

## **“A Fine, Sunshiny Night”: The Authorial Afterlife of Captain James Fitzjames of the Third Franklin Expedition**

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**Abstract:** The Third Franklin Expedition of the British Royal Navy set sail in 1845 in search of the Northwest Passage. There were no survivors of the expedition, and nearly all records associated with it were lost. This personal and textual disappearance severed the narrative control of those who participated in the expedition and sought to write about their experiences. This article examines the authorship and the authorial afterlife of Captain James Fitzjames, an officer of the Third Franklin Expedition, with an emphasis on the ways in which Fitzjames’ legacy has been contextualized and recontextualized across time, discourse, and format.

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### **Introduction**

The Third Franklin Expedition sailed from England in 1845 in search of the Northwest Passage. Its disastrous ending, including the death of all expedition members and the loss of nearly all of their records, has created an enduring and tragic mystery. The loss of the expedition itself is often thought to be the result of Victorian hubris and the assumption of cultural and racial superiority over the inhabitants of the Arctic, as well as insufficient

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preparation for the voyage itself. However, the nature of expeditions to the Arctic launched by the British Admiralty was one of both action and authorship. Expeditions were meant to achieve goals, but the ultimate assessment of their scientific, cultural, and imperial value was accomplished through the transformation of explorers into authors. This intrinsic relationship to text has been well documented in work by scholars of polar voyages, including Adriana Craciun and Sarah Moss. The role of the explorer as author, however, is predicated on the survival of his texts. Captain James Fitzjames, RN, third in command of the 1845 Franklin Expedition, is the author of letters from two decades of naval service, notably the small collection written during the expedition's Atlantic crossing and sent home from Greenland. Fitzjames is also the scribe of two of only three official, extant records of the expedition after leaving Greenland. His letters express a clear intent to continue writing, and his position of authority, combined with the conventions of nineteenth-century naval authorship, suggest that the records were two among many that he may have created. However, the dearth of other textual sources related to him has allowed others to attempt to finish his story through biography, fiction, and speculation. Analyzing Fitzjames' work from a perspective of authorial intention and control offers a new perspective on his extant texts relevant to his final expedition, while also situating his textual afterlives within a context of the secular hagiography of polar exploration.

Fitzjames' Greenland letters became part of the textual archive of the Third Franklin Expedition after their publication in *The Leader* and in the *Nautical Magazine and Naval Chronicle* in 1852 and their subsequent publication as one volume under the aegis of Fitzjames' foster brother, William Coningham, in 1858. They were also published in 1859 in *All the Year Round*, a magazine produced under the aegis of Charles Dickens. Here they are given a title, "The Last Leaves of a Sorrowful Book," as well as prefatory comments by Wilkie Collins. These letters, written during the first phase of the expedition before it disappeared into the Arctic archipelago, offer a personal, narrative foreground against which to situate two of only three written records found from the vanished expedition, both also written by Fitzjames. These were forms provided by the Admiralty for the use of naval exploring vessels, on which were recorded details about the ships' position and activities. The juxtaposition between the personal letters and the two official expedition records draws into relief the blank spaces surrounding the expedition and Fitzjames' role. As the commander of HMS *Erebus* under expedition leader Sir John Franklin, Fitzjames became second in command of the expedition following Franklin's death in 1847. His biography, only recently elucidated by Battersby (2010), and the uncertainty of nearly every detail of the Franklin disaster, have led generations of authors to depict him in a variety of ways in both historiographical and fictive texts. Additionally, Inuit oral history offers tantalizing hints of Fitzjames' presence during the final stages of the doomed expedition, though it is impossible to trace him with any specificity. His authorial afterlife

exists in a polyvalent, disparate archive which underscores the ways in which the lacunae in his biography invite speculation.

Battersby (2010) published the only modern biographical treatment of the life of James Fitzjames, drawing on naval records, correspondence, an early journal written by Fitzjames, and published and unpublished works about the Third Franklin Expedition. In it, he demonstrates the previously unknown fact that James Fitzjames was the illegitimate son of Sir James Gambier and was born, not in England, but in Brazil. His biography also provides evidence of certain of Fitzjames' more defining character traits, both according to his contemporaries and based on his actions and decisions during the course of his career in the Royal Navy. Resourceful, practical, and irrepressibly funny, James Fitzjames appears in this biography as a man conscious that his successes would depend on his intelligence, cunning, and ability to chart his own course. These qualities are borne out by his ability to lobby for the appointment to the Franklin Expedition as third in command, and in the writings which survive from the early part of that expedition. However, the James Fitzjames of biography must be reconciled with a spotty textual record.

