I

A Foretaste of those Icy Climes: England's Arctic Circles

> *I feel a cold northern breeze play upon my cheeks, which braces my nerves, and fills me with delight. Do you understand this feeling? This breeze, which has travelled from the regions towards which I am advancing, gives me a foretaste of those icy climes. Inspirited by this wind of promise, my day dreams become more fervent and vivid. I try in vain to be persuaded that the pole is the seat of frost and desolation; it ever presents itself to my imagination as the region of beauty and delight. There, Margaret, the sun is for ever visible its broad disc just skirting the horizon, and diffusing a perpetual splendour. There -- for with your leave, my sister, I will put some trust in preceding navigators -- there snow and frost are banished; and, sailing over a calm sea, we may be wafted to a land surpassing in wonders and in beauty every region hitherto discovered on the habitable globe. Its productions and features may be without example, as the phenomena of the heavenly bodies undoubtedly are in those undiscovered solitudes. What may not be expected in a country of eternal light?*
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> -- Letter 1 of Captain Walton, from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, (1818)

Mary Shelley's Captain Walton was far from alone in believing that there was open water at the Pole -- in fact, by 1818, this old belief had gained a new legitimacy -- not, certainly, among the whalers who tediously wove their way through the relentless ice of Davis Strait year after year, but among those in England who sought to revive the faded public passion for both a voyage to the Pole and the discovery of a North-West passage. The time was right, according to the clocks of empire and policy, and if heated brows could have melted a polar sea, there would have been a large one. No less than the national pride of Great Britain as a maritime Empire was at stake, or so it seemed to those such as John Barrow, the second secretary of the Admiralty and a man whose lifelong Arctic passion stood in inverse ratio to his first-hand knowledge of the subject. With Napoleon defeated (and the Navy officer-heavy even then), there was also a pressing excess of men, men who must be employed to do something, or else dismissed or retired at half-pay. England could afford such a challenge as the Arctic provided, indeed had to claim it in order to prove that it *could* afford it. England, moreover, was a *scientific* Empire, agog with the wonders of barometers, pneumatic tubes, and patent processes; there could be no better challenge than to expend and risk the lives of men in the noble and ostensibly disinterested pursuit of science.

And the pursuit would be disinterested, necessarily, because the world had changed considerably since earlier attempts at the North-West Passage. England had long ago established and strengthened colonies in India and the Far East, using the existing sea-routes, and her political and economic might required no further passage to exercise dominion. Even if one could sail over the Pole, it was fairly clear that it would be at least as difficult -- if not far more so -- than a voyage around Cape Horn or the Cape of Good Hope. Even if there were an Open Arctic Sea or a Northwest Passage, it was an indisputable fact that the ice surrounding them was often impassable, and a passage, even once discovered, could hardly be relied upon. Even when a field of ice cleared, there was a considerable risk of being "nipped" or caught in it when winds and currents re-assembled its jagged pieces. In any case, the possibility of canals from the Mediterranean to the Red Sea, or across the isthmus of Panama, was already being seriously contemplated, and were of far greater utility, than any Passage northwest or northeast could ever be. As for the Pole itself, its uselessness, except as a symbol, was given from the start -- but its symbolic value, as the axis of cartography, the point 'round which all geographic knowledge whirled, was very great indeed.

It remains a curious fact that nations that succeed in dominating the rest of the world economically and politically are frequently driven to create for themselves new theatres of public heroism, seeking out Herculean tasks and expending vast resources upon them -- squandering them in many cases -- as a sign of their power. The United States did as much with the billions its poured into the race to put a man on the Moon; at the height of its postwar prosperity, it focused its national pride on an accomplishment of almost no utility to its citizens. Just so, England in the period from 1818 to 1860 was flush in its renewed sense of world predominance in political, scientific, and cultural venues. It was time once again, the learned heads and public wags agreed, to highlight British character upon the global stage, and to do so in a way that deliberately flaunted fate and embraced hazard, even though (and perhaps because) the potential practical gain was so slight. It was this very sort of deliberate and demonstrative foolhardiness that was thought by some to be lacking in the British national character; against the old accusation that England was a 'nation of shopkeepers,' a writer for *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* set forth a portrait of a schizophrenic Englishman -- half-Saxon, half-Dane -- the Saxon part a sedentary farmer, but the Dane a restless, seafaring warrior. At times, the peaceful Saxon strain prevailed, and gathered the "laurels of conquering industry"; while at other moments, the fearless Dane took hold. For how else, mused this writer, could one "account for the multitude of expeditions which have set forth from this country, under no compulsion whatever but that of an instinct which would not be gainsaid, to explore the terrible secrets of the polar regions"?[i]

