by such self-proclaimed guides as William Gilpin (Barbier, 1963) and William Wordsworth (1970) appearing to tell the traveller where to go and what to see.

By the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815, British explorers, like less adventurous British travellers, were well versed not only in astronomical computations for charting landscapes, but also in two important and widely known aesthetic principles used to chart landscapes and seascapes — the Sublime and the Picturesque. Just as the measurements of latitude and longitude told the explorer where he stood relative to Greenwich, so the description of new tracts as more or less sublime or picturesque permitted him to identify the new lands relative to those British and European scenes familiar to him and to his readership. The deployment of these aesthetic principles formed a crucial part of geographical discovery in the North from the time of Samuel Hearne's three overland treks (1769-72). The geographical character of the vast subcontinent was being defined, except in the more prosaic and factual of the post journals kept by fur trade factors, only partially by the environment's own features; it was being defined as well in terms of, if in contrast to, known geography. "The geography of any place," Watson (1969:10) has argued, "results from how we [want to] see it as much as from what may be seen there." Not surprisingly, the discovery of the North entailed a similar process of identification that combined human expectation and fact, illusion and empirical reality.

It has been argued by Gombrich (1960) that the visual world can be represented only by known and widely held schemata

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or modes of perception. In the case of the nineteenth-century British explorer in the Arctic, the known schemata for representing nature in prose and pictures were the Sublime and the Picturesque. They would permit him, figuratively speaking, to draw aesthetic maps of the Arctic that other Britons could read sensibly. Thus, they acted as the Linnaean system for botanical identifications did for the naturalists among the explorers and as the astronomical computations of latitude and longitude did for the astronomers among them. All such systems are, loosely speaking, taxonomies or schemata — in short, metaphors, but metaphors that, because of the authority vested in them by a society, become accepted as the most accurate measurements of the external world.

The Sublime referred to the geography of vastness — vast open space whose dimensions defy definition or even imagination. Open stretches of ocean or prairie, perilous mountain peaks or abysses, thunderstorms or tornadoes — nature in its extreme habits threatening human welfare and inspiring fear and wonder — were regarded as the sublime qualities of the external world. In 1756 Edmund Burke (1958) had disseminated the notion of the Sublime among British readers. It had been an item in the aesthetic baggage of travellers to the Swiss and Italian Alps since the mid-sixteenth century. Burke's treatise made an understanding of it an indispensable item (Monk, 1960).

The Picturesque grew out of the habit of viewing tracts of land as if they were landscape paintings. A prospect or viewing "station," usually set on a moderate rise, looked out over a foreground, a lower middle ground through which a river meandered, and an enclosing background of bluish hills or mountains. A single vanishing point on the horizon encouraged a single, static perspective from each "station"; at the sides of the view, trees in clumps or rows would act as *coulisses* (literally, the wing curtains on the stage of a French theatre) to "frame" the scene and encourage the single perspective. Great variety in elevation, vegetation, and light intensity was sought in the landscape, but the sense of all features harmonizing was never to be sacrificed. The notion of a composed landscape remained paramount (Hussey, 1927; Barrell, 1972). Extreme displays of nature that threatened to burst the bounds of the moderate, composed, framed view had no part in this aesthetic. Indeed, because the foreground usually included signs of, or else seemed to invite, leisurely habitation by humans or domesticated animals, the picturesque landscape usually confirmed the British eighteenth-century belief, disseminated by Newton in science and by Pope and Thomson in poetry, that a basic harmony operated in the relations between man and his world. The seeker after the Picturesque in nature was meant to discover that quintessential harmony.

Because the wild, the desolate, the vast, the sublime geographical features of Europe lie, for the most part, outside England, the Picturesque became England's aesthetic (Lowenthal and Prince, 1964, 1965). It was, proclaimed Stendhal, one of the essential aspects of early nineteenth-century England (Hussey, 1927:128). The Englishman who discovered the Picturesque abroad, therefore, was achieving three purposes: he

was affirming England's belief in its own imperial destiny by stamping foreign tracts as English in appearance; he was conducting his travels/explorations in a sufficiently orderly manner to be able to perceive the composed qualities of nature; and, most importantly, he was nourishing his own aesthetic identity as an Englishman, which required sustenance in proportion to his temporal distance from the gentle hill-and-dale topography of his Home Countries or the more rugged but still composed lacustrine beauty of his English Lake District.

#### AESTHETIC RESPONSES TO THE NORTH UP TO 1849

During the first two decades of the Admiralty's assault on the Northwest Passage (1818-37), British explorers naturally discovered countless sublime landscapes, as Loomis (1977) has demonstrated. But it would be a mistake to overlook the many picturesque views that they recorded and the function played by them. One instance must suffice for present purposes. Fort Enterprise (Fig. 1) was erected in autumn 1820 on a site chosen in part for aesthetic reasons by John Franklin and the officers of his first overland expedition (MacLaren, 1984a). Robert Hood, the midshipman who did not survive the tundra crossing in 1821, considered "the beauty of the situation" at Fort Enterprise to have "far exceeded our most sanguine expectations" (Hood, 1974:79). "We could not have selected," wrote John Richardson to his mother, "a more convenient or beautiful spot. The surrounding country is finely varied by hill and dale and interspersed with numerous lakes connected by small streams" (McIlraith, 1868:63). The picturesque view commanded from the fort overlooked two lakes of moderate size (Winter and Round-Rock), joined by a meandering stream, all set in a valley at the tree line near the headwaters of the Yellowknife River. The completion of the fort permitted the completion of the landscape picture by presenting a humanized foreground that looked down into the lacustrine middle ground, where the river "banks are well-clothed with pines, and ornamented with a profusion of mosses, lichens, and shrubs" (Franklin, 1969:222).

There were two main consequences of the explorers' determination to construct this landscape picture as their winter residence. On the one hand, the view from the fort functioned in an aesthetic capacity that the men considered vital for morale. They prized the site and considered it great good fortune to have been led to it by the Indians. Nothing in the vicinity could match it on aesthetic grounds. Richardson, who wrote to Back while on a supply trip to the Coppermine River in the spring of 1821, aesthetically dismissed the barren land to the north of the fort: "[William] Gilpin himself, that celebrated picturesque hunter, would have made a fruitless journey had he come with us. . . . nowhere did I see anything worthy of your pencil. So much for the country. It is a barren subject, and deserves to be thus briefly dismissed" (McIlraith, 1868:82-83). On the other hand, maintaining the illusion of the Picturesque in terrain as evidently un-English in most respects as is the Subarctic was a habit that, whatever it did to maintain morale, jeopardized from the start the physical welfare of the arctic explorers. What is underscored by making a northern