### **Fitzjames the Sailor/Writer**

Like all officers on Admiralty-sponsored naval expeditions of the era, Fitzjames was required to keep a journal of his experiences and to deliver it to the Admiralty upon his return. By soliciting, and then collecting, the writings of all of the involved officers, the Admiralty could both craft and control the narrative of an expedition. Additionally, this control ensured that the expedition's leaders could be made the authors of the published accounts and, thus, the authors of the expedition's successes. However, the nature of publication of exploration narratives raises questions about the inherent authenticity of narratives from other expeditions. The Admiralty's relationship to publication, as well as the work of ghost writers and editors, complicates the ability to read an explorer's text as a simple relation of his experiences. Cavell notes the importance of a feeling of unedited authenticity to the success of an exploration narrative. However, this still implies a degree of stylistic conditioning which requires the reader to look at these texts as part of a genre (Craciun 23-24; Cavell 19). In this sense, Fitzjames' identities as a real and fictional author become conflated in the broken archive of the Franklin Expedition.

There is evidence that Fitzjames had started such a journal upon sailing with the expedition from England. However, the only texts he sent home from Greenland were letters written to his foster brother and that brother's wife, William and Elizabeth Coningham, and to Barrow, son of Sir John Barrow, second secretary to the Admiralty. These letters, private by format and potentially less so by content, demonstrate a clear authorial intention which marks the beginning of the recognized corpus of Fitzjames' textual production in the context of the Third Franklin Expedition. That they are his only

extant work from the expedition, saving the official forms, has allowed later readers to both truncate and co-opt his authority as a writer of his own life.

The Greenland letters were first published in *The Leader* in January-February 1852 and in *The Nautical Magazine and Naval Chronicle* in March-April 1852, then in a single volume by William Coningham in 1858, and again in July 1859 in Charles Dickens' *All the Year Round* with an introduction by Wilkie Collins. The various publications of the letters adopt different postures regarding their attribution, with implications for Fitzjames' identity as author. Many of the newspapers which reprinted his letters removed their salutations and dates, divorcing them from the more habitual epistolary reading experience. Cavell notes the possibility that the proliferation of published content related to the Franklin Expedition was motivated by a public desire to influence the admiralty's search activities (168). In this sense, Fitzjames' debut as an author may have coincided with the progress, or not, of the search for his body. The serial publication in *The Leader*, a radical weekly, first identifies the letters' as, "extracts from a private journal kept by an officer on board HMS *Erebus*" (Cavell 168; *The Arctic Expedition* 32). Fitzjames is named as their author only in the final installment of the letters printed in the February 28, 1852 edition. In the March 1852 edition of *The Nautical Magazine and Naval Chronicle*, the editors do not give Fitzjames' name, introducing the letters as having been written by "an officer with Sir John Franklin," which are, "interesting at the present time." By 1852, the searches to discover the fate of Sir John Franklin and his expedition were underway; indeed, notices of the search expeditions fill the pages immediately following the first installment of Fitzjames' letters. The second installment appeared in the April 1852 edition. In *The Nautical Magazine and Naval Chronicle*, his identity is, first and foremost, that of a sailor and explorer. However, the editors name him as the letters' author at their conclusion in April 1852. The single volume published by William Coningham presents Fitzjames and his authorship in a non-serialized, overtly memorial context. Coningham identifies Fitzjames as author of the letters and includes an epigraph from Bishop Hall:

"Memory, that Great Keeper or Master of the Rolles of the Soule, a power that can make amendes for the speed of time, in causing him to leave behinde him those things which else he would so carry away, as if they had not been."  
(Fitzjames 5)

This epigraph underscores the memorial intention of Coningham's edition of the letters, as does the title given to the volume emphasizing the fact that these are "the last letters" of Fitzjames. The emphasis on memory as a guarantor against loss finds its echo in the desire of later writers to continue Fitzjames' authorship after his death, and to the tradition of dead explorers living on through their texts (Moss 95). It is also interesting to note that

Coningham was not only a publisher of Fitzjames' letters, but an editor, removing the occasional word or phrase he thought not in keeping with a decorous image of Fitzjames.

