

## *Introduction*

### *Witnessing the Arctic*

On Saturday, 9 February 1850, an eager crowd of invited guests entered the well-known Leicester Square rotunda in London to witness an immense new circular painting (or panorama<sup>1</sup>) created by Robert Burford and Henry Selous. As they mounted the steps to the raised viewing platform, a spectacular and vivid view of icebergs emerged before them. This was *Summer and Winter Views of the Polar Regions*, the latest, and arguably the finest, in a series of visual entertainments that claimed to show the little-known Arctic regions visited by a recently returned British naval expedition led by James Clark Ross. For weeks, adverts and letters in the papers had noted that this visual entertainment was distinguished by being the only one to be based on an actual eyewitness source: the on-the-spot sketches of William Henry James Browne, the Irish lieutenant who had served on the expedition. Thus, its accuracy and authenticity were well established long before its completion. With no external reference points on which to rest the eye, one woman, Lady Jane Franklin, was said to have spent two hours ‘inspecting the picture’, which must have had a ‘peculiar interest’ for her, given that it was ‘near the place in which her husband and his expedition [were] supposed to be, if still alive’.<sup>2</sup>

It was almost five years since the large British naval expedition led by her husband, John Franklin (1786–1847), had disappeared into the Canadian Arctic.<sup>3</sup> Despite a huge effort by thirty-six search, supply, and relief expeditions between 1847 and 1859, no survivors of the Franklin expedition were ever found.<sup>4</sup> These expeditions represented a remarkable mobilisation of resources and men, funded by both the British government and private sponsors, including Jane Franklin herself and the American philanthropist and merchant Henry Grinnell; their combined endeavours kept the Arctic imaginary in the public eye throughout the 1850s.<sup>5</sup> During those voyages, shipboard expedition members produced large amounts of visual and written material for both scientific and sentimental reasons – topographical sketches, coastal profiles, maps, and written logs were produced alongside

personal portraits, illustrated periodicals, travel sketches, and private journals. Although there were no professional artists on any of the search expeditions, in pictures, and in words, the Arctic experience was sketched and painted, described, and inscribed. In the metropole, too, following the return of the first search expedition in 1849, the Arctic was being re-imagined, engraved, lithographed, painted, and published. Above all, it was now being commodified and sensationalised. The Arctic was everywhere: at printsellers and panoramas, in published narratives and lithograph folios, in the press and in the theatre. *Visual Culture and Arctic Voyages* investigates how these representations of the Arctic came to be, with close attention to media and contexts, moving from the ship to the city, showing how the on-board Arctic was quite different to that of the metropole, and how this re-imagined Arctic continues to resonate in the twenty-first century.

By using close analysis of visual and verbal sources, I explore the processes of transformation of the representation of the Arctic from on-board sketches through to published texts, prints, and panoramas, enabling new conclusions to be drawn about the nature of the representation of the Arctic and of the Franklin searches. On the one hand, a narrative of humour, domesticity, familiarity, and of an often-benign environment permeates the on-board record. On the other, a battleground where man was pitted against nature dominated the public narrative.<sup>6</sup> In public archives alone, upwards of five hundred sketches, watercolours, and illustrations created by expedition members exist; many more must remain in private ownership. Over six hundred prints relating to the search appeared in published books, periodicals, and folios during the 1850s, while more than ten Arctic panoramas were exhibited in London. Other Arctic panoramas appeared in Ireland, Scotland, America, Canada, and Australia. Such pictures often created a specific visual narrative for public consumption that emphasised the laborious and difficult nature of the search amidst the 'savage horrors' of the polar regions.<sup>7</sup>

