

“A Paradise of My Own Creation”: *Frankenstein* and the Improbable Romance of Polar Exploration

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the letter that opens Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818), Robert Walton reminds his sister of his childhood ardor for narratives of voyages and discovery. He longed to “embark on a sea-faring life,” but, he continues,

These visions faded when I perused, for the first time, those poets whose effusions entranced my soul, and lifted it to heaven. I also became a poet, and for one year, lived in a Paradise of my own creation. (51)

There is something arresting about the easy transition Walton remembers making between reading travel narratives and reading and writing poetry, between yearning to participate in expeditions of discovery and striving, as a poet, to “obtain a niche in the temple where the names of Homer and Shakespeare are consecrated” (51). In the 1818 text, Walton does not specify which poets or which travel writers he read, but in the 1831 text, Shelley has him credit the influence of the author of “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” on his fantasies of voyaging.¹ Of Coleridge (who, unlike Walton, successfully converted his passion for travel tales into poetry), J. L. Lowes remarks, “It is small wonder that voyages into unknown seas and travels along uncharted roads have always profoundly stirred imaginative minds” (114).²

This “small wonder”—the appeal of narratives of voyages to the “imaginative mind”—bears further exploration. In both travel narratives and poetry, Walton sought a “Paradise of my own creation.” In his poetic endeavors he hoped both to create paradises and to vault himself into a paradisaal pantheon of great poets, yet when he inherits a cousin’s fortune and recognizes his failure to sustain the paradise of poetry he turns easily back to travel narratives. Older and financially independent now, he will not simply read explorers’ journals but will follow their path: he sets out on an expedition to the pole. Poetry still has power over Walton; his vision of his voyage is shaped by the poetic language of travel narratives and of classical descriptions of hyperborean regions and peoples in Herodotus, Pliny, and Virgil.³ He anticipates a polar paradise, a “region of beauty and delight” (49), a “country of

eternal light" (50). Though few of the polar explorers whose narratives Walton is supposed to have read share his belief in a hyperborean Eden, they do search for a fantastical paradise of a kind: an open, navigable sea over the North Pole. Polar explorers, particularly in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, devoted themselves to this ever-elusive quest despite centuries of failed attempts to reach the pole by ship, because they believed in the literature of these attempts, a romance that disregarded the testimony of failed voyagers and the odds against the possibility of an open polar sea. In the era of eye-witnessing and empirical experiments, failed attempts to reach the pole only encouraged further experiments as each explorer sailed north to confront the polar ice for himself. The cumulative accounts of these voyages form a narrative of improbable yet perpetual desire, a romance of polar exploration no less an enterprise of creation than Walton's beloved poetry.⁴

The creation of this improbable romance is implicit in Shelley's framing of *Frankenstein*. There is a well-developed critical discussion of the relation of the frame narrative, Robert Walton's polar quest, to the tale told by the man whom he pulls off the Arctic ice, Victor Frankenstein.⁵ Frankenstein himself remarks the similarity to his transgressive science: "You seek for knowledge and wisdom, as I once did," he reminds Walton (62). Yet only the briefest attention has been paid to the historical resonance of Shelley's resort to a narrative of polar voyage. If the word "Frankenstein" is a cliché at the turn of the twenty-first century for science on the frontiers of genetics and biomedicine, this synonymy reflects in part Shelley's alignment of her novel with science on a different kind of frontier: the British attempts to reach the North Pole by ship. Polar exploration had specific cultural significance both in the revolutionary 1790s, when Walton's tale is set, and in 1818, after Waterloo, when *Frankenstein* was published. When Shelley decided to add a polar frame narrative some time between September 1816 and April 1817,⁶ it was at a moment when both the history and the future of polar exploration were subject to increasingly fervent discussion in scientific circles and popular journals in England. Victor's tale of over-reaching scientific undertakings is deliberately situated against the Arctic expeditions that were about to set sail. Shelley not only draws on but contends with the improbable romance of polar exploration, an enterprise with the phantasmal incentive of a temperate polar sea beyond the Arctic ice.

