


Ghosts in the archive: the textual lacunæ of the Third Franklin Expedition

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Research Article

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Abstract

The paucity of the extant written record left by the Third Franklin Expedition (1845–1848) has presented challenges to the efforts of generations of searchers and scholars. Additionally, it has underscored the reliance of Western culture on written records when establishing narratives and understanding events. This paper explores the sparse written records of the expedition in the context of their contextualisation over the years within an ersatz Franklin archive which includes a variety of discourses and documentary intents. By situating the Franklin records within an archival context, it is possible to reconsider these materials as part of a collection while also examining the ways in which they stand on their own by virtue of the (sometimes unknowable) circumstances of their creation, circulation, and preservation. Combining this archival approach with Derrida's notion of hauntology, this paper analyses the written records of the Third Franklin Expedition as an ephemeral, and ultimately inscrutable, representation of a vanished expedition.

Introduction

The Third Franklin Expedition of the British Royal Navy, led by Captain Sir John Franklin, ended in a disaster which has troubled searchers and scholars for over 170 years. The 1845 expedition to find the Northwest Passage was also an opportunity to take valuable magnetic readings near the Pole. Some three years later, all members of the expedition were lost, leaving only two written records behind in the Arctic. Having been frozen in ice during the fall of 1846, the two expedition ships, HMS *Erebus* and HMS *Terror*, were ultimately abandoned during the early summer of 1848, the men attempting a doomed overland journey to safety. The departure from the ships was accompanied by an extensive trail of material objects from the expedition, later found by Inuit and by British and American searchers. This material record is recorded in written and oral record by the individuals who encountered it. Inuit tradition even hints at papers left behind by the sailors, only two of which were found by European searchers (Woodman, 2015). These records and objects have formed the basis for generations of scholarship trying to understand the fate of the expedition, and, later, for scholarship examining the meaning of exploration narrative and its absence. The silent materiality of the Franklin disaster nevertheless stands as an eloquent reminder of the many ways in which it ultimately resists the theories by which archives are constructed and understood. Artefacts were scattered and removed from much of their original context. On a documentary level, the lack of an extant written record obstructs Western strategies of textual and archival analysis. The textual lacunæ of the Franklin Expedition offer an opportunity to consider the nature of polar exploration narrative, as well as the ways in which it is refracted by loss, interpretation, and the attempt to create and recreate an archival context. The lived experiences of the men of the expedition were certainly very varied and remain fundamentally ephemeral. Their elusive presence, glimpsed in and around the scanty documents which only a few of them left behind, recalls Derrida's concept of hauntology, which understands presence as a liminal, ghostly state (1993). Hauntology relates to the idea of the archive, to the Franklin archive in particular, and the ways in which modern researchers talk about the sailors, the decisions they made, and the records they left (and did not leave). It is a discourse of absence, but an imperfect one because the fractured archive is still very much present in both physical and digital format. The hauntology of the Franklin archive is the past calling to the future in the form of texts, objects, and even in the bodies preserved in permafrost in the Arctic.

The Third Franklin Expedition, like the British naval expeditions which preceded it, was well equipped to create a multifaceted, multimodal archive of its progress. Furnished with official log books and sick books to record the facts of the expedition, members, particularly officers, were also encouraged to keep journals which they would be obliged to turn over to the Admiralty upon completion of the voyage (Craciun, 2016; Potter 2016). Additionally, the expedition ships held materials for taking and recording magnetic observations. This activity represented a central component of the expedition's mission. Admiralty-commanded scientific activity was accompanied by the biological observations of Henry Goodsir, one of the ships' surgeons, along

with other members of the expedition (*The nautical magazine*, 2013). There was a daguerreotype machine on board which afforded the expedition the potential to add images to its archive (Potter 2016). Had images survived, they would have done so in addition to the daguerreotypes made of the expedition's officers prior to sailing. These portraits of officers provide a visual and symbolic point of departure against which the eventual disappearance of the men and their archive can be described. Finally, and crucially, the ships carried a quantity of pre-printed Admiralty forms providing the ship's location, condition, and the date, and with instructions in several languages to return the forms to the Admiralty if found. These were intended to be dropped over the side in sealed containers by British naval ships in order to provide insight about ocean currents and the state of ships (Parkinson, 1997; Potter 2016). These forms, two found buried in cairns near the site of the disaster and third found in a sealed container at sea in 1849, are among the only surviving written records of the Third Franklin Expedition. One of them, known as the Victory Point Record, provides the only textual basis for subsequent theories about the expedition commanders' plans after the abandonment of the ships.

