Odysseus of the Arctic:

The Epic of John Franklin and the Search for his Lost Expedition

Westward from the Davis Strait / Is there 'twas said to lie / The sea-route to the Orient / For which so many die.[1]

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[1] "The Northwest Passage," Stan Rogers

Abstract

This paper examines and maps the reasons for the lasting impression and legacy of the search for Sir. John Franklin's disappeared 1845 expedition in search of the Northwest Passage. In the wake of the Napoleonic Wars, burgeoning British Arctic exploration provided a rich foundation for serialized narratives, which, as they played off sentiments of national ambition and imperial pride, inspired a romanticization of the Arctic region and the men who explored it. The search for John Franklin's missing expedition became the epicenter of this trend due to the search efforts of his wife, Lady Jane Franklin, and the controversial findings of explorer John Rae. Most research focuses primarily or solely on Jane's efforts. As well as the public press coverage of the search and the response to Rae's reports as the cause of the expedition's popularity. This paper examines those two variables in tandem as well as mapping the legacy of the search through the movements and emergence of folksongs and other artistic works inspired by the expedition. Through analysis of letters and journals connected to the expedition and search, British newspapers publishing Arctic content, and archived recordings and broadsides of songs, this paper asserts that the relationship of the expedition to the quasi-mythological Northwest Passage, the efforts of Jane Franklin—amplified by the press, and the national fervor behind it—all cemented the lost Franklin Expedition as a keystone event in the history of western exploration, and a story of uniquely legendary status among the sagas of the arctic.

Ten men are seen across the northern ice, slowly pulling a sledge loaded with a boat. They are thin, dressed unsuitably for the arctic weather, and their mouths are hard and dry and black.[2] The men will spend five days camped on the eastern shore of Washington Bay, in that time they will trade for seal meat with the local Inuit people, and in return, gift their benefactors a chopping-knife in thanks. Perhaps a meager reprisal, but for men with nothing left, it is a tremendous gift. The men will follow the Inuit people, traveling at night when the rotting ice is thickest, desperately and arduously pulling their heavy sledge. The Inuit woman, Ahlangyah, who recounts this tale, does not know at the time that she and her family will be the last people to ever see these men alive.[3]

The men in question were several of the remaining officers and crew of the HMS *Erebus* and the HMS *Terror*. Two ships commandeered by the British Admiralty to carry out an expedition in search of the Northwest Passage, led by a man by the name of Sir. John Franklin. This expedition was one of many launched by the British government in the 19th century, all part of the search for a theoretical Northwest Passage—a sea route through the arctic, connecting the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, that would open a new trade route to Asia. Great strides were made through seafaring and overland voyages, but it was not until 1850 that the passage was fully charted by Robert McClure. In due course, the passage was not traversed solely by ship until Roald Amundsen did so in 1906. Both expeditions, however, could not have occurred without that of Sir. Franklin. Unlike other similar voyages, the Franklin Expedition experienced a unique amount of interest and notoriety due to the mysterious disappearance and death of the entire crew. This event triggered a slew of domestic efforts and expeditions in search of solving the

[2] Testimony of Ahlangyah.
Frederick Schwatka, *The Search for Franklin: A Narrative of the American Expedition Inder Lieutenant Schwatka, 1878-1880* (London, U.K.: T. Nelson and Sons, 1882), 35-37.
[3]Ibid.

case, including that of McClure. The effects of the expedition's disappearance went far beyond simply the immediate responses. The high stakes and political and cultural significance of the expedition, fed by a zealous press, led to a cultural and artistic movement that was characterized by a robust bevy of folksongs and paintings commemorating, and inspired by, the expedition and its loss. Notably, the ballad Lady Franklin's Lament (c.1851-2),[4] whose dissemination and popularity eventually inspired the likes of American singer-songwriter Bob Dylan. Indeed, the tragedy and subsequent mystery of the Franklin Expedition, compounded by an increasing sense of imperial ambition, catalyzed a boom of arctic exploration which inspired a popular impression of the lost expedition as the new "Holy Grail" of discovery. This effect, created by the romanticization of Franklin's story through song and press, the efforts of his wife Jane Franklin, and furthered by the expedition's relation to the quasi-mythological Northwest Passage, not only cemented the lost Franklin Expedition as a keystone event in the history of western exploration, but also a story of uniquely legendary status among the sagas of the arctic.

Since before the onset of the Little Ice Age in the late Middle Ages European cultures have attempted to discover routes to and through North America for the purposes of trading. Viking expeditions during the 10th century made it as far as Ellesmere, Skraeling, and Ruin islands in modern day Nunavut, Canada to trade with the indigenous Inuit and Dorset peoples.[5] Five centuries later saw the rise of the "Age of Discovery," and an interest in a sea-route to Asia after the Ottoman Empire monopolized the major overland routes. Left without a route across the North American continent or easily around the coast of Africa or South America, and unwilling

[4] "Lady Franklin's Lament for Her Husband." London: Crawford Collections, 1852. In https://digital.nls.uk/74897809.

[5] Tryggvi J. Oleson, *Early Voyages and Northern Approaches* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1964), 44-58.

to be 'beat out' by Portugal and Spain, England and France began pursuing the only remaining alternative: a possible route through the arctic north.

