

II

The Awful Aspect of the Scene: Arctic Panoramas and the Northern Sublime

After the martyrs of the faith, the most admirable are the martyrs of science, and among them, the most heroic [are] the navigators of the polar seas . . . In the history of travel no episode is more curious, no image more arresting, no drama more eventful, than wintering in the ice fields.

-- Jules Verne, 1855

John Ross, already forced into early retirement, was now obliged to sit at home and nurse his wounded ego, and he never again lead an official expedition into the Arctic. Some part of this could no doubt credited to popular physiognomy; while Ross was no doubt handsome, with a mane of graying red hair, he had a substantial nose and enough of a set of jowls to answer to Munchausen's figure. He was also a Scotsman (Barrow made a particular fun of Ross's dubbing the Esquimaux "Arctic Highlanders"), and came from a relatively humble background, at least when compared to Parry, the dazzling doctor's son, who cut as much of a figure in the ballroom as on the ice. Yet to the Brontë sisters, who were enamored of the unfolding mysteries of the Arctic, both men were attractive figures of idealized consorts; Anne was said to admire "Captain Ross," while Emily preferred Parry.

Barrow preferred Parry as well, for Parry's blend of daring-do, unquestioning nationalism, and almost maniacal religious faith (Parry, like Franklin, followed a daily routine of prayer with methodical regularity) fit the pre-made mold of the Arctic Man. Within a few months, Parry was in command of a newly-outfitted expedition, under direction to boldly go where Ross refused to go -- down the inviting waterway of Lancaster Sound. Parry's ships, the *Hecla* and *Griper*, were equipped for an extended voyage with the best technology of the day, and creature comforts were not neglected. Like the *Nautilus* in Disney's version of Verne's *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, Parry's ships were outfitted with miniature pipe organs, though Bach's Toccata and Fugue in D Minor was never performed on them -- they had no keyboards, but used music-box like cylinders which played a variety of Sunday hymns. Preserved food in "tin cases," a

recent invention, was provided, along with kiln-dried flour and an oven for baking fresh bread; the comfort of the crews was seen to with double pay, double woollens and wolf-skin blankets. And, as was to be the custom in all later expeditions, the ships were provided with canvas tenting to be hauled up around the masts, enclosing the decks for "winter quarters" -- a wintering-over was not only allowed for, it was planned.

In May of 1819 Parry set sail, and after a relatively uneventful Atlantic crossing entered Davis Strait in late June -- only to spend a month grinding his way through pack-ice, slowly forcing his ships along with the help of ice-saws, hawsers, and cables. Yet on July 28, almost overnight, he and his men found themselves free of the pack, and when they entered Lancaster Sound, they found it entirely ice-free. Experiences of this sort gave at least a psychological reality to the myth of the Open Polar Sea, though the ice would not be gone for long. On August 4, they passed the location of Ross's illusory "Croker Mountains," and found the way to their west unobstructed; a month later they passed the meridian of 110° west longitude, and earned the coveted Parliamentary prize of five thousand pounds. But it was not this prize, or even Parry's amazing success where others had failed, but the long winter that yet awaited them that would most capture the imagination of the public. Never had Europeans wintered so far north, and the site of Parry's "Winter Harbor" on "Melville Island," chosen after ice barriers ended his westward progress, was almost inconceivably isolated from any other place of habitation. There were no Inuit settlements, no whaling stations, not even the faintest outpost, within hundreds of miles -- and no means to reach them if there had been any.

Melville Island was truly a place apart; its lunar landscape of snow-shrouded peaks was devoid even of animals, who migrated elsewhere for the long Arctic night. It was so quiet that private conversations could be overheard at a distance of a mile, and the landscape's scale defeated any sense that one could actually *go* anywhere. Snow masked all, and unhinged the sense of scale; a hillock, seemingly near at hand, might readily prove to be a mountain some miles distant; while another apparently far-off summit might well be a small hill only a few hundred paces away. Partly because of concerns over the mistaking of distances, Parry forbade his men to go more than a short way from the ships, though he admitted this only added to the dreariness of their situation. The ships themselves, warped into the harbor and fast-frozen in ice now many feet thick, were certainly not going anywhere. As the crews dug in for the winter, and came to face with the fact that the sun was about to disappear for months, Parry and his officers set about a carefully premeditated plan of action. The men must be kept busy, even though there was in fact nothing to do. Parry set to them to building an onshore observatory, where a daily round of "observations" was to be taken. Constitutional runs about the tented decks were instituted, along with a variety of activities designed simply to pass the time, such as cleaning the decks, "drawing and knotting yarns," and "making points and gaskets," the latter of which Parry praised as "a never-failing resource, where mere occupation is required."ⁱ

Lieutenant Sabine instituted a ship-board news-paper, the *North Georgia Gazette* -- what, after all, could more civilized and civilizing than a newspaper? -- and, to top it all off, a theatre (known, inevitably, as the "Theatre-Royal") was instituted with a new play each fortnight. The theatre was perhaps the most inspired motivational activity, though the

least planned; it required that everything not provided be constructed, from sets to costumes to playbills. That the plays performed were largely stale comedies, re-heated Garrick and farcical Foote, added to rather than subtracted from their interest. When the players, in the first half of the "season," exhausted the few volumes that had been their promptbooks, they had a 'revival' season, topped off by a drama written for the occasion, "The North-West Passage," which included original songs, also published in the *Gazette*. The success of these winter theatricals in staving off ennui was so notable that all future British Arctic expeditions were provided with props and play-books explicitly for this purpose.

Yet even with these constant amusements, the Arctic cold and silence remained, and it was this cold and silence that attracted the greatest curiosity from those back home in the noisy, crowded cities of England and the rest of Europe. When Parry returned in 1820, he was of course hailed as a hero; promotion and honors of all kinds awaited, as well as a personal fortune -- followed of course by the requisite book recounting his voyage. Parry's narrative was conventional enough -- he was a meticulous, formal, proudly pedestrian writer. Yet his detailed accounts of the privations of this winter, together with the dramatic engravings prepared for the British edition of his Narrative, replaced the comic maypole of Ross-as-Munchausen with something far more terrible, something that almost approached the sublime. The extremity of cold and darkness was seen as test for men, a test of their physical and mental endurance, a flirtation with death yet one staged in a land of astonishing beauty and clarity. The alien quality of the landscape, the lack of differentiation between snow and snow, the day-round darkness, and most of all the massive displays of the Aurora Borealis, all augmented the sense that one was on some other planet, a wintry sphere where the very celestial orbs were out of joint. Most unearthly of all was the perihelion, an apparition caused when the hesitant sun was near the refractive horizon, made it appear as though five suns were in the sky.