The forms, particularly the one known as the Victory Point Record, with manuscript annotation, are typically held to be the most important piece of documentary evidence for the fate of the expedition. Though they form a focal point of the heterogeneous group of objects, texts, and interpretations which have served to create an ersatz archive of the expedition, they are situated among other resources which have received scholarly attention in the intervening decades. There is a badly deteriorated, nearly indecipherable wallet of papers known as the Peglar Pocketbook, a large quantity of Victorian artefacts including both tools and domestic items which have been collected and curated in various ways, Inuit observations recorded after the disappearance and filtered through the linguistic and cultural limitations of the Anglo-American searchers who collected them, human bones in various dispositions, and documents sent back by the expeditioners from Greenland before sailing into Baffin Bay. The lacunae of the Franklin archive are the spaces between documents whose haphazard survival has, perhaps, afforded them disproportionate importance in the story of the expedition, as well as the records that can be conjectured to have been produced by the expeditioners, based on the daguerreotype and instrumental equipment brought and the by-then rich tradition of expedition journals and narratives. The century and a half following the expedition's disappearance have seen documents, oral history, artefacts, and bones placed into new contexts which both aggregate and obscure their meaning, provoking questions about what it means to preserve not just an object or story, but its legibility. This polyvalent, interdisciplinary literature created by professional and amateur researchers represents an attempt to exploit the knowledge available in an effort to divine the knowledge which is not. Efforts to reconstitute a Franklin archive by juxtaposing these diverse materials emphasise the ways in which this archive is both traditionally Western and fundamentally problematic when viewed through the lens of Western archival theory. While largely based on texts and objects, the Franklin archive is incomplete without ample consideration of Inuit oral tradition. This record, though filtered by having been recorded by Western visitors to the region, both complements and contrasts with the stories that have been told using the extant texts and artefacts placed into a context of Admiralty convention and Victorian social mores. The ability to access the diverse sources of information is conditioned by a variety of factors, including

geography, as well as institutional access. Nevertheless, while the fragility of the physical materials and their existence in archives such as those of the National Maritime Museum and the Scott Polar Research Institute create barriers to access, the gathering of these materials in an institutional context is itself a contributory factor in the kinds of narratives that can be created. The fact that things were collected, saved, and curated both increases and obscures their legibility in ways which ask the reader to consider the idiosyncratic nature of the survival and preservation of the physical and narrative traces of the Franklin Expedition. This geographically dispersed, multi-format archive is also complicated by the digitisation of both texts and objects. Their widespread availability online increases access, partially addresses the issue of geography, and allows for the recombination of dispersed entities. However, the partial digitisation of the Franklin archive nevertheless asks the researcher to combine and recombine disparate and incomplete resources in order to understand a complicated, fractured whole. Interestingly, the very fact of digitising some of these materials, held in multiple physical locations, undoes the contextualisation and order imposed on these materials by their inclusion in a physical archive. Even though this organisation was, itself, a flawed reaction to a fragmented archive, the potential for recombination offered by the digital Franklin archive has important implications for the ways in which these materials can be read. This potential for juxtaposition and recombination underlines the spectrality of these corpora, which resist order, delineation, and defining narrative. In its way, it forms a sort of haphazard Franklin archive, a corpus of its own which provides enormous insight into an opaque historical tragedy while simultaneously presenting important insights about the ways in which information is produced, discovered, contextualised, and recontextualised.

Literature review

The diversity of the scholarly literature surrounding the Franklin Expedition reflects the hybridity and lacunae of the extant evidence. These records constitute a hypothetical Franklin archive which is notable for its ambiguity and inscrutability. The ways in which this disparate information is used and evaluated emphasises the disconnected strategies by which it was produced, assembled, and understood. A review of this literature is also a review of the manner in which the Franklin material is fundamentally at odds with the theory and practice of the archive.

At the heart of the Franklin mystery is the fact of the total loss of the expedition, compounded by the already-high rate of death recorded in the Victory Point Record. Drawing on various elements of the Franklin archive, several theories have been proposed to explain the extraordinarily high mortality rate and the ultimate collapse of an expedition which represented the best, though ultimately deeply flawed, thinking of the Admiralty at that time. In 1984 and 1985, Owen Beattie led teams which exhumed the bodies of three sailors who received proper burial and the bones of many who did not concluded that both tuberculosis and elevated lead levels were present (Beattie & Geiger, 2004). However, they and other scholars note that neither condition was unusual for Victorian English sailors, and that it is difficult to establish the concept of elevated lead levels without a point of comparison for the time and context. Cookman (2000) offers a controversial theory that the officers and sailors were essentially poisoned by badly canned food. The Franklin Expedition was furnished with canned provisions, examples of which have been found to have been badly sealed with lead solder. This theory has been challenged

by scholars who note that botulism is an anaerobic toxin which could not flourish in unsealed cans, and that there were cases of Inuit groups finding and consuming the canned food, years after the expedition, with no ill effect (Taichman, Gross, & MacEachern, 2017; Woodman, 2015). A third hypothesis is that the men of the expedition succumbed to scurvy. This is lent credence by the fact that their diet would have contained little fresh food, particularly given the relatively barren area in which they were frozen. It also may help to explain the confusing decision to travel overland which is reflected in the Victory Point Record, as Woodman (2015) has suggested.