Although the Franklin expedition itself is not the main concern of this book, but rather the intense search that this disastrous voyage inspired, a brief introduction is necessary in order to contextualise the material.<sup>8</sup> Since the sixteenth century, repeated efforts had been made by the nations of western Europe to find a northerly sea route for commercial purposes, either a Northeast or a Northwest Passage to Cathay, or China, that was outside Spanish or Portuguese control. The most significant of these was William Edward Parry's voyage of 1819 to 1820 that entered Lancaster Sound in the north-west of Baffin Bay and managed to sail further west

than anyone before, as far as Melville Island in Parry Channel, thereby qualifying for an award for sailing past longitude 110°W north of the Arctic Circle.<sup>9</sup> Franklin's expedition was dispatched in 1845 officially in order to complete the Northwest Passage.<sup>10</sup> When no news of his ships was heard for two years, his wife, Jane Franklin (1791–1875), and other figures began to argue that search expeditions should be deployed to offer relief to the missing expedition.<sup>11</sup> Thus began the search for the lost ships that lasted for over a decade and reached its most intensive phase in the early 1850s. Thirty of the thirty-six expeditions were maritime voyages that approached the Arctic by sea; only six were overland or coastal, travelling to the archipelago via the North American coast. The large British naval search expeditions intentionally wintered in the Arctic, using the ship as a headquarters from which to launch sledging journeys in spring that enabled the mapping of thousands of kilometres of what we now know as the Canadian Arctic archipelago in present-day Nunavut and the Inuvialuit Settlement Region.<sup>12</sup>

In the midst of numerous literary studies of polar exploration that include the nineteenth-century Arctic,<sup>13</sup> the role of the visual has been largely overlooked.<sup>14</sup> Much critical scholarly work that exists on the visual culture of the search period traditionally attends more to the public and published imaginings: engravings, lithographs, panoramas.<sup>15</sup> By contrast, little research has been done on the primary visual records of the Franklin search expeditions to the Arctic – the original sketches, watercolours, and drawings. This book fills that gap by prioritising the visual culture of the Arctic during the Franklin search period, both on the ship and in the metropole, without neglecting its textual associations, including inscriptions, captions, and written narratives. In doing so, a broader and more nuanced sense of the cultural history of the Franklin search expeditions is revealed. The sharp focus on a surprisingly neglected time period is essential to do justice to the wealth of archival material that exists from the search expeditions.<sup>16</sup> By drawing our attention to this history, a strong distinction between visual culture on board and that disseminated to the public becomes apparent. While the on-board history has been largely obscured, the metropolitan mode of Arctic representation remains dominant into the twenty-first century.

Interdisciplinary at its core – drawing particularly on art history, the study of literature, and historical geography – the research makes original contributions to knowledge in several fields: the study of nineteenth-century visual culture; travel and exploration literature; and Arctic humanities. As Richard Harding observes, in his appraisal of naval historical

scholarship, shipboard life is an aspect that needs more attention; peacetime periods of navies do not attract scholarship in the way that wartime periods do.<sup>17</sup> The Arctic search ships, engaged in a humanitarian cause, can be seen as microcosms of Victorian culture, complete with their own theatricals and illustrated periodicals. Isobel Armstrong notes the nineteenth-century fascination with seeing and observes how visual media bombarded city-dwellers.<sup>18</sup> Allusions to visual technologies (such as the magic lantern and the panorama) permeate published Arctic narratives, showing how embedded these forms of seeing were in the Victorian period. A crucial aspect of Arctic shipboard culture was, as in the metropole, its visuality.

### Victorian Visuality and Arctic Exploration

Text and picture are inseparable in the mid-nineteenth-century representation of the Arctic, creating slippage between personal and public perceptions of the region. The visuality of travel in the Victorian period needs to be attended to in conjunction with travel writing. With respect to the latter, Margaret Topping has noted the value of the 'interrogation of images as more dynamic, and potentially contestatory, participants in the narrative'.<sup>19</sup> As Julia Thomas points out, with regard to Victorian illustrated texts, dialogues between words and pictures generate particular stories.<sup>20</sup> Prints and panoramas of the Arctic were further enhanced by their associated texts, informing the viewers and helping to build on the strangeness of the scene in order to convey 'peril' and 'horrors', emphasising the nature of the search for Franklin as a worthy 'masculine' enterprise. Remote locations (such as the Arctic) that most people were never likely to see were alluring and invoked visual curiosity.<sup>21</sup> Kate Flint observes, 'not being able to see with the physical eye is to call into play the powerful forces of imagination and memory'.<sup>22</sup> Glimpses into the Arctic through engravings and lithographs encouraged people to use their own imagination and memory to expand these scenes. Although the high price of large lithographs might seem to indicate that they were seen by a select audience, such media often appeared in printsellers' shop windows or were exhibited at their premises, meaning that they would have reached a far wider audience beyond only those who could afford to buy them.<sup>23</sup>

