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978-1-107-12554-4 - Writing Arctic Disaster: Authorship and Exploration

Adriana Craciun

Frontmatter

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WRITING ARCTIC DISASTER

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.

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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.

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*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

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