Other researchers, such as Savitt (2008), have focused not on the Franklin Expedition itself, but on the decades-long search conducted after the disappearance. The many Franklin searches produced a voluminous textual record, with an emphasis on narratives written by captains of rescue ships. This forms an interesting counterpoint to the relative narrative silence of the 1845 Franklin Expedition. Potter (2016) focuses on the notion of doubt, and of non-knowing. He proposes that the lack of resolution has contributed to the Franklin mythology by imbuing the story with a permanent sense of uncertainty, as though mystery were an inherent component of the expedition from its inception. This theory is lent credence by the many novels and other fictional representations of an expedition for which a definitive archive is impossible to reconstruct. Lambert (2009) offers a different reading of the expedition, one which focuses on its scientific mission and insists that its demise is not, in fact, mysterious. This point is particularly well taken because Lambert's research draws heavily on the scientific and institutional environment of the Admiralty and other entities, such as the Royal Geographical Society. This certainly offers context for the genesis of the Franklin Expedition, though it also draws into relief the utter lack of the kind of scientific documentation which the vanished expedition was expected to produce, in quantity.

Lloyd-Jones (2004, 2005, 2011, 2018) contributes another component to the historiography of the expedition by focusing on the men, particularly the sailors and marines who were not officers. His research attempts to reconstruct their lives, and occasionally the lives of those they left behind. In this sense, Lloyd-Jones' work extends the ersatz polyvalent Franklin archive by including within it the life information of the men who sailed with Franklin. This information is probably devoid of evidentiary value relating to the expedition's demise. However, the fact of situating it within the Franklin story helps to decentralise Sir John Franklin as the focal point of narratives constructed about the expedition and to underscore the fundamental truth that the expedition sits within a broader narrative of the lives, careers, and motivations of the individuals who planned and participated in it.

Woodman's (1996, 1997, 2015) work collating and examining the Inuit testimony gathered during the years following the expedition have been revelatory, both of the events as they may have happened and of the implications of format for narrative. In contrast with the long tradition of doubtful European attitudes towards Inuit oral tradition of the Franklin Expedition, Woodman premises his book on the assumption that Inuit oral tradition, where it can be checked by European documentation, is generally found to be highly accurate, even years after the fact. With this in mind, he postulates that most stories will have elements of truth, and that the stories which cannot be correlated to another British expedition must, by default, be inspired by the Franklin Expedition, for which records do not

survive. This fascinating premise asks readers to confront a new corpus of evidence of the fate of the expedition, while simultaneously dealing with a non-textual, non-European tradition of remembrance and meaning-making. Eber (2008) expands on this idea by describing the history and significance of contact between the Inuit and European explorers.

The notion of narrative applied to polar exploration has received increasing attention from scholars interested in museum studies, literary history, and textual representation. These studies bring to bear concepts from literary criticism and the study of the performativity of meaning in order to explore the ways in which exploration could be narrated, as well as the choices made after an expedition, particularly a disastrous one, to memorialise it through a display of artefacts. Parkinson (1997) presents a reading of the expedition which focuses explicitly on its documents – the Victory Point Record and the Peglar Papers – as historico-literary texts. He emphasises the manner and method of creation of the documents, noting that the Victory Point Record is a public record meant to be forwarded to the Admiralty, while the documents in the Peglar Pocketbook were private. Equally important is the materiality of the documents, with an understanding of the difficulty of adding marginalia to the Victory Point Record in freezing Arctic temperatures. Indeed, he insists on these marginalia as a departure from the “formality” of the document. Craciun (2014, 2016) uses the theories and methods of the history of the book to understand repetitive tropes and preoccupations in narratives of Arctic exploration. Her treatment of the Third Franklin Expedition situates the Victory Point Record and, significantly, any of the writings the expedition officers would have been expected to produce, within a larger context of authorship and publication within 19th-century Admiralty culture. She also extends this treatment to the artefacts left behind by the expedition, paying special attention to the ways in which these objects were exhibited, curated, and retained, and how these activities were conditioned by changes in culture and attitudes. The emphasis on the museum and the archive, which Craciun relates to Michel de Certeau's notion of “library navigation,” makes the discourses of these fields central to any understanding of the accumulation of documents and objects related to the Franklin Expedition.

Lewis-Jones (2004) also situates the disparate texts and objects which compose the Franklin corpus within a broader context of narrative and storytelling, arguing that the Admiralty's desire to maintain the popularity of polar exploration voyages inspired its curation of the Franklin artefacts. Davis-Fisch (2012) proposes a departure from the notion of “linear narrative” as applied to polar expeditions, wherein, “shifting the question, from ‘what happened?’ to ‘how was what happened experienced and why was it remembered?’ provides an opening through which one might address the material, historical, and psychological conditions that determine how performative remains are preserved and acknowledges that the remains of past performances are always and necessarily fragmented” (14). This approach, building on Moss, insists on the unknowing of the Franklin Expedition as a central element of its lasting presence in the culture. By emphasising both the need to focus on memory rather than narrative, as well as the final impossibility of a reconstruction of that narrative, Davis-Fisch offers a counterpoint to a documentologic strategy which privileges records as evidence. This is liberating in a Franklin context, though the departure from “reconstructive” narrative poses interesting problems for a fraught Franklin archive which is, in fact, the product not of the expedition itself but of nearly two centuries

of curation, recuperation, conjecture, and memorialisation. An emphasis on experience, on the “why” rather than the “what,” moves the focus to the frame text of the expedition and away from the silence and absence at its centre. Unfortunately, within this ultimate silence, broken only by objects and two ambiguous documents, lies the truth of the fate of the Franklin Expedition.