Coningham's text is the one reproduced in *All the Year Round*, and is preceded there by a detailed biography of Fitzjames and notice of the circumstances of the Coningham publication as a memorial to his adoptive brother. The volume Coningham published had been done for private circulation; sending Fitzjames' letters to *All the Year Round* for publication represents a strategy for making the letters public, as noted in the prefatory remarks written by Wilkie Collins. It was also an opportunity to memorialize Fitzjames to those who did know him, particularly within the laudatory context of the frame text printed in *All the Year Round*. This purpose is further served by Collins' introductory comments to the letters, there entitled, "The Last Leaves of a Sorrowful Book." Collins insists on Fitzjames' worth as a tragic figure of Arctic exploration, and also as a writer of the drama in which he figures. Collins writes:

We have gladly accepted Mr. Coningham's offer [to print the letters], not only in consideration of the deep public interest which attaches to this unpretending document, viewed simply as an addition to our few memorials of the lost Polar Expedition, but also on account of the remarkable merit of the journal itself. Every page of it assures us that Captain Fitzjames added to his high professional qualifications the two rare gifts of a quick and true observation of character and a happy facility in conveying the results of that observation plainly, unaffectedly, and graphically to others. ("The Last Leaves of a Sorrowful Book," *All the Year Round* vol. 1 p. 319, July 30, 1859)

In this iteration of his published letters, Fitzjames is praised, both as an author and as a man (Cavell 234). Collins makes particular note of his ability to describe, and his insight into the people around him. These two elements of his short collection lend it enduring interest, while also placing it somewhat at odds with the title under which it appears. These are the last leaves in an archival sense, though their style and content suggest that they were meant to be the first of many.

The various publications of Fitzjames' letters from the early days of the Franklin Expedition form the basis of his identity as an explorer/author in the tradition of Parry, Ross, and Franklin himself. Their incompleteness finds poignancy in the Coningham memorial text, with its epigraph and its reproduction of the texts in a single volume. Published serially by newspapers and magazines, the letters take on an urgency and contemporaneity which echo the temporal and geographical complexities of the searches taking place during the 1850's. It is interesting to note that the publication of Fitzjames' letters in print preceded the return of McClintock from the Arctic with the Victory Point

Record, one of the only surviving records of the expedition and evidence of the death of Sir John Franklin in 1847. Close reading of the text of the letters provides the primary evidence of Fitzjames' authorship in the context of the Third Franklin Expedition, as well as the basis for some of his textual afterlife in terms of both content and authorial persona.

In Fitzjames' letters to Elizabeth Coningham, he explicitly differentiates them from the official record he is keeping to give to the Admiralty. This is important because it allows him to share them privately, and also because it asserts an authorial intention which is independent from the Royal Navy. Fitzjames would have been aware that his official account, and any publications it would inform, would be a path to career advancement and financial success (Craciun 23-24). However, the letters he sent to his relative are both charming to read and full of the kind of narrative detail which suggest a personal letter which is written with an eye to a potentially wider circulation:

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. ("Arctic Matters" 158)

His insistence on being asked to create this record for Elizabeth Coningham's sake reinforces the private nature of the corpus while also providing a pretext for its creation which recalls the frame text of a novel composed of "found" letters or journals. He also underscores the fact that this corpus will be created as a series of casual observations and not edited for style or precision, a situation in keeping with the somewhat paradoxical nature of admiralty expedition narratives, in which there was an effort to appear as unedited as possible in order to give the impression of authenticity in these highly stylized accounts (Cavell 19). This self-consciously forthright beginning is followed by a series which provides an account of the first phase of Fitzjames' journey to the Arctic, and the beginning of what may have been a much larger collection of writings.

In addition to the self-consciousness of Fitzjames' discussion of his intentions in these letters, he writes frequently of the process of shipboard writing in itself. He mentions the state of his quill, the amount of paper he uses, his desk, the motion of the ship, and the social context in which he writes. This last element is conveyed by reporting comments others make about his writing, the relationship between time spent writing and the potential for more sleep, and his responsibilities as a high-ranking officer on a ship under sail. Fitzjames makes several references to his circumstances while writing, noting that,



I went to bed thinking of you and dear [William], whose portrait is now looking at me; for I am writing at the little table you will see in the *Illustrated News*-- only you must imagine that the said table is three feet long, or from the bed to the door, and the picture just looking down on me. ("*Arctic Matters*" 159)