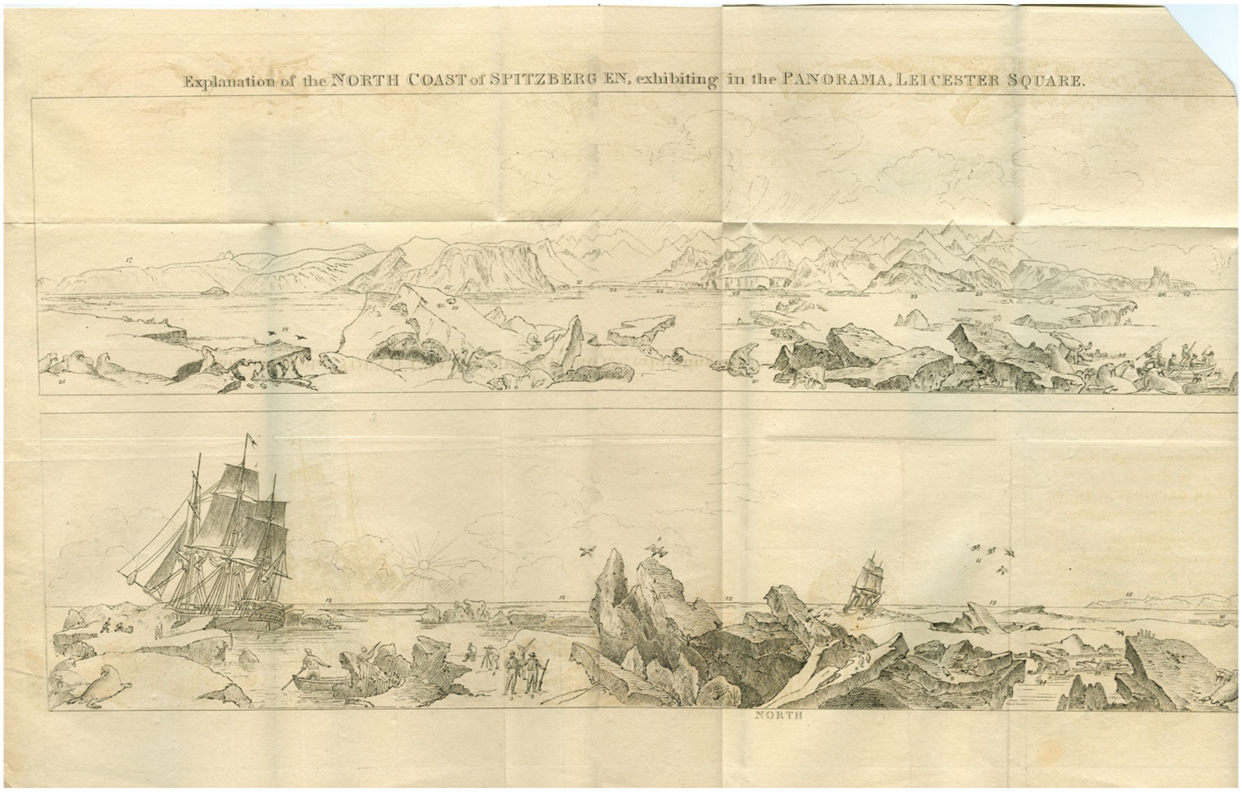
The writer in *Blackwood's* wrote, significantly, after the failure of Sir John Franklin's disastrous 1845 expedition had been more or less ascertained, and readily redirected the tears of elegy into a welling-up of national pride. That the last dozen or so British expeditions had been dispatched to locate another lost one, and that all but the last of these had failed to shed much light on Franklin's fate, was conveniently overlooked. Yet his underlying imagery was but a more vociferous version of that which had long underpinned British Arctic exploration, albeit with a twist. For if it was the daring Dane who, like Henry Hudson, deliberately steered his ships into realms of eternal ice, only to remain there forever, the men who managed to return and write their tales of this encounter were for the most part Saxon shopkeepers of the soul, whose prose was as plain and palatable as brown bread, and as dense. One could see this as yet another vindication of the *Blackwoods* writer's figuration of the British character (one which persists, indeed, to our time) -- or else as a deep contradiction within the public response to these "Arctic Men" -- one which always had a deep element of ambivalence, and only resolved itself in the wake of Franklin's public tragedy. The Arctic -- now there was a fascinating place, as distant and desolate as the Moon, from the Victorian viewpoint -- but the men who went there and returned were not always lionized on its account. The different receptions of the two Arctic expeditions of 1818 are a case in point.