Moss adds to the discourse about the polar expedition archive by establishing a connection between the body and the text. This is crucial to the notion of a Franklin archive, however disparate, precisely because Franklin’s body has never been found. Indeed, modern researchers have placed importance on Franklin’s putative tomb because of its connection in Franklin lore with a cache of records (Gross & Taichman, 2017). However, Moss also asserts, using Scott as a counterpoint, that the explorer’s body, its recovery, and its legibility as a monument to his discoveries are central to the memorialisation and understanding of his expedition. She writes that:

It is necessary to write as you die in the Arctic because someone will come to read what you write, and it is necessary to find the bodies of the dead in order to read what they wrote. Writing, in this account, works to legitimate both death and exhumation. As we saw with Scott, a fully written death is not absolute; to write one’s own dying is to extend one’s power as an interpreter beyond death, to deny the pointlessness of death. (135)

In this sense, Franklin did not write his death, nor did any of his men. However, this is an interesting lens through which to view the surviving documents which situates the focus on the writer and his ability, or failure, to connect with posthumous readers. A counterpoint to this author relationship exists in the assumption that Captain F. R. M. Crozier (captain of HMS *Terror* and Franklin’s successor as expedition leader) must have buried records on land upon abandoning the ships, a conviction held by Charles Francis Hall and explored by others searching for Franklin records (Cyriax, 1969). As Cyriax points out, the lack of past precedent for this kind of disaster in an expedition coupled with the omission of any directive from the Admiralty decreases the likelihood that the surviving expedition leaders would have buried the probably large quantity of documents in frozen ground during their escape from the ice (1969). Nevertheless, the assumption that records must exist, and that they must be held as the final arbiters of the truth of the Franklin archive, has proved remarkably persistent (Flynn, 2019; Gross & Taichman, 2017).

In addition to official records, unofficial accounts in newspapers and plays often provided quotidian detail about the lived experience of expeditions, as well as more supernaturally inflected discourses of Arctic travel (McCorristine, 2018). McCorristine (2018), who also links Derrida’s hauntology and its temporal tensions with the Franklin Expedition, notes that mediums and clairvoyants who took spiritual journeys to the Arctic were unbound by the kinds of temporal and geographical limitations of polar travel. These additions to the Franklin archive speak to both the insufficiency of the extant records and the inherent strangeness of the geographical and narrative context of the Franklin Expedition’s disappearance. Though these texts complicate the archive for the modern reader, it is also notable that they may have complicated the actual search process during the 1850s and 1860s. Gillies Ross (2003) describes information received through mesmerism and other occult methods as a distraction from the business of mounting expeditions to discover the fate of the Franklin Expedition. This scholarly ambivalence situates the spectrality of the Franklin archive at a crossroads between pragmatism and exegesis.

Records, narrative, and the imperfect archive

The diversity of the modern conversation about the Franklin Expedition underscores the fundamental truth that the Franklin archive, if one can be said to exist, is impossible to construct in an entirely coherent way. The interplay of doubt, spectrality, and the nature of the archive contributes to the hauntology which governs the extant Franklin texts and artefacts, and especially their interstices. Modern archival theory rests on the concepts of *respect des fonds* and original order, both of which privilege the provenance and prior arrangement of a group of records (Blouin & Rosenberg, 2011). There is no way to reestablish order, or indeed to know what was lost during and after the demise of the expedition. Provenance comes a bit more easily by virtue of the explicitly administrative and governmental overtones of an Admiralty expedition, as well as the fact that the Victory Point Record is known to have been authored by James Fitzjames, commander and later captain of HMS *Erebus*. However, an archivist wishing to create a Franklin archive according to established principals would encounter challenges related to nearly every document or object in the corpus. This fundamental problem points to a risk of overemphasising the surviving records and objects simply because they still exist, and of ascribing provenance, usage, or other qualities to them when their original context remains unknowable. An examination of several of the principal *fonds*, or record groups, produced by the Franklin Expedition illustrates this point.