Although being able to draw was an expected accomplishment in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries for the upper and middle classes,<sup>24</sup> drawing was embedded in everyday life across ranks and was a normal part of shipboard life. Sketching on the spot encouraged engagement with the

environment and was practised by expedition members far beyond any professional obligation. Art historian Geoff Quilley observes that a concern with the visual material from James Cook's three voyages in the Pacific (1768–1780) has eclipsed subsequent visual representation of travel, particularly that created on nineteenth-century expeditions.<sup>25</sup> Cook's expeditions hired professional artists who produced several high art paintings, in contrast to the Franklin search expeditions that relied on the drawing skills of naval officers. Certainly, the rich archive of material from the Franklin search ships has been undervalued and has not benefited from any sustained critical inquiry. This is likely due to the amateur status of the artists, the varying quality of the work, and the attention that the Franklin expedition itself attracts (to the detriment of the comparatively successful search expeditions). Furthermore, work by these amateur artists is more likely to be lost, damaged, or scattered in various archives. Unlike professional artists, who used sketchbooks, many of these works are on loose pieces of paper or within travel journals, making them difficult to discover through searches of online catalogues. With limited resources and challenging environmental conditions, expedition members persisted in creating comic illustrations, travel sketches, coastal profiles, portraits, landscapes, and even theatre backdrops, telling a more complex story than the contemporary media depictions of the Arctic searches.

Small sketches, as opposed to finished paintings, were the most common visual works undertaken in the Arctic by expedition members. Refined commercial products such as prints and panoramas purported to reproduce officers' on-the-spot sketches, thereby associating the contents of their own products with truth and authenticity.<sup>26</sup> By examining a broad array of media, both private and public, I emphasise the significance of these panorama-painters, lithographers, and publishers in re-imagining the Arctic through convincing products. Unlike the Alps, the Arctic was relatively untrodden aesthetic territory, and work that claimed to reproduce original sketches by officers was prized for its 'truth', despite being reinterpreted by professional artists who had a greater aesthetic awareness and less concern with topographical accuracy. Such products of Victorian commercial culture cannot be seen as unmediated perceptions of Arctic 'explorers'. The Arctic had, of course, been represented in paintings that depicted the British whaling industry, and, as the nineteenth century progressed, whaling ships sailed further northwards into Baffin Bay and often got trapped in the ice. In Hull particularly, where the largest whaling fleet was based, artists like John Ward (who it is thought may have been on at least one whaling voyage<sup>27</sup>) and Thomas Binks represented the natural

history of the Arctic as well as the whaling ships.<sup>28</sup> However, the focus of these works, in which whale hunting was the main interest, was different from the visual material that emanated from the Franklin searches. The latter was closely connected to the idea of new and ever-expanding horizons, whether real or imaginary, as they sailed further into the unmapped regions of the Canadian Arctic archipelago.

A recurring theme in the critical literature is nineteenth-century British explorers' difficulty in perceiving and representing the Arctic, due to their lack of understanding and unfamiliarity with the environment.<sup>29</sup> Much of the pictorial evidence used to support this argument is comprised of published lithographs, which, it is argued, show that explorers were too concerned with the aesthetic categories of the sublime or the picturesque to be capable of producing an accurate representation.<sup>30</sup> However, although expedition members had an awareness of aesthetic terminology, such an aesthetic concern is not noticeably evident in the primary source material of the Franklin searches. By analysing the transformation from sketch to print and emphasising the importance of the dialogue between picture and text, I argue that it is in the prints and panoramas (products of commercial metropolitan enterprises) that a very deliberate aesthetic manipulation is evident, which intensifies the difficulty of the search.

