Polar Record 44 (228): 25–34 (2008). Printed in the United Kingdom. doi:10.1017/S0032247407006936

Representing Akaitcho: European vision and revision in the writing of John Franklin's *Narrative of a journey to the shores of the polar sea…*

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Received February 2007

ABSTRACT. This article compares the representations of aboriginal people, and especially the Yellowknife leader Akaitcho, in the journal written by John Franklin during his first expedition (1819–1822) and the narrative he published in 1823. In the introduction to his 1995 Champlain Society edition of Franklin's journal, Richard Davis claims that when revising the journal for publication, Franklin changed his original entries so as to present an unfavourable, stereotyped image of Akaitcho to the British reading public. However, comparison of the relevant passages shows that, while Franklin evidently viewed Akaitcho with distrust during much of the expedition, he later, and on reflection, changed his opinion so that it became much more favourable, and accordingly altered the journal entries in order to do Akaitcho justice. These facts cast doubt on the interpretation of the first Franklin expedition put forward by Davis and others.

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Introduction

Since the 1970s, developments in the scholarly world have given rise to a highly critical, revisionist attitude towards British explorers and their writings. In Canada, explorers' journals and narratives have been subjected to intense critical scrutiny. This tendency is particularly strong in studies of northern exploration literature, as new academic trends merge with the well-established Canadian tradition of debunking British Arctic heroes, which began with Vilhjalmur Stefansson and was carried on by popular historians including Farley Mowat, Peter Newman, and Pierre Berton (Stefansson 1938; Mowat 1960; Newman 1985; Berton 1988). Of all the erstwhile Arctic heroes who have undergone this process of re-evaluation, none has either received more attention, or been subjected to harsher criticism, than has John Franklin. He is now considered by many Canadian historians, literary scholars and popular writers to be the explorer who most clearly and dramatically displayed the eurocentric failings typical of his kind (see Wallace 1980; MacLaren 1984, 1985, 1989, 1994; Davis 1989, 1991; Wiebe 1989, 1994, 1995; Warkentin 1990; Struzik 1991; Atwood 1995; Collis 1995; Parkinson 1995; Krans 1999; McGoogan 2001; McGhee 2005). Only a few authors, including David Woodman and Barbara Belyea, have resisted the general trend (see Woodman 1991; Belyea 1990). While most of his critics concede that Franklin possessed some appealing personal characteristics, such as courage, kindness and sincere religious faith, they nevertheless argue that he was, in Rudy Wiebe's words, 'at a certain bull-headed point fundamentally unteachable' (Wiebe 1995: 26).

Post-modernism, far from being a revolutionary development in this context, has served to sharply accentuate pre-existing tendencies in Canadian writing about the Arctic. The post-modernists and post-colonialists among the writers listed above have provided some of the most impressive, and on the surface the most convincing, analyses of Franklin's career. According to Richard Davis, for example, Franklin was above all 'an exponent of a commercial, social, and political philosophy that is considered dominating and insensitive by modern post-colonial societies . . . A product of his own culture's imperial consciousness, Franklin exuded a confident superiority over what he assumed were less civilized people'. In retrospect, 'Franklin looms as a solid representative of his imperial culture' (Introduction to Franklin 1995: xlv, lxxix, lxxxi).

This picture is rendered all the more credible by the disasters of Franklin's first and last expeditions. On the first, in 1819–1822, 11 of 20 men died; on the fatal 1845 voyage, all 129 men perished. These tragedies, we are told, were caused by Franklin's failure to value local, and especially aboriginal, knowledge. He was condemned for this on purely practical grounds by Stefansson, but his failure is now explained as the inevitable result of imperialist discourse: the rigid ideology of British imperialism decreed that explorers could not possibly be required to learn and adapt in a new land. Franklin and his men, therefore, were victims not of the harsh northern environment, but of their own arrogant, aggressive culture.

However, a close and careful analysis of Franklin's writings reveals many characteristics that cannot easily be reconciled with the prevailing view. Franklin's quest for

information and advice from those with local knowledge runs like a recurrent theme through the early portion of his published account of his first expedition, the *Narrative of a journey to the shores of the polar sea in the years 1819, 20, 21 and 22* (Franklin 1823: 22–23, 27, 31, 96, 127–28, 135–36, 142–43, 145, 148–49). A typical passage is, 'I feel greatly indebted to this gentleman [Mr. Clark, the Hudson's Bay Company trader at Île à la Crosse] for much valuable information respecting the country and the Indians residing to the north of Slave Lake, and for furnishing me with a list of stores he supposed we should require' (Franklin 1823: 127). Franklin readily deferred to the traders' opinions. '[W]e left the matter to be settled by our friends at the fort, who were more conversant with winter travelling than ourselves' (Franklin 1823: 96) is another characteristic observation. He quickly adopted the local diet and dress, referring to pemmican as a 'most essential article' (Franklin 1823: 165). This evidence hardly confirms Davis's statement that Franklin must have 'exuded a confident superiority' during his interactions with the inhabitants of Rupert's Land.

Many Canadian writers would unhesitatingly name Franklin as the explorer in whose published works a distorted, negative image of aboriginal people would most likely be found, and Davis has claimed that this was indeed the case. However, a comparison of the journal written during his first expedition with the published version clearly indicates that Franklin made a conscious effort to produce a more accurate and favourable account for publication than the one provided by his diary entries. It should be noted that there is no reason to believe that changes to the journal account were made by anyone other than Franklin himself. His correspondence preserved in the John Murray Archive, the Scott Polar Research Institute, and the Derbyshire Record Office indicates that, although he collaborated to some extent with John Richardson, and submitted his manuscript to John Barrow, the second secretary of the Admiralty, for proofreading and comment, the narrative was essentially Franklin's own work.