The Victory Point Record

The Victory Point Record is rendered unique not by its production as an Admiralty form, but by the dual factors of its presence as one of only three official records, all form letters, left by the expedition (the other being an additional form letter) and its manuscript annotations. Its uniqueness is fundamentally problematic because it is impossible to gauge its position relative to other documents like it, because only one other has been found and it is, essentially, a copy. Applying a lens of diplomatics, the study of historical documents and records, is appropriate here, particularly because the Victory Point Record is an administrative document. Establishing its authenticity is less of an issue than understanding its intent. There is no reason to believe that there were not other documents of this kind left behind, particularly since the Victory Point Record’s manuscript annotations were added to a pre-existing document which was left in duplicate in two separate cairns. Since no others have been found, however, the scholarly tendency has been to accord the Victory Point Record the last (written) word on the expedition’s plans, particularly since it is the only record which recounts, though which does not explain, the abandonment of the ships for an escape overland. Indeed, the very uniqueness, or not, of the Victory Point Record provokes interesting questions about the nature of the document as a record. Cyriax (1959) observes that, though the Admiralty required expedition commanders to drop records in the sea while in the Arctic, orders did not specify the manner of leaving records on land. Though searchers anticipated finding many such, it is not at all clear based on past practice that Franklin would have left this kind of documentary trail of his progress. Cyriax offers the example of Sir John Ross having left several records after abandoning the *Victory*, as well as that of Sir Edward Parry leaving records in cairns. However, he also notes that circumstances often conditioned the leaving (or not) of records, including wind delays and distance from land. Seen in this light, he notes

that the only truly surprising lack of record concerning the Franklin Expedition is the non-discovery of a record from the expedition's first winter harbour at Beechey Island. This has been explained, by Cyriax and others, in various ways. From the perspective of a polyvalent Franklin archive, it is interesting to observe that the only textual record of the expedition's time at Beechey Island is the inscriptions left on the grave markers of the three men buried there in 1846. These have received their own scholarly attention in an effort to understand the expedition's collective mindset or tone after that first winter in the ice. However, their ability to stand as an effective counterpart to the Victory Point Record is limited by the fact that they were created for an entirely different purpose.

Two other crucial pieces of information imparted by the Victory Point Record are the death of Captain Sir John Franklin in the summer of 1847, as well as the deaths of 9 officers and 15 men. This has been noted by scholars to be an unusually high death rate for a British naval expedition to the Arctic, which has given rise to some of the studies seeking to establish the existence of a health risk which predated the ships becoming beset in ice (Forst & Brown, 2017; Millar, Bowman, Battersby, & Welbury, 2016; Taichman et al., 2017). The Record, a hastily written text of some 254 words, supplies the reader with the status of the expedition as it prepared to abandon its 2 ships and attempt an escape. This brevity has invited inference by generations of searchers and scholars, permitting readings into the gaps left between the emphasis of certain details and the seeming omission or downplaying of others (Cyriax, 1958; Woodman, 2015).

As the last extant word of a vanished expedition, the Victory Point Record has raised many more questions than it settled. In addition to questions about the deaths of Franklin and the other 24 members (3 of whom are known to have been buried on Beechey Island in 1846), the record provides no explanation of the decision to leave the ships and to set off for the distant Back River. This has given rise to doubts regarding the expedition leaders' competence, and even to speculation that they may have known that this was not a route to survival but to have undertaken it in order to provide temporary hope to dying men (Lambert, 2009). The desperation of these queries lies in their certainty that the Victory Point Record was written and deposited as a sort of farewell to British civilisation, in the distant hope that it might be found and sent to the Admiralty.

However, the factors against the survival of documents in the Arctic, as well as the archaeological record of objects of bones, have also inspired some scholars to question whether the Record does, in fact, tell the story of the end of the expedition. Woodman posits a multiple abandonment theory, based on Inuit testimony and the physical evidence, which asserts that the officers and crews left the ships not once, but at least twice, possibly with the intention of finding fresh game (Woodman, 2015). Impossible to prove definitively but tempting to many scholars, this narrative more closely aligns with both the archaeological record and Inuit testimony. By prioritising the Victory Point Record as the last extant piece of information written by the fleeing sailors, we risk overlooking the fact that it may well represent only a snapshot in time of the expedition, a midpoint rather than an ending.

In some contexts, the value of the Victory Point Record is not limited to its production and preservation (in the cairn) as an administrative document. Whether or not it was intended as the final word of the expedition, it became so by virtue of the strangeness of the Franklin archive that has developed over the intervening 171 years. Another perspective is to see it as a more symbolic,

or even literary representation of the men. Edward Parkinson has read the Victory Point Record as a narrative unto itself, with temporal and geographical preoccupations, as well as the material considerations of frozen ink and fragile paper. Drawing on the interpretation of McClintock, the Franklin searcher who found the Record, he writes:

McClintock's interpretation draws attention to the document's brevity, yet argues that its literary *effect* is still substantial, in spite of its compression. He implies that it does "tell a tale" and therefore its value for him is primarily narrative. (45)

The notion of a "literary effect" is reflective less of Fitzjames' authorship than it is of the way the document has always been read, as the last written testament of a disastrous expedition. The effect is enhanced, Parkinson asserts, by the fact that the new information added to the Victory Point Record upon the abandonment of the ships is in Fitzjames' own hand. Adding materiality to material, he moves the Record from the realm of the administrative to that of the affective. Though Fitzjames' own letters, written from Greenland prior to entering Baffin Bay, are proof of his descriptive style, the ability to read the Victory Point Record as a piece of literature is in immediate conflict with a diplomatic, archival approach to it as a record to be dealt with on its own merits. For Parkinson and McClintock, the Record is inextricably linked both to the material difficulty of its production – frozen ink and a desperate mission – as well as to the poignancy of its discovery.