Much of this manipulation borrowed stylistically from the sublime and the picturesque,<sup>31</sup> aesthetic categories that changed over time, particularly during the eighteenth century when discussion of aesthetics was at its height, with publications such as William Hogarth's *Analysis of Beauty* (1753), John Baillie's *Essay on the Sublime* (1747), and Edmund Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry* (1757 and 1759). According to Burke, the sublime was that which produces delight by the depiction of pain and danger.<sup>32</sup> In nature, the sublime caused 'astonishment' and found its source in obscurity, privation, vastness, infinity, difficulty, magnificence, quick transitions from light to dark, or the idea of physical pain and even the 'angry tones of wild beasts'; indeed, such sources for the sublime were associated with the Arctic in the popular imagination.<sup>33</sup> Absences such as 'vacuity, darkness, solitude and silence', which were a key part of polar imaginaries, were also productive of the sublime.<sup>34</sup> Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgement* (1792) maintained that the sublime could only refer to a state of mind, that objects in nature themselves could not be sublime.<sup>35</sup> He divided the aesthetic into the mathematical, an overwhelming of the senses by a huge natural object, and the dynamical, which is an awareness of the effect of power.<sup>36</sup>

Burke's influential *Philosophical Enquiry* had polarised beauty and sublimity, leaving a middle ground that became occupied by Uvedale Price's

late eighteenth-century picturesque, which was distinguished by variety, intricacy, and roughness.<sup>37</sup> Price believed that the picturesque was located somewhere between beauty and sublimity and could be blended with either,<sup>38</sup> making it a versatile aesthetic. Thus, dashing waves, Gothic architecture, ruins, and hovels all had picturesque potential. Above all, the picturesque was found in 'partial and uncertain concealment' and in the 'forms, the tints, and the lights and shadows of objects'. However, according to Price, if destruction was threatened, the scene acquired 'a tincture of the sublime'.<sup>39</sup> By the mid-nineteenth century, the picturesque aesthetic had gone through several stages, including being ridiculed in popular satire.<sup>40</sup> These satires made fun of the practice of touring the landscape in search of the ideal viewpoint from which to observe a scene or make a picturesque sketch. Although the formal neoclassical picturesque, as popularised by William Gilpin, divided the painting into the foreground, middle ground, and distance, crucially, picturesque paintings were not expected to be accurate topographical records but to give a general idea of the landscape.<sup>41</sup>

It is important to stress that none of the expedition members in the Franklin searches were professional artists, or even dedicated draughtsmen; they had many other tasks to perform, and personal drawing was only possible when time allowed. Ultimately, although an awareness of aesthetic categories must underlie sketches by amateur artists on the Franklin searches, they were more informed by the environment than they were by the influence of high aesthetics. Members of the Franklin search expeditions who sketched and painted would have also been aware of the strong tradition of marine painting that thrived in nineteenth-century Britain. Although originally influenced by seventeenth-century Dutch marine art, many of the marine artists, like Clarkson Stanfield for example, had experience at sea, and the specialism demanded in-depth knowledge of ships, the sea, and meteorological conditions, all of which members of the Franklin search expeditions would have had. The early romantic interest in marine subject matter, including shipwreck paintings and paintings of the sea, continued during the Victorian period.<sup>42</sup> While some of the on-board work shows the influence of the aesthetic categories (in the choice of subject matter and composition), such drawings underwent considerable transformation by other agents, who often dramatically heightened the sublime, before they reached the public eye. The representation of the nineteenth-century Arctic that we have inherited is the transformed, commercial version of the Arctic, not the version that was represented in the small, self-effacing sketches of expedition members.