The great majority of the critical remarks in Franklin's journal were omitted or considerably softened in his narrative. The explorer noted in both the journal and the narrative that he had been asked, as a matter of justice and fairness, to do this by Akaitcho, the leader of the native band that assisted him during the expedition. In exploration narratives of the time, these people — a subgroup of the Dene nation — are referred to as the Copper Indians or the Red Knives; they are now usually called the Yellowknife. (See Abel 1993: xvi and the entry for 'Yellowknife' in Helm 1981). It is clear that Franklin believed that he was under a moral obligation to comply with Akaitcho's request. Although post-colonial theory has opened up fruitful new ways of understanding the past, it therefore seems that, when used without due regard for primary source evidence, this approach can obscure as much as it reveals. It can only be beneficial to consider non-European perspectives on exploration and colonisation, but in order to do this, it is not necessary to draw dramatic and distorted contrasts between explorers and indigenous peoples.

Both the 'debunking' tradition and post-colonialism exhibit a strong tendency to envision the past in starkly dichotomous terms. 'Debunking' books on polar history characteristically revolve around heroes and villains: former heroes like Franklin and the Antarctic explorer Robert Falcon Scott are toppled from their pedestals and revealed as fools or knaves, or both, while other, formerly less celebrated, figures like John Rae and Roald Amundsen are idealised in their place (see Stefansson 1938; Mowat 1960; Huntford 1979; Newman 1985; Berton 1988; McGoogan 2001). Post-colonialism, though it provides a far more sophisticated and scholarly approach, is in its way equally dominated by the perceived oppositions between imperialists and 'others'.

This is a very broad and persistent trend, not limited to studies of exploration literature. It was Frantz Fanon who first observed that '[t]he colonial world is a Manichean world.' By this he meant that it was understood by its white inhabitants in terms of a crude dichotomy between good and evil (Fanon 1963: 41). According to Fanon, imperialists maintained their power by setting up an opposition between their enlightened, progressive selves and backward, dangerously primitive natives. Edward Said took up Fanon's observation about the 'Manichean' nature of colonial society, arguing that Europeans had legitimized their imperialist activities by constructing non-Europeans as wholly 'other', alien, and inferior. Fanon had held the optimistic view that false dichotomies could eventually be overcome by the exercise of good will on both sides (Fanon 1963: 146), but Said contended that the power of imperialist discourse was such that all Europeans 'were constrained in what they could either experience or say' about the colonised world. In other words, once they had formed their superior, rational identity, imperialists were trapped within it. Every European, according to Said, 'was consequently a racist, an imperialist, and almost totally ethnocentric' (Said 1979: 43, 204). Any true interaction or dialogue between Europeans and 'others' was impossible. The dichotomies, once established, decreed that the colonial world would forever be a 'Manichean' world, polarised and static.

Many writers, including Homi Bhabha, Frederick Cooper, Ann Laura Stoler, and Pier Larsen (Bhabha 1994; Cooper 1994; Larsen 1997; Stoler and Cooper 1997), have challenged this model from the perspective of the colonised, arguing that imperialist discourse was regularly subverted: subject peoples, they point out, understood such discourse according to their own cultural norms, thereby hybridising and appropriating it for their own purposes. There has, however, been a strong reluctance to admit that imperialists might have willingly and regularly engaged in the process of cultural interaction and hybridisation. Instead, it is often claimed that they fought a dogged, though futile, battle against hybridity, constantly

asserting and re-asserting their Manichean dichotomies. A notable exception is the work of Robert Young, who argues that a positive view of both biological and cultural hybridity co-existed with the racist attitudes that so many post-colonial scholars have described. He believes that imperialists were able to incorporate cultural slippages into their mental picture of the colonial world with relative ease, and remarks that '[t]he question is whether the old essentializing categories of cultural identity, or of race, were really so essentialized, or have been retrospectively constructed as more fixed than they were' (Young 1995: 27).

It may therefore be useful to follow Young's lead, and approach the primary source evidence on the first Franklin expedition without rigid preconceptions about the nature of the encounter between British explorers and northern aboriginal people. This article will first examine two post-colonial analyses of Franklin's writings from the first expedition, those by Germaine Warkentin (1990) and Davis (1995). It will then compare these critics' assertions with the primary sources, focusing on the relationship between Franklin and Akaitcho. Finally, it will discuss the implications of this evidence for future studies of exploration literature.

Post-colonial analyses of the first Franklin expedition

In the introduction to her anthology of Canadian exploration literature, Warkentin describes Franklin as a prime example of 'the closed certitude of the imperial mind'. She compares the encounter between present-day readers and exploration texts to an adventure in which 'it is we who become the explorers', deftly making use of post-modern reading strategies in order to discover the hidden truths behind imperialist literature. In her view, Franklin's writings require such an approach even more than most exploration literature. '[T]here are few texts,' she writes, 'which so evidently invite what is now called "deconstruction." At every point in the narrative there occur gaps and silences which only the voices which have been erased . . . could fill.' The exclusions in Franklin's journal and narrative are 'signals to the alert reader', indicating that 'the silences . . . have to be explored'. For Warkentin's 'alert reader', then, Franklin's texts must not be taken as a reasonably reliable guide to 'what really happened', but rather as carefully constructed imperialist discourse, written by a man of limited vision, yet expertly designed to facilitate and legitimise British expansionism. Such 'skilled reading' can 'unlock the subtexts [the explorers] did not recognize, and give utterance to other voices — women, natives, labourers' (Warkentin 1990: xx, xi, xix).