Barrow's audacious plan was to attempt both the Passage and the Pole in one year. To that end, he convinced the Admiralty to send two separate expeditions, each with two ships; David Buchan, with the *Dorothea* and *Trent*, would command a voyage to the pole, following in Hudson's path to the shores of Spitzbergen, and (hopefully) beyond. Buchan's second-in-command was none other than a young lieutenant by the name of John Franklin, a veteran of Nelson's naval campaigns (among other things, he participated in the battle of New Orleans in the War of 1812, and had been present at Trafalgar). The second expedition, which was directed to search for Baffin Bay and attempt to locate a north-west passage, would be commanded by John Ross, aboard the *Isabella,* accompanied by the *Alexander*. Barrow was convinced, having heard reports of unusually extensive ice-floes coming out of the North Atlantic, that this was to be a banner season for exploration, and that as the "frozen barrier" drifted away, a route would be clear to the Open Polar Sea. He was only partly wrong; while there was and had been no open water at the pole in millennia, the years 1818-21 *were* unusually good ones -- at least for the inland waters of Canada. But this same phenomenon turned the ocean near Spitzbergen into a raging maelstrom of drifting bergs, and shortly after reaching Hudson's old latitude of 80° north, Buchan and Franklin were forced to turn aside to the east. There, caught in a ferocious gale, the two ships were horribly battered by drifting ice. The impact of the bergs against the ships was so great that the ship's bell of the *Trent*, which had never rung spontaneously even in the roughest seas, began to toll mournfully, and Franklin ordered it muffled lest the ship's crew be disheartened by its omen. In the end, both ships had to retreat to a safe harbor, where Buchan found the *Dorothea* so heavily damaged that it needed immediate repairs, and even then could only be rendered fit enough to limp back to England. Franklin, so the story goes, volunteered to carry on in the *Trent*, but since the Admiralty orders expressly forbade such a plan, both ships returned to London in October of 1818.

One might think that Buchan and Franklin would have been regarded as the leaders of a failed expedition, but in fact quite the opposite occurred. Their courage in the most desperate of straits was hailed as a sign of the greatness of English character and seamanship, and Franklin found himself in line for a promotion and the leadership of an Arctic land expedition. The battle of the *Dorothea* and the *Trent* with the massive icebergs was the talk of London, and Henry Aston Barker, the proprietor of the Panorama-Royal in Leicester-Square, decided to open a Panoramic view of the expedition based upon Beechey's drawings of the event. It was to be the first representation of the Arctic in a panorama ever undertaken, and set the tone for dozens of such shows to follow for decades to come.

Producing a Perfect Map of the Ice: Henry Aston Barker's Panorama of 1820

Robert Barker's Panorama in Leicester Square -- since his death in 1806 managed by his son, Henry Aston Barker -- was the first and most famous permanent Panorama building in London, and was near the very peak of its popularity in 1820. Built to the elder Barker's exacting specifications, and involving a system of perspective drawing that was innovative enough to be patented, the Panorama featured two vast circular walls, each reached from the center of the circle via a series of stairs. The outer circle, where the largest panoramas were hung, was complemented by an "upper circle," reached from inside the central column, and about a third the size of the larger painting. From the start, Barker's edifice drew astonished crowds, and, having already earned the praise of the art cognoscenti (Barker's conversion of a skeptical Sir Joshua Reynolds was the stuff of legend), it became a familiar resort for a broad range of London spectators, mostly of the middling classes but including everyone from artisans to Archdukes. Barker drew respectability from his more prominent patrons, but he also took care to maintain his popularity with the masses; he had an eye for scenes that would grip the popular imagination, and repay the effort of preparing the seamless swathes of his vast circular canvas, an instinct apparently inherited by his son. The younger Barker's most recent triumph had been a panorama of the Battle of Waterloo, which was detailed enough that one could pick out individual officers, including Napoleon and the Duke of Wellington and their principal commanders; a circular "key" included in the programme enabled spectators to identify particular battles, encampments, death-scenes, and skirmishes.


Explanation of the NORTH COAST of SPITZBERGEN, exhibiting in the PANORAMA, LEICESTER SQUARE.
NORTH

Barker's panorama of 1819-20 was notable in a number of respects. It was the first large-scale panoramic treatment of the Arctic, and its influence on future panoramas was tremendous.[ii] It was also the first, and for some time the *only* public representation of Buchan and Franklin's expedition, appearing years before Beechey’s narrative version was published.[iii] Finally, it was to be the only Arctic panorama which actually included the figure of Franklin himself, for though the search for

Franklin in the 1850's inspired numerous panoramas, Franklin was the one figure that, out of artistic and societal decorum, could not be represented in them. For the frontispiece to the program accompanying this novel scene, Barker did not use his customary circular "key," but rather had a large, fold-out horizontal engraving cut in two panels, one representing the view to the "south," the other the "north" (fig. 1). It was also a fortuitous choice, from the viewpoint of the historian of such productions, since like almost all other paintings of its kind, the original no longer survives; the large panel illustrations give a far more detailed idea of what the actual scenes must have looked like than would the far more compressed circular depiction.