At this time, the "discovery" and exploration of the Americas re-kindled an interest in cartography and scientific mapping methods. Many of these maps, such as Giacomo Gastaldi's *Universale Descrittione del Monde* and the *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* of Abraham Ortelius,[6] contributed to the widespread belief in the Anian Strait. A theoretical (and non-existent) strait separating North America and Asia, it was believed to be the western end of a Northwest Passage. While the search for the Anian Strait was unsuccessful, it did lead to the charting of the Pacific coast—from California to the Bering Strait. The first concrete expeditions in search of the Northwest Passage started in England in the second half of the 16th century with Martin Frobisher, whose 1576 voyage was notable for being the first well-documented interaction between Europeans and the Inuit people.[7] Following Frobisher, Humphrey Gilbert, Sir. Walter Raleigh, and John Davis all undertook expeditions along different routes starting in the late 1500's. Their expeditions were unsuccessful in finding a passage but did reveal the morphology and ice-blocked composition of the region—that showed how much more difficult than expected the search would be. The most significant expedition of the century was Henry Hudson's 1610 discovery of Hudson Bay. While Hudson believed that a Northwest Passage could be found in the bay, his crew was reluctant to continue their expedition after a harsh winter, and they mutinied, leaving Hudson and a small group of his supporters to die in a lifeboat.

After Hudson, not much progress was made until after the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars. In the early 1800's the British government renewed their efforts under the initiative and

[6] Elena Baldassarri, "The Northwest Passage as a Voyage to Myth and Adventure," Environment & Society Portal, August 18, 2021, https://www.environmentandsociety.org/exhibitions/northwest-passage/northwest-passage-voyage-myth-and-adventure#top.
[7] Glyn Williams, *Arctic Labyrinth: The Quest for the Northwest Passage* (Univ of California Press, 2011), 20.

encouragement of second secretary of the Admiralty: John Barrow. Barrow endeavored to convince the public as well as the government that the search for a Northwest Passage was a matter of national interest—and thus a duty of the Royal Navy. In the wake of the Napoleonic Wars, Britain was left with a larger navy than it knew what to do with and a renewed sense of national pride that Barrow sought to take advantage of in pursuit of resuming colonial and mercantile exploration. In 1817 he published an article in the popular paper, the *Quarterly Review*, inspiring interest in the movement of ice in the upper Atlantic. After successfully convincing the First Lord of the Admiralty, Lord Melville, to sanction four expeditions into the Arctic, Barrow published his book *Chronological history of voyages into the Arctic regions*. In his book, Barrow argued for the scientific results to be expected from such expeditions and leveraged the feeling of imperial pride and national ambition left over from the war to motivate support.[8] The most notable expeditions chartered by Barrow during this time were of John Ross, who controversially claimed that there was no passage to be found north of the Davis Strait (something that almost completely destroyed his reputation),[9] William Edward Perry, who went further west than anyone before him (but was forced to turn back because of the ice barrier), and the expeditions of John Franklin.

Sir. John Franklin led two expeditions through the Canadian arctic in 1819 and 1825, gaining a reputation in Europe as a courageous and stalwart explorer,[10] but it was his third expedition, in 1845, that proved the catalyst for all that followed. One of the final expeditions chartered by Barrow, Franklin was in fact his fifth choice of leader. Two other options, James Fitzjames and Francis Crozier, were rejected for command by the admiralty but served as

[8] Ann Savours, *The Search for the North West Passage* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1999), 39-43.
[9] "Narrative of a Second Voyage in Search of a North-West Passage," GLASGOW UNIVERSITY LIBRARY SPECIAL COLLECTIONS DEPARTMENT, September 2006.
[10] Fergus Fleming, *Barrow's Boys: A Stirring Story of Daring, Fortitude and Outright Lunacy* (London: Granta, 1998), 389.

second-in-command of the *Erebus* and executive officer and commander of the *Terror* respectively. The two ships used by the expedition, HMS' *Terror* and *Erebus*, were outfitted with steam engines, internal steam heating, and ice-breaking prows—all recent innovations in shipbuilding—and stocked with three years' worth of provisions.[11] Only six of the expeditions hundred and twenty-nine men had previous Arctic experience, and on the 19th of May, 1845 they sailed north from England.

On July 14th, 1845, the *Erebus* and Terror were moored in Baffin Bay, off the coast of Greenland. Alongside them were the whaling ships *Enterprise* and the *Prince of Wales*, commanded by Robert Martin and Dannett of Hull. Aboard the E*nterprise*, Franklin's men and the whalers dined and conversed. Despite the ships being outfitted with only three years of food, Franklin told the whaler Martin that he had enough food for five to seven years if needed, and there was some contradiction in the length of time the expedition was expected to take. One member of the crew said two and half years, while the ice-master James Reid speculated that the voyage would take four to six years.[12] Around the 27th of July, Martin bade farewell to Franklin and his crew, and on the 28th he spied the *Erebus* and the *Terror* moored to an iceberg before he lost sight of them. Little did he know that he would become the last subject of western civilization to see the Franklin Expedition alive.[13,14]

After this point little is known for sure about what happened. Over the following one-hundred seventy years or so, much of the story has been pieced together from subsequent

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"Preparations," The Franklin Mystery: Life and Death in the Arctic (Canadian Mysteries, 2015).

[12] A.G.E. Jones, "Captain Robert Martin: A peterhead whaling master in the nineteenth century," *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, (1969): 196, DOI: 10.1080/00369226908736133.

[13] Ibid.

"Sir John Franklin's Expedition," *The Morning Post* (London, October 25, 1845), p. 5.

explorations, modern scientists, and Inuit testimony.[15] However, in 1847 there had been no word from Franklin for almost two years. The orders given to Franklin upon his command included instructions for sending messages by bottle about the ship's whereabouts and the conditions of the region during the time the expedition spent above sixty-five degrees north.[16] Yet no messages were recovered before 1851, and by the time 1847 arrived, with no word from or sign of the expedition, uncertainty began to creep into the minds of John Franklin's wife, Jane, and several members of the admiralty.