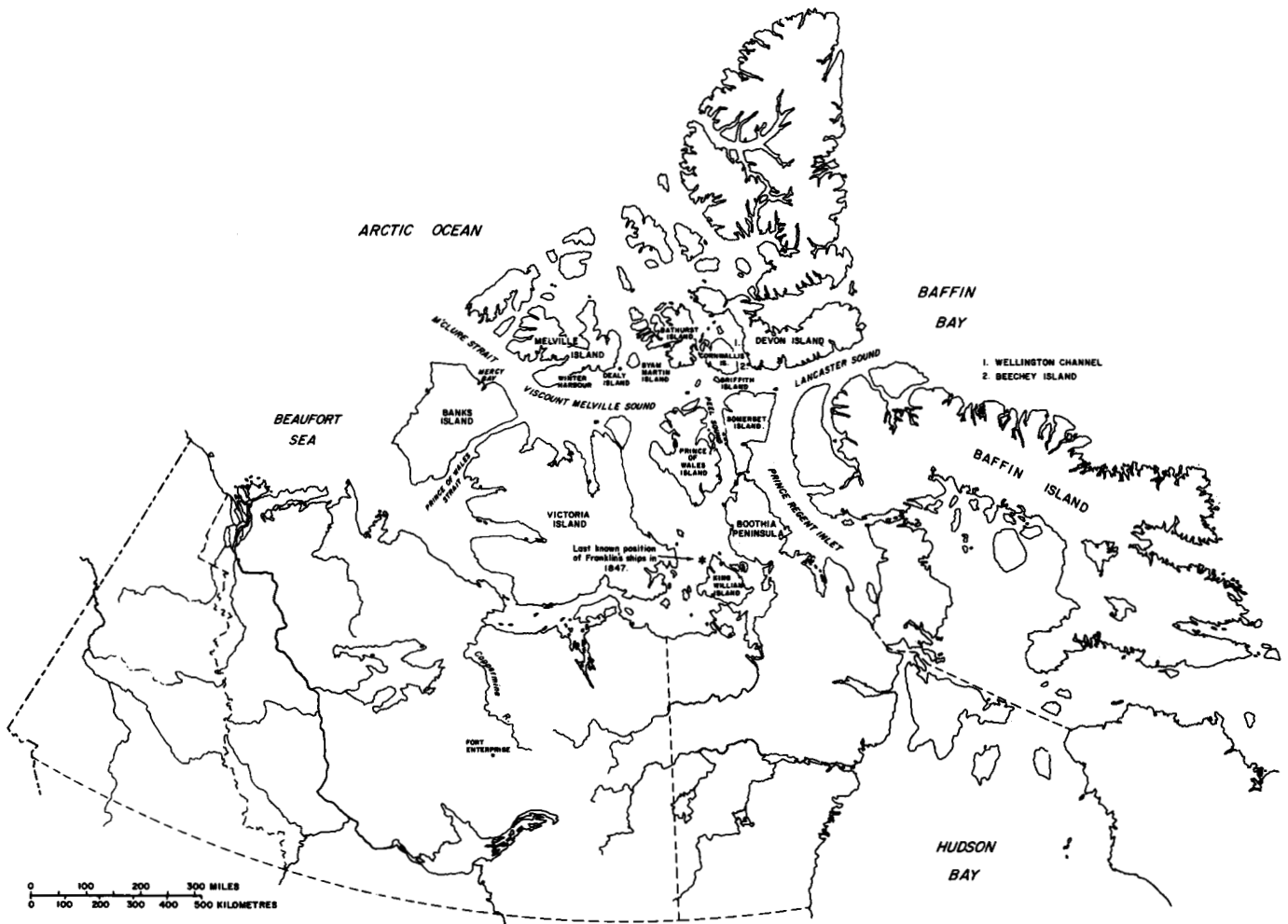


FIG. 1. Modern map of the Canadian North, showing places explored during the search for Franklin. (Courtesy Department of Geography, University of Toronto)

valley into an English valley by means of an imported schema is the danger of not apprehending the terrain's own unique qualities. Had aesthetic considerations not governed site selection, the winter quarters would not have been built on the top of a hill commanding a "beautiful" prospect of the valley, but down at the lake where food, water, fuel, and wind shelter were to be had. In fact, the physical consequence of the site selection almost proved catastrophic for those men who survived the tundra crossing in 1821. Once they had arrived back at Fort Enterprise, Franklin and Richardson could not pull themselves down the hill to the lake to fish out the food that could forestall starvation. When they were rescued by the Indians, they were fed fish immediately. Aesthetics had precluded their saving themselves.

Thus, the search for the Picturesque in the Arctic, if the Fort Enterprise near-disaster may be allowed to stand as a rather extreme instance of a clash between aesthetic and physical needs during the early decades, would continue in the 1850s, when 34 expeditions sailed in search of the third Franklin expedition. Balancing aesthetic and physical welfare would prove precarious, often engaging the mariners in wide discrepancies between their perception of the North and its true character. A reading of the aesthetic map produced by those

later voyagers will help to point out where the discrepancy grew widest and narrowest between, to recall Watson's notion of geography, the travellers' expectation of terrain on the one hand, and the North's unique identity on the other.

#### SEARCHING FOR FRANKLIN: THE 1848 AND 1849 EXPEDITIONS

The Admiralty had not sponsored an expedition to the North since George Back's nightmare voyage of 1836-37 when, on 26 May 1845, Franklin sailed out of the Thames, his mission nothing less than the discovery of the Northwest Passage. Sighted by the whaler *Prince of Wales* in Baffin Bay on 26 July, HMS *Erebus*, under Capt. James Fitzjames, and HMS *Terror*, under Francis R.M. Crozier, sailed under Franklin's command into Lancaster Sound, never to be seen again. Arctic sublimity thereby realized its vast potential to swallow whole and intact an entire expedition. Nine years passed before any remains of the starved sojourners were discovered and 13 before Francis L. McClintock and Lieut. W.R. Hobson came across the skeletons of the majority of the 129 sailors strewn across the west and south sides of King William (IV) Island (Fig. 1). The sublimity of the disappearance into a void ex-

tends to this day, for only a single paper was ever found to help decode the mystery of the men's fate (Gibson, 1937; Neatby, 1958; Dodge, 1961; Nanton, 1970; Thompson, 1975; Owen, 1978; Wallace, 1980).

For all the picturesque description of arctic scenes that former voyagers had reaped, the British public still saw the region as the frozen continent and, at least imaginatively and aesthetically, if not scientifically, located it, as Milton had (MacLaren, 1984b), somewhere on the far side of hell. Franklin had embarked in *Erebus*, named after the son of Chaos, brother of Night, and father by her (Night) of Aesther (Air) and Hermera (Day); in it he sailed into the impenetrable darkness that is the home of Erebus. Thus was the macabre stage upon which the fate of his last quest was played out. History has uncovered the lamentable probability that all Franklin's men were dead before the first search expedition arrived in the Arctic.

In 1848 searches were initiated on three fronts: from the Pacific Ocean via Bering Strait, from the Mackenzie River, and from the Atlantic Ocean via Baffin Bay. Each of these searches produced published accounts (Richardson, 1851; Hooper, 1853; Seemann, 1853), but two are most germane to the present discussion. William Henry James Browne, who sailed with James Clark Ross in HMS *Enterprise* and HMS *Investigator* in 1848, produced a portfolio of *Ten Coloured Views* (1850) of Ross's unsuccessful attempt to penetrate past (North) Somerset Island. As well, the case for an artistic response to the North is made in prose by Robert Anstruther Goodsir, who sailed only as far as Baffin Bay in 1849, and whose *An Arctic Voyage* was published in 1850.

Failure to find Franklin did not deter Browne from responding imaginatively to the Arctic. Accompanying Ross through Lancaster Sound, he participated in the sledging expedition from Port Leopold, at the top of (North) Somerset Island, and part way down the island's east coast in the spring of 1849, while Ross explored the west coast down as far as 72°38'N. No published narratives were forthcoming of this frustratingly unavailing voyage, which escaped from the ice of 28 August

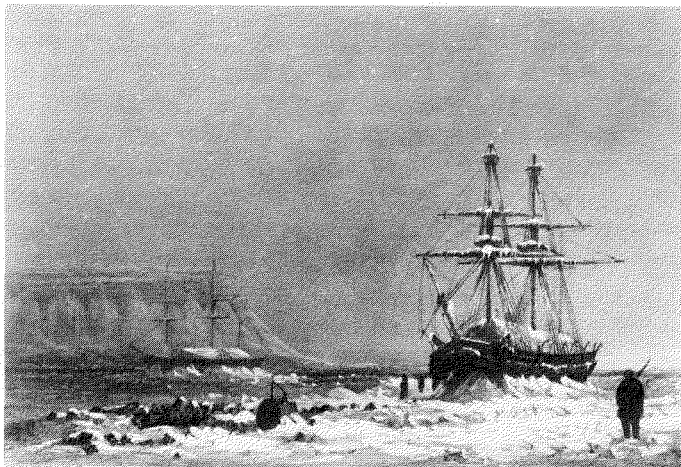


FIG. 2. W.H.J. Browne. "Noon in Mid-Winter. H.M. Ships 'Enterprise' and 'Investigator' in winter quarters, Port Leopold, North Somerset — Noon in December." (Courtesy Metropolitan Toronto Library Board)



FIG. 3. W.H.J. Browne. "The Bivouac (Cape Seppings): The Party, under command of Lieutenants Robinson and Browne, at Dinner on the Ice, after the First Southern Deposit of Provisions, May, 1849. Temperature Forty Degrees." (Courtesy Metropolitan Toronto Library Board)

1849 and was back at the Orkney Islands in September, but Browne's ten pictures (1850) fill the void admirably.