Fitzjames' cabin was depicted in the *Illustrated News* prior to sailing, on May 24, 1845 (Cavell fig. 9). In this letter, he offers Elizabeth Coningham a sort of sentimental picture of his accommodations, focusing on the portrait of William Coningham and relating his writing table—the place of his continuing connection to the Coninghams—to a published image that they can see. This collapsing of time and distance creates an emotional intimacy in the letter, even as the size of the table reinforces the cramped materiality of writing on a sailing ship. In addition to considerations of physical space, Fitzjames also comments on the materiality of writing itself, ending one letter with this statement:

Here ends, I find, my third sheet; so if you don't like your letter thus far pray don't read the following which I intend to write. There is nothing to interest you now, and we are not far on our journey, so I wind up this and call it a letter, just for the sake of adding that I am, as ever, yours, &c. (*Nautical Magazine* 161)

The self-consciousness of Fitzjames' characterization of his work as a letter and his persistent doubt of Elizabeth Coningham's opinion of it sits oddly next to his lighthearted closing, suggesting that Fitzjames thought more about his authorship than the casualness of his words, here and at the beginning of the correspondence, would imply.

Fitzjames' preoccupation with writing in his spare time was noted by his shipmates as well. He quotes Reid, the ice master and a former whaler, imitating his Scottish accent:

"Why, mister Jems, you never seem to me to sleep at arl; you're always writing!" I tell him that when I do sleep I do twice as much as other people in the same time. Now for the journal. ("*Arctic Matters*" 163)

Battersby notes Fitzjames' talent for mimicry based on examples from earlier in his naval career (51,60). Here, he mimics Reid as a joke for Elizabeth Coningham, even though the content of the joke provides direct evidence of his prolific activity as a writer. Not only that, but his answer to Reid reinforces the duality of his writing, which encompasses both his private correspondence and the journal he keeps for the Admiralty.

Fitzjames' ability to convey dialogue is also an effective way to give the reader a sense of the atmosphere at sea. Though he is careful about his nautical references, at one point mentioning to Elizabeth the "at nine o'clock this evening, we tacked (if you know what it is) ("Arctic Matters" 160)," he provides a lot of information about the ship and his fellow officers, once writing that,

[...] now the officer of the watch comes to tell me the wind is lighter, and we certainly are quieter. "Shake a reef out, set the fore-top-gallant-sail" (the main being set). "Call me at six if anything happens." Good night, good night! (*Nautical Magazine* 163)

The orders are in quotations, but the closing is not. However, Fitzjames' "Good night, good night!" fits as neatly after an order to contact him at six o'clock, the implication being that he is going to bed (this letter being written at midnight), as it does at the end of his letter. This layering of meaning creates an impression that the reader of the letter is on deck with Fitzjames, while simultaneously receiving a report of his experiences. These comments are also evidence of an ability to craft a description to suit his audience. Descriptions of the sailing of the ship are accompanied by passages devoted to the weather and the increasingly polar scenery, as well as to the personalities and behavior of the other officers on HMS *Erebus*. These descriptions include comments on character as well as anecdotes, serving as a social context within which to situate Fitzjames' shipboard experiences. He initially writes to Elizabeth Coningham that he, "shall probably from time to time give [her] descriptions of," his fellow officers, though it is impossible to know whether such descriptions, or even the letters, continued after leaving Greenland ("Arctic Matters" 159). Reading the correspondence in the context of the disaster, as nearly all readers save the letters' initial recipients have done, the descriptions take on the cast of memorials to men who were soon to die in the Arctic, the last years of their lives un-narrated and anonymous to posterity. For Fitzjames as an author, these descriptions reinforce a notion of humor and of observation which entertains the reader while suggesting the ability and the desire to record events from a perspective of optimism and insight.

The completeness of this early correspondence is underscored by its ending, when Fitzjames knows that he must close the letters in time to send them to England from Greenland before sailing into Baffin Bay. However, his closing also suggests the possibility of further correspondence:

And now here goes a new pen into the porcupine, to say that your journal is at an end, at least for the present. I do hope it has amused you, but I fear not; for what can there be in an old tub like this, with a parcel of sea bears, to



amuse a “lady fair”? This, however, is a *façon de parler*, for I think, in reality, that you will have been amused in some parts and interested in others, but I shall not read back for fear of not liking it, and tearing it up. (*Nautical Magazine* 197)