As the expedition progressed, commented on and followed closely by the press, the public became more and more invested in the journey of Franklin and his crew. In the early 1800's, the arctic grasped a hold of the European imagination and began appearing heavily in the literature of the century. The most famous example of this being the use of the Arctic and the search for the Northwest Passage as the setting and framing of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; Or the Modern Prometheus.* Beyond lengthy novels, however, arctic narratives shared in serial form through periodicals also became very popular as a means of entertainment.[17] Following the Peterloo Massacre, the deaths of protesters for parliamentary reform at the hands of the cavalry, the British government passed the Six Acts of 1819. Aimed at suppressing "radical" movements and threats of reform, the acts imposed an increased tax on radical newspapers, leading to raised prices that prevented their accessibility to the masses. To adapt, newspapers like the *Mirror of Literature,* the *Literary Chronicle, Amusement,* and *Instruction* achieved great success in

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[15] From the departure of the expedition in 1845 to the discovery of the wreck of the HMS Terror in 2016, the most recent significant discovery.

[16] The official orders of the admiralty given to Franklin, detailing the purpose and course of the expedition. Including instructions for communicating and recording observations, and instructions to winter on the coast if needed and continue exploring the following season.
Haddington, G. Cockburn, and W.H. Gage, "Instructions Addressed to Captain Sir John Franklin (5 May 1845)," Instructions Addressed to Captain Sir John Franklin (5 May 1845) § (1848), pp. 3-7, https://www.canadianmysteries.ca/sites/franklin/archive/text/InstructionsToFranklin_en.htm.

[17] Janice Cavell, *Tracing the Connected Narrative : Arctic Exploration in British Print Culture, 1818-1860* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), p. 154, ProQuest Ebook Central.

publishing content related to ongoing arctic explorations. Being largely apolitical, gripping, and providing fodder for illustrations (which due to new technologies in printing were cheaper than blocks of text and took up more space) these expeditions brought the newspapers great success.[18] Beginning shortly after the publishing of John Franklin's book on his 1819 expedition, the *Mirror's* publications quickly grew in popularity, resulting in many other journals and newspapers—even ones that did not previously publish arctic content—beginning to publish their own articles and reprints of letters. For example, the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, which had the largest circulation of any periodical at the time, replaced articles of "less temporary character" with letters from officers of Edward Parry's 1821 expedition upon their return. This was done ostensibly to satisfy readers but was really to remain in good standing as a publication--and compete with the *Literary Gazette* and *Chronicle.*[19,20] Even when expeditions were unsuccessful or uninteresting, the public demand for the stories remained, as the people understood Arctic exploration to be an ongoing story--with conflicts and failures just like any other. This understanding was encouraged by the press. The publication *The British Critic* remarked that: "it would be difficult to suppose that any of our readers are unacquainted with the slow advances in discovery [of this sort]."[21] These publishers were quick to assure their readers that the search for the Northwest Passage was one of the most pressing geographic questions of the time. One of the writers of the *Mirror* went so far as to say that ""To a nation like this, such expeditions are honourable, even in their failure; and … the least successful contributes something towards a more correct knowledge of the Arctic Regions, and thus paves the way for future discoveries."'[22] Expanding on the ideas expressed by Barrow in his *Chronological*

[18] Ibid, 141-142.
[19] "The Northern Expedition," *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine*, 1823, pp. 753-757, 756.
[20] Cavell, *Tracing the Connected Narrative*, 142-143.
[21] "North-West Passage," *The British Critic*, 1824, pp. 463-496, 465.
[22] Cavell, *Tracing the Connected Narrative*, 144.

History,[23] the press helped emphasized that the arduousness and fraught repeated efforts of the explorers was not proof of the inaccessibility of the arctic, but that perseverance and effort were defining traits of the 'British character.' The non-political periodicals held great appeal to all classes, but none more so than those of John Franklin, a figure considered to be almost "canonized" by the people: "'[...]many of [the northwest passage's] most celebrated navigators acquired their glory, and have had their names almost canonized by a grateful people.'" As seen in an excerpt published in the *Edinburgh Review* December 1828.[24] This impression existed even from the beginning of his exploratory career.[25] He came into renown as "the Man Who Ate His Boots" upon his return from his 1819 Coppermine Expedition where the desperate measures he and his men took to ward off starvation captured the public imagination and was lauded as a sort of folk hero upon his return from his difficult voyage.[26,27]

As winter 1847 approached, Sir. James Ross, the nephew of John Ross and an explorer in his own right, began to express concerns about the lack of news. He entreated the commissioners of the Admiralty to understand that something unfortunate had likely befallen the expedition and stated that "[he would] venture to believe that unless an expedition is sent to enquire after their fate during the approaching season, few, if any of the officers and crews, will ever return to this Country."[28] While the admiralty was not overly concerned about the lack of news from

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[23] John Barrow, *A Chronological History of Voyages into the Arctic Regions Undertaken Chiefly for the Purpose of Discovering a North-East, North-West, or Polar Passage Between the Atlantic and Pacific* (London: J. Murray, 1818), 379.

[24] "'[...]many of [the northwest passage's] most celebrated navigators acquired their glory, and have had their names almost canonized by a grateful people.'" Published in the *Edinburgh Review* December 1828. Cavell, *Tracing the Connected Narrative*, 148.

[25] Over a dozen letters and reports relating to Franklin's second voyage were published between 1825 and 1827, as well as a steel engraving as part of the *Mirror's* series on famous figures. Ibid, 147.

[26] Fergus Fleming, *Barrow's Boys: A Stirring Story of Daring, Fortitude and Outright Lunacy* (London: Granta, 1998), 153.

[27] Cavell, *Tracing the Connected Narrative*, 146-147.

[28] Ross cited in his letter that he had promised Franklin to look into the expedition's status if nothing had been heard of them by January 1847.
James Ross, "The Franklin Mystery: Life and Death in the Arctic," *The Franklin Mystery: Life and Death in the Arctic* (Canadian Mysteries, 2015): 1-2.