Warkentin's theoretical approach is shared by Davis, the editor of *Sir John Franklin's journals and correspondence: The first Arctic land expedition, 1819–1822*. Davis, too, makes the fundamental assumption that readers can expect to find no absolute truth in any written European version of the first Franklin expedition, whether it be a private journal or a published narrative. Instead, they can, to quote his introduction to Franklin's journal, 'only hope to understand the context out of which each account arises'. 'Franklin's written accounts,' he insists, 'must be read as expressions of Franklin's subjective experience and not as unassailable historical fact. Truth, if anything so absolute can be said to exist, surely must lie somewhere outside this very culturally-skewed account' (Franklin 1995: xlii, lxxxix). There are now five published accounts by participants in the 1819–1822 expedition: Franklin's journal, his narrative, and the journals of John Richardson, Robert Hood, and George Back. However, Davis does not believe that the use of these different primary sources by historians employing a traditional empirical methodology could produce an adequate account of the expedition. Like Warkentin, he argues that the abundant documentary evidence in itself is not sufficient; instead, a particular way of reading these texts is crucial to an accurate understanding of the expedition's historical significance.

For Davis, Franklin's journal is useful primarily as a means of revealing how the official discourse represented by the narrative evolved. Davis' editorial practices were designed principally with this end in view. He notes that the writing of a narrative provided 'an opportunity for Franklin to shape the telling of those events that led up to the disaster of 1821,' and that he therefore 'attempted in this edition to flag any significant differences between Franklin's journal and narrative accounts' (Franklin 1995: xli). This might lead the reader to expect that the differences are numerous and striking. However, Davis concedes that they are on the whole very minor. He suggests that this in itself is proof of Franklin's ethnocentricity. 'There are places in the *Narrative*,' he observes,

> at which a late twentieth century reader — nurtured on Watergate and postmodernism — would have expected greater evidence of Franklin's editorial hand. . . . That the journals and the *Narrative* run as parallel as they do has several implications: that Franklin wished to be fair-minded and truthful as he wrote his *Narrative*; that he possessed a rather naive understanding of the possibilities of constructing a truly 'objective' account and that he genuinely failed to comprehend how much his view of the world was a construction of his own society. . . . [E]ven though composing the *Narrative* provided Franklin with an opportunity to disguise some of his blunders or his dismissive behaviour, he did not take advantage of the opportunity because he did not recognize any connection between his own behaviour and the expedition's disastrous ending. (Franklin 1995: xli)

The possibility that Franklin was doing his honest best to write an honest account is quickly passed over with a condescending comment on the explorer's naïveté, and Davis goes on to inform his readers that if the narrative shows little evidence of deliberate distortion, this is only further evidence of Franklin's culturally-based limitations: he was simply too stupid or too arrogant

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0032247407006936 Published online by Cambridge University Press

to realise that his behaviour required a Watergate style cover-up.

In his introduction and notes, Davis offers his readers a reconstruction of 1819–1822 expedition that, in his opinion, makes clear the reality concealed behind Franklin's words. The expedition ended in disaster because Franklin placed no value whatever on local knowledge. This was not a mere personal flaw, but one that sprang from the wider British imperial culture: '[t]he pervasive ethnocentric grasp of nineteenth-century Britain as it expanded and secured its global Empire made it virtually impossible for [him] to respect the traditionally-evolved wisdom of Yellowknife Indians and Canadian voyageurs, even though their assistance was crucial to the success of the expedition. . . . Franklin could not recognize the need to accommodate new ways' (Franklin 1995: xlv, lxxxi). Davis points to Franklin's relationship with, and representation of, Akaitcho as a prime example of his ethnocentricity. A reading of Franklin's journal makes it clear that conflicts and misunderstandings did indeed mark the relationship between the men described by Davis as 'the two cultural leaders'. In both his introduction to the journal and the footnotes by which he flags the discrepancies between the journal and the narrative, Davis repeatedly draws the reader's attention to these conflicts. He refers to the differences of opinion between the two men as a 'power struggle', and claims that 'it is . . . important to note the adversarial role in which Franklin viewed Akaitcho' (Franklin 1995: xcvii–xcix). However, Franklin saw Akaitcho as an adversary only in the earlier stages of the expedition. By the time he came to write his narrative, Franklin's opinion of the natives had changed entirely, leading him to describe Akaitcho and his band as 'our kind Indian friends' (Franklin 1823: 473). The angry and disparaging remarks in the journal that Franklin left out of, or changed in, the narrative are not flagged by footnotes in Davis's edition. Why, the 'alert reader' may wonder, is Davis's editorial voice so loudly heard when Franklin makes negative statements about Akaitcho, and yet so silent when the explorer can be seen shaping his narrative in a way that produces a more favourable portrait of the native leader?

Revisions to Franklin's journal account

Franklin and Akaitcho first encountered each other in July 1820 at Fort Providence on Great Slave Lake. Franklin, a 33-year-old lieutenant in the Royal Navy, had arrived at York Factory the previous August, accompanied by two midshipmen, George Back and Robert Hood; by the naval doctor and naturalist John Richardson; and by the seaman John Hepburn. He had also hired a crew of boatmen from the Orkney Islands. Franklin's aim was to reach the Arctic Ocean and travel eastward along the coast, in order to meet, or at least leave information for, William Edward Parry's second expedition in search of the Northwest Passage. Franklin had been told in London that he would receive extensive help, particularly in the form of food supplies, from the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company. However, on his arrival in Rupert's Land, he found that the intense rivalry between the two companies, which was then at its height, had led to a serious shortage of provisions throughout the fur-trading country, and that the companies were unable to help him to the extent that had been promised.