This part of Fitzjames’ correspondence to Elizabeth Coningham is brought to an end by the material consideration of needing to conclude his letters in order to send them back to England with the departing transport ships. However, the qualification that “your journal is at an end, at least for the present,” reinforces both the possibility of continuity and the private nature of the letters which distinguish themselves from Fitzjames’ Admiralty-mandated expedition journal. This is an important statement because it firmly classifies the letters while announcing Fitzjames’ intention that they be read as a sort of whole, with an acknowledgment of their likely interest, even to a “lady fair.” Because so little survives from Fitzjames after this point, the letters to Elizabeth Coningham have become a stand-in for the “real” journal he never returned home to publish. His insistence that these letters are separate from his official journal is a way of keeping them from admiralty control and of asserting his own authorship, all while stipulating that they are written particularly at the request of Elizabeth Coningham and as a corpus which will be neither edited nor even read through. Fitzjames underscores this casualness at the start and end of the collection, and also in his intimate and somewhat chatty tone, demonstrating Cavell’s observation regarding the carefully careless air of successful expedition narratives (19). It is impossible to know how he would have felt about these letters becoming public, or what he would have done with them if he had returned from the Arctic. However, this early piece of text from his time with the Franklin Expedition announces an authorial intention to be both an official naval author in the tradition of Franklin himself, as well as a private chronicler of his experiences, and to manage his authorship in thoughtful, deliberate ways.

In addition to the letters to Elizabeth Coningham, Fitzjames also sent letters home from Greenland to William Coningham and to John Barrow, Jr., son of the influential admiralty secretary. In this short note, Fitzjames seems to preface that larger correspondence, which he calls, “E’s bundle of yarns,” and to which he refers Coningham for details. Again, this deprecating attitude toward the letters which he obviously took time to write hints at the desire to separate them from his admiralty record, and, possibly, to playfully introduce himself as an author of texts about an expedition which he believed, correctly, would be historic.

The letter to Barrow echoes some of the same information conveyed in the letters to Elizabeth Coningham, but with a difference in tone which reflects a more professional dynamic. Fitzjames does not provide Barrow with a description of his fellow officers, possibly because they were known to him, or out of professional sensitivity, though he does

mention his adventures in kayaking. Barrow and his father were influential figures who were important professional contacts. Battersby has shown convincing evidence that the Barrow family was instrumental in getting Fitzjames appointed to the Franklin Expedition in the first place (2010). This suggests a very different motivation for his letters than is present in those written to Elizabeth Coningham. Both groups of letters betray a tendency toward narrative and a definite humor, giving rise to a temptation to aggregate them into an authorial voice. It is impossible to know how Fitzjames' writings progressed in the Arctic and to whom he may have written. However, these early letters create an impression of a man capable of crafting prose to suit his audience, but with a firm literary identity as an observer and as a storyteller.

After departing Greenland in July 1845, the Franklin Expedition was last seen by Europeans in Baffin Bay. The expedition spent the winter of 1845-1846 at Beechey Island, leaving a written record in the form of the inscriptions on the gravestones of the first three expedition members to die. In the fall of 1846, the expedition ships, HMS *Erebus* and HMS *Terror*, became beset in ice off the coast of King William Island. The final written records to be found from the expedition are two form letters which were buried in cairns ashore. A third record using the same template had been tossed overboard prior to entering the arctic archipelago. The two records found on King William Island were deposited in the late spring of 1847 and were originally identical documents noting the departure of a sledging party in search of the Northwest Passage. Both are written in Fitzjames' hand and are not signed by Sir John Franklin. Instead, Fitzjames notes that Franklin is still in command and, "All well" at the close of the document. One of the records, now known as the Victory Point Record, was disinterred from its cairn in 1848 and updated upon the expedition members' departure from the ships, which were still hopelessly beset. Written in Fitzjames' hand around the original record in a kind of spiral, the manuscript addendum of the Victory Point Record tells a short, suggestive, and, ultimately, inconclusive tale of death and despair. By this time, Sir John Franklin is dead, along with over a dozen of the officers and crew, and the ships are being abandoned so that the survivors can escape overland to mainland Canada via the Back River. At just 254 manuscript words, the Victory Point Record would seem to be a concise final word from Fitzjames to the outside world. However, there are several factors which complicate this interpretation and which have critical implications for Fitzjames' role as an author, both during his lifetime and within the context of his textual afterlife.