Without a doubt the most spectacular aspect of Barker's panoramas was the sense that, by escaping the inevitable limits of a frame, and mimicking the horizon of the visible, they either vastly expanded the affective power of painting (a view endorsed at Robert Barker's first panorama by Sir Joshua Reynolds), or else were entirely outside the pale of art (the view later taken by critics such as Delacroix and Constable).[iv] There was a sense in which their realism was simply too realistic to accommodate any satisfactorily nuanced articulation of art's ethos of representation -- and yet, at the same time, this seeming deception could also be admired for its artifice, for the cunning with which it replicated the eye's sensations of distance, proportion, and detail. From the first panorama to fill the "great circle" – a view of the fleet at Spithead, which was said to have made Queen Charlotte seasick – the ability of the Panorama not only to fool the eye, but to almost physically engage the senses with the same power as the actual place depicted, was a constant and continually recapitulated trope of its accomplishment.[v] Whether it fell within the definition of 'high art' or not -- and middle-class England was to become increasingly skeptical of this term as the century progressed -- it marked the limit of the spectacular capabilities of representation in an age of expanding Empire, and the epitome of public art for many who never ventured inside a Royal Academy show.

The Arctic, however, was a place much more alien to the British public than Waterloo, stranger by far than such conventional panorama exotica as the Holy Land or the Swiss Alps. For there were thousands of people who annually made their pilgrimages to Rome, Jerusalem, or Paris, and the principal views and monuments in these cities were rendered familiar even to the untraveled, appearing as they did in books, illustrated magazines, and mass-produced engravings. The Arctic, in contrast, was a region that only a very few intrepid or foolhardy men had ever seen, a place that almost none of the public would desire to *actually* visit, however strong their interest. It had a strong inflection of unearthly romance, much like the craggy mountain-peaks whose habitués, like Byron's *Manfred* (1817), always seemed to be a bit unhinged, and like them its attraction was always tinged by the possibility of a deadly encounter with elemental forces. The Romantics would seem to have had a natural inclination toward the Arctic, and indeed among the early admirers of Barker's panorama was John Keats, who pronounced it "impossible to describe."[vi] It was also no accident that Mary Shelley, only a year previous, had chosen the Arctic for the final, furious encounter between Victor Frankenstein and his accursed creature, and indeed Shelley's fictional "Captain Walton" shared a great deal with Buchan and Franklin, whose retreat from the ice, after having been closed in on all sides, paralleled his own. And, just in case the symbolic connection between Alpine and Arctic wonders might be missed, the spectators needed look no farther than the "inner circle" of Barker's own panorama, where "A View of Lausanne, and the Lake of Geneva" – very nearly the same view Victor Frankenstein might have seen out his window – was displayed concurrently with the larger Arctic circle.

No doubt the battle of the *Dorothea* and *Trent* with the gale-driven ice would have heightened the appeal of the painting, but here Barker was presented with the familiar difficulty of rendering *moving* subjects with the panoptic hyperrreality the medium took as its measure. Water does not stand still, and paint, however it might freeze the force of movement, remained resolutely static. Barker's solution, as with many of his other nautical subjects, was to render the water calm and at a distance, and thus the ostensible time of the scene was immediately *after* the gale, with Franklin and Buchan consulting about what to do next as their men struggled to right the ships and free them from the ice into which the storm had forced them. The visible list of the ships, and their place in the middle range of distance, conveys their peril through a landscape they cannot dominate either visually or practically; both foreground and distance reveal nothing but jagged, unforgiving masses of ice, over which the craggy peaks of the "Norway Islands" rear their snow-capped heads. The coolness of the two commanders can also be shown to good effect, as they stand unperturbed by the scene about them, while their men go calmly about their appointed tasks: one man takes aim at some Arctic gulls with his fowling-piece; two others are engaged in making celestial observations to determine the longitude and latitude; to their left, another crewman sits calmly on a barrel. Three other crewmen are visible on a nearby iceberg; one is assisting in securing the *Dorothea* to a berg by means of a line or cable.

Barker, of course, gives other reasons for choosing this moment -- that "a diversity of scenery was observable . . . calculated to convey a general idea of the nature of the Arctic Regions."[vii] And indeed, the panorama provides space for a broad range of features; besides some seals, said to be so familiar "as to render any description unnecessary," there is a group of "Walrusses," described as "monsters" and "hideous animals . . . the eyes are small and sunk in the head; the lips fat, and beset with long bristles; the skin, which is about an inch thick, hangs in folds or wrinkles."[viii] It is odd for us today to think of walruses as monstrous, but for Barker's viewers they were fitting habitants of a monstrous land. More monstrous still were the Polar Bears: "These animals have been known to grow to the enormous length of fourteen feet . . . they retire during winter to their icy dens, where they are supposed to live in a torpid state until the sun appears over the horizon, when they stalk forth and devour every thing they met with . . . . Barentz in his voyage tells us of some of his seamen being carried off and devoured by them."[ix] There are also several groups of Arctic sea-birds, described in the programme with their scientific names and a sketch of their habitat and diet; if the bears and walruses blend terror with the naturalist's passion for description, the birds, like Buchan and Franklin, are framed by the abstract calm of the armchair observer.