The conventions of the Sublime — emphasis on vertical or horizontal expanses, the placement of tiny human figures in the picture to intensify the scale of the topography, and the extremities of landscape novelty — structure Browne's views and influence his choice of subject matter; nevertheless, these aesthetic considerations do not impede fulfilment of the pictures' functional roles as documentations of locations reached and phenomena witnessed. Darkness at noon provides him with the opportunity of exhibiting perhaps nature's own most sublime example of *chiaroscuro* — the balance of light and shadow in a picture. Entitled "Noon in Mid-Winter. . ." (Fig. 2), the scene's moonlight and the slightest hint of sun on the horizon combine with the stars to provide a most uncommon array of lighting over a windswept, desolate landscape. In "The Bivouac (Cape Seppings). . ." (Fig. 3), a meal on the ice contributes more novelty to a picture already made sublime by its extreme verticality. A slight echo perhaps of J.M.W. Turner's paintings of cattle feeding beneath Yorkshire cliffs, Browne's work captures the wonderful castellated appearance of the cliffs on the west coast of Prince Regent Inlet (Fig. 1).

In both Figures 2 and 3, the horizon is set so low in the vertical layout of the painting as to suggest how slight the purchase is that the travellers, in contrast to Turner's lowing cattle, have on the face of the terrain/ice in the polar realm. The possibility that Franklin's men had encountered difficulty but were managing to survive in such desolate lands seems all but precluded by the sublimity depicted so dramatically by Browne. Finally, the avid reader of exploration narratives would recognize a further sublime aspect of Browne's "Bivouac" picture. It recalls the same coastal cliffs depicted in H.N. Head's sublime picture of the loss of HMS *Fury* in August 1825 when it was crushed by the ice against the coastal cliffs (Parry, 1828:V, frontispiece). The same region would also remind the reader of the last winter spent by the crew of John Ross's *Victory* at Somerset House in 1832-33 prior to a miraculous escape from the jaws that would seize Franklin (MacLaren, 1982). In itself, dining on ice in May suggests a precarious activity to the English reader, and with these added echoes and the apparent impossibility of escaping from the ice to accessible land were the dining room floor to break up, the scene depicted by Browne resounds with a multiple sublimity.

As if to bear witness to Browne's work, Goodsir, who commanded HMS *Advice* into but not through Baffin Bay in 1849 in search of his brother Harry, who was dead with Franklin, makes an unequivocal declaration of the aesthetic attributes of the North: "I do not think there is any region in the world where the landscape painter could enjoy better studies than in the Arctic regions" (1850:119). Goodsir's own picture-making sensibility is highly developed and is attracted most by the picturesque variety of the ice formations in Baffin Bay:

All that has been said of the coral reefs of the Southern Seas may well be applied to the icy masses of the Northern; but I must suspect it must be with the accompaniment of such weather as we at this time enjoyed, for a whistling north wind soon drives one to look for the picturesque in the neighbourhood of the cabin stove. (Goodsir, 1850:22-24.)

Goodsir's enthusiasm must be tempered by the recognition that because his voyage failed to penetrate Lancaster Sound he did not pass a winter in the North. Nevertheless, his remarks concerning the picturesque properties of icescapes do compare with several made by John Richardson, a veteran of six northern winters, when he wrote from Great Bear Lake in the same summer (1849) that:

Here only, of all the countries I have seen, can I understand the deep blue shades of the ancient Italian masters. . . . The depth of shade which marks out low snowy waves of the lake when the sun is low would surprise a painter brought here for the first time. (McIlraith, 1868:236-237.)

While the weather initially induces and latterly curtails Goodsir's celebration of the moving islands' picturesque features in his Baffin Bay scene, the collision of several icebergs awakens simultaneously a captain's concern but also the landscape traveller's eye for the Sublime:

And hark! the lengthening roar continuous runs  
Athwart the rifted deep: at once it bursts  
And piles a thousand mountains to the clouds.

One might almost think that the poet of the "Seasons" had witnessed such a scene. Great misshapen columns, like those of Stonehenge are not infrequently seen reared on end, on the top of these ramparts, poised so delicately, that a slight touch will send them thundering down on either side. (Goodsir, 1850: 51-52.)

Just as Thomson had utilized the sublime chaos of the floe in the "Winter" segment (1908:ll. 1001-03) of *The Seasons* to depict foreign realms, Goodsir, more than 100 years later, quotes Thomson to embellish his guidebook to the Arctic. Likening slabs of ice to the most primitive but at least familiar architecture, as George Back had done 15 years before him (1970:415), he also intimates from the allusion that the delicate assembly of the ice fragments appears both chaotic and intentional. The sublime thrill that he experiences derives as much from the positioning of the massive pieces on the brink of annihilation as from their appearance. In short, the associations arising in the mind contemplating the icescape are as powerful as the effect directly on the mind of any of the natural elements.

The indulgence in associationism had long been sanctioned by landscape enthusiasts, since it redounded to a landscape enthusiast's sensitivity to be able to derive a plethora of sensations — emotional and intellectual — from the contemplation of a scene. Not surprisingly, this form of extrapolation tends toward increasingly fanciful responses to landscape during the apogee of nineteenth-century landscape touring. The power of associationism is given free play by Goodsir on several occasions (1850:79-80, 133), but perhaps nowhere is it more fancifully displayed than in his aesthetic response to "one of the most beautiful icebergs" encountered by HMS *Advice*:

It was of immense size. The south side, on which we advanced towards it was almost perpendicular, as if a recent split had taken place; but on rounding the corner and coming abreast of the west side, which we did almost within arm's-length, we found it to be wrought into ledges, — ledge above ledge, each festooned with a fringe of crystal icicles, which here and there reaching the ledge beneath, formed columns slender as those of a saracenic mosque; within them ran a gallery green as emerald. Two or three tiny cascades were tinkling from ledge to ledge, and fell with a soft splash into the water beneath, sending the pearl-like bubbles dancing from them over the smooth surface. All was glancing and glittering beneath a bright sun, and if I had had it in my power I could have stood for hours to gaze at it. Passing the corner, the north side was seen to be cut into two little deep bays with sloping shores, a long point running out between them. The lowest ledge of the west side rounded the corner and inclined down towards the nearest bay, if so it may be called, and ending in a broad platform. This little bay seemed so snug, and lay so beautifully to the sun, that, unnatural as it may appear, one could not help fancying it, — as a fit site for a pretty cottage. (Goodsir, 1850:61-62.)

Goodsir finds himself running the aesthetic gamut on this iceberg. He begins at the sublime south side whose "immense" vertical character suggests to him a recent sublimely cataclysmic rending. He then turns the corner to encounter a picturesque, horizontally ordered western scene and a picturesque cottage dell on the northern side. In fact, he concocts with an impressive aesthetic resourcefulness a landscape

tour from a single iceberg. Furthermore, he practises a sort of imaginative sculpting, creating the columns of a mosque in which the ice is magically "green as emerald," as it was in perhaps the most widely known of the period's examples of associationism — Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (1967:ll. 53-54), itself based on exploration narratives. Besides the columns, Goodsir produces a "tinkling" fountain, bays (as if the ice were, indeed, an enchanted mobile island), and a neighbourhood for an English cottage that would ravish picturesque painters such as George Morland or poets such as Wordsworth (1967) who wrote in "Tintern Abbey" of "These plots of cottage-ground, these orchard-tufts,/Which at this season, with their unripe fruits,/Are clad in one green hue, and lose themselves/'Mid groves and copses."

The subject matter is perhaps so foreign but, for the moment, so innocuous, that Goodsir is capable of transforming it into familiar sights. Although he refrains from composing a complete picture, he does render the berg more art than nature and, in so doing, follows the normal and, for a reader, most effective procedure for identifying an unfamiliar visual phenomenon by means of familiar aesthetic concepts and images: a saracenic mosque or a Lake District cottage brings the sight of the iceberg to life for his reader. Clearly, Goodsir is not transported by his fanciful indulgences — his earlier remark concerning when and where the picturesque can be sought, and his qualification of the bay ("if so it may be called") mark two narrative rudders guiding his associationist voyages — but his scenes are more fanciful than many of the picturesque scenes envisaged by previous arctic explorers. They introduce a trend toward the more fanciful scene in the works of what may be called the second generation of maritime arctic explorers of the nineteenth century — explorers who either were not yet born or were very young when Franklin made his first expedition in 1819. The more fanciful scene may reflect a landscape practice that had passed its prime in England, but also represents one way by which the British mariners could persuade themselves and their nation of the benignity of the Arctic until the Franklin expedition was rescued and while they pressed bravely on in their rescue attempts.

