

Adriana Craciun, *Writing Arctic Disaster: Authorship and Exploration*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016. £74.99. Pp. xii + 306. ISBN 9781107125544.

Every so often a book comes along which is strikingly original. Adriana Craciun's *Writing Arctic Disaster* is one of these. It is a study of the Franklin era in memory and culture, an era which historically culminated in the loss of the *Erebus* and *Terror* and all their crews. Craciun is discriminatingly alert to the scale of Sir John Franklin's memory in everything from narratives of Victorian exploration to claims of Canadian sovereignty over the Arctic. The romance which continues to surround the Northwest Passage has recently led to the development of a Crystal cruise through its waters, a performance of commodified memory which Craciun traces back to the associations of early mid- nineteenth century geography and exploration, beginning with the Raleigh Club of 1827 and the Royal Geographical Society of 1830.

Craciun shrewdly points out the literary connections of early Arctic exploration, including the links of senior Admiralty officials to John Murray and the *Quarterly Review*, and the fact that Captain Duncan, who lost his reason on the ill-fated 1792 *Beaver* expedition, had been commissioned to publish an account of his traverse of the Northwest Passage. Craciun speculates on a link between Duncan and *Frankenstein*, making clear that Shelley's Arctic fiction was written in what was quite a fevered atmosphere of the literary Arctic, and in the context of the Admiralty's takeover of the mission to find the Passage in 1818.

There are shrewd inquiries as the book progresses on issues such as Arctic exceptionalism, the relationship of the imagined Arctic to imperial projection and the importance of the fiascos of Northwest Passage exploration to narratives of obsession, heroism, monstrosity, relics and risk. But this is far more than a theoretical study: exploration and disaster are explored in a most historically informed way, and put in the context of other voyages and adventurers, as well as trading settlements such as those at Hudson's Bay. The Hudson Bay Company's relative secrecy and 'reluctance toward exploration' (139) is itself worked out in detail. Even colonial graffiti (192) falls within Craciun's purview.

This is an extraordinary book and a *tour-de-force* in positing the Arctic as a unified field for enquiry through the deployment of literary and cultural criticism, historiography, geography, politics, current affairs (224-32 provides an outstanding epilogue here) and memory studies. Craciun handles all of these – and integrates them – with an expertise which is breathtakingly surefooted. In doing so she provides not only a palimpsest for the study of the frozen north, but a model for many other future studies. In both seeing through the eyes of the past as if it were contemporary and in her exploration and analysis of subsequent cultural memory, Craciun's work stands out. This is one amazing book.

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