Both Robert G. David and Heidi Hansson point out that the Arctic of the popular imagination is associated above all with winter.<sup>43</sup> Hansson further discusses how, in nineteenth-century polar biographies and adventure stories, ‘the main adversary is the Arctic itself, almost always in winter’.<sup>44</sup> A common misconception in the twenty-first century is that the Arctic is an empty place that is permanently covered in snow and ice; when the effects of climate change on the Arctic are mentioned, it is not uncommon to hear throwaway responses like ‘well, nobody lives there anyway’.<sup>45</sup> Adriana Craciun has observed that a visual and literary focus on ice has dominated the scholarly discourse concerning the Arctic.<sup>46</sup> Certainly, during the Franklin search period, the public image of the Arctic portrayed a space in which a key component of the Arctic narrative – ‘man’s struggle against the elements’<sup>47</sup> – could be displayed. The imaginary of an empty Arctic has been associated specifically with (published) representations by nineteenth-century British explorers. Francis Spufford suggests that ‘when it comes to the explorers’ success or failure at traversing the landscape’, Inuit ‘did not belong in the stories of discovery and achievement’.<sup>48</sup> For David, the ‘single-minded objective’ of the mid-century Franklin search expeditions resulted in a sudden disappearance of Indigenous people from representations in favour of subjects that depicted exploration.<sup>49</sup>

While it is true that a considerable proportion of the published pictures and texts from the search period do not show an Indigenous presence, one reason for this is that many of the large, high-profile search expeditions of the 1850s spent the majority of their time in the northern part of the Canadian archipelago (as seen in Figure 0.1), an area that did not support Indigenous populations in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>50</sup> Of course, prior to European incursions, there had long been a human presence in some parts of the Arctic,<sup>51</sup> and in the mid-nineteenth century, the far north-east of Siberia on the west side of the Bering Strait was inhabited by the Chukchi and Yupik; Iñupiat and Yup’ik were present in coastal north Alaska; and Inuvialuit and Inuit were scattered over the coastal High Arctic of Canada and in Greenland.<sup>52</sup> However, a large part of the central and northern half of the Canadian archipelago was uninhabited during the period of the Franklin searches. When ships did spend significant amounts of time near settlements, particularly in the Bering Strait region, there is ample literary and visual material in the archive attesting to a peopled Arctic. Intense interaction took place when ships wintered near Indigenous communities, and expeditions were reliant on the goodwill of residents for their hunting skills, winter clothing, and geographical knowledge, as well