Familiar substances, the very stock of the ships, took on new qualities in the extreme cold. Lemon juice, brought to avert scurvy, burst in its bottles, reduced to cakes of ice; syrup became as hard as a rock and concentrated vinegar as stiff as syrup. Moisture was an ever-present problem, condensing, then freezing, as it moved up the decks, and difficult to vent. One man, who on account of illness had become incontinent, had to be hacked out of his sleeping-berth when his urine froze (he was soon to be the expedition's first fatality). The celebrated wolf-skin blankets worked like sponges, soaking up moisture, and becoming useless for insulation -- but drying them above decks was impossible since they froze stiff on contact with the air. They had to be dried below decks, and the moisture vented with great care, and in the process many of them fell to pieces (a fact which did not diminish the faith of the Admiralty, which continued to provide similar blankets to all subsequent Arctic voyagers). And, while the ovens worked wonderfully, the bread produced frequently froze before it could be consumed; a few seconds in a seaman's pocket were enough to turn a slice into a slab of stone.

All these phenomena added to the alien, otherworldly quality of life aboard the ships, all of which fascinated the reading public in England. But what most solidified their imaginative grasp of the scene were the large-plate illustrations, based on officers' sketches, which embellished the English edition.ⁱⁱ As Chauncey Loomis has observed,

the illustrations, drawn and engraved by William Westall, "helped create a popular image of the Arctic that was very romantic indeed," and Parry's understated prose, his "calm and logic in describing the prodigies that he had seen," only served to "emphasize the strangeness" of it all.ⁱⁱⁱ There was romanticism and strangeness -- yes, but also something more, something which Loomis quite rightly identifies as the "Arctic Sublime." The stars at midnight, the nearness of death, the immobility of the ships in the ice, the utter isolation, illuminated by the fiery frozen play of the Aurora, combined to create a sense of the sublime in scale, the vast and inexpressible smallness of humanity, even of the earth itself. For, while Parry's outward accomplishment in planting the British Flag on such vast and alien shores was a grand feather in the cap of British imperialism, by the same stroke he demonstrated the tremendous uselessness of any such gesture. Ross's flag-planting could be --and *was* -- laughed at; Parry's could only be wondered at, grasped and yet ungrasped in the public mind.



The importance of Westall's plates in establishing this new sense of the Arctic sublime is too seldom recognized; aside from Loomis's article, there has been almost no attention given them. Based, as were nearly all the illustrations in Murray's Arctic folios, on sketches made by the expedition's officers, they nevertheless stand apart from any others of their kind. The majority of the sketches had been made by Lieutenant Beechey, a gifted amateur who stood in the first rank of Naval artists -- and yet Beechey's sketches, though skillfully composed with pencil and watercolor, have nothing of the intensity of Westall's designs, particularly his aquatint plates. This may be due in part to the fact that Westall himself was no stranger to the explorer's life; together with the then fourteen-

year-old John Franklin, he had accompanied Matthew Flinders on his circumnavigation of Australia in 1801-02 as the expedition's artist. Westall's sketches of the Australian landscape, the natives, and the ship's crews are now recognized as the most important early representations of Australia; for vividness, immediacy, and sureness of hand they are unmatched.

At the same time, Westall also sketched some of the more terrifying moments of this expedition, as when eight crewmembers were lost attempting to return to the ship from shore ("The Entrance to Port Lincoln from behind Memory Cove") and his own shipwreck aboard the "Porpoise" on his return journey to England. His skill at maritime subjects, particularly those with a fearful aspect, would doubtless have earned him a career in the fine arts, had it not been interrupted by an apparent nervous breakdown in 1815. In the end, he had to be largely content with book illustration, at the time a far less prestigious line – and yet his masterful designs, together with his understanding of new techniques of engraving, soon established him one of the foremost draughtsmen of his day, particularly for travel narratives.^{iv} His work for Murray's edition of Parry's narrative involved images not simply copied but "drawn and engraved" –that is, Westall re-drew the pictures as well as engraving the plates.^v A comparison of Beechey's original "His Majesty's Ships Hecla and Griper blocked up with the ice, in Winter Harbor" (plate 2) with Westall's image of the same scene (plate 3) demonstrates compellingly how much Westall added to the sketches with which he was provided. The chill of the star-filled sky, the utter isolation of the ships, the faint glow of a darkened horizon – all are rendered with an almost supernatural clarity. Beechey's is a sketch of some ships; Westall's a luminous vision of an undiscovered country.

The Sea of Ice

This uncanny visual conjunction, this Arctic spectacle, gripped the English imagination, and soon that of Europe as a whole, in a way few other geographical exploits had before. Within the year, the Marshall brothers had mounted their own "Peristrepthic Panorama of the Frozen Regions," which toured Great Britain, accompanied by a "collection of Natural and Artificial Curiosities from those almost unknown Regions."^{vi} In Europe, Parry's exploits were recounted with nearly as much enthusiasm as they had been in Britain; in Prague in 1820, Antonio Sacchetti's half-circle panorama of the "North Pole Expedition" appeared, and the following year Johann Carl Enslin's miniature panorama, "Winter Sojourn of the North Pole Expedition," was the toast of Dresden.^{vii} As these titles suggest, the mission to the Northwest Passage was conflated with that to the Pole (as had happened in a more comic way with Ross as Munchausen), and the central scenes were those of wintering-over in the 'desolate regions of ice and snow.'

These images of Parry's ships, frostbound in an alien landscape where darkness reigned at noon, were a perfect allegory for Romantic notions of the soul, lost and yet found in snowy remoteness, far from the press of the crowd. To Caspar David Friedrich, Enslin's panorama may have served as an extension of his own fascination with the image of the human subject reduced to insignificance by the sheer scale and tone of the

landscape.^{viii} As was already evident in Friedrich's earlier painting of a "The Monk by the Sea" (1809-10), where a lone figure clad in dark brown robes stands, facing away from the viewer, nearly swallowed by a desolate coastline of nearly identical hues, there is a kind of chromatic extinction possible at the far limits of geographic space (plate 4). Hooded in wool and wrapped in heavy pale overcoats, the Arctic monks of Parry's expedition were not simply dwarfed but *swallowed* by the impartial coldness and vastness of a sea of blinding snow.