Franklin's critics invariably downplay this factor. The tragedy of his first expedition does in fact appear to have been to a large extent caused, as he himself stated, by over-hasty planning in London, where officials did not anticipate the unusual conditions in Rupert's Land at the time of his arrival. In a confidential letter written to Barrow after the expedition, Franklin noted that 'the party left England without any previous notice either to the traders residing in those parts of America or the Indians, and without any preparation for its approach. The Expedition and its objects were alike strange to those among whom it came, and they not knowing in what estimation to regard either, it had to fight its way step by step against increasing obstacles while the animosity then existing between the Hudson's Bay and the North West Company rendered any assistance received from the one, a Source of Suspicion, and Jealousy in the other' (Printed in Klotz 1899: 3; see also Holland 1988).

From York Factory, Franklin and his party proceeded inland to Cumberland House on the Saskatchewan River, where they arrived in October 1819. During the winter, Franklin, Back and Hepburn travelled on snowshoes to Fort Chipewyan on Lake Athabasca, in order to obtain information about possible routes to the sea. Hood and Richardson followed them in the spring. In June 1820, the explorers heard the very welcome news that Willard Ferdinand Wentzel, a North West Company employee, wished to join the expedition, and that he had persuaded a native band, led by Akaitcho, to serve as hunters and guides. It was evident that without such assistance, the explorers would have not the slightest chance of success, and Wentzel's offer was gratefully received by Franklin (Franklin 1823: 149).

The Orkney boatmen were unwilling to travel to the Arctic. Franklin therefore had to hire a crew of voyageurs, and he recorded that as soon as he had obtained the promise of native help, it was far easier to find volunteers. At the end of July, the explorers and voyageurs joined the natives at Fort Providence. There Franklin informed Akaitcho of the expedition's plans.

He told Akaitcho that the natives would be very generously paid for their services in trade goods, and in addition the British government would pay any debts they owed to the North West Company. However, they must wait until the end of the expedition to receive the payment, since it had not been possible for the explorers to bring sufficient goods with them at the outset. Such an arrangement was not usual in the fur trade. The natives often received goods on credit from the two companies, but they were not accustomed to provide either furs or services for which they did not receive immediate compensation.

However, Franklin believed that the generosity of the payment would provide sufficient incentive for the natives to devote themselves to the expedition's success.

The party then proceeded to the winter quarters suggested by Akaitcho, in a good hunting area within easy reach of the Coppermine River. Franklin had already come to the conclusion that Akaitcho was a man of 'much penetration and intelligence,' and was careful to treat him in what he had been told was the appropriate manner. He recorded, for example, that Akaitcho 'was always furnished with a portion at our meals, as a token of regard which the traders have taught the chiefs to expect, and which we willingly paid' (Franklin 1995: 30 July 1820). This did not mean that his view of the natives was entirely favourable. On two occasions, Franklin expressed his fear that their 'fickle' nature (of which he had apparently been warned by the traders) would make them difficult to deal with at some future time (Franklin 1995: 21 June, 25 July 1820).

Franklin had hoped that he might travel down the Coppermine to the sea before winter set in, so as to gain a clearer idea of what obstacles there might be to boat travel along the coast. Akaitcho had originally encouraged Franklin to believe that this would be possible, but on arrival at the site chosen for their headquarters (later named Fort Enterprise), the native leader stated that the plan was not feasible. This gave rise to the first serious conflict between explorers and natives, and, in his introduction, Davis makes much of it. Franklin considered disregarding Akaitcho's opinion, but in the end agreed to a compromise. Back and Hood would reconnoitre the route between Fort Enterprise and the river, but would make no attempt to reach the sea. In his journal, Franklin explained the reasons for his decision: the cooperation of the natives was essential to the success of the expedition, while arousing their anger might be 'destructive to every prospect of getting Provision and Pemmican to enable the Party to proceed in the spring.' Franklin 'therefore deemed it important to keep on terms with these Men, and not act decidedly counter to their statements and representations, lest they should become highly offended, and with their usual fickleness, refrain . . . from hunting' (Franklin 1995: 26 August 1820). He also admitted that the changes in the weather at the end of August confirmed Akaitcho's statement that there was insufficient time to reach the sea and return before winter began.

During the winter, matters at first went well. However, some of the natives who travelled to Fort Providence returned with the news that Franklin's notes for small amounts of goods or ammunition had not been honoured by the North West Company's representative, Nicholas Weeks. In addition, there were rumours that the explorers 'were merely a set of dependant wretches, whose only aim was to obtain subsistence for a season' and that 'there was not the smallest probability' that they would ever make the payment they had promised (Franklin 1823: 251). Nevertheless, the natives continued to hunt for the explorers. Franklin attributed this to a number of causes, of which the first was the 'sound judgment and discretion' of Akaitcho. Second was the fact that two Inuit interpreters had been sent from Fort Churchill to assist the expedition, which, to the natives, was a clear indication of the Englishmen's status and influence. Also, the natives trusted Wentzel, whom they had known for many years, and they appreciated the courteous manner in which the explorers treated them. Finally, they recognized the value of Richardson's medical services. According to Franklin, Akaitcho 'often remarked . . . that formerly numbers had died every year, but that not a life had been lost since our arrival among them' (Franklin 1995: 5 December 1820, 13 June 1821; Franklin 1823: 312).