But the principal feature of the panorama is nothing living, but rather the ice itself. It looms in the foreground in dark, angular heaps, broken and enjambed by wind and wave; it drifts ominously through the waters in the middle ground, threatening the ships, and hangs upon the distant peaks in stark, glacial majesty. It even invades the sky, for, we are told:

> The yellow tint over the horizon behind the *Trent* . . . is intended to represent the Ice Blink, a phenomenon always seen over any compact aggregation of ice, whenever the horizon is tolerably free from clouds. It is evidently occasioned by the rays of light striking on the snowy surface of the ice, and being reflected into the superincumbent air, where they become visible; but the light which falls on the sea is in great measure absorbed; hence the openings occurring in a body of ice are seen in the

> atmosphere, reflected with a blink, producing a perfect map of the ice and water in the air.[x]

In many ways, this explanation evokes Barker's own task at hand, to produce in paint a 'perfect map' of this potent yet tremendously temporal element, echoing its form within his own sphere of production. The technical air of the language lectures its readers in Oxonian tones, but the effect is only to amplify the wonderment felt at the alien hue of the sky arching over these terrific fields of ice. For sense of scale, two relatively small bergs in the far distance are given an individual description, informing the viewer that they are "worthy of admiration, being upwards of a mile in length, and 200 feet in height.”

But how high are they, really? Here it becomes clear why Barker's art was so centrally staked to the use of perspective; the enormousness of an object is, within this enormous canvas, paradoxically verified by being made small. In a similar manner, the lifelike qualities of human figures are ensured when they are painted to a scale which prohibited detailed inspection (viewers were 40 feet from any point on Barker's canvas), and the greatest detail is given to the foreground, which is artificially large in order to appear closer than the actual distance from eye to canvas. The cumulative effect is to propel the viewer forward, into the very field of ice itself, and it is little wonder that at this, as at the other Arctic shows at Barker's establishment in 1834 and 1850, many spectators felt a chill breeze across their cheeks; a facetious piece in *Punch* in 1850 even advised that viewers protect their noses from frost, and suggested that the panorama would be ideal as a cooling retreat in the summer months. There is also an element of vertigo in Barker's perspective buttressing, a sense that if one is as close as one feels, one's feet must necessarily be in a void of some sort (the 'ground' below the spectators was deliberately painted black in order to prevent its materiality from despoiling the illusion). And this vertigo, too, must have been heightened for spectators of a painting of a region so remote and foreboding that even the few brave souls who ventured into it only narrowly escaped with their lives and their ships intact.

Yet even even as Barker's patrons were looking on with awe at his depiction of the ice-choked northern seas, a very different sort of public spectacle was brewing over the lately returned John Ross, leader of that season's *other* Arctic voyage, whose achievements, though seemingly far more substantial than anything accomplished by Buchan and Franklin, were soon to fall victim to a sort of hissing ridicule thoroughly antipodal to the reverence accorded the voyage to Spitzbergen. It would take Ross another fourteen years, and another Arctic voyage far more hazardous than his last, before he too would find his way into the circular stage of Barker's Panorama. A slow learner in such affairs, Ross had yet to realize that the refracting eye of the public gaze was far a more significant portent than any ice-blink on the north-western horizon.

Munchausen on Ice: The Mythic Mis-taking of John Ross

Sir John Ross, unlike Buchan, was unfortunate enough to be fortunate. By the conventional measures of scientific data, geographical scope, good Naval discipline, and the health of the crews, Ross's voyage was a resounding success. In the centuries since William Baffin's original navigation of the bay that bore his name, there had been so few attempts to penetrate it that it was reported on many charts as "supposed"; Ross proved the skeptics wrong. Baffin's charts, in fact, were shown to be extraordinarily accurate, and the principal outlets of his Bay, such as Smith Sound and Lancaster Sound were almost precisely where Baffin had placed them. Ross followed the coast of Greenland as far as Whale Bay, at the very edge of Smith Sound, which he found (as had Baffin) to be blocked by ice. In the course of his northward progress, he charted hundreds of miles of coastline, observing in the process the soon-to-be-infamous patches of "red snow" along the Greenland coast (the cause of this coloration, unknown to Ross, was a microscopic plant that flourished in the brief Arctic summer).[xi] Near the settlement of Etah, Ross became the first European to meet with the Inughuit of northern Greenland, who asked his ships (whom they regarded as living creatures) whether they had came from the moon or the sun, and wondered from what animal's skin the strange garments of Ross and his men had been made. Ross and his readers likely found this misunderstanding to be a humorous confirmation of their preconceptions about the ignorance of savages -- yet they themselves regarded the northern Arctic as only slightly less remote than the moon, and its inhabitants (whom Ross dubbed "Arctic Highlanders") almost as exotic as the "Lunites" imagined in Lucian's facetious *True History*. If Lucian's moon-men had hollow fur-lined bellies and detachable eyes, these strange folk wore double furs and seal-skin boots, and greeted each other by rubbing or pulling noses; they looked behind the hand-held mirrors for the spirits within them, and mistook glass for ice. That they also possessed the secrets of survival in a climate that had the power to reduce British seamen to scurvy-ridden and frostbitten wraiths was largely overlooked -- after all, how could fur-clad savages teach anything to men who possessed the secrets of the compass, chronometer, and sextant?