Firstly, although the Victory Point Record is in Fitzjames' handwriting, it is difficult to understand his relationship to it as one of a sole author to his own intellectual property, as is the case with his letters from Greenland. The Victory Point Record is, first and foremost, written on an Admiralty form letter and intended to be found by naval search and rescue missions. In this sense, Fitzjames' authorship is subsumed under that of the Royal Navy as

a sort of corporate author which directed his textual practices, by the same authority that it had sent him to the Arctic. Additionally, we know nothing of the circumstances under which Fitzjames composed the Victory Point Record, except that it was probably done ashore after the expedition had left the ships. Evidence for this lies in the fact that the Record specifically states that Lt. Irving had been sent to fetch it from the cairn in which it had been placed in 1847, in order for Fitzjames to add to it. It is impossible to say who was with Fitzjames when he wrote the Victory Point Record, though guesses have been made. In his book examining Inuit testimony related to the Franklin Expedition, Woodman cites Cyriax, who points out that Fitzjames made several edits to the Victory Point Record while writing it (Cyriax 185; Woodman 117-119). One of these changes, relevant to Irving finding the record in the cairn, substitutes “under” for “in,” in a way suggestive of Fitzjames having made the correction while writing. Additionally suggestive of this kind of collaboration is the other correction to the distance at which the cairn was found, added by caret. Cyriax posits that, “Fitzjames read aloud what he was writing down, and that the last two emendations mentioned above were suggested by Irving himself” (185, quoted in Woodman 118-119). If so, Fitzjames may have written the Victory Point Record collaboratively, in a manner designed to maintain accuracy while finishing the record as efficiently as possible, in what were undoubtedly cold and inhospitable conditions for writing (Potter 37-38; Parkinson 48-49). Finally, it is necessary to consider the fact that Fitzjames was not the senior officer of the expedition, nor was he the senior signatory to the Victory Point Record. Captain Francis Crozier also signed the document as “captain & senior officer.”

Even if he did not write the document, it seems likely that he contributed to its content. Below his signature is also the only textual clue to the expedition’s next moves, escaping by means of the Back River. That this was added, seemingly as an afterthought and in Crozier’s hand, has puzzled generations of scholars and seems to bely the importance of the information it conveys (Parkinson 49). Oddly, much of the Victory Point Record focuses on finding the initial record and whether or not it was located in Sir James Clark Ross’ cairn. The Record mentions the deaths of Sir John Franklin and the other expedition members, but provides no details. Parkinson has analyzed this obsession with place and provenance, included to the detriment of what seem like more important details, as a preoccupation with the ways in which the text has moved and may continue to move if and when it is discovered (49). If so, this suggests that Fitzjames’s authorship of the Victory Point Record is not only collaborative, but almost meditative on the situation in which the expedition members find themselves. The lack of detail, the evidence of joint authorship, and the questions of naval authority all challenge notions of Fitzjames as the Record’s author, simply because he is its scribe. It is also impossible to compare his voice here with the one he uses in his earlier correspondence, so great is the difference in both

genre and discourse. The Victory Point Record is, as Parkinson has written, a sort of letter to whomever finds it. However, it is characterized less by its ability to convey discrete information than by its existence and survival as an existential snapshot of a situation which had itself become confusing, desperate, and impossible to read.

The debate surrounding the Victory Point Record has also been informed by the disagreement between its contents and the archaeological record, which does not support the narrative of a single abandonment of the ships in May 1848. Scholars have noted the evidence of graves and material goods which, by their orientation or location, suggest a sequence which was much more complicated and a trajectory that probably led at least some expedition members back to the ships (Woodman 116-119). This theory is also supported by Inuit observations and the timeline suggested by their oral history. Events in the Franklin Expedition continued to unfold after the writing of the Victory Point Record, and not necessarily in the direction it would indicate. In that light, it seems that the Victory Point Record is not the final word of the expedition, but a midpoint update which has lost any additional documentary context it might have had. By virtue of being one of the only extant documents left by the expedition, the Victory Point Record is often read as the definitive word on the expedition's fate, if only the physical evidence could be made to fit. However, reading the Victory Point Record as an update, rather than a denouement, authorizes other interpretations. Notably, the Record does not use the word "abandoned" to talk about the ships, but rather, "deserted," placing this action in a context of duty and place. Could this indicate that the ships were left unmanned, but not as a definitive, irrevocable course of action? Woodman has posited, based on Inuit testimony and archaeological evidence, that the trek to the Back River was intended as an extended hunting expedition to help cure the scurvy that was ravaging the crews. It is impossible to be certain, but the idea of a collaboratively created Victory Point Record which does more to convey the mood of the expedition than the fact of its actions recontextualizes both the document and Fitzjames' role on the continuum of author to scribe (Parkinson 45; Woodman 92-94).