My attention to *Frankenstein* and polar exploration builds on several related critical contexts in which Shelley's oeuvre has been read. Jeanne Moskal documents Shelley's saturation in travel writing during the years of *Frankenstein*'s preparation for publication; we can add to this account the genre of polar travel narratives. Esther Schor argues that Shelley's ethic of traveling and travel writing, especially in *Rambles in Germany and Italy* (1844), stressed sympathy, impressionability, and sensitivity to the land and peoples the traveler visits. It becomes more difficult to read Walton sympathetically when we measure him, as the author of a polar travel narrative, against Shelley's standard. Anne K. Mellor argues that as a feminist critique of science, Shelley's novel demonstrates her preference for the descriptive scientific practice of Erasmus Darwin over the penetrating science of Humphry Davy and Luigi Galvani, whose experiments serve as models for Frankenstein's "unhallowed arts." When we extend Shelley's feminist critique of science to include polar exploration, that critique looks both richer and more complicated. Polar exploration narratives reveal descriptive science to be an art of creation rather than an act of objective recording; as such, descriptive science carries many of penetrating science's risks in addition to the perils that Shelley saw in other arts of creation, particularly in Walton's first love, poetry. Ultimately, as an act of creation, like poetry, Shelley subjects the revival of

polar exploration in 1818 to the scrutiny that her novel gives broadly to Romantic projects of what Mary Poovey calls “imaginative self-assertion” (149).

II. POLAR HISTORIES

In January 1818, the month *Frankenstein* was published, the British Admiralty began to outfit a large, costly, exploratory expedition to the polar region, the first major voyage since the wars with America and France. Sir John Barrow, Second Secretary to the Royal Admiralty, suggested that the officers and ships consigned to peacetime unemployment since Waterloo be used to take advantage of a polar thaw reported by whalers in 1817.⁷ He proposed an expedition that could “correct the very defective geography of the arctic regions” by attempting “a direct passage over the pole” (“Article XI” 204). In articles in the *Quarterly Review*, beginning in the October 1816 issue (published Feb. 1817; Shelley notes reading the *Quarterly* on May 29 & 30 1817) and in a book-length study, *Chronological History of Voyages into the Arctic Region* (1818), Barrow worked to secure governmental and popular support for British polar exploration.⁸ His extensive writing on the Northwest Passage and polar exploration in the *Quarterly* was so popular that it “was believed to have added some thousands of names to . . . the subscriber list” of that journal (Shine xvi).

Drawing on the practice of earlier polar enthusiasts, empiricists for whom the failure of expeditions proved nothing but that further expeditions were necessary, Barrow gained public support for the 1818 voyages by recounting the history of unsuccessful polar exploration as a narrative of progress and promise. British polar exploration began in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries with a search for sea routes to new markets for English goods.⁹ Not coincidentally, Shelley has Robert Walton plot his course from northern Russia, where the British made the first attempt at a Northeast Passage in 1554. This voyage, though it yielded no eastern route, inaugurated English trade with Russia when the crew of one ship took refuge in the port of Arkhangel’sk (anglicized as “Archangel” in *Frankenstein*).¹⁰ Having established trade with Russia, the British abandoned the search for a Northeast Passage (though explorers such as Cabot, Baffin, and Hudson continued to search for a Northwest Passage across the northern part of the American continent in the seventeenth century). Russian navigators, however, continued to explore the waters north of Arkhangel’sk, making it one of the best charted regions in the Arctic by the time Walton sails out of the Archangel port on his voyage and thus a very unlikely place to discover a new route to the pole.¹¹

While the Russians were exploring their part of the Arctic, the British and Dutch had turned to whaling, and every summer ships from both countries crowded the waters near Greenland and Spitzbergen in search of whales. The success of the whaling industry and the Hudson’s Bay Company monopoly of trade from North America had stifled the mercantile motives which, despite repeated failures, had propelled the quest for the Northwest Passage. Remote markets for English goods had been secured by the first half of the eighteenth century, so that private merchants and the government could focus on stabilizing the growing trading empire, rather than on further exploration. In the second half of the century, British interest in polar exploration gradually revived, in part because of the very success of trade. Latecomers wanted to get in on the business of empire, and renewed interest in finding a polar passage was fueled by a reaction against the monopolies of trading companies, who were suspected of thwarting exploratory expeditions that might threaten their

domination of the established trade routes. In 1742, for example, when the British Admiralty funded a voyage by Christopher Middleton, a former employee of the Hudson's Bay Company, his sailors accused him of accepting a bribe of £5000 from the Company *not* to discover a Northwest Passage. He was charged with falsifying information and with avoiding areas where discoveries would be likely (Barrow, *Chronological* 284–85). Middleton's fraud only confirmed polar enthusiasts' tendency to discount the testimony of explorers who described the Arctic as impassable by ship. The Admiralty quickly dispatched another expedition under a captain who was not in the pay of a monopolizing company; he was no more able than Middleton to find a Northwest Passage.