Franklin's expedition, as they did not expect to hear from him until the following year, they prepared to outfit three expeditions to search if no news arrived before then.[29] These expeditions used a concentrated three-pronged approach to find the lost expedition; one voyage was overland led by John Richardson and John Rae, one approached from the Pacific under Henry Kellet, and the third through the Atlantic with James Ross. In addition, the British government issued a reward: 20,000 dollars to anyone who was able to find and assist Franklin's expedition.[30] When these efforts revealed next to nothing, it only increased the public interest in the search: "Since the zealous attempts to rescue the Holy Sepulcher in the Middle Ages," one newspaper exclaimed, “the Christian world has not so unanimously agreed on anything as the desire to recover Sir John Franklin,"[31] And no-one was more adamant in their desire than Lady Franklin. Going so far as to appeal to US president Zachary Taylor for help in a moving letter where she appealed to shared national sentiments, stating: "I am not without hope that you will deem it not unworthy of a great and kindred nation to take up the cause of humanity which I plead in a national spirit, and thus generously make it your own."[32] Lady Franklin devoted all her time, energy, and considerable connections to finding her husband. Together the outpouring of support from the public, press, and Lady Franklin was a sign that the Admiralty could not ignore.[33] The

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[29] “Sir John Franklin's Expedition,” *Sheffield and Rotherham Independent* (Sheffield, November 13, 1847), p. 3.
[30] British Admiralty. “Admiralty Reward Poster (1850 March 7).” *The Franklin Mystery: Life and Death in the Arctic*. Canadian Mysteries, 2015.

[31] Martin W. Sandler, *Resolute* (Sterling Publishing Company, Inc., 2006; Internet Archive, 2012), p. 88. https://archive.org/details/resoluteepicsear00sand/page/n241/mode/2up?q=songs.

[32] Jane Franklin and Erika Behrisch, *As Affecting the Fate of My Absent Husband: Selected Letters of Lady Franklin Concerning the Search for the Lost Franklin Expedition* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Univesity Press, 2009), 70-71, ProQuest Ebook Central.
[33] Political and class tensions expounded on through the press at this time played a large role in the fervor, the narrative became one of conflict between the people and the government—what was the nature of the relationship between the expedition and the nation, and what did the country owe the lost explorers. The underlying consensus in this conflict was that only public opinion and intervention could ensure the proper effort—these men were heroes of the *people*. Cavell, *Tracing the Connected Narrative*, 171-173.

following decade saw the greatest surge of arctic voyages and activity in history, as many as forty ships and thousands of people would join the search for Franklin.[34]

In late October 1854 an answer to what happened finally appeared. John Rae, one of the men who had been first to conduct a search into the fate of Franklin, returned from Boothia Peninsula, the northernmost point of mainland North America, with grave news.[35] During his journey he had encountered a group of Inuit hunters who told him of a party of *kabloonas* (white men) who had died of starvation further west.[36] Their ships had apparently been crushed by the ice and they were headed west in search of deer to hunt. Later that season, thirty-five or so corpses and graves were discovered. Even more tragically, Rae reported that: "From the mutilated state of many of the bodies, and the contents of the kettles, it is evident that our wretched countrymen had been driven to the last dread alternative as a means of sustaining life [cannibalism]."[37] Upon returning to England, Rae was quick to report his findings. Believing that the many artifacts of the lost expedition (shown in figure 1. of the appendix) that he bartered for or found would be sufficient proof of the natives' testimony, Rae sent a report to the admiralty—who promptly had it published in *The Times*.[38]

The response was immediate and scathing. Within a week of the article in *The Times*, responses and criticisms of Rae, his findings, and his methods were appearing in the press.[39] With one word, John Rae, the man who had traversed more of the arctic than any other Franklin

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[34] One of these individuals, Lt. Robert McClure, was part of an 1850 expedition that became stuck in the ice, much like Franklin's had, but in this case, McClure was able to trek over the ice to reach a rescue ship. In doing so, he became the first person to traverse the Northwest Passage. Sandler, *Resolute,* 95.
[35] Ibid, 136-139.
[36] John Rae, "Further Papers Relative to the Recent Arctic Expeditions in Search of Sir John Franklin and the Crews of H. M. S. Erebus and Terror," *Further Papers Relative to the Recent Arctic Expeditions in Search of Sir John Franklin and the Crews of H. M. S. Erebus and Terror* (London, U.K.: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1854), pp. 835-844.
[37] Ibid, 839.
[38] Cavell, *Tracing the Connected Narrative,* 204.

[39] E.J.H., "The Franklin Mystery: Life and Death in the Arctic," *The Franklin Mystery: Life and Death in the Arctic* (Canadian Mysteries, n.d.).

searcher, who knew more about the Inuit than anyone else, created a maelstrom bigger than any other since the search for the Northwest Passage had begun.[40] It was inconceivable to Victorian society that representatives of the most civilized nation on earth, on an awe-inspiring and epic journey, would ever do such a heinous thing. And no one was more outraged than Lady Franklin.[41] Accusing Rae of embellishing his story and labeling him as an opportunist, only out for his own glory, Lady Franklin rallied the press and authorities to her cause yet again.[42] In a most impressive display of influence and demonstration of fortitude, Lady Franklin found a spokesperson in her campaign by the way of one Charles Dickens. Though an admirer of Rae, Dicken's fervently opposed his findings, and the two exchanged a series of letters in the journal *Household Words,* which Dickens often contributed to and edited.[43] Beginning in early December 1854, Dickens published nine pages condemning Rae's findings, asserting that: "that it is in the highest improbable that such men as the officers and crews of the two lost ships would, or could, in any extremity of hunger, alleviate the pains of starvation by this horrible means."[44] Dickens published Rae's response in *Household Words* but did not retract any of his arguments. Rae continued to push for his findings in the following decades, publishing a reaffirmation of

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[40] Sandler, *Resolute,* 136-140.