The Franklin Expedition defies certainty on many levels because of the lack of surviving written records, most notably in terms of epistemology. Without any parameters in which to situate evidence-- textual, material, skeletal, oral-- it is impossible to assign absolute belief or even relative priority to much of it. Fitzjames as an author exists primarily in his letters written prior to leaving Greenland (to say nothing of his earlier correspondence and journals, predating the Franklin Expedition, discussed at length by Battersby), although, technically, the primary surviving record of the expedition is an autograph manuscript. Had he returned, it is likely that he would have had the opportunity to craft a textual legacy which would have combined with his naval activities to create a career. Even deceased, Fitzjames loses control of his authorial legacy not because his life is

over, but because his journals and his body have never been found. Moss explains the connection between an explorer's body and his writings, insisting on the meaning to be derived from the confluence of his death scene and the discovery of his journal. Fitzjames has been eligible for neither, due to the circumstances of the Franklin Expedition, and, as Moss says, has essentially become a private individual following his death (95). Because he and any other texts he may have produced are lost in the Arctic, his authorial intentions and agency have been complicated by decades of scholarship, fiction, and speculation.

### **Textual Afterlives**

The disappearance of James Fitzjames coincides with an almost complete absence of the records he intended to create of his voyage. Although his authorship, had he returned, would have been conditioned by the wishes of the Admiralty and the expedition commanders, Fitzjames would still have had the opportunity to influence his own textual afterlife by providing primary texts which could have formed the foundations of subsequent scholarship and fiction. His disappearance and that of his work removes him as author and as editor of his textual legacy. However, he continues to exist in the oral history of the Franklin Expedition, collected from the Inuit groups living in that area during the decades after the disaster, as well as the novelized accounts of the vanished expedition. Woodman offers a well-researched, comprehensive treatment of the various stories and testimonies of Inuit groups in which he recognizes the overall accuracy of Inuit oral record. From this, he posits that any stories which cannot be connected to a documented expedition may, in fact, have reference to the Franklin Expedition, because the dearth of textual evidence makes this impossible to check according to Western narrative and historical standards (221). With this paradigm in place, Woodman examines stories which could refer to the Franklin crews during their retreat, based largely on evidence collected by Charles Francis Hall in the 1860's during his interviews with members of local Inuit groups. Woodman acknowledges serious limitations in the Hall corpus, primarily an inherent racism and a fixation on glorifying the expedition leaders. Hall's informants shared several stories featuring a man they called Aglooka. This name had previously been given to two British explorers, Sir James Clark Ross and Francis Crozier. This second man's presence as commander of the expedition from 1847, following the death of Sir John Franklin, led Hall to conclude that all references to Aglooka must, in fact, refer to Crozier, to the point that his notes often actively conflate the two names. Woodman acknowledges this potential inaccuracy, as well as the frustrating inability to be certain to whom the original informant meant to refer, if not to Crozier. The tendency to conflate Crozier with Aglooka is a tempting one, given the near impossibility of tracing any individual member of the Franklin Expedition, particularly after the deposit of the Victory Point Record in May 1848. However, some of these stories present a person in a leadership role in the group,

along with details which resonate with some of what we know about James Fitzjames' earlier life. While it would be going too far to say that he could be Aglooka in any of these stories, it is useful to reconsider them in the light that, whatever Hall's conclusions, we do know that the name was given to at least two English naval officers, and could certainly have been given to others, as Woodman acknowledges. He notes that Aglooka might have been mistaken for an officer's title by non-Inuktitut-speaking British sailors, and that, "the name, meaning 'he who takes long strides,' could legitimately be given to any tall, purposeful white man—and was" (195-198). Indeed, Woodman recounts a story first recorded by Hall, in which Aglooka and a group of Franklin Expedition members make contact with a group of Inuit. During this encounter, the man called Aglooka drew pictures of some of the Inuit present, in addition to taking notes of some kind (128-129). These could certainly be the actions of many members of the expedition, particularly of those in charge. However, it is known that Fitzjames liked to draw, and that he was an accomplished artist who had depicted scenes from his previous expeditionary experience in the Middle East (reproduced in Battersby). Additional examples of Fitzjames' artistic work include a sketch of HMS *Erebus* and HMS *Terror* at anchor in Disko Bay, Greenland (now held at the Scott Polar Research Institute), as well as drawings of ships included in his letters to John Barrow, Jr. The quantity and variety of Fitzjames' artistic work demonstrates its role in his authorial identity as an additional mode of expression. It is impossible to know whether Fitzjames was the unknown artist described in the story recorded by Woodman and Hall, but the possibility reinforces the inherent ephemerality of Fitzjames' documentary afterlife following his letters to Elizabeth Coningham, and the official brevity of the Victory Point Record.