After turning southward, Ross dutifully traced the western limits of Baffin Bay, finding Jones's Sound blocked by ice as he expected. Lancaster Sound, by a good fortune Ross could only belatedly surmise, cleared of ice shortly after his arrival, and he duly entered it and pressed westward. Sailing through calm waters, Ross found the sound to be open and clear of ice as far as the lookouts could see, and there was every prospect of a significant progress into a potential Northwest Passage -- until a mist set in, and in that mist Ross discerned (or thought he discerned) a chain of mountains which he was convinced blocked any further movement. That these peaks, which Ross named the Croker Mountains (after the First Secretary of the Admiralty), were a mere mirage was only discovered later, and for all England knew they were as capacious and majestic as the Himalayas, but whatever the case, Ross duly returned home, determined to avoid what he regarded as needless and likely fruitless risk. There was every reason to imagine that he would receive the laurels of the triumphant explorer, who had duly planted his feet and his country's flag in the most remote and inhospitable region of the known globe.

Yet while he did receive the anticipated promotion to the rank of Captain, and the outward thanks of the Admiralty, Ross also received an unexpected degree of private and public lampooning. If the Arctic was for some an alluring realm of mystery and severity, it was by the same token a region antipodal to the comfort and practicality held forth as the proper English values of an industrial and utilitarian age. What use, after all, could there be in Esquimaux harpoons, "red snow," or the skin of an Arctic Bear? Ross was ridiculed to an unusual degree in the press; one cartoon depicted him pompously leading a procession of officers and men, all of whom sported pasteboard noses to cover the void left when their own had been worn off through too much rubbing. Trailing behind their comical leader, Ross's crews were depicted bearing aloft their cargo of polar-bear skins, buckets of melted "red snow," and petrified wood, with an exoticized "Esquimaux" at the end of their train. The utter uselessness of these tokens was certainly one focus of ridicule; having won the victory over Napoleon, it seemed, the Royal Navy must be kept busy, and an Arctic voyage seemed a particularly comic labor for a dignified conquering force. The doubts, voiced privately by Parry, that Ross had in fact invented the "Croker Mountains" out of caution or cowardice, cost Ross many key supporters in the Admiralty, and in a stinging rebuke John Barrow himself attacked Ross's judgment in a lengthy unsigned essay in the *Quarterly Review*.[xii]

Barrow, who was impatient with those who thought the exploration of the Arctic to be useless, savaged Ross for the opposite reason -- that he had not followed his orders far enough, but had retreated in the name of caution and safety when he ought better to have boldly advanced, whatever the risk or likelihood (or value) of success. Barrow scornfully referred to Ross's voyage around Baffin Bay as a "pleasure cruise," and regarded his claim that there was no indication of a Passage via Lancaster Sound as only "a pitiable excuse for running away home."[xiii] To Barrow, the value of the discovery of a North-west passage was demonstrable and broadly-based; like those who justified NASA's budget by touting the commercial applications of its technological breakthroughs (even as they reiterated the fear of falling behind in the "space race" with the Soviet Union), Barrow cited both economic and nationalistic rationales for Arctic exploration. Summing up his familiar refrain in 1844, he wrote:

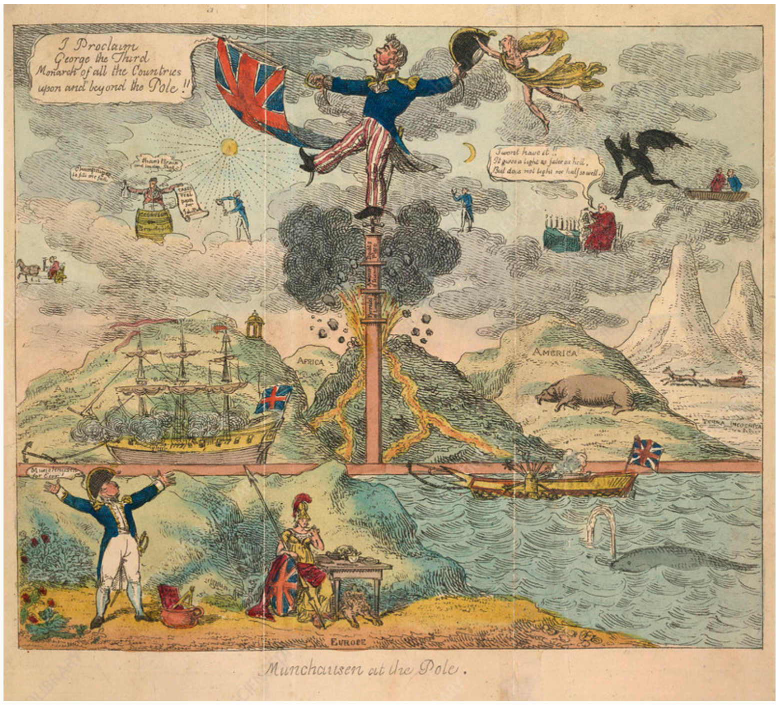
> The utilitarians were at all times ready to ask "to what good?" But Queen Elizabeth and her Ministers with their enlightened minds sought for "knowledge," the result of which, they needed not to be told, was power. Observe what followed: the knowledge gained by the Arctic voyagers was not thrown away. Sir Humphrey Gilbert by his grant of the Island of Newfoundland, made his voyage thither in which he nobly perished, but his knowledge did not perish with him; on the contrary it laid the foundation of the valuable cod industry. Davis by the discovery of the strait that bears his name, opened the way to the whale fishing, still carried on; and Frobisher pointed out the strait which conducted Hudson to the bay that bears his name, and which gave rise to the concerns of the Hudson's Bay Company . . . Lastly, the discovery of Baffin, which pointed out, among others, the great opening of Lancaster on the Western coast of that Bay that bears his name, has in our time been found to lead into the Polar Sea through which the passage from the Atlantic to the Pacific will one day accomplished, and for the execution of which we are now contending, and which if left to be performed by some other power, England by her neglect of it after having opened the East and West doors should be laughed at by all the world for having hesitated to cross the threshold.[xiv]

Better to "nobly perish," it was clear to Barrow, than to turn back in the name of safety or security. Ross was this damned on both sides -- by those to whom a search for the Northwest Passage was a costly chimera, and by those who thought it a profitable object and an issue of national reputation on a newly global stage. Barrow also neatly conflated the issues of knowledge, national pride, and profit, making each an inevitable consequence of the other; if this was 'shopkeeper's' reasoning, it was subjoined to an aristocratic faith in success in the face of uncertainty.

Ross's caution, which might be thought to be a virtue in a self-proclaimedly rational society, turned out to be his greatest liability -- the knowledge he had gained was weighed in proportion to the risk he took, and found wanting -- so much so that Barrow felt quite comfortable making fun of the very ceremonies of national possession that he lauded in other explorers:

> On taking leave of Lancaster Sound on the 31st of August, and proceeding homeward along the same coast, the following day Ross sent a boat on shore, in a small bay near Cape Byam Martin, with orders "to take possession of the country, in the name and on the behalf of his Britannic majesty," with the usual silly ceremony -- the more silly when the object is worthless, as in the present case -- a barren, uninhabited country, covered with ice and snow, the only subjects of his majesty, in this portion of his newly-acquired dominions, consisting of half-starved bears, deer, foxes, white hares, and such other creatures as are commonly met with in these regions of the globe.[xv]

Worse was yet to come, for there soon appeared a far more ambitious satire, which merged Ross's narrative into the deliberately facetious ramblings of Raspe's fictional Baron Münchausen, whose tales of living in the belly of a whale, sailing his ship to the Moon, and hobnobbing with Cyclopses in the furnaces of Mt. Aetna were well-established in England as drolleries for young (and old) readers. A trip to the Arctic, and by imputation to the Pole, seemed a no less frivolous and fantastic escapade, and that Ross was in fact charged to look not for the Pole but for a North-West Passage was readily overlooked. *Munchausen at the POLE; or, the Surprising and Wonderful Adventures of a Voyage of Discovery . . . by the renowned Capt. Munchausen, G.C.B.A.,* appeared early in 1819, and featured a frontispiece in which Ross, depicted astride a literal "Pole" rising up over the continent of America, shouts "I Proclaim George the Third Monarch of all the Countries upon and beyond the Pole!!"


I Proclaim George the Third Monarch of all the Countries upon and beyond the Pole !!
I won't have it !! It gives a light as false as hell, But does not light me half so well.
ASIA
AFRICA
AMERICA
TERRA INCOGNITA
EUROPE
Munchausen at the Pole.