However, some distrust had evidently been created in Akaitcho's mind, and in the spring matters came to a crisis. At the end of May, when the caribou were returning and Franklin expected the hunters to redouble their efforts, Akaitcho instead expressed his fear that he and his men would never be paid. When reminded that he had been told when the bargain was made that payment would not be forthcoming until the end of the expedition, he 'denied with the most impudent effrontery' that this had been the case. An obviously infuriated Franklin wrote in his journal that '[n]either reason nor argument appeared to have any influence over his Mind and his conduct reminded me of the pettish freaks of a Spoiled child' (Franklin 1995: 22 May 1821). What few goods the Englishmen could spare were offered to Akaitcho, but he replied that it would be beneath his dignity to accept so paltry a gift; on being told they had nothing more, he suggested that the clothing that had been brought for the voyageurs should be given to his men instead. Franklin commented with evident distaste on Akaitcho's 'rapacious desire for the obtainment of our goods,' and added grimly, 'I sometimes think this mercenary passion for the acquirement of property weighs so powerfully on his mind at this time, that he would almost venture on taking the remaining stores by force if our party were less Strong than it is' (Franklin 1995: 27 May 1821).

In the end, Akaitcho's hunters sided with the explorers against their leader. Several of them publicly contradicted his words, saying that they remembered being told they would not be paid during the expedition, and they expressed their willingness to continue hunting. As Back recorded in his journal, the hunters had decided that 'if [Akaitcho] ceased to [keep] sight of their interest they would leave off obeying him and follow us' (Back 1994: 25 May 1821). Clearly, the consensus of opinion in the band was that it was to their advantage to remain with the explorers, and Akaitcho accordingly backed down. Franklin, for his part, accepted the proferred reconciliation, but he wrote coldly that after Akaitcho's 'ungrateful conduct' he regarded the native leader as someone to be placated only so long as he was useful. 'Our Interests,' Franklin wrote, 'will prompt us to preserve the best terms we Can with him, even to the humouring of his Whims in Some measure, until we are provided with meat for the voyage. This desideratum being gained I consider

it quite immaterial whether he accompanies the party to the Sea or not providing the hunters will continue without his being present' (Franklin 1995: 31 May 1821).

Akaitcho did willingly accompany the expedition as far as the mouth of the Coppermine. The natives and Wentzel then turned back. Franklin had often pointed out to both Wentzel and Akaitcho that the party would in all likelihood return to Fort Enterprise, and that it was therefore essential for provisions to be left there, a service for which he was willing to pay generously once his supplies arrived. When Franklin eventually discovered that this had not been done, his low opinion of Akaitcho seemed to be amply confirmed. The explorers arrived at Fort Enterprise in a state of extreme weakness. Franklin was intent on carrying out his orders, even though they had been based on the false assumption that he would have adequate food supplies. He had therefore prolonged the outward journey farther than was wise, and in addition, the caribou began their southward migration earlier than usual that year. On their return march, the party were often reduced to eating a lichen known as *tripe de roche*. By the time they reached Fort Enterprise, the Inuk interpreter Junius and two voyageurs had already perished. Franklin wrote that he and his companions had wept at the realisation that the lives of the weakest remaining men 'would in all probability be forfeited in consequence of this serious neglect of the Indians. This awful neglect seemed to be the final stroke to the evil consequences which the Misconduct of the Indians had entailed upon us' (Franklin 1995: 11 October 1821). Back, the strongest of the group, was sent to seek aid from the natives, but two more voyageurs died of starvation before some of Akaitcho's hunters arrived with food. The hunters then spent several days caring for the survivors, before taking them first to Akaitcho's camp and then to Fort Providence.

Perhaps not surprisingly, Franklin's journal at this time was little more than a bare recital of events. He recorded the natives' many acts of kindness to the weak and emaciated white men, but made little or no comment on them. His emotions at this critical juncture thus remain largely unknown. However, it is clear that Franklin eventually reconsidered the entire history of his dealings with Akaitcho and his band. When writing his narrative, Franklin significantly altered many of the passages written in May 1821, and gave a much fuller account of the days following the natives' arrival at Fort Enterprise. In describing the conflicts that took place in the spring, he continued to depict Akaitcho's behaviour as unreasonable, but the more extreme criticisms were omitted, and he had by this time evidently made a serious effort to see the episode from Akaitcho's point of view. Franklin made it clear to his readers that hindsight had influenced his opinions, and in a rare departure from his usual strictly chronological ordering of events, he began his account of the conflicts with Akaitcho by referring to the fact that the natives had later saved his life. 'Of their kindness to strangers we are fully qualified to speak,' he began. '[T]heir love of property, attention to their interests, and fears for the future, made them occasionally clamorous and unsteady; but their delicate and humane attention to us, in a season of great distress, at a future period, are indelibly engraven on our memories' (Franklin 1823: 287–288).