#### SEARCHING FOR FRANKLIN: THE 1850 AND 1851 EXPEDITIONS

The trend toward a more fanciful picturesque view of the North continued through the narrative and pictorial works produced by members of 1850 and 1851 search expeditions. During these years Lancaster Sound became the haunt of many British mariners. The Austin expedition of 1850-51 (one of six expeditions to set sail in 1850) consisted of four ships: HMS *Resolute*, under Sir Horatio T. Austin, who had been first lieutenant on HMS *Fury* when it was wrecked in 1825 during Parry's third voyage; HMS *Assistance*, under Capt. Erasmus Ommanney; and two screw-steamers, the *Pioneer*, under Capt. Sherard Osborn, and the *Intrepid*, under Capt. Bertie Cator. These four ships produced three newspapers among them: the *Aurora Borealis*, published aboard the *Assistance* on the 15th of each winter month (November 1850-March 1851)

and republished in London under the title *Arctic Miscellanies* in the following year; the *Illustrated Arctic News*, edited by Osborn and George F. McDougall, published at the end of each month on board the *Resolute* (October 1850-March 1851) and republished in facsimile form in London in 1852; and a few issues of a rare paper titled *Minivalis*.

The *Resolute* and *Pioneer* wintered at Griffith Island (Fig. 1), while the *Assistance* and *Intrepid* wintered 28 miles away, at Assistance Bay, Beechey Island (Fig. 1:2), at the southeastern extremity of Wellington Channel. There the two ships were joined by the *Lady Franklin* and *Sophia*, under the command of the whaling captain William Penny, by the *Felix* and *Mary*, under the command of the 73-year-old Sir John Ross, and by the ships of the American expedition under Capt. De Haven.

In the face of the horror of Franklin's fate, the Austin expedition built with their newspapers and theatrical productions a morale-boosting, illusion-confirming view of their habitation of the gelid frontier. Osborn and McDougall saw as the purpose of *Illustrated Arctic News* the need to show "that in the desolation of Land & Ice around us, the gentle lily Wisdom can still be culled — either in the contemplation of the ruins of the Old World, or in the strange, & ever changing phenomena of nature" (Osborn and McDougall, 1852:1). In the article "Notes from the Plank," Osborn demonstrates that the lily Wisdom of nature that the culler is meant to seek are the novel and picturesque aspects of the region:

... if nature here does not assume those rich & gorgeous forms under which the imagination becomes enthralled in more genial climes, yet the sweet and delicate tints thrown by her across the heavens, and filling up the background of some of her most striking tableaux leave a pensive and reflective effect upon the mind which cannot be well expressed or easily forgot. (Osborn and McDougall, 1852:17.)

The parlance of the habit of viewing nature as pictures — "tints," "background," "tableaux" — governs what may be called an aesthetic strategy for survival in high latitudes. Over in the *Assistance*, the reinforcement of the illusion of the Picturesque took on a humorous but no less fanciful tone in the form of a newspaper advertisement for real estate in *Aurora Borealis*:

To be sold or let, with immediate possession. Two new cottages, called Marble Villa and Cerulean Cottage, situated a short distance to the southward of 'Assistance,' in a very picturesque neighbourhood; they both face to the south, having extensive undulating grounds in front, over which fine healthy exercise may be taken; the climate is so well known, that it does not require the flowery language of a Robins to say anything in its praise.

... N.B. — There are good quarries of building material close to the cottages, and any quantity of water can be obtained by sinking wells of a few feet.

WM. KNOCKMEDOWN,  
Auctioneer (*Arctic Miscellanies*, 1852:36-37.)

Landscape appreciation takes an obvious jibe from such a passage, but it is clear that what makes the joke possible is the widespread habit among the mariners of surveying the

“fields” of ice from the elevated prospects of their ships’ decks and of feeling inclined to transform desolate wastes and hummocks of ice into “undulating grounds” and cottage plots, induced in this by the spontaneous exertions of their aesthetic wills to survive. Numerous fanciful pictures are made in prose by “A.B.,” whose journal extracts appeared in *Aurora Borealis* and were hailed by the editor as the most valuable sort of submission to the paper that the officers could make.

In the *Lady Franklin*, which was commanded by William Penny, Dr. P.C. Sutherland answers the advertisement, as it were, with the following single-paragraph description of the animated landscape he views in Assistance Bay from the deck of his ship on 23 September 1850:

Assistance Bay was beginning to show signs of life and activity. On this point a party of strollers; on that level plain two boon companions with their guns; wending his way in a rugged ravine, charmed with its iron cascades, and wretchedly dreary, wild, and barren aspect, a solitary individual; and, chasing one another playfully along the beach, the dogs, were the objects that now began to meet and please the eye. (Sutherland, 1852: 1:380.)

A common narrative corollary to the picture frame, the paragraph form governs this single view. The here/there composition of the second sentence parallels the orthogonal structure of a picturesque view in which vegetation, ruins, animals, and so on are set on an axis. The humanized, animated foreground contrasts ideally with the “wild, and barren aspect” of the ravine through which the solitary traveller wends his way in the middle ground. Sutherland’s view attracts and merits attention less for the landscape than for the human activity going on in it.

Such is also the case with J. Coventry’s picture “Assistance Bay . . .” (Fig. 4), which was selected as the frontispiece for the first volume of Sutherland’s *Journal*. Its rendition of landscape, apart from the successful execution of the convention of hiding the sun on the horizon and behind a headland, a convention attributable to the most influential picturesque landscape painter, Claude (Gellée) Lorrain (Manwaring, 1925; Röthlisberger, 1961), offers less interest than does the chronicle it provides of pedestrian excursions and games of field hockey taking place amid temperatures sufficiently cold to freeze mercury, and in a country whose windswept bareness is destitute even of a cover of snow in February. As well, the picture is interesting for its inadvertent suggestion that the Marble Villa and Cerulean Cottage of the advertisement in *Aurora Borealis* refer humorously to the two ice sheds in the foreground, built for the storage of explosives and flammable *matériel*. Coventry in art and Sutherland in prose, like the tars in action, throw the illusion of picturesque contentment over Assistance Bay, making a recognizable landscape of it.

*The Voyage of the Prince Albert in search of Sir John Franklin* (1851) offers many parallel responses to the arctic tundra, but one exceptionally fanciful response merits attention for its alliance of the North with landscapes visited on the Grand Tour by British travellers. William Parker Snow, who had been employed before the voyage of the *Prince Albert* in the summer of 1850 as the amanuensis to Thomas Macaulay,



FIG. 4. J. Coventry. “Assistance Bay 24<sup>th</sup> February 1851, The Coldest Day, Mercury Frozen.”

the historian whose first two volumes of the *History of England* appeared in 1849, quotes the third-to-last stanza of Byron’s *Childe Harold* as the epigraph to his *Voyage*. Occasionally fancying himself a roaming child, charmed to a “pleasing fear” by the global oceans, in a work whose structure bears several signs of the sort of guidebook for the Grand Tour that Byron’s poem in some ways is, Snow encounters at the top of Baffin Island the type of majestic vale that Childe Harold discovers after treks across “wild and rugged” mountain ranges:

. . . I could not help for the moment assimilating it, however great the difference might really be, to the far-famed Val d’Ossola first seen from the Simplon Pass in Italy. This arctic vale certainly gave as bright and pleasing relief at that moment, and among those wild and rugged scenes, as the other could in its own neighbourhood. (Snow, 1851:352.)

Besides making his own aesthetic charting, Snow manages to align his summer “tour” to the Arctic (the *Prince Albert* did not stay the winter) with the most fashionable continental tours made by travellers who would not dare not to know their Byron.

As well as editing a newspaper, Osborn kept his own journal (1852) and edited for publication the diary of his friend Capt. Robert M’Clure. M’Clure, who had sailed with George Back in HMS *Terror* in 1836-37 (Back, 1838) and patrolled the Great Lakes on board HMS *Niagara* in 1838 and 1839 after the Upper Canada rebellion, commanded HMS *Investigator* to the Arctic by way of Bering Strait in 1850, having departed five months prior to the Austin expedition. M’Clure was a strong-headed, exceedingly capable commander and was possessed of an apparently common Irishman’s disregard for the aesthetics of landscape. (Neither of his countrymen who commanded expeditions to the Arctic — Richard Collinson [1889] and Francis L. McClintock [1972; 1861] — display any aesthetic interest in nature in their writings.) The passages from M’Clure’s own pen that are quoted at length by Osborn in *The Discovery of the North-West Passage* (M’Clure, 1969) attest almost not at all to the character of the region through which he travelled from 1850 to 1854. Likely, M’Clure recog-

nized Osborn's own talent for composing "correct" landscape pictures and left it to his friend to embellish his own notes to suit public taste.