[41] A formal complaint lodged by Jane Franklin outlining her condemnation of John Rae and the results of his discovery. Jane Franklin, "Further Papers Relative to the Recent Arctic Expeditions in Search of Sir J. Franklin and the Crews of Her Majesty's Ships 'Erebus' and 'Terror;" Including the Reports of Dr. Kane and Messrs. Anderson and Stewart.," *Further Papers Relative to the Recent Arctic Expeditions in Search of Sir J. Franklin and the Crews of Her Majesty's Ships "Erebus" and "Terror;" Including the Reports of Dr. Kane and Messrs. Anderson and Stewart.* (London, U.K.: Harrison and Sons, 1856), pp. 58-63.

[42] The periodicals were quick to pick up the story and dissect it, a number, such as *The Times* questioned whether the integrity of the "esquimaux's" information could be trusted, others such as the *Daily News* scorned Rae for placing so much emphasis on second-hand information. Criticism turned to Rae personally as well, condemning him as "reprehensible" for not verifying his information, and even for publishing it at all. Cavell, *Tracing the Connected Narrative,* 207.

[43] Richard King published a similar statement, though one that was much more vicious. Rae now stood accused of "duplicitous, self-serving behavior" and was widely panned as an apathetic servant of the government as his refutations of Dicken's statement adopted a sentiment much less laudatory of the lost expedition. In addition, he further incurred the ire of Lady Franklin by returning the artifacts of the expedition, not to her, but to the admiralty. Through these actions, Rae became firmly associated with the world of officialdom, something that cemented his unfavorable reputation to the modern day. Cavell, 210-219.

[44] Charles Dickens, "The Lost Arctic Voyagers [Part 1 and 2] (1854 December 2," *Household Words,* December 2, 1854, pp. 361-393, 361.

cannibalism having taken place in *The London Standard* in 1884, but his reputation never recovered.[45] In point of fact, despite his accomplishments in geographical discovery and arctic navigation, Rae was the only major 19th century British explorer to not receive a knighthood.[46]

The public nature of his exchange with Dickens served only to sink Rae deeper in the hole that he had been thrown into by Lady Franklin and the press, and it was not helped that the Admiralty granted Rae the reward for finding news of Franklin. In doing so, the government considered the matter solved, and staunchly refused to send out any more expeditions.[47] With rising concerns over the cost incurred by these expeditions, both financially and sacrificial—the government had spent over forty million dollars in today's money and lost over a dozen searchers.[48] The admiralty officially declared the members of the expedition dead. This decision was met with support from members of the public and peerage who believed that the searches were a waste of time and resources. While it never became the prevailing sentiment, pushback against the search expeditions gained traction as the Crimean War began and other matters became more pressing. The popularity of John Franklin and the search for him lay in the romantic nature of the narrative surrounding it, in part created by the emergence of the romantic movement that colored the writing of the era, and the culture-hero mystique that emerged around the explorers. Rae's negative discovery and the mounting costs began to dissolve some of the rabid infatuation with the expedition, and outspoken cries for Franklin's rescue gradually subsided as the British public accepted the likelihood of his death and the government turned to more pressing matters.

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[45] John Rae, "The Franklin Mystery: Life and Death in the Arctic," *The Franklin Mystery: Life and Death in the Arctic* (Canadian Mysteries , n.d.).
[46] Martin W. Sandler, *Resolute: The Epic Search for the Northwest Passage and John Franklin, and the Discovery of the Queen's Ghost Ship* (Sterling Publishing Co., Inc., 2010), 143.
[47] "Franklin Searches Interactive," CBCnews (CBC/Radio Canada), accessed December 16, 2022, https://www.cbc.ca/news2/interactives/franklin-searches/horizontal.html.
[48] Sandler, *Resolute,* 162.

This did not deter Jane Franklin, however. Taking the extreme cost of the search missions as a sign to not let them be in vain, she began personally funding and sponsoring more and more expeditions. As Lady Franklin appealed more and more to the admiralty, the American government, the British press, and the colleagues of her husband, her popularity grew—she became a sort of heroine of the story. Due to the romantic nature of the metanarrative surrounding the search, and the 'man of the people' type that supported and aided her, such as William Penny, a 'lowborn' Scottish whaler who even the Royal Navy turned to for advice in navigating the arctic[49] an atmosphere of "chivalrous adventure" emerged.[50] Like a queen sending her knights out on quests, Lady Franklin, in the words of Sir Clements Markham, a member of the 1850 search expedition under Captain Horatio Austin: "introduced into the expeditions the element of chivalry, and it was this inspiration which gave to the searches the character of an epic."[51] This impression helped further shape the mythical elements of the search. Lady Franklin was like a noble lady desperately trying to save her husband from his prison of ice with the help of her loyal knights. In contrast, the government took on the role of treacherous dragon, stymieing a higher calling to justice and duty.[52]

Alongside the periodicals and political moves, the Franklin expedition and the subsequent search for it—especially that by Lady Franklin—generated an artistic movement as well. Beginning in 1851 with the publishing of George Henry Boker's song "A Ballad of Sir. John Franklin"[53] the 1850's onward saw a number of songs written lamenting the fate of Franklin,

[49] As well as William Kennedy, Henry Grinnell, Elisha Kane, Sherard Osborn, Francis Beaufort, and Edward Parry among others. Cavell, *Tracing the Connected Narrative,* 172.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid.
[52] "Fancy these men in their adamantine prison … chained up by the Polar Spirit whom they had dared, – lingering through years of cold and darkness," a suggestion by a writer of the *Athenaeum,* echoed in the popular interpretation. Cavell, 172.
[53] Shane McCorristine, “Polar Queens, Ghosts and Mummies: Love and Laments,” The Spectral Arctic: A History of Dreams and Ghosts in Polar Exploration (UCLPress), accessed December 16, 2022.