The changes in Franklin's account began with the meeting at Fort Providence in July 1820. In the journal, there is a faint note of derision in Franklin's description of Akaitcho approaching the white men 'with quite a measured, and as he supposed, dignified step, without appearing to cast a look either right or left' (Franklin 1995: 30 July 1820). In the narrative, however, Franklin simply wrote that Akaitcho 'assumed a very grave aspect, and walked up . . . with a measured and dignified step, looking neither to the right nor to the left' (Franklin 1823: 202). Franklin's comments on the natives' 'usual fickleness' were not repeated (Franklin 1995: 26 August 1820; compare Franklin 1823: 226). In describing the conflicts of May 1821, Franklin depicted Akaitcho's behaviour as unreasonable, but not as utterly irrational or sinister. The references in the journal to Akaitcho's 'pettish freaks' and 'rapacious desire for the obtainment of our goods', and the comparison of his behaviour to that of a 'Spoiled child' were all omitted, while the phrase 'most impudent effrontery' was altered to 'an effrontery which surprised us all'. Akaitcho's 'importunity' was mentioned in the narrative, but in the journal, Franklin had complained in stronger terms of his 'incessant' and 'wearying' importunity (Franklin 1995: 25 and 26 May 1821; compare Franklin 1823: 308).

Franklin then offered the readers of the narrative an explanation of Akaitcho's conduct that was absent from the journal. He wrote that on 29 May, Akaitcho 'took an opportunity of telling me that I must not think the worse of him for his importunities. It was their custom, he said, to do so, however strange it might appear to us, and he, as the leader of his party, had to beg for them all; but as he saw that we had not deceived him by concealing any of our goods, and that we really had nothing left, he should ask for no more' (Franklin 1823: 310). Whether this conversation actually took place in May 1821 but was not recorded at the time by an exasperated and sceptical Franklin, or whether the passage reflects his later understanding of native trading practices, it is clearly intended to make Akaitcho's actions more acceptable to the British reading public. The account given in Samuel Hearne's narrative of the hard bargaining by native leaders closely resembles Franklin's, indicating that Franklin's initial response to such behaviour was typical of Europeans, even those with long experience in the fur trade. Hearne wrote that if their requests were refused, the leaders would 'immediately turn sulky and impertinent to the highest degree; and however rational they may be at other times, are immediately divested of every degree of reason' (Hearne 1958: 187; see also Ray and Freeman 1978: Ch. 7). Given that Franklin spent much less time in the north than did the fur-traders, his shift from a critical to a more understanding

attitude toward Akaitcho's behaviour was made with commendable rapidity.

In the journal, Franklin wrote that he had recorded his 'tedious conversations with the Leader' at such great length because he 'deemed the duty incumbent on me to give the preceding details, nearly in the manner in which the complaints were delivered to me, in order to point out to future Travellers, the fickle disposition and avaricious nature of these Indians, and how little reliance can be placed on their most faithful promises, when your views on proceedings jar in any way with their Interests, the mainspring of all their actions' (Franklin 1995: 31 May 1821). In the narrative, however, this passage (which Franklin had evidently intended from the beginning to be made public) was altered to read, 'I have deemed it my duty to give the preceding details of the tedious conversations we had with Akaitcho, to point out to future travellers, the art with which these Indians pursue their objects, their avaricious nature, and the little reliance that can be placed upon them when their interests jar with their promises.' But, he added, 'their dispositions are not cruel, and their hearts are readily moved by the cry of distress' (Franklin 1823: 311).

In his account of the hunters' rescue of his party, Franklin again revised his journal in order to highlight their compassion and generosity. In doing this, he drew on Richardson's journal to supplement his own. His own entry for 7 November, the day of the hunters' arrival at Fort Enterprise, was sparse. Richardson, however, made a striking comment on the natives' ability to perform tasks which were beyond the strength of the starving explorers. 'The ease with which these . . . kind creatures seperated [sic] the logs of the store-house, and carried them in, and made a fire,' he wrote, 'was a matter of the utmost astonishment to us, and we could scarcely by any effort of reasoning, efface from our minds the idea that they possessed a supernatural degree of strength' (Richardson 1984: 7 November 1821). Franklin, too, was evidently impressed by this contrast between the natives and the whites. He noted the next day that '[t]hey cleaned out our room and gave an appearance of comfort to this dreary dwelling. We viewed their agility & strength with perfect astonishment in our present enfeebled state' (Franklin 1995: 8 November 1821). Richardson recorded that '[t]he Indians today cleared the room of part of the filth which had accumulated in it, through our inability to remove it,' and he appreciatively described the increased warmth and comfort from 'the good fires the Indians keep up' (Richardson 1984: 8 November 1821). When writing the narrative, Franklin combined his own and Richardson's journal entries for these two days to produce a memorable record of the transformation of Fort Enterprise and its inhabitants. 'The improved state of our apartment, and the large and cheerful fires [the hunters] kept up,' he wrote,

> produced in us a sensation of comfort to which we had long been strangers. In the evening they brought in a pile of dried wood, which was lying on the river-side, and on which we had often cast a wishful eye, being unable to drag it up the bank. The Indians set about every thing with an activity that amazed us. Indeed, contrasted with our emaciated figures and extreme debility, their frames appeared to us gigantic, and their strength supernatural. These kind creatures next turned their attention to our personal appearance, and prevailed upon us to shave and wash ourselves. (Franklin 1823: 468)

In the version of events which Franklin presented to his readers, the white men were no longer superior beings who expressed their disdain for the irrational, importune natives; instead, they looked with admiration on the hunters' almost 'supernatural' strength, and gratefully enjoyed the warmth and food provided for them. Moreover, the whites were repulsively filthy, and were able to clean themselves only with the natives' assistance.