Yet *living* monks, like sailors snug inside their coats, were too much for Friedrich; if shown at all, they threatened to become such a focus for the contemplative eye that the viewer's identification with them might humanize the landscape, offering some shelter from the desolation and emptiness of the scene. So, like the monastery in Friedrich's "Abbey in an Oak Wood," Parry's ship had to be destroyed and buried, rendered a ruin by the dispassionate movement of the ice, before it could truly embody the sublime destructive force of nature. The narrative of Parry's voyage provided the perfect hint; his description of how the HMS "Griper" was "nipped" in the ice – a pleasant euphemism for the crushing force of wind-driven floes, strong enough to snap a ship like a twig – was highlighted in many reviews and excerpts in the press, several of which appeared as early as 1821, a year before a German translation of Parry's official narrative was published in book form.^{ix}

In 1822, Friedrich had painted his first Arctic subject, a painting, since lost, described as 'Wrecked Ship off the Coast of Greenland under a May moon.' The ship bore the name "Hope" -- a name with a long history of association with the Arctic -- and the painting became popularly known as "The Wreck of the Hope."^x The painting caused an immense stir, and was purchased by the Empress Catherine of Russia, a triumph for Friedrich – only to be lost some years later, leading to later confusion of that canvas with Friedrich's masterful *Das Eismeer* ("The Sea of Ice"), which he commenced the year after (plate 5). Friedrich began with a series of small oil studies of ice formations on the River Elbe which he had made in the winter months of 1821, through which he sought to understand the ways in which pressure-driven ice was pushed upwards, and often over, neighboring floes in a cold, crushed geometry of forms. Work on the new, more ambitious "Sea of Ice" commenced in 1823, and in 1824 the painting was exhibited in both Prague and Dresden to tremendous acclaim.



Friedrich's finished canvas centers not on any man-made forms, but on a heaped-up pyramid of ice-slabs, jaggedly enjambed by the pressure of the floes, tilting dangerously to the left of the field of view. It is only after tracing the outline of this icy mass that the viewer notices the stern of a sailing-ship off to the right, its masts carried away and crushed like toothpicks under the looming ridge of ice. Angular forms, almost cubist in their rhythm, punctuate the now completed movement which has destroyed the ship; there is no evidence of survivors, no human figure to enable the comfort of a survivors' reflection. Like the ethereal acolytes of Friedrich's earlier monastic scenes, the seamen have gone to their graves, only here there will be no monument to mark their place of passing, no ghostly procession, not even the footsteps of a latter-day tourist. This landscape, it seems clear, will itself soon be gone, gone with the next shift of pressure among the floes, upgorging the shattered ship only to let it slip, broken, to the deep.

Friedrich knew, just as the crowds who had scorned Ross and flocked to see Barker's Panorama of Buchan and Franklin's battle with the bergs, that the Arctic was more than simply a destination on the globe, a blank region in need of filling-in, or an exotic clime whose flora and fauna might fill a cabinet of curiosities. To go the Arctic was to go to the land of the dead, a place where snow (which fascinated Friedrich) was not a harbinger of coming spring, but a mute and fruitless premonition of itself, a deathly circularity. To encounter such a sign, to see how snow and ice could snap sturdy ships in two, to witness how unavailing human sweat and scientific expertise were in the face of this relentless

force, was to come face to face with the sublime. For if the sublime meant a recognition of one's own ultimate demise, and beyond that, the recognition that this inexorable dissolution into the elements was only part of the vast rhythm of life and death, a sequence in which the "individual" as such was only a brief caesura, there was no better place to encounter it than the Arctic. To go there without facing this elemental danger, without risking one's life and even sanity, was not to go there at all.

Ross's Return and the Panorama of Boothia

That the British public, themselves rarely known to take a risk, even if that meant only going out of doors without an umbrella, demanded dramatic risk-taking in their heroes, was a hard-learned fact for Sir John Ross. What was still more difficult was the realization, after years of lobbying, that he simply was not going to get another chance from the Admiralty. Parry, once the *wunderkind* of the North, had retired from exploration after his last, unsuccessful Polar voyage of 1824-25; Franklin, to his lasting fame, had very nearly managed to starve himself and his men to death on an Arctic land expedition to the shores of the "Polar Sea," only to return once more to complete his survey to the westward. The Admiralty, despite Barrow's advocacy, was losing interest in funding costly expeditions to find the Northwest Passage -- and even if they had not, the mutual animosity between Barrow and John Ross remained so strong that Ross knew he would never be selected to lead one. Ross's nephew, James Clark Ross, a veteran of Parry's missions and an explorer in his own right, might have been a possibility -- but the gears of officialdom were in no hurry to turn. John Ross, nothing if not persistent, finally decided that he would have to find private funding for an expedition of his own. Having become, in his years of semi-retirement, something of an authority on steam-power, he conceived of an expedition on a smaller, single ship, powered by steam, with a shallow draught to enable her to navigate difficult coastal waters. Ross found a backer in Felix Booth, then Lord Mayor of London and proprietor of a highly successful gin distillery. Ross was willing to put up some of his own money -- about three thousand pounds -- and Booth was willing to invest several times as much. There remained only one small and sticky hurdle: the craving for propriety in all things. For, since the Parliamentary bounties of ten to twenty thousand pounds for making all or part of the Passage were still in effect, Booth was concerned that, were he to fund a private expedition, it would be seen as a grab for the prize money, which would have been deadly to his social reputation. Gin was not exactly a prestige beverage to begin with, and the thought of Booth's name being attached to an Arctic expedition likely struck some advocates of such a voyage rather like putting "Budweiser" on the Space Shuttle might strike supporters of space travel today. Commercialism was one thing, but making a profit by taking government prize-money was thought to be too crass, even for a 'nation of shopkeepers.'

There was a remedy in the wings, unlikely as it seemed: a party of persons who wished to *discourage* private Arctic voyages persuaded Parliament to revoke the £20,000 bounty, as part of a bill eliminating the Board of Longitude. This last obstacle to respectability conveniently removed, Booth backed Ross to the fullest, eventually spending nearly £18,000 in outfitting the expedition. Ross located a ship, the *Victory*, which was quickly rebuilt for Arctic service; its sides were raised and reinforced, and it was fitted with the

very latest patent bellows-driven steam boiler, attached to a side-wheel paddle. Ross also enlisted a tender, the *Kruzenstern*, to assist the *Victory*, and signed up a hand-picked crew, beginning with his nephew James as second-in-command. There was some talk that Booth had wanted James all along, but only used the elder Ross as a figurehead -- but whatever the reason, the two "Polar Rosses" were to be off together on a renewed search for the passage that John had turned back from, and James, on Parry's ships, had failed to find. A unique part of the plan, in fact, called for a stop at "Fury Beach," where James, at the time Parry's lieutenant, had deposited a massive cache from the hold of the *HMS Fury*, when that ship was crushed by the ice and had to be abandoned. Other means to take advantage of circumstance were not neglected; there was even a plan to bring along a whaling vessel, whose cargo of whale oil might help defray expenses (the plan fell through when the crew of the whaler mutinied before the vessel ever set sail).