Because he published the journal in 1856, before discovery of the Franklin crew, Osborn still strikes the fanciful note in many of the descriptions of landscapes he himself had not seen. By way of picturing the icescapes over which a sledging party, led by M'Clure, passed on 22 October 1850, en route from the winter quarters of the *Investigator*, up Prince of Wales Strait to the top of Banks Island and Barrow Strait, Osborn employs a telling analogy: "After some difficulty in crossing ridges of broken ice — the *hedge-rows* of an arctic landscape, — they reached vast fields of smooth ice..." (M'Clure, 1969:134). This instance of fancifully identifying a feature of arctic landscape as English is not unique. At the top of Banks Island, the prospect extended out across the polar ice pack in Melville Bay and over to Melville Island, 75 miles distant. The view is sublime not just for its vastness but because it represents the first *published* sighting of a Northwest Passage: in the distance lay Winter Harbour, where Parry's first expedition spent the winter of 1819-20 (Parry, 1828). Osborn enlarges the dimensions of the conventional picturesque representation but his description is not suitably sublime. He retains an England-based schema for the view: "great hills and dales of blue crystalline sea-ice rolled on before them" (M'Clure, 1969:137).

To obtain the nineteenth-century sublime response to this significant "Passage" view from Banks Island, one must turn to the work of Samuel Gurney Cresswell, the expedition's artist. His picture of this icescape is entitled "Melville Island from Banks [Is]Land" (Fig. 5). It appeared both as one of eight sketches published by Cresswell himself (1854:VI) and in the M'Clure/Osborn collaboration (1969:opp. 256). The tiny pair of explorers are conventionally dwarfed by the wondrous vastness of arctic space. They gaze off into the interminable north from a cliff, which Osborn notes reaches 600 feet above the gelid sea. The succession of headlands on Melville Island rises like a series of spectres out of the refracted distance across M'Clure Strait. But the erubescenscent skies of a late October sunrise, which present the view's most sublime aspect, show Cresswell's adaptability to a vermilion lucidity of atmosphere not commonly found in English skies or in his other works. Such adaptation is fitting for an important painting of an imaginatively and topographically significant view, a view which consecrates that aspect of the quest motif central to the geographical and aesthetic mapping of the North. Finally and ironically, one must note that the picture consecrates what would become a pedestrian but never a marine Northwest Passage. It marked perhaps the single most remote and wild excursion on any walking tour by a nineteenth-century British traveller.

Two members of M'Clure's expedition, its surgeon/naturalist and its chaplain, produced journals that were published. The minister was Johann Miertsching, a Moravian missionary in Labrador. In 1967, L.H. Neatby translated his journal, titling it *Frozen Ships*. Not surprisingly, the missionary's chief concern lies with contacting the "Eskimaux"



FIG. 5. S.G. Cresswell. "Melville Island from Banks [Is]Land." (Courtesy Metropolitan Toronto Library Board)

of the western Arctic, but his complete lack of interest in landscape shows, by contrast, how intensely aware of it the British officers for the most part were. Miertsching writes baldly of the various "fightful" situations of the *Investigator* in pack ice and of the "pleasant" arctic sunsets, his avocation for landscape touring virtually undeveloped in an otherwise fascinating journal.

Alexander Armstrong, on the other hand, follows the impressive aesthetic response to landscape by such navy surgeons before him as John Richardson and Peter Sutherland. Off the northern continental coast, west of Point Barrow, on 6 August 1850, he demonstrates a keen perception of how his aesthetic habits tend to make over the natural phenomena before him, transforming and composing them into a recognizable picture:

The position from whence these fears [of becoming ice-bound] were entertained, could scarcely be supposed to have existence in the frigid regions of the north, from the picturesque beauty and loveliness of the scene which then met the eye; but when I say that ice and water alone contributed to form the landscape, it must be equally difficult to fancy that these elements could so closely imitate true lacustrine scenery. We lay with all our canvas set, hanging sluggishly from the yards on the glassy surface of a sheet of water some two or three miles in diameter, apparently ice-locked. The sun shone forth brilliantly, imparting to us all, the delightful warmth of his rays, and to the icy regions in the distance, that peculiar splendour produced by their reflective power in a highly refractive atmosphere. Masses of snow-white ice, in form resembling little islands were interspersed around, with intervening spaces of water. Numerous as they were, there was light sufficient to display the outline of each as they floated motionless on the surface of the sleeping sea, with the distant and uneven pack all around, forming a land-like but ice-locked boundary, resembling one of our own northern lakes in its wintry garb. There a vivid imagination might readily have taken a flight far from the Polar Sea, in contemplating the icy scene which surrounded us, the novelty of which was only surpassed by its beauty. (Armstrong, 1857:89-90.)



Like Snow, who likens a Baffin Island valley to Val d'Ossola, or Back, who thinks of Alpine scenes when viewing the tundra (Back, 1970:170-178), or Chappell, for whom the powerful summer sun striking a calm arctic sea reminds him of a description of the Syrian desert (Chappell, 1970:54), or Franklin, Hood, and Richardson, who recall the picturesque aspects of the English Lake District when viewing the prospect from Fort Enterprise — indeed, like almost any explorer whose visual mode of perception involves the composition or, at least, the identification of landscapes — Armstrong perceives nature in terms of the natural world familiar to him and his readers. But his practice differs from some others in its degree of fancifulness since, as he notes, he finds himself making a terrestrial scene from an aqueous one; that is to say, making a landscape from a seascape. The motionless ship in the foreground, the island-dotted (or lake-dotted) ocean in the middle ground, and the delimiting “distant and uneven pack” resembling hills in the background constitute a view sufficiently similar to its Lake District model as to enable Armstrong to chart it aesthetically.

Nevertheless, picturesque illusion of a highly fanciful sort, however reassuring it may be momentarily, endures only as long as the “landscape” does; and with the ice continuously in motion, Armstrong soon finds himself greeting other prospects. The fear to which he alludes at the outset of his Lake District single-paragraph picture becomes a profoundly expressed emotion throughout the narrative account of the next three years. On the night of 8 October 1850, in Prince of Wales Strait, HMS *Investigator* was thrown up on the ice, amid

a general movement in the pack; this commenced with a low rumbling noise, resembling the distant roar of the ship, when we were amazed at seeing immense masses of ice slowly and gradually raised to different degrees of elevation, others crumbling to pieces, or packed on each other, and the same force slowly but surely approaching ourselves. Our astonishment rapidly changed into intense anxiety for our own safety. (Armstrong, 1857:248.)

Edmund Burke had argued in his *Philosophical Enquiry* that natural sublimity had to be kept at a distance for it still to enthrall the spectator: once it approached too near him, terror erased any appreciation of it. Clearly a landscape enthusiast in the Burkean tradition, Armstrong falls silent, abdicating his self-proclaimed role as the expedition's aesthetic voice, once the harrowing litany of ice converges on the ship, thereby rapidly changing astonishment to intense anxiety.