Franklin also made extensive use of Richardson's journal in his published description of the trip from Fort Enterprise to Fort Providence. In his own entry for the first day of the trip, Franklin merely noted that '[t]he Indians Supplied us with Snow Shoes and walked without themselves,' and that '[t]he Indians had our encampment prepared and immediately on our arrival gave us warm pemmican to eat, before they arranged their own encampment' (Franklin 1995: 16 November 1821). Richardson gave a more detailed account, writing with evident gratitude that '[t]he Indians treated us with the utmost kindness, gave us their snow shoes and walked without themselves, keeping by our sides that they might lift us when we fell. . . . [They] cooked for us and fed us as if we had been children evincing a degree of humanity that would have done honour to the most civilized nation' (Richardson 1984: 16 November 1821). In the narrative, this passage was repeated almost word for word (Franklin 1823: 470–71).

On 26 November they arrived at Akaitcho's camp. Franklin recorded in his journal that the explorers were kindly received and that

> [a]ccording to the custom of these Indians on first meeting persons who had experienced Suffering . . . little Conversation passed. A perfect silence indeed prevailed for some time, but their Countenances of pity clearly bespoke their tender Sympathy. . . . [T]he Leader prepared Some meat and attended to the cooking of it himself . . . This was a peculiar mark of his attention, and during our stay in his tent he either prepared our Meat himself, or made Some of his young men do it. (Franklin 1995: 26 November 1821)

Franklin, then, had become sensitive enough to native customs to realise that silence was an indication of compassion, not callous indifference. Nor did he misinterpret Akaitcho's courtesy as subservience. Richardson corroborated his account, noting that '[w]e were kindly received and hospitably entertained, the Leader himself shewing every personal attention in his power and every one in the encampment, expressing a high degree of sympathy with our sufferings, in their countenances.' The

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0032247407006936 Published online by Cambridge University Press

doctor also made the slightly cynical remark that '[in] the course of the day we were visited by every person of the band, either out of curiosity or kindness' (Richardson 1984: 26 November 1821). In the narrative, Franklin strongly emphasised the compassionate behaviour of all the natives and the courtesy shown by Akaitcho:

> [W]e arrived in safety at the abode of our chief and companion, Akaitcho. We were received by the party assembled in the leader's tent, with looks of compassion, and profound silence, which lasted about a quarter of an hour, and by which they meant to express their condolence for our sufferings . . . The Chief, Akaitcho, shewed us the most friendly hospitality, and all sorts of personal attention, even to cooking for us with his own hands, an office which he never performs for himself.

In a sentence that can properly be understood only in the light of Richardson's journal entry, Frankin added that 'we were visited by every person of the band, not merely from curiosity, I conceive, but rather from a desire to evince their tender sympathy in our late distress' (Franklin 1823: 471).

By the time the explorers reached Fort Providence, Franklin had learned the reasons why the natives did not leave provisions at Fort Enterprise. Their own return from the coast was difficult, and they too had gone for days at a time without any food other than *tripe de roche*. A shortage of ammunition hampered their efforts; then three hunters were drowned, and the band spent several weeks mourning them. This information seems to have gone far towards softening Franklin's resentment. Then, on his arrival at Fort Providence, he was appalled to find that the goods with which he intended to pay Akaitcho and the hunters had not arrived. Franklin wrote that he felt 'a deep Sorrow' at 'being unable to give them their due or any adequate reward for their recent valuable Services' (Franklin 1995: 15 December 1821). Remembering the events of the previous May, he feared reproaches from Akaitcho. However, Akaitcho

> [s]poke of the circumstance (which to them, the Indians, must have been [as] serious a disappointment as it was a source of humiliation to ourselves) in a tone of moderation quite unexpected from him. He said, that he Supposed we were now poor, the traders appeared to be poor and that he and his Companions were poor likewise, and added that it was the first time the Whites were ever indebted to them. He trusted however that the payment would be made Next Season and on receiving an assurance that every endeavour on my part should be exerted to procure and forward the goods . . . Akaitcho abandoned the subject.

During the subsequent conversation, Akaitcho 'expressed . . . an anxious desire that we should give a favourable representation of himself and his Nation in our Country,' remarking to Franklin, 'I know you write down occurrences in your journals but probably you only take notice of the bad things we Say or do and are Silent as to the good' (Franklin 1995: 14 December 1821; see also Franklin 1823: 475). This shrewd observation may have been the catalyst for Franklin's change of heart. He seems to have reflected seriously on the implications of his power to construct the natives for European readers, and his revisions were evidently carried out with the intention of doing Akaitcho justice.

Yet in his role as the editor of Franklin's journal, Davis attempts to convince readers that Franklin failed utterly to bridge the cultural gap between himself and Akaitcho, and that he left Rupert's Land even more prejudiced and insular than he had been when he had arrived. In a footnote to Franklin's journal entries for May 1821, Davis comments that 'the portrait of [Akaitcho as] a whining, unreasonable, sulking child that Franklin has painted . . . clearly needs reconsideration' (Franklin 1995: c; Franklin 1995: 138 n. 305). He gives no indication that the portrait was in fact long ago reconsidered by Franklin himself. Instead, in his note on Akaitcho's request that the natives be fairly represented to the British public, Davis makes the inexplicable statement that 'Akaitcho and his band were probably presented more favourably and fairly in Franklin's journal than they were in his public account' (Franklin 1995: 231 n. 511). In his introduction to the journal, Davis glosses over the natives' actual reasons for not leaving provisions at Fort Enterprise, and suggests instead that their disdain for the arrogant, incompetent Englishmen made them indifferent to the party's fate (Franklin 1995: cvi). In putting forward this explanation, Davis ignores Wentzel's account of events (printed in Franklin 1823: 492–93), and he implies that Akaitcho was capable of deliberately leaving others to starve. It might therefore reasonably be suggested that both Akaitcho and Franklin are more fairly represented in Franklin's writing than in Davis's.