Once the mission was inevitable, the Admiralty belatedly gave it their blessing, even supplying James Ross with a formal letter of approbation; the Lords of the Admiralty joined other dignitaries in inspecting the ship while it was docked before its departure. When the *Victory* finally steamed on its way in May of 1829, spectators lined the shore and gave it an massive escort of smaller craft; the air was filled with huzzahs and there seemed to be every expectation that the boat would meet with a destiny that would redeem its name. Not all the omens were favorable -- the steam-boiler was having all kinds of troubles, during one of which the chief engineer had his arm horribly mangled by the machinery. But Ross, ever resourceful and determined to erase his past reputation, calmly amputated the engineer's arm himself (there was no surgeon on board, but there was a case of surgeon's implements) and escorted him to a doctor at the next port.^{xi} The steam machinery was to prove a constant vexation, with its leaky boiler devouring the ship's fresh water supply, and its side-wheel providing inadequate speed. Ross ended up setting the sails, and made most of the crossing under wind-power, eventually discarding the nearly useless steam-engine to make more room for the crew. Yet what technology could not do, the winds of fate performed; Ross found Baffin Bay and Lancaster Sound both almost completely free of ice, such that he traversed in a week what it had taken Parry in 1819 two months of constant struggle to cross.

What happened next, the British public would not learn until 1833 -- by which time the Rosses were given up for dead by all but their most optimistic backers, and James Ross's old compeer Back had been sent on an overland mission, in part to recover what nearly everyone imagined would be the frozen corpses of Ross and his men. It is difficult, given the existence of Ross's official narrative and the dozens of redactions it has had over the years, not to think of what actually *happened* to Ross as proceeding logically from the day of his departure. Conditioned as we are to the identify and follow the protagonist in a fiction or a film, we like our history, too, to follow the "main" character, letting a sigh pass our lips now and then as we contemplate our retroactive superiority over the limited perspective of the public at the time. The irony of their thinking Ross dead, or Franklin alive, long after what we now can see was "actually" unfolding in the Arctic, blinds us to our own blindness, our own distance from the readers who filled the gap of unknowing with an overflowing palette of disastrous imaginings, who felt their belief that Ross could be alive ebb slowly away like a fading pulse. There was a thrill to this ebbing, a complex thrill that, though vaster than empires and more slow, was the nineteenth-century cousin

to today's highway rubbernecking at the site of some spectacular crash, or (more aptly) to the collective catharsis of the continually-repeated footage of the *Challenger* space shuttle explosion.

The pace of disaster quickens. The *Challenger* exploded in seconds, in "real" time, and then exploded again and again before an audience that felt its collective dread each time, even as each time it was slightly numbed. When the *RMS Titanic* sank in 1912, it took hours for her to finally go under; already one can sense in such reconstructions as the Hollywood film *A Night to Remember* that the panoptic irony of the all-seeing viewer is the heavy hand that steers this ship. We know that they are doomed, all those elegantly-dressed people who snack on caviar and play gin rummy, along with their well-fed children in their faux sailor-suits, the society matrons, the poor folks in steerage dancing to Irish jigs. But for James Ross, as for John Franklin later, this irony was retarded by the slow and frustrating time it took to discover the full narrative of their fortunes, good or ill. All that could be said was that, eventually, a heavy pall or a sudden lightness would be cast, that all hope -- or all dread -- would suddenly be made groundless. The anticipation of one or the other result stretched the public mind, extended and altered its appetites, and invaded its dreaming mind. Even before Ross sailed in 1829, he received a letter from an volunteer cook, an ex-Royal Navy man who had had a dream in which a voice declared to him "Go with Captain Ross, he will be crowned with success."^{xii} The dreams, and psychic visions, which attended to the Franklin party during the fourteen years of unknowing, would fill a large folio volume. Along the attenuated wire of public anxiety, bits of rumor and news ran like squirrels, scampering back and forth but never fully relieving the tension.

And so it was with Ross. As he and his men sat at their anchorage, exchanging gifts with their Inuit neighbors, and sledging forth to explore coast-lines and locate the North Magnetic Pole, the business of England went on much as usual. As the Rosses found they could not get the *Victory* out of its too-shallow harbor, and resigned themselves to weather another winter, murmurs of anxiety rose here and there, and the Arctic men piously gathered at the Royal Society and the Admiralty. By the third year, schemes of rescue began to seem belated, and indecision on the part of the government seemed to some to be tantamount to murder. Pieties and verities were trotted out in great number, and letters exchanged in *The Times* (where else?), just as Ross and his men were slowly sledging their provisions to Fury Beach, having abandoned the *Victory* in her impossible predicament. To us, the denizens of many a film that uses intersplicing and split screens to underline such ironies, we want to have it both ways. But as far as the British public knew, John Ross's bones had already become dinner for polar bears, and the *Victory* an icy tomb. It was into that peculiar air, that atmosphere that breathed death even as it held its breath, that a very much living John Ross stepped when word arrived of his rescue in 1833 -- and still more when it was learned that the ship which had saved him was none other than the *Isabella*, the very ship Ross had commanded in 1818, now converted to commercial service as a whaler. It turned out that there was, after all, an architecture to the universe; there was, after all, a reason for hope; there was, after all, a release for those years of public anxiety that had been hard-tutored to expect none. There was, inevitably, total delirium.

Ross could not have planned it better. To venture precariously close to death, to see one's ship stranded and one's crew pushed to the limit of its endurance, and then to return -- this was the patented Franklin method of self-resuscitation. To a Britain which idealized the fruitful countryside and the comfortable hearth, the Arctic was the land of death, and to venture there demanded a struggle with disaster; thus it was that Ross canceled the failure of success with the success of failure. Honors awaited him, and the very funds that he and Booth avoided like the plague before departure were awarded by acclamation of Parliament - fifteen thousand to Booth and five thousand to Ross. Booth was created a baronet, and Ross made a Knight Commander of the Bath; over four thousand letters crowded Ross's desk, among them a sheaf of unrefusable invitations and honors from sundry statesmen and crowned heads of Europe, which required a six-month tour to accept. Ross's crew received double wages for the entire sojourn, as well as promotions; James Ross gained a prominence which would catapult him to further fame as an Antarctic explorer, and John Ross's retreat of 1818 was erased from the public mind.