Yet, just at this point of Armstrong's abdication, Cresswell comes into his own. Three of Cresswell's paintings depict the struggle waged between HMS *Investigator* and the pack ice. These paintings (1854:III, IV, V) cover the period beginning with the night Armstrong's picturesque eye shrinks away, 8 October 1850, and extending one year, until 23 September 1851, during which time the ship coasted south out of Prince of Wales Strait and around Banks Island to Mercy Bay (Fig. 1) — its winter harbour and its grave. Two of Cresswell's scenes set the ship in icescapes rather than seascapes: “H.M.S. Investigator in the Pack . . .” (Fig. 6), and the famous “Critical

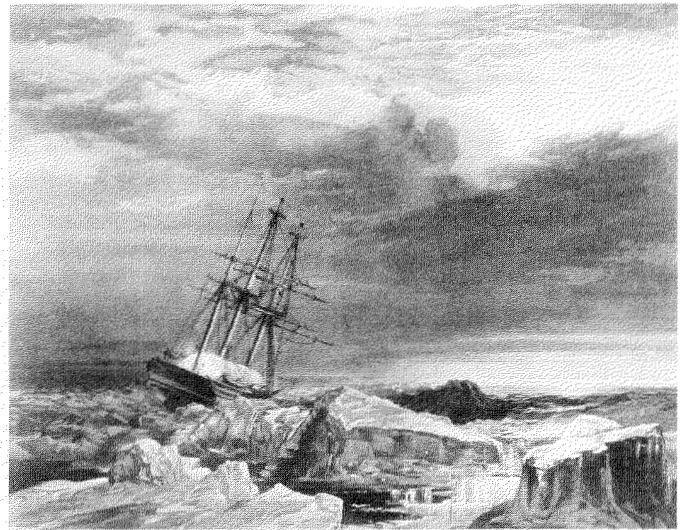


FIG. 6. S.G. Cresswell. “H.M.S. Investigator in the Pack, October 8<sup>th</sup> 1850.” (Courtesy Metropolitan Toronto Library Board)



FIG. 7. S.G. Cresswell. “Critical Position of H.M.S. Investigator on the North-Coast of Baring [Banks] Island, August 20<sup>th</sup> 1851.” (Courtesy Metropolitan Toronto Library Board)

Position of H.M.S. Investigator . . .” (Fig. 7; Neatby, 1982:555). The ship is an aesthetic and navigational anomaly, involving its sailors in an aesthetic and navigational crisis. Indeed, the whole scene in each case is sublime in the sense that it lies beyond human navigational or imaginative control. This sense of the absurdly inconceivable actually being realized charges Cresswell's achievement with a distinctly profound gloom which is evoked by the curious glow of the cabin lantern shining against the moonlit onslaught of nature in the first work, and the tiny figures desperately scaling the mountainous iceberg in the second. The sense of impending doom which suffuses all the works and is effected principally by Cresswell's achievements with the technique of *chiaroscuro* mark a degree in the rendition of natural sublimity previously unattained in polar art and comparable to the sublime achievements of Cresswell's peer, Turner.

Armstrong's concerns as a doctor became paramount in his journal from the winter of 1851 onward. The *Investigator* remained beset in Mercy Bay through 1852 and M'Clure planned to send out the weaker half of his scurvy-ridden crew to seek the continental coast at the Mackenzie River in April 1853. This misguided and disastrous plan was averted only through the sudden arrival on 7 April, eight days prior to the scheduled departure of the infirm, of Bedford Pim, from HMS *Resolute*, which had wintered off Dealy Island (Fig. 1), 28 days' march away in the direction of Melville Island.

Over in Prince Regent Inlet, William Kennedy and the French volunteer, Joseph René Bellot, were icebound aboard the *Prince Albert*, the only ship to spend the winter of 1851-52 in the eastern Arctic. The men survived an extremely rigorous winter and an unusually late spring. As if to give vent in February to his distaste for what appeared to be a continuous gale blowing from December until April, Kennedy fashions a singular outcry, echoing John McLean's lament (1932:II:249) of a winter spent at Fort Chimo by quoting the same Miltonic passage:

The terrible enemies of travelling parties were the snow-storms and furious gales which prevailed with us during the greater part of the winter. A low temperature, even the lowest recorded in the Arctic region, is elysium compared with a piercing nor'-easter driving the sharp keen spiculae of snow-drift, like a shower of red-hot sand in your face and through every pore of your body. The comparison may seem Hibernian, but nevertheless gives a very good idea of one's sensations under the pitiless discharge of a hurricane of snow-drift in these regions, where as in Milton's Pandemonium,

"The parching air

Burns froze, and cold performs the effect of fire."

I have a strong opinion that old AEolus, with his den of ruffianly winds, that so shamefully belaboured the pious Aeneas, must have emigrated to North Somerset since the days of Virgil. (Kennedy, 1853:106.)

A deeply religious man, Kennedy appears to doubt the existence of Providence at the height of the tempest. Short of an outright expression of such doubt, he alludes to the region as a pre- or extra-Christian domain, where a "pitiless discharge" of climatic havoc is wreaked by a pagan god who seems bent on presenting a series of "terrible enemies" to "travelling parties." A native of Cumberland House and a resident of England, Kennedy alludes to Ireland ("Hibernian") in a way that recalls a view of it as a God-forsaken country in the minds of many Englishmen. The allusion also suggests, by way of the Miltonic quotation and the Virgilian comment, that the pious Kennedy regards himself sledging across the Arctic as the Englishman would touring Ireland — alternately as one of Milton's fallen angels in *Paradise Lost* passing across to the "frozen Continent" (Milton, 1957:Bk. II:587-605) and as Virgil's epic hero questing through a hostile realm.

The narrative of Joseph René Bellot lies, properly speaking, beyond the perimeter of this study, but it may be consulted briefly for the contrast it bears to the British response to nature. Initially, Bellot voices great pleasure in arctic landscapes. Like Goodsir, who did not penetrate Lancaster Sound,

Bellot finds the ice in Baffin Bay enchanting: "There is more poetry in this than in the burning lava crust of a volcano. What pencil could reproduce the thousand beauties of the sun playing amid the ice? What pen could describe the thousand sensations experienced by the intellect and the heart?" (Bellot, 1855:I:235-236). But the novelty of besetment soon wears thin, and two weeks later (9 August) Bellot's response to a rain-drenched landscape sounds more like Kennedy, Parry, and Ross:

I cannot find hard words enough to say of these icebergs, for which I panted so long at the period of my feverish admiration for the sublime scenes of the north. The sense of its own impotence reacting on the human mind, makes it regard with rage mingled with terror and scorn... this ignoble triumph of number and of mere physical force... But Nature no longer feels her heart beat in the slumber of the north... Moral nature seems to have abdicated, and nothing remains but a chaos without a purpose, in which everything clashes confusedly and by chance. (Bellot, 1855:I:256-258; "sublime" is translated from "grandioses" in the French original [Bellot, 1854:91].)

The Frenchman's landscape concerns strike a new chord, taking to a more profound level British complaints of, or efforts to mask, perceived monotony and uniformity in arctic nature. His inquiry, however casual, into the moral character of Nature was not indulged in by his British counterparts because of two aspects of the Picturesque aesthetic: its tendency to keep the landscape viewer's attention, as Christopher Hussey (1927:248) maintains, on the surface features of nature, their textural values, tonal relations, and compositions; and the faith in a fundamental harmony between man and nature that still obtained in early nineteenth-century imperial Britain, and that helped to nurture the dream of Franklin's survival. For the most part, the response to nature by such pre-Huxleyan naturalists as John Richardson and David Douglas (Morwood, 1973:48) took the form of belief rather than inquiry. Yet, British explorers who were exposed, not to moderate conditions of nature, but to chaotic and desolate extremities of climate and terrain do begin to voice doubt. Equipped only with the illusions of reality which were formed in response to moderate English nature, on the one hand, or the genial sublimity of the Alps which evoked a pleasing horror, on the other, and which produced descriptions of the Arctic that were more or less fanciful, the British explorer could not endure indefinite time searching for survivors in realms where nature relentlessly assaulted his prior conceptions of it. Sooner or later, he would come to doubt a faith he rarely had reason to question at home, a faith, to recall Wordsworth's enunciation (1967), that "Nature never did betray / The heart that loved her." One finds this process of doubt engaged most openly in the work of John Ross (1835:190-191), but in other journalists and painters the doubt takes the form of silence and deliberate ignorance. In either case, a fear is registered over the capability of the Picturesque and its attendant faith to represent reality, and a recognition is made of the possible existence of a natural force divested of moral purpose — a Demorgorgon, to cite Shelley's personification of raw potentiality (1970) without a cultivated, beneficent character — which appears to be as

capable of annihilating man as of protecting and nourishing his physical and aesthetic needs.