praying for his return, and memorializing the search for him. Some examples include "Northward Ho! Or Baffled not Beaten" a song about arctic exploration during the era that mentions Franklin (see fig. 2 of the appendix), the poem "The Affair of the *Resolute"* by Martin Tupper detailing the voyages of the search ship the HMS *Resolute,* and the J. Wilson ballad opening with "My Franklin dear long has been gone..."[54,55] Often written to the tune of popular folksongs, ballads surrounding the expedition would be published in newspapers as 'broadside ballads', most notably, the song "Lady Franklin's Lament."[56] First appeared around 1852,[57] it was written to the tune of the traditional Irish melody, "Cailín Óg a Stór. Dozens of variations of the song exist, two of the most common being "Lord Franklin" and "The Sailor's Dream." The song tells the story of a sailor who dreams of Lady Franklin speaking of the loss of her husband and her wish that he would return.

Just as the story told by the song grew in popularity, so did the song itself, appearing in Scotland and Canada as well as making its way to the United States before the early 1900's. The earliest recording in the United States dates to 1941, sung by a man named William Merrit who learned it from his Scottish mother, who, judging by Merrit's age, likely became familiar with the tune from sailors and whalers in the Orkney Islands in the late 1800's.[58] A variety of recordings exist in the Orkney Islands, preserving the versions of the songs known by fisherman and sailors from the 1970's who learned the tune from older relatives.[59] Finally, the oldest Canandian recording comes sung by Edward Little of Nova Scotia in 1948.[60] In the early days of the song's

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[54] Sandler, *Resolute*, 272.
[55] J. Wilson, *Broadside Ballads Online* (Bodleian Libraries, n.d.).
[56] Many variations exist with slight changes to lyrics and/or title. Alternative titles: *Lord Franklin, Franklin's Crew, The Fate of Franklin.* Robert B. Waltz and David G. Engle (Fresno, n.d.).
[57] "Lady Franklin's Lament for Her Husband." London: Crawford Collections, 1852.

[58] *Track 05 : Fate of Franklin* (Ludlow, n.d.), https://archive.org/details/HHFBC_tapes_D14B.
[59] *The Fate of Franklin* (Orkney, Scotland, n.d.).
[60] *Franklin and His Bold Crew* (Terrace Bay), accessed 2023.

existence, however, it did not become entirely widespread until after news of Franklin's fate arrived—despite the song having been written prior to the news of his death.[61]

After five expeditions with little success, in 1857 Lady Franklin purchased the schooner *Fox* and enlisted a young but experienced explorer named Leopold McClintock to search around King Williams Island. Finally, where many other expeditions had failed, McClintock made the key discovery. In a stone cairn on the edge of the island, McClintock's mission found the remains of five corpses and the first written record of the Franklin Expedition.[62,63] The message, first dated May 28th, 1847, stated that all was well with the expedition. A second message, added a year later, dated April 28th, 1848, dealt crushing news. Franklin had died on the 11th of June 1847, twelve years past.[64]

The news was received by the public with great sadness. By 1875 a variety of memorials had been erected in Franklin's honor, a statue outside Waterloo Palace, the Athenaeum Club, and a plinth in Westminster Abbey hosting an inscription by Alfred, Lord Tennyson among many others. Despite the unspoken assumption that Franklin had been dead for a while, the concrete news was crushing. Yet, the search was not over. While Britain was satisfied, Lady Franklin was not. Though she lacked the resources to continue launching expeditions, she refused to give up on finding the remains of the expedition and the wrecks of the ships. Encouraged by her, explorers in the United States picked up the mantle. The expeditions of Charles Hall and Frederick Schwatka were successful in collecting expansive oral testimony from the Inuit people, more artifacts, and established a larger base of evidence for what happened to the expedition.[65]

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[61] While the ballad did appear in broadside form, it was not widely published until 1861. Robert B. Waltz and David G. Engle (Fresno, n.d.).
[62] Sandler, *Resolute,* 170.

[63] See fig. 3, image of the note.
[64] Sandler, *Resolute,* 168.

[65] "Franklin Expedition Timeline," The Franklin Mystery: Life and Death in the Arctic (Canadian Mysteries, 2015).

The findings of these expeditions helped create a better idea of when and how to successfully traverse the Northwest Passage, which was finally done in 1906 by Roald Amundsen on the ship the *Gjøa.*[66] Sixty years after Franklin's final attempt to discover it and fifty-six years after Robert McClure was credited with discovering the passage, it was fully traversed by ship.[67] The final frontier of western exploration had been conquered. Yet, the story did not end there, a deeper connection had been made. Amundsen himself said it best: it was the stories of the old explorers that "thrilled me as nothing I had ever read before. What appealed to me most were the sufferings that John Franklin and his men had to endure. A strange ambition burned within me, to endure the same privations ... I decided to be an explorer."[68] Like other great heroes of empire before him, to those that followed, Franklin became a sort of martyr. A symbol, in death, of Man's battle to triumph over the wilds. His failure represented the possibility of success by someone else, and spurred a sense of righteousness, that his death in the arctic was something to be avenged in the name of the ultimate quest. The tragedy of the Franklin expedition became the archetypal call to adventure for legions of eager explorers, and that sentiment endured similarly in the greater public.