Yet at the heart of all this was a silence, the unimaginable silence of not one but *four* Arctic winters. What had Ross done? How had he survived, kept his men's spirits up, made his way to unlikely rescue against terrible odds? The story was quickly set down, and issued forth by subscription in a massive folio volume replete with the requisite plates 'made from sketches taken on the spot.' It turned out that Ross, though now hailed as a hero, was still antipodal to Parry when it came to ship-board routines. There were no winter theatricals, no hi-jinks on the ice, no ship-board paper; the humorless Ross took a dim view of anything that seemed to approach fraternization between officers and men. There had however been relief nonetheless, most of it occasioned by their interactions with a neighboring band of Netsilik Inuit (referred to by Ross, as by his predecessors, as "Esquimaux") whose igloos sprang up overnight within sight of the ship in January of 1830 -- much to the surprise of the lookouts. There were misunderstandings at first, but they were soon replaced by lively trade and social interchange between the Inuit and Ross's crew. Ross, ever the starched officer, invited those he thought to be the leaders of the band into his cabin, and with James Ross's help got them to annotate and correct the charts they were preparing of the area. The usual gifts were exchanged -- needles, barrel-hoops, and trinkets for seal meat, furs, and such, and the carpenter of the *Victory* even made a wooden leg for one Inuk, who had lost his in an encounter with a polar bear. After a time, John Ross, feeling he had learned all he could of value, banned the Inuit from the ship, but they and his crews continued to enjoy each other's company, and throughout the first winter the Inuit supplied the *Victory* with fresh seal-meat and blubber, which Ross had the prescience to realize were vital to the health of his men. Indeed, without the assistance of the Netsilik, it is doubtful whether Ross and his men could possibly have survived three further Arctic winters.

Yet despite the fact that the arrival of the Inuit considerably livened the winter months, and taught the English valuable lessons about hunting, diet, and travel, Ross and his men still saw them as savages, albeit more good-natured than most. In his official comments, John Ross was full of praise, to a point; he certainly admired their generosity of spirit and their ability to survive in what he regarded as an inhospitable country:

If a moralist is inclined to speculate on the nature and distribution of happiness in this world, [let him consider the Eskimo]: a horde so small, and so secluded, occupying so apparently helpless a country, so barren, so wild, and so repulsive; and yet enjoying the most perfect vigor, the most well-fed health.^{xiii}

Yet in other moments, Ross was far less magnanimous; he remarked pointedly on the ugliness of Inuit women and the wretchedness of their table manners ("disgusting brutes!"); the pleasure of their company was for him only a relative one:

We were weary for want of occupation, for want of variety, for want of the means to mental exertion, and (why should I not say it?) for want of society . . . Is it wonderful then that even the visits of barbarians were welcome?^{xiv}

and again

Is it not the fate of the savage and the uncivilized on this earth to give way to the more cunning and the better informed, to knowledge and civilization? It is the order of the world; and the right one."^{xv}

In these sentiments, Ross likely reflected the attitudes of most men of his class and background, and indeed what caught the fancy of the reading public was the reassurance that the "Esquimaux" was awed by the Englishman, not any awe felt for the Inuit. In any case, the Inuit had arrived as a characteristic part of the English vision of the Arctic, and their presence conferred a sort of symbolic authenticity upon accounts and representations of the same.

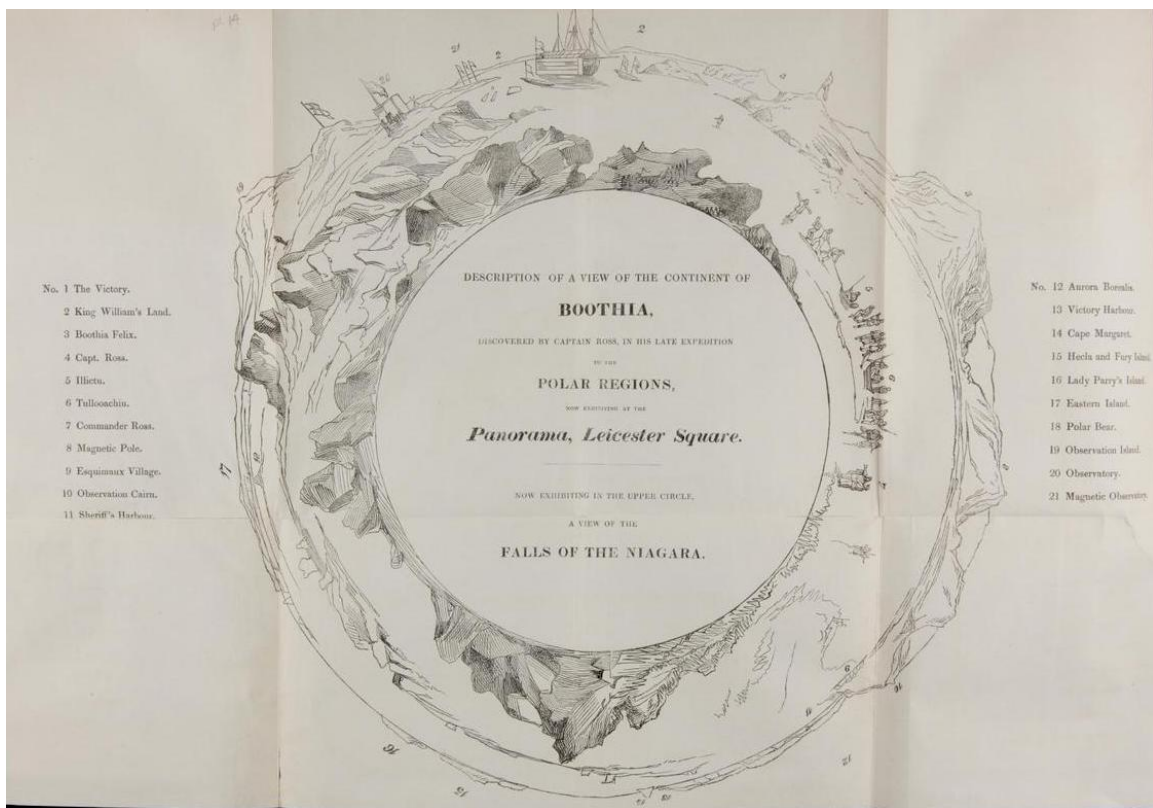
The Esquimaux had been met with before, of course, and not only by Ross in 1818 and Parry in 1822-23, but also by the inhabitants of London in 1824, the year an enterprising whaler by the name of Samuel Hadlock became the first in over fifty years to bring a group of Inuit to England, where they were put on show at the Egyptian Hall.^{xvi} Host over the years to all manner of entertainments, ranging from Albert Smith's "Ascent of Mont Blanc" to P.T. Barnum's "General Tom Thumb," the Egyptian Hall was part cabinet of curiosities, part carnival side-show, and Hadlock's display partook richly of both those elements. The Esquimaux were accompanied by a large and varied exhibition, which included a Polar Bear's paw, a walrus tusk, a sledge dog, and a skin tent or tupiq, all framed by a "grand panoramic view of the country inhabited by the Esquimaux."^{xvii} Yet the Esquimaux brought by Hadlock were both too few and too late; there were only two of them (Niakungitok and Coonahnik, described as "man and wife"), and they were members of a southerly band of Inuit in Labrador long familiar to whaling ships, despite the attempt of the descriptive pamphlet to associate them with the Inuit lately encountered by Parry near the Fury and Hecla Strait.^{xviii} They also arrived well after

