How did the Victorian fixation on the disastrous John Franklin expedition transform our understanding of the Northwest Passage and the Arctic? Today, we still tend to see the Arctic and the Northwest Passage through nineteenth-century perspectives, which focused on the discoveries of individual explorers, their illustrated books, visual culture, imperial ambitions, and high-profile disasters. However, the farther back one looks, the more striking the differences appear in how Arctic exploration was envisioned. Writing Arctic Disaster uncovers a wide range of exploration cultures: from the manuscripts of secretive corporations like the Hudson’s Bay Company, to the nationalist Admiralty and its innovative illustrated books, to the searches for and exhibits of disaster relics in the Victorian era. This innovative study reveals the dangerous after-life of this Victorian conflation of exploration and disaster, in the geopolitical significance accruing around the 2014 discovery of Franklin’s ship Erebus in the Northwest Passage.

Adriana Craciun is Presidential Chair at the University of California, Riverside. Her books include Fatal Women of Romanticism (Cambridge, 2003), British Women Writers and the French Revolution: Citizens of the World (2005), The Material Cultures of Enlightenment Arts and Sciences (with Simon Schaffer, forthcoming in 2016), and several collections and editions.
Nineteenth-century British literature and culture have been rich fields for interdisciplinary studies. Since the turn of the twentieth century, scholars and critics have tracked the intersections and tensions between Victorian literature and the visual arts, politics, social organization, economic life, technical innovations, scientific thought – in short, culture in its broadest sense. In recent years, theoretical challenges and historiographical shifts have unsettled the assumptions of previous scholarly synthesis and called into question the terms of older debates. Whereas the tendency in much past literary critical interpretation was to use the metaphor of culture as ‘background’, feminist, Foucauldian, and other analyses have employed more dynamic models that raise questions of power and of circulation. Such developments have reanimated the field. This series aims to accommodate and promote the most interesting work being undertaken on the frontiers of the field of nineteenth-century literary studies: work which intersects fruitfully with other fields of study such as history, or literary theory, or the history of science. Comparative as well as interdisciplinary approaches are welcomed.

A complete list of titles published will be found at the end of the book.
WRITING ARCTIC DISASTER

Authorship and Exploration

ADRIANA CRACIUN
for River,

my favorite author and explorer
le savoir n’est pas fait pour comprendre, il est fait pour trancher.

knowledge is not made for understanding, it is made for cutting.

Michel Foucault

my home is the sea, disaster flies upon me

Will Oldham
Contents

List of illustrations  viii
Acknowledgments  xi

1 Introduction: Northwest Passages and Exploration Cultures  1
2 Arctic Archives: Victorian Relics, Sites, Collections  33
3 Exploration, Publication, and Inscription in the Age of Murray  82
4 Building Upon Disaster: Adventurers in Hudson Bay  124
5 The Famous Mark of Our Discovery: Social Authorship and Arctic Inscriptions  170
6 Broken Lands and Lost Relics: The Victorian Rediscovery of the Early Modern Arctic  200
Epilogue: Franklin Found and Lost  224

Notes  233
Bibliography  274
Index  303
Illustrations


1.2 Walter May, “Franklin Relics Brought by Dr. Rae,” Plate XIV, lithograph from *A Series of Fourteen Sketches, made during the voyage up Wellington Channel in search of Sir J. Franklin* (London, 1855). © The British Library Board (1781.a.6).


1.7 John Cheyne, Case 1, *Fourteen Stereoscopic Slides of the Franklin Relics* (London, 1860). Scott Polar Research Institute, University of Cambridge, with permission.

1.8 John Cheyne, Case 4, *Fourteen Stereoscopic Slides of the Franklin Relics* (London, 1860). Scott Polar Research Institute, University of Cambridge, with permission.


List of illustrations


1.17 Heinrich Klutschak, detail of “Irving’s Grave” from “Der Schauplatz der Franklinischen Katastrophe” (Fig. 1.16). Klutschak, Als Eskimo unter den Eskimos (Leipzig, 1881). © The British Library Board. 1046ooe18.

2.1 George Cruikshank, “Landing the Treasures, or Results of the Polar Expedition!!!” (1819). © The Trustees of the British Museum.


2.5 John Ross, untitled watercolor painting, c. 1829–33. Courtesy of the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG).

2.6 Francis McClintock, “Remarkable Sandstone Mass.” Additional Papers Relative to the Arctic Expedition under the Orders of Captain Austin and Mr. William Penny. London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1852. Courtesy Linda Hall Library of Science, Engineering, and Technology.
List of illustrations

2.7 Unnamed Inuit artist, pencil drawing (SPRI Y: 76/7/2). Igloolik, 1821–23. Scott Polar Research Institute, University of Cambridge, with permission.


3.4 Title page, James Knight’s York Fort post journal, 1714–15. Hudson’s Bay Company Archives, Archives of Manitoba. HBCA B.239/a/1 fo. 2.


4.2 Samuel Hearne, petroglyph at Sloop Cove, Hudson Bay. Photo by David Rudkin, Royal Ontario Museum, used with permission.

4.3 Furnace and Discovery petroglyph at Sloop Cove, Hudson Bay. Photo by David Rudkin, Royal Ontario Museum, used with permission.

4.4 Field of petroglyphs, Sloop Cove, Hudson Bay. Photo by David Rudkin, Royal Ontario Museum, used with permission.


6.1 Rolex “Submariner” advertisement. Skin Diver 34.5 (May 1985) 25. Author’s collection.
Acknowledgments

“No one chooses the Northwest Passage alone,” William Vollmann tells us in his brilliant novel, *The Rifles*. Ten years ago I chose to pursue a book on searching for Northwest Passages, and like all such pursuits it has been a collective one.

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