#### SEARCHING FOR FRANKLIN: THE 1852-57 EXPEDITIONS

The spring of 1852 saw the Admiralty launch another large-scale campaign. It was to be the last grand search for the crews of the *Erebus* and *Terror*, for after 1854 the Crimean War made its claims on Navy manpower and *matériel*: with the arctic voyages proving repeated failures, their continuation could not be countenanced against an arguably greater need. Capt. Edward Belcher was a Nova Scotian by birth (Pierce, 1982:552). He had sailed with Beechey aboard HMS *Blossom* in 1825-28 as part of the third Parry and second Franklin expeditions, but with no more experience in ice-infested waters he was appointed to command the 1852-54 voyages. He sailed in HMS *Assistance* with Comm. G.N. Richards. Accompanying them were Kellett in HMS *Resolute* and Comm. Francis L. McClintock and Capt. Sherard Osborn in the screw steamers *Intrepid* and *Pioneer*. Belcher and Osborn proceeded up Wellington Channel (Fig. 1:1) while Kellett and McClintock wintered at Dealy Island, whence the rescue expedition by Pim was initiated to save M'Clure and company the same fate as Franklin. As well, HMS *North Star*, under Capt. Pullen, wintered at Beechey Island, ready as a supply ship to the other four if need arose; and need did arise.

Comm. Walter W. May, who had a serious falling out with Belcher during the voyage, produced *A Series of Fourteen Sketches* (1855). Two pictures record novel environmental events: the return of daylight, and sledging over a pool of water on a July ice floe. The second, "Sledge Party Returning Through Water during the Month of July" (May, 1855:XIII), does not offer the intricate ice formations or variations of light captured so superbly by Cresswell in his picture of sledging across M'Clure Strait earlier in the same year (1853), but another of May's sketches does.

"Sledges in a Fair Fresh Wind, Going over Hummocky Ice" (May, 1855:XI; Fig. 8) is suffused with a sense of exposure to



FIG. 8. W.W. May. "Sledges in a Fair Fresh Wind, Going over Hummocky Ice." (Courtesy Metropolitan Toronto Library-Board)

the sledgers' "terrible enemies." The sky and billowing sails portend disaster as the weather appears on the verge of enveloping the icescape; it already has effaced any distinction between middle ground and background and threatens to throw a sublime obscurity over the sojourners. "The drift is so strong," writes May in his annotation to the picture, "that it makes some of the objects appear quite indistinct, and with the sky, drift and sledges all going together, a different picture is presented to any of the rest of the work."

Two more pictures serve to display May's range of execution and perception of these 14 works. These are "H.M.S. Assistance and Pioneer Fast to the Floe..." (May, 1855:V; Fig. 9) and "Division of Sledges Passing Cape Lady Franklin..." (May, 1855:X; Fig. 10). May supplies a guidebook-like resumé for the first of these paintings:

...Cape Majendie is the northern boundary of Wellington Channel, fifty miles to the northward of which, in the Queen's Channel, H.M.S. Assistance and Pioneer wintered in 1852-3. The Sketch was made at midnight, the red cliff being covered by a table-cloth of white mist. There was about two miles of floe between us and the shore, which, together with Dundas Island on the left, completed the scene.

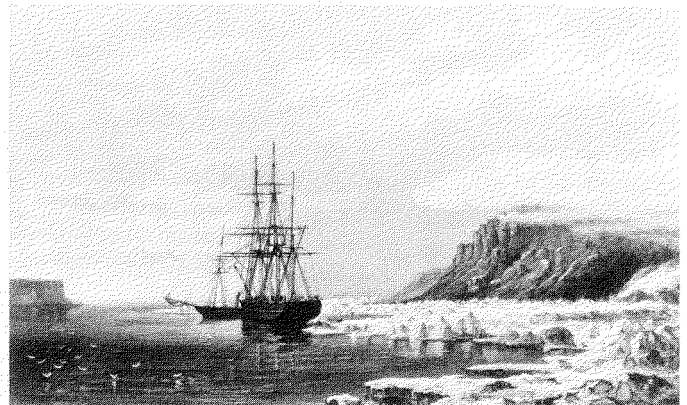


FIG. 9. W.W. May. "H.M.S Assistance and Pioneer Fast to the Floe, off Cape Majendie, Wellington Channel, 1853." (Courtesy Metropolitan Toronto Library Board)



FIG. 10. W.W. May. "Division of Sledges Passing Cape Lady Franklin; Extraordinary Masses of Ice Pressed Against the North Shore of Bathurst Land." (Courtesy Metropolitan Toronto Library Board)

Perceived as a landscape picture ("scene"), the channel is portrayed like many of the seascapes of the Franco-Italian doyen of the picturesque style in landscape painting, Claude Lorrain. As in one of Claude's Mediterranean seascapes, the declining (here, the declined) sun is hidden behind the *coulisse* of Dundas Island on one side, while the headland on the other rises precipitately from the ocean floor. The intricately shaped ice in the right-hand, and the scene-enlivening ducks in the left-hand foreground echo the contrast perceptible in the geography in either side of the background. The stillness of the open water and the slumbering state of the ships with their sails reefed spread an impressive quietude over this picturesque midnight sunset view.

"Division of Sledges" (Fig. 10) illustrates several conventions. The variation in shade cast on the fore- and middle ground provides a depth into the picture, which in turn intensifies the height of what May in his notes calls "the tremendous barrier." The sublime force of nature is explicit, for the sea ice has been thrust against the cape with a force sufficiently strong to force peaks of the ice above the cape itself. As well, May depicts the route of the journey in a serpentine line, again probably in order to emphasize depth into the landscape since his concern in several of the sledging scenes is to define the space *through* which the sojourners journeyed. This concern arises out of the artist's fear that the sameness of the snow-covered landscape or icescape would strike the viewer of his work (as it strikes him) as a two-dimensional absurdity.

Identifying a middle ground proved a continual problem for sledgers: only what was right before them or far in the distance was visible; but because space could not readily be demarcated and approximated between the immediate foreground and distant background, many sledgers found themselves approaching for days a headland they believed no more than 20 miles distant. Of course, the fact that the characteristic English view rarely exceeds 10 miles — a recent edition of Turner's *Picturesque Views of England and Wales* (Shanes, 1979) includes only one landscape in 103 plates whose view appears longer than 10 miles — fosters perceptual habits that expect objects in the distance to lie only so far away. The English reaction to repeated disillusionment in the middle-groundless and highly refracted environment was, as May's picture of the north shore of Bathurst Land illustrates, to superimpose on a given terrain or tract of ice the conventions of landscape viewing with which he was familiar. The serpentine line and varying bands of light and shade are what James Thomson saw from the hill overlooking Hagley Park when composing *The Seasons* (Barrell, 1972:21-22), that poetic manifesto of picturesque landscape touring. They are brought forcibly into play in the Arctic for the Englishman's aesthetic nourishment and spatial orientation and to permit him to make somewhere a place, to make it *mean* something that the English mind could endure. Such illusions rendered such "excursions" as McClintock's wondrous 105-day, 1200-mile trek across Melville Island, Fitzwilliam Strait, Eglinton and Prince Patrick Islands in the spring of 1853 aesthetically, psychologically bearable.

McClintock was based on the steamer *Intrepid*, wintering with Kellett's *Resolute* at Dealy Island in 1852-53, and west of

Byam Martin Island (Fig. 1) but still in Viscount Melville Sound in 1853-54. The record of this half of the Belcher expedition was published in 1857 by George F. McDougall as *The Eventful Voyage of H.M. Discovery Ship "Resolute."*

Including some of his own sketches, McDougall's work expends much ink on the practical affairs of the expedition: the composition and achievements of the various sledging parties embarking from the *Resolute* and *Intrepid*, the effects of scurvy, the examination of Belcher's decision to abandon ship, and a detailed account of the recovery in 1855 of the *Resolute*. Perhaps because he also had accompanied Osborn in the *Resolute* in 1850-51, McDougall finds polar landscapes no longer hold the allure of novelty for him that they did when he co-edited and illustrated the *Illustrated Arctic News*. His aesthetic response during the later expedition is comparatively slim, but perhaps this may be attributed to the drain on the physical network of the European constitution by the arduous sledging journeys across all the islands on the north shore of Viscount Melville Sound.

McDougall does, however, discuss the fate of Franklin in a manner that includes criticism of British perception of the arctic environment. While discussing the comparatively large numbers of animals on Melville Island, he argues that this profusion marks an exception to the findings on previous expeditions of a general paucity of wildlife in the polar archipelago:

It must be apparent to the reader that I despair of Sir John Franklin and his brave companions still existing within these regions, the more so as the graves and other relics on Beechey Island prove that their first winter was spent in one of the most unproductive places within the arctic circle. . . .