This tension between the face value meaning of a document and the refraction and interpretation of that meaning through context sits uneasily next to the use of records as monuments. Moss (2006) compares Franklin to Scott, though that could apply to Fitzjames as well, as the author of the Victory Point Record. Indeed, his authorship is in his official capacity as an officer of Franklin's Expedition. By this logic, the body is text and archive, as well as monument:

If the expedition comes to a complete end with death, if the explorer disappears and is allowed to decay silently into the howling wilderness, then he has in death become merely a private person, which is precisely not the point of exploration. If instead his death itself is fetishized and the story told and told again to the last gasp and beyond, then the body becomes a relic or a kind of cultural bookmark. *Here* lies Our Great Explorer who died heroically *here*. (See his statue outside Parliament back home.) An expedition fails not in death, which is usually more or less expected and budgeted for, but in disappearance. (95)

Craciun (2016), in her reading of the Victory Point Record, extends the link between body and text to the British reaction to allegations of cannibalism on the part of the Franklin Expedition members.

Human remains and other objects grew exponentially throughout the late nineteenth-century searches, while the Victory Point Record simultaneously grew in its talismanic power as the unique legible message received from the vanished expedition. By the end of the nineteenth and throughout the twentieth century, written inscriptions – the traces of British civilization, not its savagery – replaced the material inscriptions of bones, graves, objects, as the truth-bearers of the Franklin mystery. Even the mythic grave or "vault," in which some persist in believing Franklin himself was buried, has become the object of obsession because it is believed to archive his writing. (37)

The conflation of the document with the body both broadens the definition of the archive with regard to polar expeditions and narrows the role of the record to a symbol of the explorer who wrote it. The Victory Point Record has become more than its limited content, functioning as a monument to a vanished expedition while simultaneously evoking questions and prompting scientific inquiry on the part of those who read it as a record. The uniqueness of the

record inspired broad circulation in reproduction in *The Illustrated London News*, *Harper's Weekly*, and in McClintock's, *The voyage of the Fox in Arctic seas* (1859) (Potter 2016). The mass availability of the now-digitised Victory Point Record extends its reach, though, as a symbol of the Franklin Expedition, it must compete with images of personal objects and bones. This is an interesting position for an official record, which draws into relief its dual afterlife as an Admiralty document and as a quasi-literary monument to Franklin, even though not written by him. Written under his auspices and listing his death, it is put to the service of centralising a man who, by this point in the expedition, was no longer in command.

Inuit stories collected by Charles Francis Hall (1865) and other Franklin searchers in the 1850s and 1860s and treated in Woodman (2015) and Eber (2008) tell of quantities of paper carried by the sailors as they left the ships, of papers being buried ashore in cairns made of rocks, and even of papers being left with the Inuit on a vague understanding that more English expeditions might follow (Woodman, 2015). The Inuit told Charles Hall, the American who interviewed them a decade after the expedition vanished, that they had destroyed the papers (Woodman, 2015). In addition to providing proof that written record is one paradigm among many, the destruction of these records, if real, demonstrates that the Victory Point Record may have been produced in a much broader context which is unknowable to modern researchers.

Journals and letters

Context is also a conditioning factor for the letters sent home by expedition officers from Greenland, before the expedition sailed into Baffin Bay. The established Admiralty practice of stewarding the transformation of explorers into authors led to a requirement that leaders and other officers write about their work, and that they give this content to the Admiralty (Craciun, 2016). This practice rendered the journal, theoretically a private document, into a public text (Parkinson, 1997). It is impossible to know what records were created by the men of the Franklin Expedition after leaving Greenland. The letters and one official log sent back to England at that point, however, are read differently because of this absence. The log book receives special attention because it is the only one to survive, even though it lacks the narrative value that later log books would presumably have had, relative to the demise of the expedition. The letters are also special, not only because of the extreme paucity of personal documents related to the expedition, but also because they, unlike official expedition journals, were written and sent as personal documents. Though some of these letters found their way to print in their entirety or as excerpts, they are made different by their composition for personal use and at the very optimistic beginning of the expedition. Their stories derive poignancy from the juxtaposition between the light-hearted moment they describe and the, ultimately unknowable, loss to come.