The mystery and romanticism of the Franklin expedition has continued to inspire and intrigue since then. It was in 2014 and 2016 that the wrecks of the HMS *Erebus* and HMS *Terror* were found, and investigations into their artifacts continue to be made.[69] The ballad "Lady Franklin's Lament" has proven to be enduringly popular, having been consistently performed and

[66] Elena Baldassarri, "The Northwest Passage as a Voyage to Myth and Adventure," Environment & Society Portal, August 18, 2021.
[67] Sandler, *Resolute*, 228.

[68] Ibid, 230.
[69] NPT Staff, "Research Resumes at Franklin Expedition Wreck Sites," National Parks Traveler, May 4, 2022, https://www.nationalparkstraveler.org/2022/05/research-resumes-franklin-expedition-wreck-sites.

recorded since 1954 with A.L Lloyd's album *The Singing Sailor.*[70] Though perhaps the most enduring testament to the popularity of the song lies in its influence on the great Bob Dylan. After hearing Martin Carthy perform "Lady Franklin's Lament" in 1962, he was inspired. Dylan wrote a song based on the central themes of the ballad and to the same tune, a song that became "Bob Dylan's Dream."[71] Many other artists have been influenced by the expedition, and countless pieces of art (the most famous being Edwin Landseer's supposedly haunted painting. *Man Proposes, God Disposes*),[72] music, books (Jules Verne's eponymous hero of *Mistress Branican* was based off Lady Franklin's efforts), and other inspired works continue to be created from Iron Maiden[73] to the popular tv series, AMC's *The Terror.*

Thus, the question remains, why? Why has this expedition, one that failed in its mission and cost hundreds of millions of dollars to recover corpses and trinkets, surpassed the legend of the Northwest Passage and become a cultural touchstone for discovery? From the beginning there was criticism, early commentators questioned the value of northern exploration and the costs of the dangerous expeditions.[74] One review in the 1829 volume of the *Westminster Review* criticized in particular the narratives surrounding the burgeoning focus on arctic exploration. The unknown author derided the books written by Barrow and Franklin as being dull and overly empirical, while also leaning too heavily into "romantic delusions."[75] This was one of the first criticisms of this kind, but not the last. Modern post-colonial and ecological scholarship takes a much more disparaging view of the romanticization and national celebration of the Arctic region and its trade routes. Heather Smith wrote in *The International Journal*, regarding discussion of

[70]"Lady Franklin's Lament / Lord Franklin (Roud 487; Laws K9; G/D 1:16; Henry H815)," Mainly Norfolk: English folk and other Good music, accessed December 16, 2022.
[71] Ibid.
[72] See fig. 4
[73] Their song "Stranger in a Strange Land" is based off the expedition.
[74] Cavell, *Tracing the Connected Narrative*, 144-145.
[75] Ibid, 150.

sovereignty and climate change in the arctic, that "we see that the assumptions of control and domination that are so central to the idea of sovereignty in the […] Arctic are naïve and dangerous."[76] She argues that they are naïve because we cannot control the future of the Arctic any more than we can control the future of any part of the environment. And they are dangerous because the Western militaristic view of securitization and stewardship does nothing to combat climate change. The Arctic is not some mythical paradise of future technology and discovery, but the very real home of many groups of Indigenous people, animals, and geographies that are strongly affected by ecological and political changes.

Yet at the same time, perhaps there is some value to the mythologizing and rhapsodizing. In a television interview about the use of the Northwest Passage as a trade route, arctic expert and author Pierre Berton stated that "'a commercially viable Northwest Passage would detract from the romance of the region.'"[77] Berton's comment truly gets to heart of the matter. Though perhaps a cliché, the great attraction of the Northwest Passage was the *journey*, not the destination. Arguably, no journey was more epic than that of John Franklin and those who searched for him. Like Odysseus of old, he heard the call of the unknown and answered it. Leaving a noble Penelope behind to await his return, and a thousand Telemachus' to search for him. The legend, for through the folksongs and serial narratives that have carried the tale through the ages has surpassed in many ways the bounds of actuality, is one of romance, adventure, and the pursuit of something greater than oneself. Even, and especially, at the cost of everything.

Seeking gold and glory / Leaving weathered, broken bones / And a long-forgotten lonely cairn of stones

[76] Heather Smith, "Choosing Not to See: Canada, Climate Change, and the Arctic," *International Journal* 65, (2010): 941-942.
[77] Sandler, *Resolute,* 229.

- *Stan Rogers, "The Northwest Passage"*

Appendix

Figure 1: tools and artifacts recovered by John Rae.

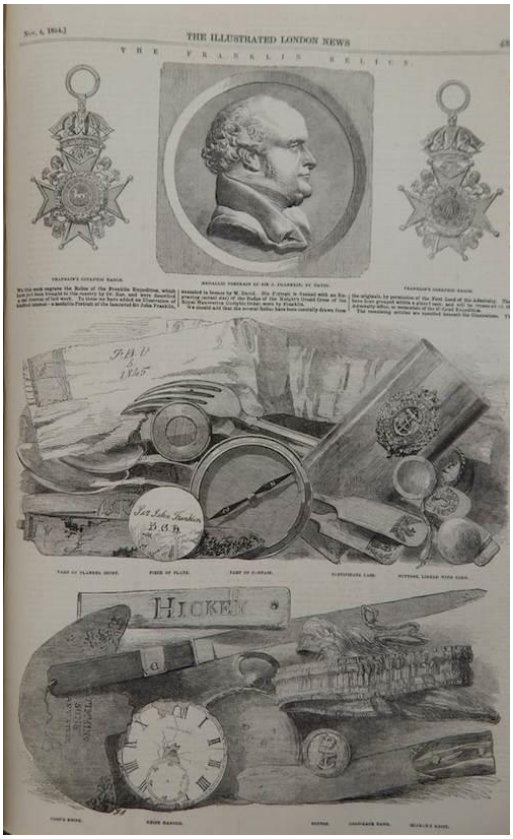


Figure 2: song cover for the ballad "Northward Ho! Or Baffled not Beaten."