But economics no longer prevailed as the primary justification for polar voyages; there were too many other opportunities for an English merchant to make money in international trade without the risks of searching for a polar passage to the East. With the increasing importance of empirical science, a voyage of exploration could be warranted as a mission to verify new hypotheses as well as a venture to open new markets (Vasbinder 66). In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, expeditions did not rely only on the observations made by captain and crew, but also carried a dedicated scientist on board who worked to understand the behavior of the compass in polar regions and to make notes on arctic flora and fauna. Shelley draws on this expanded cultural mission when she has Walton list the scientific justifications for his expedition: "I may there discover the wondrous power which attracts the needle; and may regulate a thousand celestial observations, that require only this voyage to render their seeming eccentricities consistent forever" (50). The contributions he hopes to make to science were much needed; the compass and "the secret of the magnet," as Walton dramatically describes it, were still imperfectly understood. In 1588 Gerard Mercator had noted that "because the loadstone hath another pole than that of the world . . . the nearer you come unto the loadstone, the more the needle of the compass doth vary from the north. . . . This is a strange alteration and very apt to deceive the sailor" (Pinkerton 1: 68–69). The behavior of the compass in the polar region still plagued eighteenth-century explorers. On a polar voyage in 1773, though the ship's instruments of observation were of the highest quality, Captain Phipps was often unable to get the same reading of latitude or direction twice in one ten-minute period (Pinkerton 1: 568–69). Alexander Dalrymple, who tried in the 1780s to make the polar regions of Mercator's maps more accurate, complained about the explorer Samuel Hearne, who, during a journey from December 1770 to June 1772, "gives no observation in his journal for the latitude . . . but in June 1771; . . . it is a very extraordinary circumstance, that he should have given no observation, during the whole of this intermediate time: it indicates great room for suspicion of the instrument, an elton's quadrant, or of his ability to use it" (Dalrymple 7). In the polar regions, even the testimony of supposedly objective instruments was unreliable. Despite this uncertainty of evidence gathering in high latitudes, the most important aspect of the scientific mission of polar voyages was to provide empirical verification of the "open polar sea theory," Robert Walton's passionate focus.

The fantastical theory of an open polar sea was magnetically attractive precisely because the progress of ships traveling in the Arctic had always been arrested after a certain point by huge fields of floating ice, called "pack ice" for the way it separated and rejoined in large compacted structures, stretching across the horizon. Reading a paper to the Royal Society in 1772, titled "The Practicability of Circumnavigating the Pole Asserted," Daines Barrington, a judge with an amateur passion for polar exploration, described the topography of the Arctic region as a thick ring of this pack

ice beyond which, he hypothesized, there was an open and temperate sea over the pole. In some seasons, he believed, the ice was not as solid as it appeared, and there were fissures in the wall of ice which would allow passage across the open sea beyond. To explain more than two hundred years' worth of failed expeditions, Barrington speculated that most journeys of discovery had reached the pack ice too late in the summer; if a ship could reach this point in early spring, the first thaws would open fissures leading to the temperate sea. Suggesting her awareness of this discussion, Shelley subtly indicates Walton's incompetence as an expedition leader (despite his extensive reading and apprenticeships on Greenland whaling vessels) when she has him begin his journey on a rather late date, July 7th. Whether Walton is simply a poor planner, or, as Frankenstein himself fears, he "share[s] my madness," a departure date so late in the season all but dooms his enterprise to failure from the outset (319).