The letters of James Fitzjames, commander and later captain of HMS *Erebus*, found an early public in the 1852 volume of the *Nautical Magazine* and *Naval Chronicle*. They were also edited by his adoptive brother, William for publication in book form in 1858. Additionally, Fitzjames' letters were published in 1859 in Charles Dickens' *All the year round*, with an introduction by Wilkie Collins. First published during the years of the search, these letters provide a window into the experience of one officer as seen in letters written to his relatives and friends. Both narrative and descriptive, they describe the expedition's progress prior to

departing from Greenland and, in many ways, from any kind of written canon. In the opening lines of these letters, Fitzjames provides a sort of frame text emphasising the distinction between his official journal and what he writes to William Coningham's wife, Elizabeth Coningham:

You appeared very anxious that I should keep a journal for your especial perusal. Now, I do keep a journal, such as it is, which will be given to the Admiralty; but, to please you, I shall note down from time to time such things as may strike me, either in the form of a letter, or in any other form that may at the time suit my fancy. I shall probably never read over what I may have written, so you will excuse inaccuracies. (*The nautical magazine* 158)

It is impossible to know whether Fitzjames continued to write letters to Elizabeth Coningham, or to any of the other correspondents represented in this small corpus. The abrupt cessation of this corpus is poignantly borne out by the way that Fitzjames himself ends it, telling Elizabeth:

And now good bye [sic] for the present; if there be an opportunity of writing by any of the whalers, I shall give you a line; in the meantime, believe me always, Your sincere Friend,

James Fitz James [sic]. (*ibid.* 200)

This casual farewell is in juxtaposition with the modern reader's knowledge of the fate of Fitzjames and the rest of the expedition, forever conditioning readings of the letters. The letters exist permanently outside their original context as both a private correspondence and as the optimistic start to an Arctic adventure. Original order is preserved by the materiality of the letters themselves, which are dated. However, their context, based on their role in the extremely limited corpus of the Third Franklin Expedition, erases the original circumstances of their creation.

By Fitzjames' own indication in the letters, he was planning to create a larger corpus. However, the only textual epilogue to these letters within the Franklin archive is the Victory Point Record itself. Written in Fitzjames' hand, though in his capacity as second in command of the expedition, it is a public document rendered poignant by its status as the final written word of the vanished men.

The Peglar Pocketbook

The only example of personal papers found after the demise of the expedition is known as the Peglar Pocketbook, named so because they contain, among other things, the mariner's certificate of Henry Peter "Harry" Peglar, Captain of the Foretop on HMS *Terror*, as well as a brief description of his service as a sailor. These papers are also the only extant example of a shipboard publication. This type of production, which included plays, memoirs, and other texts, was common during polar expeditions of the period and often more revelatory of the quotidian experience of an expedition than the official narratives sanctioned by the Admiralty (McCorristine 2018). Because the Peglar Pocketbook is the only example of this kind of text to survive from the Franklin Expedition, there is a risk of overemphasis, or of assuming that it is exemplary of other shipboard publications which would likely have been produced. Discovered underneath the body of a fallen sailor by Captain Francis Leopold McClintock during his 1859 expedition in search of Franklin, the papers initially lead searchers to ascribe the whole parcel, held together in a small leather wallet, to this individual. Later research suggests that this man was probably not Harry Peglar, but one of his friends, offering the possibility that the Peglar Pocketbook may contain papers relevant to multiple individuals (Cyriax & Jones 1954; Potter 2016).

Attempting to read them, scholars have noted that some of the papers, appear to contain a narrative of previous sea service in the Caribbean consistent with the naval service of Harry Peglar, or with that of Hugh Armitage, the identification which is widely given to the body under which the papers were found. Other documents in the parcel seem to be letters with addresses and evidence of sealing wax. Still others seem to hint at important events in the narrative of the Franklin Expedition. One passage makes reference to the burial of a man who had been at Trafalgar, a description which could only have applied to Franklin himself. Another line, mentioning a watch schedule and items to be packed, suggests that it could have been written shortly before the abandonment of the ships (Potter 2016). In addition to its ambiguous name, the Peglar Pocketbook also possesses some curious archival characteristics. The fact that the papers cannot be conclusively ascribed to one sailor suggests a polyvocal written record, the assemblage of which is completely unknowable. It is widely acknowledged that the fleeing expedition members brought a multitude of objects with them from the ships, many of which seem to be of questionable utility in those desperate circumstances. Nevertheless, these papers were carried as a portable archive and not discarded before the bearer's death. Likewise, readings of the Pocketbook papers have typically attempted to make some kind of meaning of them based on dated letters, keywords, and proximity on the page. These tentative conclusions are lent credence by the ways in which we customarily approach documents, seeking to organise them into a narrative, or at least into a coherent conceptual framework. Into this reasoning, however, enters the fact that the Peglar Pocketbook as an archive is an inherently retrospective construction. Attempts to derive meaning, or even to impose order, reveal more the development of archival practice than about the papers themselves. It is impossible to know the circumstances which brought these papers together in this particular order and why they were carried by a sailor whose identity remains in some dispute. The context in which the papers were found is certainly the result of a series of decisions, and it forever conditions our readings of the content as records. These decisions, however, are ultimately inscrutable, as are the potentially even more impactful circumstances of the creation of the papers themselves. Potter (2016), as well as Cyriax and Jones (1954) have described the heterogeneous nature of the corpus, noting that it includes a mariner's certificate, narratives of prior service, letters addressed to London, communications that seem to have been sent between the ships, snippets of verse, and at least one drawing. The multitude of genres and discourses create a disparate archive. The documents, many of which are entirely or partially illegible and some of which are written backwards, have been considered as individual records. I argue that, while individually they may defy exegesis, their aggregate presence might say more, particularly if Potter's analysis of the supposed intraship communications is taken into account. The combination of official records (mariner's certificate), documents created during shipboard entertainment or ceremony (verse, narratives), and potential ship-to-ship communication, itself with ominous overtones, in a packet of paper held by a sailor whose multiple possible identities do not include anyone of authority in the expedition raises questions about the manner of accumulation of this archive and the level of intentionality. This is further complicated by the notion that papers in Peglar's handwriting, one of which has been read as a will, may have been carried by someone else. This potential will, as well as other papers addressed as letters, was diverted from their original direction by disaster and recontextualised as semi-legible components of