Whilst fitting out, I overheard a very amusing discourse between an eccentric but talented Scotch gentleman (connected with one of the most important of our public institutions) and a young officer about to make his first trip to the Northern seas. . . .

"Now," said he [the Scot], "I see no reason for supposing, that Nature has entirely excluded the northern regions, from participating in the gifts so lavishly displayed, in the more favoured regions of the south. Not that I would have you expect an English landscape, with its meadow lands and picturesque groups of trees; but I venture to predict, that during the summer and autumnal months, you will find the shore of North Devon [Devon Island] abounding in rich vegetation, which forms the food on which the numerous animals in that locality exist. There, interspersed with gay mosses, you will find brilliant lichen, and luxuriant saxifrage, with the arctic poppy; the whole forming a delightful picture and instructive study to the inquiring mind."

I leave the sojourners at Beechey Island, on board the "North Star," to confirm or refute the above statement. The numerous animals have dwindled down to an occasional solitary bear, whose flesh, even to hungry men, is anything but palatable; and the above description is far too glowing and imaginative, for the scanty portions of the floral world at Beechey, or in its neighbourhood; although it is true that gay mosses and brilliant lichens are to be found there, specimens of which, obtained by Dr. McCormick, may be seen in the Arctic collection at the British Museum. (McDougall, 1857:280, 282-283).

McDougall pinpoints the important aesthetic thesis on which, as Yi-Fu Tuan argues (1971:17), the identity of man in

relation to the external world is based. Ordering sense impressions is a vital procedure in human conduct, but when the order being cast (in this case, by the Scot) over the outside world bears little relation to the phenomena actually there, it becomes questionable whether that order can stand for reality, and whether it can stand the burden of expectation which the illusions or schemata or taxonomies, that together one calls reality, must bear.

#### CONCLUSION

Just as the Picturesque permitted the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Briton to see the world with an English eye and to show off his landscape learning, it provided the nineteenth-century imperialist with a way to make other parts of the globe British and to show that he was abetting the effort to impart British/Christian values to foreigners and English scenes to foreign lands. Pope's and Thomson's intentions of making English views worthy of the Arts grew, with confidence, into the urge of the Victorian generations of imperialists to make other parts of the world identifiable by "correcting" them in terms of an English concept of nature. Arctic voyagers embarked, leaving behind what Charles Dickens (Brannan, 1966), called "an English hearth and Devon's waving trees," and, coming face to face with another form of nature, they attempted to "correct" it: first, by decoding the inscrutable sublimities of the terrain, or, citing Dickens, "the secrets of the vast Profound"; then, by "making a garden of the desert wide" in the name of British aesthetic principles, British science, and a British God. (The "Dr. McCormick" alluded to as the eccentric Scot by McDougall still spoke of an arctic landscape as "a fit subject for the pencil of a Claude" when he published his narrative in 1884 [McCormick, 1884:II:120].) What the tenacious voyagers met was a resilient land which, like the sea, gave up its secrets very grudgingly. Through no fault of their own, the Britons deployed an ill-fitting aesthetic *matériel* that, because largely unadaptable, caused fanciful depictions and, in the end, several perceptual mistakes themselves productive of a unique aesthetic map of the North.

Finding picturesque and genially sublime views is, as has been seen throughout the examination of these pictorial and narrative responses to the Arctic, an aesthetic practice that conserves the traveller's idea of how space and time in foreign realms exist in relation to what he knows. But continuing to find picturesque views where they do not exist or where the relations between European man and nature which underlie the aesthetic principles do not obtain, opens a dangerous and not always bridgeable gulf between illusion and nature, those two components of geography as Watson defines it. And a perversion in response to nature, that is, increasingly fanciful responses, will, rather than sustain the viewer's sense of identity, imperil his chances for understanding what changes an altered state of nature demands of him. As George McDougall (1857:278-279) implies, fanciful pictures of the Arctic produce graves; or, as John Ross noted, snow and ice in a Dutch landscape painting are not the same snow and ice which beset a scurvy-ridden crew of incarcerated sojourners at the greatest

odds with the surrounding environment (Ross, 1835:600-603, 698; MacLaren, 1982).

The unquestioned belief in a harmony operating between man and nature promises a certain blindness to the threat posed by an environment unguided by the beneficent hand of the Deity. Neither the Sublime nor the Picturesque met the British explorer's imaginative needs in the North: only the apocalyptic efforts in the poetry of Franklin's peers — Byron, Shelley, and Keats — display an imaginative scope commensurate with that of the explorer, a few of Cresswell's paintings marking a possible exception. The void which these poets imaginatively confronted bears a certain affinity to the void which the arctic map of 1819 showed. Charting the map, filling the void beyond the mouths of the Mackenzie and Coppermine rivers and the east coast of Baffin Island, like the Romantic poets' struggles to map the imaginative provinces of the mind, would cost the dreamers nothing less than life. Shelley's poetic epitaph for Keats in *Adonais* (1970) — "Die, / If thou wouldst be with that which thou dost seek!" — appears to be poignantly remembered in another line of heroically alliterative monosyllables, Tennyson's epitaph for the Franklin cenotaph — "They forged the last link with their lives." It was Franklin's crews who discovered the navigable Northwest Passage, but the discovery was like attainment of beauty in Keats's poetry: it came only with death. *Adonais* was Shelley's understanding of Keats's imaginative quest. Duncan Campbell Scott's comes in his poem entitled "Ode for the Keats Centenary" (1974). Not surprisingly, perhaps, Scott gives Keats's soul the "fields of arctic moss" as a topographical haunt in which to seek "The wonder of the various world, the power / Of 'seeing great things in loneliness.'"

Between 1770 and 1860, explorers of northern British North America did not perceive the region's vastness in terms of its unique landscape properties; nor were the geomorphic names for and the sheer dimensions of these properties — eskers, tarns, permafrosted valleys, gravel beaches of immense sizes, badlands erosion, glacial flutings, tundra polygons, ice-covered pingos, and more fresh-water lakes than in the rest of the world — known to them. Rather, the Picturesque and the Sublime dictated how the terrain was perceived, and although, along with astronomical computations, they told the Briton where he stood relative to the nature and geography of England, they pointed out what the nature of the North did *not* possess. Yet, just as the British explorers brought with them all their food and supplies, stubbornly yet understandably resisting adaptation to such proven survival techniques of the indigent peoples as a diet of pemmican and blubber (although the Ross expedition of 1829-33 survived only because of forced adaptation to this diet), so they brought with them a perceptual baggage which they felt was equally elemental to their survival but which proved adaptable only with difficulty. Distance in a view could only be measured where a foreground was succeeded by a middle ground, and a middle ground by a background. Where this did not occur, the Britons quite naturally complained of monotonous, dreary extents, lacking variety and uncomposable by conventional techniques. Just as Franklin in 1825 insisted upon using specially designed boats,

fabricated in London and tested on the Thames, to coast the north shore of the continent when Eskimos advised him that ice conditions necessitated sledge travel along the shore, so British explorers insisted with a wonderful tenacity upon making their landscape observations based upon made-in-England customs, made in England, where rock seldom meets sky without an intervening band of treetops, hedge rows, or, at the least, a plant- or soil-covering. Yet, this aesthetic tenacity not only sustained the early-century explorers in their searches for a passage, but it permitted the hundreds of mariners who searched for Franklin to endure harsh, even imperilling conditions until the missing men and, with them, the key to a passage were found.

Undoubtedly, the tenacity with which the explorers attacked the North compensated in part for the unsuitability of their perceptual schemata; however, it left for subsequent generations a bewildering legacy of landscape perception which could only see the Arctic, almost without exception, as a vast, uninhabitable, and annihilating realm (McClintock, 1861:13). The recent publication of poetry by F.R. Scott (1981:223-239) and by Al Purdy (1967:29-30, 36), as well as the journals and sketches of A.Y. Jackson's first arctic trip in 1927 (1982), attest to the difficulties involved in altering perception to the extent demanded of artists of any age by the North. Still, such relatively modern developments as aerial photography and, as in Purdy's poetry, the appreciation of minute flora and fauna have suggested new ways of seeing the realm that Canadians are just now learning to appropriate into their imaginative nationhood. Only 20 years ago, I.N. Smith edited the book he titled *The Unbelievable Land* (1964).

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