public interest in Arctic expeditions had begun to wane, and unlike the family of Laplanders who had been a great success at the same venue two years previously, Hadlock's Esquimaux could not evoke the same interest as the narrative and pictorial representations of the regions from whence they came. Compounding the situation was the fact that Hadlock had managed to assemble only a very small assortment of "natural and artificial curiosities," which were inexplicably jumbled up with a panoply of unrelated items, most of them from New Zealand -- including apparently the corpse of a "Zealand Chief," said to have died the year previous but "beautifully and tastefully tattooed."^{xix} Despite the fact that the New Zealand artifacts were credited to the "Bay Isles, South Pole," it must have been fairly common knowledge even in London that New Zealand was hardly an Antarctic wilderness.^{xx} Hadlock's half-hearted attempt to symbolically join the antipodes was poorly received and attended, and he was obliged to close the Egyptian Hall show and try his luck in the provinces and on the continent.^{xxi} When the Esquimaux next made their appearance in London, it was, as with Ross and his crew, in the form of paint on canvas -- courtesy of Robert Burford, the inheritor of Barker's franchise on the Panorama at Leicester-Square, and Henry Courtney Selous, a gifted young painter employed by Burford to assist him in producing this latest of Arctic circles.^{xxii}

There the whole of London could see in one sweep the whole progress of Ross's journey, a thing rendered possible in part because the ice-bound *Victory* never made it more than a few miles from her first winter harbor. Selous was also willing to take some poetic license with the landscape, particularly in order to include James Ross's sledge-trip on which he found the North Magnetic Pole -- which, even if not the *geographic* pole, was certainly an accomplishment of particular pleasure to John Ross, who had been lampooned as a pole-hopping Munchausen when it had not even been his goal. Both Rosses felt that the discovery of the location of the pole justified their whole expedition, and since it appeared clear from their reconnaissance that Prince Regent Inlet was certainly not a potential route to the Passage, it was a fortuitous change of focus. Selous brought the pole within sight of the ships -- it was in fact a two week sledge-journey away -- but at least placed it on the distant horizon. Another telescopic sight was the inclusion of King William Land, where James Ross had reached the expedition's furthest west -- over 98° -- at a spot he named Victory Point. It was only a scant 200 miles from this point to Franklin's surveyed coast at Point Turnagain, from which the passage west was known, and Ross hopefully gave Franklin's name to a nearby cape at the edge of his line of vision, though he doubted in his journal that anyone would ever return to the spot. Little did he know that he was naming, and Selous would be painting, the very place where Sir John Franklin would later meet his death, a season before his scurvy-ravaged crews would abandon their ships and begin a slow march to nowhere.

Selous, in his drive to represent the entirety of the Rosses' four-winter sojourn, telescoped not only space but time. The *Victory* was depicted housed-in for the first winter (1829-30) at Felix Harbour, but off to the right of the "Esquimaux village" the circular key indicated "Sheriff's Harbour," the winter anchorage of 1830-31, and some ways past this, "Victory Harbour," the ship's final resting place, where she was berthed for 1831-32 (fig. 3). While it was true that these anchorages were only a few miles from one another, they were never in plain sight, and of course the significance of the later harbors at the

moment ostensibly represented in the Panorama -- the crews' meeting with the Esquimaux in January of 1830 -- would have been nil. Nonetheless, the representation of all three harbors, all within the great circle of the viewer's wandering gaze, made a strong impression of the desolate indifference of the Arctic landscape, a place where all the efforts of the crew for the whole year's sailing 'season' -- often only a few weeks -- could scarcely move one ship from one place to any other of advantage. The circularity of the key, like the circularity of the Panorama itself, were in this instance the circles of a panoptic prison, though not of the kind described by Jeremy Bentham. This was a panopticon of landscape, where every direction of the compass was visible, even the direction of the place from which the compass's movement emanated -- but in which no sight, no bearing, could be taken as a means of escape or return.



Some of the chronological and geographical compression of this panorama may, in fact, be due to the fact that Sir John Ross himself played a part in its design, albeit a not entirely welcome one. For in addition to the usual claim of being “based on sketches made at the spot,” the Selous panorama of Boothia was favored, even as it was being painted, with several visits by its most prominent subject, who did not at all hesitate to criticize its accuracy and make pointed suggestions for its improvement. Thanks to the fortuitous survival of Selous’s diary for this period, we have a unique account of the interaction of artist and explorer, a relationship which was evidently uncomfortable from the start. Even before Ross’s first visit, Selous had a sense of foreboding, confiding to

his diary on the eve of the event:

Monday 25 November 1833: Had a good practise [playing violin] and afterwards went to the painting room and retouched upon the sketch of the north pole. I am afraid when Captn Ross comes tomorrow he will destroy a great many flights of fancy of ours...^{lxxiii}

His fears were evidently realized, as the next day's entry reads:

Tuesday 26 November 1833: Went to the painting room and assisted in making arrangements for the reception of the canvas for commencing the new picture of the discoveries of Captn Ross at the north pole I certainly did porter's work on half a pint of ale after waiting till near 4 O Clock Captn. Ross made his appearance and did us the favour of obliterating nearly half our sketch and we shall have to commence our work over again...'