Barrington's enthusiasm for the open polar sea theory convinced the Admiralty to fund a two-ship expedition, under the command of Constantine John Phipps, in 1773. Even so, the idea of the open polar sea remained purely theoretical. Despite a strategic spring departure date, the ships were halted by impenetrable pack ice, and Phipps reached only between 80 and 81 degrees North latitude—just 25 miles farther than Hudson had gone almost two hundred years earlier (Edwards 179). Olaudah Equiano, a former slave who went on Phipps's expedition as a free man, described the frustration of the voyage in his best-selling autobiography, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa the African, Written by Himself* (1789).¹² The ships were trapped in ice for eleven days, and the crew nearly despaired of escaping. For four days, Equiano and others tried to haul the ships' boats across the ice to open water, though none was to be seen. Finally, the wind changed, broke up the ice, and released the ships. In Equiano's view, the expedition was successful in its mission to gather empirical data: "we fully proved the impracticability of finding a passage that way to India" (Edwards 134). Yet Barrington and the Admiralty did not find such testimony conclusive.

Equiano's use of the word "impracticability" has particular resonance because Barrington's paper advocating the expedition had emphasized the "practicability" of a polar passage. But the alternative titles Barrington affixed to his polar tracts suggest why, though the mission of the expedition was to gather empirical evidence, Barrington felt free to reject the crew's interpretation of that evidence. In 1775, when Barrington published a collection of his addresses to the Royal Society, he shifted his emphasis from "practicability"—suggesting the British were capable of finding a polar passage—to "probability." The change in terms signals a decline from certainty to likelihood and makes explicit the problem of evaluating evidence, witnesses, and testimony that plagued historians of polar exploration.¹³ As a judge, Barrington was accustomed to the task of weighing the likelihood of evidence and testimony; he may have been familiar with the developments in mathematical and philosophical probability theory that addressed the problem of evaluating likelihood in the face of uncertainty.¹⁴ The revised title "The Probability of Reaching the North Pole Discussed" also suggests, however, the casuistical probabilism, attacked by Pascal and Hume, by which one may "follow a course of action that is recommended by some authority even when more or weightier authorities counsel the opposite course of action" (Hacking 24).¹⁵ Despite his profession as a judge, Barrington's response to the failure of Phipps' voyage indulges in probabilism, a continued belief in the open polar sea based on supportive anecdotes rather than on the disappointments of Phipps's crew.

Despite the result of Phipps's voyage, "the opinions of Mr. Barrington upon the possibility of proceeding farther, under different circumstances, remained unshaken,"

Colonel Beaufoy tells readers of his 1818 reprint of Barrington's papers (v). Barrington's confidence in the face of failure, according to Barrow, was consistent with responses to earlier failed expeditions. After the scandal of Captain Middleton's fraudulent voyage in 1742, "the public opinion in favour of the existence of a northwest passage was not in the least shaken" (Barrow, *Chronological* 287). Even earlier, Edward Fenton (a captain under the sixteenth-century explorer Frobisher), "notwithstanding three unsuccessful attempts for the discovery of a Northwest Passage . . . remained firmly persuaded that such a passage was practicable, and might be resumed with the strongest probability of success" (Barrow, *Chronological* 96). Barrington once again addressed the Royal Society, but this time in defense of the project on which, at his urging, the Admiralty had spent so lavishly. Under the title, "Instances of Navigators who have reached High Northern Latitudes," Barrington compiled examples from the history of polar exploration that supported the open polar sea theory. Faced with Phipps's inability to reach a high latitude, Barrington lists at great length navigators who claim—however dubiously—to have gone much farther north than Phipps could. He responds to the empirical experience of two ships-full of men with highly circumstantial anecdotes from long-dead explorers. Barrington's defense of polar exploration by anecdote appears to have been convincing; rather than declare the open polar sea theory disproved, the Admiralty sent Phipps on a second expedition, and Parliament officially consecrated the project of Arctic quest with a reward of £20,000 for the discovery of a Northwest Passage by any route and by any ship, including those of the Royal Navy. An award of £5,000 would go to any ship approaching within one latitudinal degree of the pole (M.J. Ross 27).

The unreliability of testimony in the polar regions presented an opportunity for fraud and a problem for the administration of these rewards. There were no immediate attempts to claim them, but on August 5 1786 a letter appeared in the *Ipswich Journal* in which Capt. James Wyatt claimed to have reached 89° N. He described the sea to be open and the weather fairly mild, until his ship came to a huge polar volcano sitting over the North Pole, spewing phosphorescent nitrous crystals (which Wyatt thought must cause the *aurora borealis*). Wyatt did not stay to investigate, however, "being apprehensive of the most fatal consequences" from the volcano, and turned his ship southward. He concludes his letter, "I request you will be pleased to solicit the parliamentary reward for me, for having passed certain latitudes" (Jones 9). This letter was clearly considered fraudulent, but when the Parliamentary rewards and the Admiralty's continued investment in polar exploration were based merely on uncertain anecdote, verifying accounts such as Wyatt's became particularly difficult.