The 'adventures' which followed included a broad variety of Munchausen-esque digressions, including an account of how the good Captain's ship, the "Incombustible," was raised up three miles atop an iceberg, of how he discovered the wonderful cleansing properties of "red snow," and of his perilous ascent of the Pole itself - not to mention "Munchausen's" discovery of the Lost Tribes of Israel, the ghost of Captain Cook's navigator, and the legendary Irish king Brian Boru.

The book mimicked all the features of the Munchausen tradition, from the testimonials of truth to a "correct list of the curiosities brought home and deposited in the museum and tower of London" -- a list which included such facetiæ as "an amphibious Esquimaux," "a cable, made from the hairs of an East Greenlander's beard," and "a button from the coat in which Mungo Park was drowned," as well as "other important articles too tedious to mention." The narrator, impossibly pompous and yet dryly methodical, alternates between Brobdingnagian ploys -- using the tooth of a "Behemoth" as a chair -- and scientific routines, such as taking lunar altitudes. Its vivid plates, which besides the comic frontispiece included scenes of "Munchausen entering the Capital of East Greenland" and "Munchausen shaved and lathered with red snow," expand the broad comedy of the text; in his preface, "Munchausen" alludes thus to their presence: "Reader, *if thou canst read*, thou wilt be much amused by following me through a series of the most extraordinary adventures which ever occurred to human nature. If thou canst *not* read, the plates in my volume (if thou canst see) will almost speak my meaning."

Thus it was that Ross, even as he accepted his explorer's laurels, felt the barb of public ridicule, ridicule which was redoubled when his "Croker Mountains" turned out to be as mythological as Lilliput. For, in 1819, Ross's first lieutenant, William Parry was dispatched to make another try at Lancaster Sound (an action which suggested even before the fact a lack of faith in Ross's official report), and found it to be entirely free of mountains -- leading in fact into Barrow's Strait, and clear sailing as far as 110° west longitude, enough to win the coveted Admiralty prize and make the younger Parry into a national hero.

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[i] Arctic Adventure," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, March 1857.

[ii] Barker’s 1819 panorama, along with the succeeding Arctic panoramas of 1834 and 1850 at the same venue, were first given attention by Richard Altick in his magisterial *The Shows of London* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978) p. 177; they are also discussed by Robert G. David in his *The Arctic in the British Imagination* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 149-156, along with a reproduction of the key to the 1850 panorama which, like that of 1819, was in two panels.

[iii] Beechey’s narrative of his first major Arctic foray did not appear until 1843; see Frederick William Beechey, *A voyage of discovery towards the North Pole, performed in her Majesty’s*

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ships Dorothea and Trent, under the command of Captain David Buchan … London: R. Bentley, 1843.

[iv] Constable had similar criticisms of both the Diorama ("it is without the pale of art, because the object is deception. Art pleases by reminding, not deceiving") and the Panorama (of his onetime friend Reinagle's panorama of Rome, he remarked that "great principles are neither expected nor looked for in this mode of describing nature"). For the former, see Angela Miller, "The Panorama, the Cinema, and the Emergence of the Spectacular," *Wide Angle*, v. 18 n. 2 (1996), p. 44; for the latter, see Altick, *The Shows of London*, p. 137.

[v] For the anecdote about Queen Charlotte, see Stephan Oetterman, *The Panorama: History of a Mass Medium* (NY: Zone Books, 1997), p. 105.

[vi] "I stopped at Taylor's on sunday [sic] with Woodhouse and passed a quiet sort of pleasant day. I have been very much pleased with the Panorama of the ships at the north Pole, with the icebergs, the Mountains, the Bears, the Walrus, the seals, the Penguins, and a large whale floating back above water. It is impossible to describe the place." Keats, letter to George and Georgiana Keats, 21 April 1819; *Selected Letters of John Keats*, ed. Grant F. Scott (Revised Edition), p. 283.

[vii] Barker, Henry Aston, *Description of a View of the North Coast of Spitzbergen* . . . 1820, p. 5.

[viii] Ibid., p. 12.

[ix] Ibid., p. 11.

[x] Ibid., p. 10.

[xi] This organism, by various authorities, is said to have been either *Protococcus nivalis* or *Chlamydomonas nivalis*.

[xii] "A Voyage of Discovery Made under the Order of the Admiralty, in His Majesty's Ships *Isabella* and *Alexander* . . . ," *Quarterly Review*, January 1819.

[xiii] This quote comes from the version printed in Barrow's later *summa* of Arctic exploration, *Voyages of Discovery and Research with the Arctic Regions, from the year 1818 to the present time . . . . Abridged and arranged from the original narratives, with occasional remarks . . . by Sir John Barrow, Bart., F.R.S.* New-York: Harper & Brothers, 1846, p. 44.

[xiv] Quoted in Paul Nanton. *Arctic Breakthrough: Franklin's Expeditions, 1819-1847* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, and Company, 1970), pp. 224-5.

[xv] Barrow. *Voyages of Discovery and Research,* p. 45.