On a second occasion, two days later, Selous went to the painting room and was irritated to find Ross already at work "making the necessary alterations." Clearly, there was little love lost between artist and explorer. Yet both Ross and Selous appear to have shared a similar desire to create with this Panorama an entirely new kind of visual experience, one in which the landscape, and particularly the sky, was as much the center of attention as the explorers. Ross was particularly emphatic on the accuracy of the light, it appears that Selous consulted some of Ross's own watercolors to obtain the accurate shading for what the explorer dubbed the "Arctic twilight," a reddish glow on the horizon which stood exactly opposite from the Aurora in the great circle of the painting.

The overall plan of the Panorama's fields of vision, however, was not entirely dissimilar to Barker's 1820 depiction. The near foreground still loomed, with angular masses of ice filling all of the circle except the small portion where human figures gathered. The mid-ground remained calm, though the now water was *entirely* frozen, providing no relief from the white monotony of the scene; the *Victory* herself, fronted by a snow-wall, her decks housed over with white canvas, was blended by this camouflage into the broader fields of snow and ice. The background, perhaps, was less dramatic -- the few headlands and hills that inflected its borders were rounded and sloped, and flags planted at several points have the effect -- at least in the illustration in the programme -- of making these outcrops seem somewhat less daunting.

The human figures nonetheless remain dwarfed by the immensity of the land. Here, the principal scene is that of an encounter between the crew of the *Victory* and the Inuit, whose village can be seen as a distant clutter of white hemispheres. The parties having already met and exchanged greetings, they are proceeding together in the direction of the ship. Captain Ross, wearing not his uniform but much more appropriate "Polar Dress," holds a pike in his right hand, and with his left gestures towards the others.^{xxiv} To his right, "Illictu," an old man which the Inuit sent at the head of their party, is drawn in a sledge by some of Ross's men (Ross, typically, refers to him being drawn by "Capt. Ross and his party of sailors," even though Ross is simply directing them). This group is

followed by "Tulloochiu," the one-legged man for whom the ship's carpenter later made a wooden leg, also drawn in a sledge. Around him are a number of figures, though whether of Inuit or Ross's crew it is hard to say from the limited detail of the key; at the back is James Ross apparently talking with an Inuk, and also gesturing towards the ship.

But of all this panorama, with its twenty-one features noted by number in the engraved key, the feature which most powerfully inscribed itself on the public mind was not the land at all, but the sky, which elicited a notice of unexpected enthusiasm in *The Times*:

The interest of these scenes fades almost into insignificance before the singular effect produced by the painting of the sky. The vast and clear firmament is studded with myriads of stars (whose apparent magnitude and relative position, we are assured, are preserved), of such refulgent brightness, that to the eye of the beholder they actually appear to scintillate. At the same time, they are so well relieved from all surrounding objects, that they seem to be floating in the immense ocean of space. The same remark may with equal justice be applied to a beautiful representation of the Aurora Borealis--a welcome visiter [sic] in those dreary wilds during the long absence of the sun. The varied hues and their gaseous appearance of this brilliant meteor are very happily depicted; but arduous as must have been the production of these effects, perhaps the greatest difficulty which the artist has had to overcome is the representation of the sombre yet clear twilight which pervades this desolate region for so long a period of the year. The effect is beautifully maintained throughout the picture, and it imparts to the painting a solemn stillness perfectly in accordance with the awful aspect of the scene.^{xxv}

The Aurora Borealis, however, was only one aspect of the treatment of light that made such an impression on the reviewer. *The Times*, in general, took brief or no notice of Panorama shows, but nearly filled a column with this review, which included a lengthy quote from John Ross's description of the scene.

The quality of light described by the reviewer is difficult to recover in the absence of the painting itself. Perhaps it was something like Frederic Church's "Aurora Borealis" of 1864-5, where, below the arcing, iridescent ribbons of the Aurora, the sky is a burnished grey-green, a color which dominates the picture except for a streak of red in the center of the aurora, which is echoed on the neighboring mountain peak. The programme for the Boothia panorama does refer to "an arch of bright and crimson light" -- yet this is not the aurora but 'arctic twilight,' a mid-day refraction of visible solar light, "always visible about noon, even when the sun was in its greatest southern declension"^{xxvi} The aurora in fact is placed *opposite* this light in the virtual "north" of the view, and is described as an "extraordinary and brilliant phenomenon . . . vividly darting its brilliant corruscations towards the Zenith in endless variety, and tinging the ice and snow with its pale and mellow light."^{xxvii} In fact, the most remarkable thing about the 1834 panorama is that, in fully half of its cylindrical sweep, there are no humans and scant other items of compelling interest in sight; having been "so well relieved from all surrounding objects," the silent ground gives way to the music of the celestial spheres, reinforcing both the silence of the "dreary wilds" and the phantasmic splendor of "this brilliant meteor." The

light of this aurora thus diffuses an otherworldly quality to sky and ice alike, and along with the "twilight" coloration of the opposite hemisphere, were for *The Times's* reviewer the painting's most memorable effects.

In much the same way that the public gaze had first misprisioned Ross's destination in 1818, assuming that any journey north must be a journey to the Pole, this scene, with the silent magnetism of what is, in fact, quite nearly "no earthly pole," draws the viewers' eyes away from the comparatively perfunctory business of exploration, meetings with natives, or ship's harborage, and into the heart of an almost extraterrestrial territory, a place whose very light emanates from new and different bodies, shadowing each element of the "awful aspect of the scene," and making in the process a whole landscape in a minor 'key.' It is contained, in a sense, like a larger version of a "ship in a bottle" -- but without any horizontal exit, it is the firmament which finally provides a means for the eye to lean over the panoptic railing of Burford's proprietary view. It is this upward yearning of the gaze that drew in the reviewer for *The Times*, and which would cast a very extended shadow into all further spectacles of these "almost unknown regions" -- regions whose sublimity was ever underwritten by the terrific splendor of a light which never shone on any other part of earth, and seemed in fact to shine upon a realm disjunct from earth itself.

ⁱParry, William Edward, *Journal of a Voyage for the Discovery of a Northwest Passage . . . performed in the years 1819-20 in His Majesty's Ships Hecla and Griper, under the orders of William Edward Parry, R.N., F.R.S., and Commander of the Expedition* .

Philadelphia: Printed and Published for Abraham Small, 1821, p. 114.

ⁱⁱ Not everyone was able to see these plates; first American edition, published in Philadelphia in 1821 by Abraham Small (see n.1), was printed in a reduced octavo format, without illustrations, though it did include a fold-out map of Parry's discoveries.