### Coda

Sarah Moss writes that "[t]he bitterest ends in polar exploration are probably those about which nothing is known, expeditions which nobody survives and from which no bodies or texts are found" (95). This is certainly true of the Third Franklin Expedition, and of the putative life-writing of its eventual second-in-command. James Fitzjames exists in the modern textual record as author, topic, character, and pseudo-author. He occurs as a major character in several novels based on the Franklin Expedition. One novel in particular focuses explicitly on Fitzjames as author by positioning itself as the continuation of Fitzjames' letters to Elizabeth Coningham. John Wilson's 1999 novel, *North with Franklin: The Lost Journals of James Fitzjames*, focuses on finishing the letters as a way of developing the unknowable story of the vanished expedition, as well as the personal connection between Fitzjames and Elizabeth Coningham. The novel posits the collection of unsent, and unsendable, letters as a journal, though the historical Fitzjames insists in his surviving letters that what he writes to Coningham is not a journal, but merely casually-written



letters. Gallagher (2011) proposes that fictional characters based on historical personages are counterfactual when they behave in ways inconsistent with their real-life counterparts (321-322). The dearth of writing left by Fitzjames after Baffin Bay means that it is impossible to ascertain exactly whether any fictive or even historiographical Fitzjames is, in fact, counterfactual. In Gallagher's framework, all authors who write about Fitzjames are engaged in a process of creating character based on scanty evidence and suppositions grounded in pre-expedition facts. In effect, this is the creation of a new Fitzjames through the imposition of narrative in novels, archives, exhibits, and even in biographies. The journals in Wilson's novel, as well as any texts Fitzjames may have composed after Baffin Bay, had no entry into the written historical record of British polar exploration. The novelized Fitzjames comes to the realization that his texts may die with him; perhaps the historical one did as well. Moss insists on the narrative and epistemological link between the body of an explorer and the texts that he writes, particularly in the event of his death:

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 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. (95)

In dying without scene, body, or extant texts, Fitzjames' death is illegible to posterity. What remains of him is written and rewritten by others in ways which impose meaning where perhaps there is none.

The relationship between these texts and knowledge about the expedition is an extremely complex one, conditioned by questions of authorial intent and control, as well as the near dearth of extant information produced by the expedition members. Fitzjames' letters to Elizabeth Coningham, his scribal, and possibly authorial, relationship to the Victory Point Record, and his fictional afterlife must be put into the context of the overall epistemology of the Franklin archive in order to be meaningful. In a sense, this elides the differences in discourse among these texts. The paucity of textual evidence of the Third Franklin Expedition presents a risk of overemphasizing the few extant sources. In Fitzjames' case, this creates a situation in which his extant textual creation must be read against the probability of other texts, now lost, particularly the official journal which he mentions in his Greenland letters. This authorial chiaroscuro makes it impossible to properly situate his surviving work and to understand it as part of the authorial persona he clearly hoped to create. However, when considered within the context of authorship, Fitzjames' writing appears as part of a shadowy whole, rather than as a fragment. This is

particularly true of the Victory Point Record. Representative of a completely different kind of discourse, it is also a part of Fitzjames' textual legacy, and is perhaps even more at risk of being overemphasized by virtue of its lack of archival context. James Fitzjames' authorial intentions cannot be reconstructed beyond admiralty tradition and his words to Elizabeth Coningham. They can, however, be reframed. Describing the experience of twenty-four-hour daylight in the Arctic, Fitzjames wrote to Elizabeth Coningham of, "a fine, sunshiny night" ("Arctic Matters" 197). The juxtaposition of light and dark in Fitzjames' description is echoed by the fragmentation of his textual production, a corpus which is characterized by both loss and recontextualization.

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