the disparate accumulation, that is, the Franklin textual archive. Contemporary scholars are not in a position to resolve these questions because of the isolation of the Peglar Pocketbook. Nevertheless, the haphazard or intentional creation of the collection, its presence in the possession of one individual, and the impossibility of understanding the corpus, underscores the difficulty of reading the fragmentary textual records in the Franklin archive and of separating the original meaning of the documents from the denouement of the Franklin story and more than 170 years of memorialisation, collection, and exhibition.

Potter (2016) calls for the papers in the Peglar Pocketbook, currently held at the National Maritime Museum, to be revisualised using lighting techniques. This method has been effective with such high-profile texts as the Archimedes Palimpsest, or with the Livingstone journals, as Potter notes. The possibility of manipulating the physical appearance and materiality of the papers may well provide greater insight. It is also, however, a pathway to fragmented and recombined readings similar to the haphazard archiving of the records themselves. In a certain sense, this kind of reading would be in keeping with the multiple and sometimes contradictory narratives (un)authorised by the various textual records left by the men of the Franklin Expedition.

Administrative and personal papers, coupled with the likelihood of voluminous records of the expedition's magnetic readings, as well as the potential for daguerreotypes, contribute to the accumulation of a disparate, complicated archive. This archive is rendered even more complex by recent footage from Parks Canada suggesting the possibility of papers and maps left in closed drawers in cabinets and desks (Flynn, 2019). Such a discovery would complicate the archive by raising questions about the narrative of the abandonment of the ships, and the ways in which the men tried to create and preserve their archive. The totality, both extant and yet to be discovered, cannot be read as an archive without simultaneously reading into the gaps between objects, records, remains, and oral history. Reading the Third Franklin Expedition is an exercise in archival *chiaroscuro* which emphasises the importance of situating documentary and material evidence in a context which can never be known and of the inability to reestablish the circumstances of creation of the individual records. Any application of diplomatics to these records is resisted by their disparity and lack of legible context.

Conclusions

No British naval polar expedition has an unambiguous record. Narratives were crafted to emphasise scientific, naval, and exploratory achievement by men whose careers depended on successful outcomes, and by an Admiralty which sought to control the official narrative (Craciun 2016). Likewise, official records were presupposed to be written in a way which enforced certain blind spots. Inuit oral record demonstrates divergences between British narratives of contact and their own experiences, and those of their ancestors (Woodman 2015). The resulting textual accumulation – the standard by which the success of an expedition would be judged – is predicated on a fundamental manipulation of truth created in an area culturally, geographically, and experientially foreign to the public who would read it (Craciun 2016). In the case of the Third Franklin Expedition, the textual *fonds* which have been aggregated into an ersatz Franklin archive create problems for understanding individual documents as free-standing records within their original context. The narrative of the Third Franklin Expedition has been written with disparate pieces. The

hauntology of these records and objects suspends them in an eternal present which, in Derrida's framework, is simultaneously first and last. Because of the gaps between them, the elements of the Franklin archive can be endlessly recombined and recontextualised in ways which produce new speculations and meanings. This is true of texts, objects, narratives, and even bodies. In some ways, the bones of Franklin's men have been "read" more clearly by science than their words. They haunt this archive in a silence which elides the records with the meanings read into them and imposed on them by memory, narrative, and the desire to make tragedy legible. The juxtapositions of presence and absence within and around the expedition records present a challenge to archival and literary theories governing the approach to textual evidence. A corpus which forces the reader to focus on lacunæ, the Franklin records, and artefacts tells no story as powerfully as one of fragmented context and the destabilisation of the accepted reality of Victorian British naval expeditions to the Arctic. Literal and narrative lacunæ like those in the Victory Point Record and the Peglar Pocketbook find their reflection in the personal letters sent back from Greenland, which are included in the Franklin archive under a retrospective veil of affect and poignancy. In a sense, the records which were lost or never created, materials capable of providing context for those which survived, are necessarily more impactful to the Franklin story than the desolation left behind. The chiaroscuro quality of the Franklin archive forces the reader to confront a corpus which resists diplomatic and narratological certainty, while still telling an equally eloquent story of a failed expedition.

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