ⁱⁱⁱ Chauncey Loomis, "The Arctic Sublime" in *Nature and the Victorian Imagination*, ed. . . U. C. Knoepfelmacher and G. B. Tennyson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977).

^{iv} This aspect of Westall's work is noted in his entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, where Michael Twyman is quoted as saying "there can't have been many draughtsmen of the period that mastered so many different processes."

^v I am indebted to Richard Westall, author of the entry for William Westall in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, for his elucidation and emphasis of this point (Richard Westall, e-mail to the author, March 15 2005).

^{vi} Hyde, *Panoromania*, p. 132

^{vii} Enslen's and Sacchetti's productions differed from the large fixed-circle panoramas chiefly in their size, and were at times referred to as "cosmoramas," at other times as "hemicycloramas." As Stephan Oettermann describes these productions, they usually consisted of "landscape scenes, painted in watercolors on strips of paper 18-20 feet long and up to 3 1/2 feet high. They were then mounted to form a semicircle and enclosed in a case. To view them, visitors stepped up to a matching semicircle of magnifying lenses set in the front of the case" (*The Panorama*, p. 69). While Enslen's, also referred to as "minature panoramas," were apparently typical of the form, Sacchetti's, part of his "Topographical Art Gallery," were larger, but still portable. For a supposed revival of Sacchetti's panorama in 1853, see below p. #.

^{viii} There is evidence that Friedrich attended panoramas, and even that he had at one point planned to paint one of his own; see Oettermann, *The Panorama: History of a Mass Medium* (NY: Zone Books, 1997), p. 47.

^{ix} Friedrich may have read of this incident in an early German review of Parry's book which ran in the *Literarisches Conversationsblatt* in January of 1821.

^x Sir Hugh Willoughby's *Bona Esperanza* ("Good Hope") was perhaps the most famous example, and when Charles Dickens alluded indirectly to the Franklin search ship H.M.S. *Resolute* in his and Wilkie Collins's play *The Frozen Deep*, he renamed it the "Hope."

^{xi} It's worth noting that Arctic expeditions often began by sailing up the British coastline, stopping at several ports, the last of which was usually Stromness in Scotland.

^{xii} Dodge, *The Polar Rosses*, p. 116-17. The cook never showed up, however, because his wife refused to let him go, writing in a letter to Ross that "he must be mad ever to think of leaving a comfortable home, to be frozen in with ice, or torn to pieces with bears."

^{xiii} This passage has been quoted by the contemporary Inuit writer Alootook Ipellie, who remarks that "A modern-day explorer can use the same words and still be close to explaining the truth about the nature of the Inuit and his environment."

^{xiv} Quoted in Berton, *The Arctic Grail*, p. 115.

^{xv} *Ibid.*, p. 115.

^{xvi} *An Interesting account of those extraordinary people, the Esquimaux Indians, from Baffin's Bay, North Pole to which is affixed a vocabulary of Esquimaux words, translated into English by George Niagungitok, and a catalogue of the Museum of Natural and Artificial Curiosities, which accompany the exhibition of the Esquimaux Indians.*

Sheffield: Printed by G. Ridge, 1824. The last Inuit to arrive in England had been a group brought to London by Captain George Cartwright in 1772. See Altick, *The Shows of London*, pp. 47-48 and p. 275.

^{xvii} *An Interesting account*, pp. 33-36. The "grand panoramic view" was likely similar to that used for the Laplanders (see Altick, *The Shows of London*, p. 48 for a reproduction of Rowlandson's illustration of that show) – which was in fact a three-sided wall-painting more akin to a theatrical backdrop than to Barker or Burford's vast circular canvasses.

^{xviii} Kenn Harper, who is fluent in Inuktitut and has devoted considerable study to the Inuit brought over by Hadlock, has long held that the couple most likely came from Hopedale, Labrador, a view which has recently been confirmed by a letter written by a former Hopedale missionary who met and spoke with “George” while Hadlock was exhibiting him in Germany. This area, which was visited early on by Moravian missionaries and whaling vessels, was the source of a number of Inuit who were displayed in European capitals, including Mikak in 1767 and Caubvick in 1772; even as late as 1880, a party of eight Inuit were taken from Nachvak, Labrador for display at Karl Hagenbeck’s Zoo in Hamburg, Germany. See Tim Borlase, *The Labrador Inuit*, Goose Bay: Labrador East Integrated School Board, 1993, pp. 156-165.

^{xix} *An Interesting account* , pp. 4-5.

^{xx} The Esquimaux themselves were similarly antipodized, being said to be from "Baffin's Bay, North Pole," even though they were actually from Labrador; the programme itself gave them the equally inconsistent origin of "73 deg. north latitude, and 95 deg. west longitude" -- which was in the middle of the as-yet unknown and unnamed Boothia peninsula, not visited by Europeans until John and James Ross's expedition of 1829-33 (*An Interesting account*, p. [3]). Large sections of this pamphlet were quoted from Parry’s accounts.

^{xxi} In Hadlock's diary, published in a highly-edited form many years after his death, it appears that the female Inuk he brought with him died early on in his travels, perhaps even before the London show. This did not defeat Hadlock, who simply replaced her with other women who seemed to him to be of the appropriate "kuller"!

^{xxii} Selous, better known for his large easel paintings such as his depiction of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert's opening of the Crystal Palace exhibition, worked on and off for Burford for much of his career.

^{xxiii} Selous's diary, first found and identified by Ralph Hyde, and later by Carol Cronquist, is in the library of the Victoria and Albert Museum, MSL/1979/5117.

^{xxiv} I take the small frontispiece of Barker's programme, "Portrait of Captain Ross in his Polar Dress," as likely being a detail from the panorama, since Ross's stance and gesture in the "key" are almost identical.

^{xxv} *The Times*, 14 January 1834.

^{xxvi} *Description of a View of the Continent of Boothia, discovered by Captain Ross in his late Expedition to the Polar Regions, now exhibiting at the Panorama, Leicester Square. Painted by the proprietor, Robert Burford, from drawings taken by Captain Ross in 1830.* London: J. & G. Nichols, 1834, p. 5. Something of this particular light may be guessed from John Ross's own watercolor of the scene of his meeting with the "Esquimaux," which survives; see Brendan Lahane, *The Seafarers: The Northwest Passage*, Alexandria, Va.: Time-Life Books, 1981, pp. 118-19 for a full-color reproduction.

^{xxvii} *Ibid.* p. 5