Conclusion

The belief that the English explorers did not develop even the slightest understanding or appreciation of aboriginal culture is clearly not tenable. This is not, of course, proof that they should be considered models of tolerance and cultural relativism. However, it does seriously undermine the dichotomy between arrogant explorers and open-minded, adaptable fur traders drawn by Davis and others (for example, see Wallace 1980; Newman 1985; Berton 1988; McGoogan 2001). Davis repeatedly claims that Franklin stubbornly 'ignored the evolved wisdom of fur trader, voyageur, and Yellowknife.' He defines this wisdom as 'a cultural development that grew out of generations of activities in the subarctic', and comments that 'Indians and fur traders had been evolving an enduring and mutually advantageous relationship for many years'. The fur traders, in Davis's view, had accepted the aboriginal world on its own terms, with humility and respect, and eventually an almost organic relationship had 'evolved' between these enlightened white men and the northern environment. Franklin, on the other hand, 'did not possess this same adaptability. Rather, he had supreme confidence

in his own culture's value system' (Franklin 1823: cvii, xc). Franklin, then, was an outsider, an intruder, the representative of an overbearing and insensitive imperial culture, who rejected the quasi-organic harmony between traders and natives for arrogant attempts at domination. In this version of Canadian history, the fur traders hardly seem to be of European origin at all; in spite of the fact that very few of them were born in North America, they are presented as having a claim to be considered 'indigenous' to the Canadian north. Significantly, Davis makes no distinction between the wisdom of 'fur trader, voyageur, and Yellowknife': the natives, the Canadian-born voyageurs, and the British-born traders are all seen as equal and united in their wisdom. For him, the negative qualities of European imperialism are embodied by Franklin, while the voyageurs and traders are a benign presence, welcomed and accepted by the natives with whom they had 'evolved' such a 'mutually advantageous relationship'.

For present-day Canadians who have come to doubt the justice of much of what was done in their country's early history, this vision of the past is an exceptionally comforting one. It allows them to believe that the fur trade was significantly less aggressive and exploitative than other forms of European expansionism. There is, of course, an extensive and convincing body of historical work to demonstrate that the natives who engaged in the fur trade were far from being mere dupes of cunning European traders. Native agency has rightly been given a key place in studies of the fur trade and other works of ethnohistory (for example, see Ray 1974; Van Kirk 1980; Brown 1980; Trigger 1985; Abel 1993). However, the fact remains that the long-term results of these interactions were far from beneficial to Canada's indigenous peoples. The use made of ethnohistorians' work by writers like Davis results in an overly romanticised picture of the fur trade. By emphasizing the ways in which the traders did adapt to aboriginal culture, while simultaneously denying that the nineteenth-century British Arctic explorers demonstrated any similar appreciation of aboriginal people, these writers suggest that the fur trade was a uniquely tolerant Canadian variation of imperialism. This hybrid fur trade culture gains in appeal when set in opposition to the stereotyped image of Franklin and his fellow British explorers. The application of post-colonial theory to the history of Canada's north has been noticeably uneven and inconsistent: while the self/other dichotomy has unhesitatingly been utilised in studies of British explorers like Franklin, the long Canadian tradition of fur trade and ethnohistorical studies has apparently led to an assumption that the traders were unique among imperialists for their enthusiastic acceptance of hybridity.

It is clear that Franklin was a man of considerable personal integrity, and one who was far from unwilling to learn from other cultures if necessary. To state this is not a discursive strategy for claiming that northern explorers were innocent of the wrongs perpetrated by European imperialism, and still less is it an argument that Franklin does, after all, deserve to occupy a hero's pedestal. However, to portray an honest, well-meaning man as the epitome of arrogance, and to claim that he deliberately distorted his published representation of people to whom he owed his life, does not serve the cause of historical inquiry well. It has been all too easy for writers like Warkentin and Davis to suggest that Canadian readers can expiate any guilt they may feel by deconstructing Franklin's texts in order to liberate the suppressed voices of their country's original inhabitants. The writings of many British explorers contain native voices which speak clearly enough to anyone willing to listen. Franklin's journal and narrative offer no idealised picture of cultural harmony between natives and Europeans, but they do tell us a great deal about both the conflicts and the accommodations that characterised the interaction of the two races in Canada's north. It is surely more difficult to understand the success of imperialism while at the same time denying that explorers and other agents of imperial Britain ever displayed any meaningful understanding of other cultures. An empire built on pure arrogance could never have endured unless supported by overwhelming military might, but as the nineteenth-century historian J. R. Seeley pointed out in *The expansion of England* (Seeley 1883), Britain's army never approached the strength required to hold the empire by force alone. The discourse of imperialism was indeed, as Said claims, a powerful instrument, but it was a far more flexible and subtle one than he admits. It is, therefore, unrealistic to expect that the history of British imperialism would not contain many stories like Franklin's (and indeed the story of the fur trade), combining eurocentric goals with tantalising and attractive elements of cultural relativism. To force the narratives of Arctic exploration and other imperialist literature into a false model of rigid Manichean dichotomies is to misunderstand the cultural foundations of the British Empire.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Parker Duchemin for his helpful comments on an earlier version of this article; David Dean, Dominique Marshall and Robert Goheen for sharing their knowledge of theoretical matters; and the two anonymous referees. Financial support from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and from Carleton University is gratefully acknowledged.

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