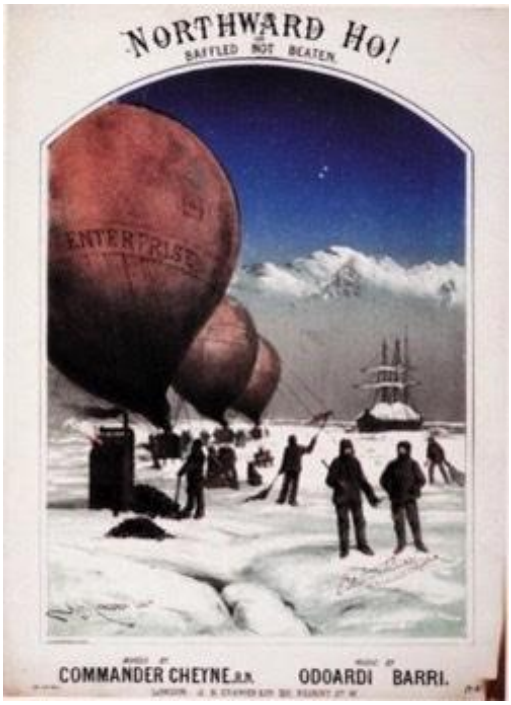
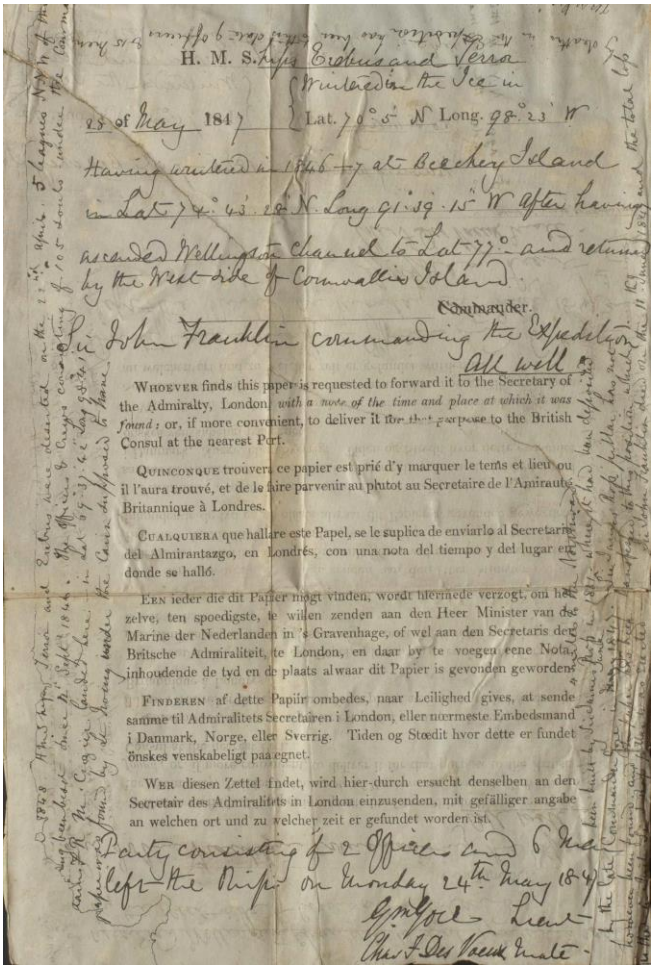


Figure 3: the message from Franklin's expedition found on King Williams Island by Leopold McClintock.



H. M. S. Erebus and Terror
Wintered in the Ice in
28 of May 184[illegible] Lat. 70° 5' N Long. 98° 23' W
Having wintered in 1846-47 at Beechey Island
in Lat. 74° 43' 28" N Long. 91° 39' 15" W after having
ascended Wellington Channel to Lat. 77° and returned
by the West side of Cornwallis Island.

Commander.

Sir John Franklin commanding the Expedition

All well

WHOEVER finds this paper is requested to forward it to the Secretary of the Admiralty, London, *with a note of the time and place at which it was found*; or, if more convenient, to deliver it for that purpose to the British Consul at the nearest Port.

QUINCONQUE trouvera ce papier est prié d'y marquer le tems et lieu ou il l'aura trouvé, et de le faire parvenir au plutot au Secretaire de l'Amirauté Britannique à Londres.

CUALQUIERA que hallare este Papel, se le suplica de enviarlo al Secretario del Almirantazgo, en Londres, con una nota del tiempo y del lugar en donde se halló.

EEN ieder die dit Papier mogt vinden, wordt hiermede verzogt, om het zelve, ten spoedigste, te willen zenden aan den Heer Minister van de Marine der Nederlanden in 's Gravenhage, of wel aan den Secretaris der Britsche Admiraliteit, te London, en daar by te voegen eene Nota inhoudende de tyd en de plaats alwaar dit Papier is gevonden geworden.

FINDEREN af dette Papiir ombedes, naar Leilighed gives, at sende samme til Admiralitets Secretairen i London, eller nærmeste Embedsmand i Danmark, Norge, eller Sverrig. Tiden og Stædit hvor dette er fundet ønskes venskabeligt paa egnet.

WER diesen Zettel findet, wird hier-durch ersucht denselben an den Secretair des Admiralitets in London einzusenden, mit gefälliger angabe an welchen ort und zu welcher zeit er gefundet worden ist.

Party consisting of 2 Officers and 6 Men
left the Ship on Monday 24th May 184[illegible]
G. M. Gore Lieut
Chas. F. Des Voeux Mate

Figure 4: *Man Proposes, God Disposes* by Edward Landseer

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