If the nation's continued investment in polar exploration after Phipps's unsuccessful voyage was based on a probabilistic selection of anecdote and opinion rather than the empirical experience of Phipps's crew, it is no wonder that Shelley's Walton, like Barrington, ignores empirical experience and marshals choice opinions to support his polar voyage. As he walks through St. Petersburg before embarking, Walton writes to his sister that though he feels the cold wind, he tries "in vain to be persuaded that the pole is the seat of frost and desolation" (49). The bitter wind feeds his dreams of a temperate polar zone, when it should contradict them. In spite of what his own senses might suggest, he triumphantly predicts, "There—for with your leave sister, I will put some trust in preceding navigators—there snow and frost are banished" (49). It is significant that Shelley situates Walton's voyage in the 1790s, after the failure of four major polar voyages, for if he really were to trust "preceding navigators," he would probably not undertake his voyage at all. Walton shares his counterintuitive interpretation of contrary evidence with Victor Frankenstein, who describes how

“sometimes, on the very brink of certainty, I failed; yet I still clung to the hope which the next day or the next hour might realize” (83). As Barrow’s histories of polar exploration show, this doggedly optimistic interpretation of failure, while common to all scientists, was especially characteristic of polar explorers. When a Spaniard claimed to have proceeded through a Northwest Passage in the sixteenth century, his story, even when it was discovered to be false, had “encouraging effects” on exploration, “spur[ring] on a spirit of adventure, by holding out the hope of certain success from perseverance” (Barrow, *Chronological* 90). The trust Walton puts in “preceding navigators,” then, is not a trust in what they have seen or experienced, but in their system of justifying new expeditions by the failure, rather than the success, of previous voyages.

Failure even proves an enticement. Beyond the monetary reward offered by Parliament were the ideological rewards of the masculine romance of conquest, penetration, and possession.¹⁶ Frankenstein’s university tutor, M. Waldman, aligns modern scientific enquiry with sexual conquest (and gynecological mastery): scientists “penetrate into the recesses of nature, and shew how she works in her hiding



Figure 1 “Map of the Countries Around the North Pole According to the Latest Discoveries.” Colonel Mark Beaufoy, F.R.S., *The Possibility of Approaching the North Pole Asserted by the Hon. D. Barrington. A New Edition with an Appendix, containing papers on the same subject, and on a Northwest Passage* (London: 1818; New York: James Eastburn & Co., 1818), frontispiece. Princeton University Library.

places" (76).¹⁷ This sexual image of the scientific method seems almost too apt for the expedition of discovery, in which sharp-prowed ships venture to unknown parts of the globe. As Shelley discovered, "penetration" was a key word in polar discourse. In his response to the failed Phipps expedition, Barrington tells the story of a Dutch captain who decided "to try whether he could not reach the Pole; and accordingly he penetrated (to the best of Dr. Campbell's recollection), as far North as 88°, where the weather was warm, and the sea perfectly free from ice, and rolling like the Bay of Biscay" (qtd. in Holland, *Farthest North* 18). The map that Beaufoy published with his reprint of Barrington's polar tracts in 1818 (see Figure 1) illustrates this sexualized geography, in which fissures in the polar ice will open up to English prows to reveal liquid warmth.¹⁸

On this "Map of the Countries Around the North Pole According to the Latest Discoveries," the top of the globe, above 58° North latitude, is laid out in a flat circle so that the viewer, rather than finding his position in England and then looking up to the pole at the top of the globe, looks down on a piece of paper, where a small circular space in the alluring center represents the North Pole. On a conventional map or globe, the pole appears as a tiny point, remote from and unimportant to Europe. But on Beaufoy's map, the northern coasts of all the continents stretch toward the pole, and the lines of longitude, now straight instead of curved as on a conventional projection, point from all directions to the center and touch, but do not penetrate, the perimeter of the small circle marked "North Pole." Inside the circle marking 80° North latitude (reminiscent of the ring of pack ice that sailors had been unable to penetrate), there are no more topographical features. Even the engraver's hatch marks indicating water generally stop at 80°, but here and there they edge across the line of latitude into the blank center, suggesting the way the successful explorer's discoveries will fill in the map. Writing about Coleridge's interest in travel narratives, Lowes remarks on "the fascinating fringes of early maps," where "the advancing territory of the known is rimmed and bounded by a dubious borderland in which the unfamiliar and the strange hold momentary sway" in a "zone of the marvellous" at once geographical and discursive (Lowes 115). Beaufoy's map reverses the traditional cartography Lowes describes; on the polar map, the known world is on the margins and the zone of the marvellous at the very center.