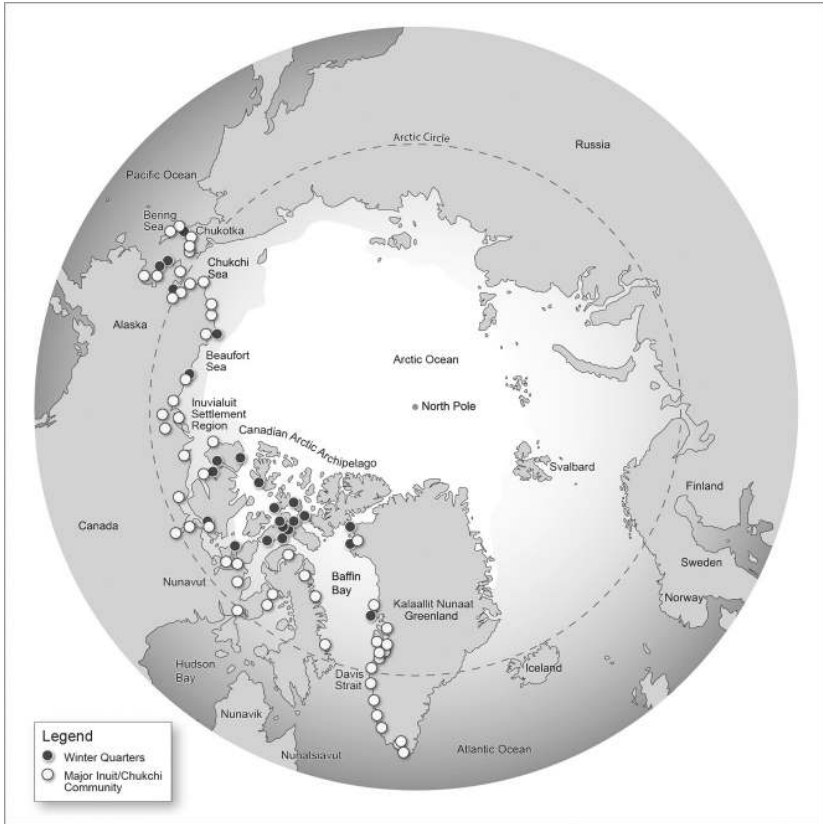


Figure 0.1 Map of the Arctic showing winter quarters of the maritime search expeditions and Indigenous communities in areas closest to expedition routes and winter quarters, 1848–59. Map by author.

as social, and sometimes sexual, interaction. There are also published versions of this peopled Arctic. For example, a large portion of the narrative *Ten Months among the Tents of the Tuski* (1853) focuses on the expedition's interactions with Chukchi individuals.<sup>53</sup> As Efram Sera-Shriar has observed, reliable travel narratives contained substantial evidence that Indigenous knowledge and social interaction were valued,<sup>54</sup> even if this value was not fully acknowledged.

The archival, and indeed some of the published material, shows evidence that complicates the notion of Mary Louise Pratt's imperial gaze. This gaze sees the landscape in scientific, objective terms, observed by 'the

European male subject of European landscape discourse – he whose imperial eyes passively look out and possess'.<sup>55</sup> But the relationship of the search expedition members to the Arctic and its people was far more complex than that; their place-making behaviours as well as their interpersonal relationships with Indigenous people suggest a multifaceted gaze, which supports Majid Yar's contention that the association of the gaze with power overlooks other aspects of vision such as the 'hermeneutic, emotional, communicative' possibilities.<sup>56</sup>

Although the Arctic was considered to be an environment in which man's nobility was put to the 'ultimate test',<sup>57</sup> the establishment of winter quarters in the ice meant that life became less about exploration and travel, and more about home-making. Arctic winters in particular became associated with specific activities – masked balls, pantomimes, ice-sculpting, evening classes – thus creating a sense of history, identity, and community, resulting in a feeling of belonging and home.<sup>58</sup> Expedition members individually engaged in place-making behaviours, such as informal naming of topographical features,<sup>59</sup> social interaction, and engagement with the environment; the primary sources show significant *topophilia*, or attachment to place.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, based on John Agnew's triadic definition of place, the Arctic took on all the attributes of place for overwintering expedition members.<sup>61</sup> These visitors to the Arctic, who ceased to move through a space, began to behave a little more like inhabitants and less like Pratt's British explorer, or 'monarch-of-all-I-survey', in Africa.<sup>62</sup> Neither were overwintering expedition members tourists in search of the picturesque, moving through a landscape; they were not perpetually apprehending the sublime that travellers first began to experience as they crossed the Alps from the late seventeenth century. They were living and working, embedded in the environment and forming habits of familiarity through daily routine. Both the sublime and the picturesque are dependent on novelty and on the visibility of new prospects. In contrast, the overwintering maritime expeditions were immobile for much of the year, and some expedition members made repeated voyages to the Arctic, even returning to the same places several times.

The imagined geography of the Arctic, as a vast empty space where man pits himself against a hostile environment, has been created and maintained by public visual representations and texts.<sup>63</sup> The idea of North is projected as a masculine gendered zone.<sup>64</sup> Nineteenth-century Arctic exploration is typically represented in terms of hardship, pain, and suffering; titles of books such as *Arctic Hell-Ship* (2007) emphasise this aspect for potential readers.<sup>65</sup> Indeed, very little has been written about the positive