III. POLAR ROMANCES

Drawing on the symbolism Beaufoy's map provided, Barrow's particular achievement in 1818 was to narrate the history of polar exploration—for which there was no longer much mercantile incentive (though the Parliamentary reward was still on offer)—as the enticing romance of a centuries long national quest. When Phipps published the journal of his failed 1773 voyage, he noted in his introduction that "a voyage of a few months to an uninhabited extremity of the world, the great object of which was to ascertain a very interesting point in geography, cannot be supposed to afford much matter for the gratification of mere curiosity" (Pinkerton 1: 542). Similarly, in 1817, reporting the polar thaw that instigated Barrow's attempt to revive British polar exploration, whaler William Scoresby (who in 1815 had published a paper repudiating the open polar sea theory) concluded, "I do not conceive there is sufficient interest attached to these remote regions to induce the Government to fit out an expedition" (qtd. in M.J. Ross 28). Writing in the teeth of supposed lack of interest, Barrow inspired both the general reader and the government with the romance of polar exploration.

Elaborating this romance by building on British military pride in the post-Waterloo era, Barrow paints the polar explorer as a national hero. The epigraph to his *Chronological Voyages*, from one of Coleridge's favorite recreations, Purchas's collection of travel narratives, commends the "heroicke courage" of those who brave the polar clime to witness the agony of "monstrous icie ilands, renting themselves with the terror of their own massines" (1).¹⁹ At the end of the *Chronological Voyages*, summarizing the history he has recounted, Barrow enlists his readers' nationalism to support the recently embarked expedition:

It is sufficiently evident that the discovery of a north-west passage to India and China has always been considered as an object peculiarly British. It engaged the attention and procured the encouragement of the first literary characters of the age, and the most respectable of the mercantile class. It has received the patronage of sovereigns. . . . It never failed to excite a most lively interest among all conditions of men. . . . It would therefore have been something worse than indifference, if, in a reign which stands proudly pre-eminent for the spirit in which voyages of discovery have been conducted, England had quietly looked on, and suffered another nation to accomplish almost the only interesting discovery that remains to be made in geography, and one to which her old navigators were the first to open the way. (364)²⁰

In Barrow's vision, polar exploration will unite the classes—from literary men to merchants to monarch—behind a quest on which the very sovereignty of the nation depends as other countries pursue this "peculiarly British" goal. This national quest is further energized, like Beaufoy's map, by the romance of gender. In his most famous *Quarterly Review* essay, a review of Lieut. Chappell's *Narrative of a Voyage to Hudson's Bay*, Barrow dismisses the book in a single paragraph and introduces his all-consuming topic, "the Polar Ice and Northern Passage into the Pacific," with a Shakespearean allusion: "by looking a little farther northward we shall meet with 'metal more attractive'" ("Article XI" 199). Barrow literalizes Hamlet's bawdy description of Ophelia's magnetism, foregrounding the sexualized geography of exploration; the North Pole, like Ophelia, irresistibly attracts the explorer's compass, yet always remains just beyond his reach.

Barrow's history of polar exploration provides a cultural correlative to Patricia Parker's theory of romance as a genre which "simultaneously quests for and postpones a particular end, objective, or object" (4). The historian of polar exploration promises progressive discoveries, the attainment of higher and higher latitudes, and finally the Pole. Shelley has Frankenstein describe the "enticements of science" in similar terms: "In other studies you go as far as others have gone before you, and there is nothing more to know; but in a scientific pursuit, there is continual food for discovery and wonder" (79). In narratives of expeditions, however, forward progress is forestalled by what Stephen Greenblatt calls "discontinuous wonders." Progress, as he notes in his discussion of Renaissance travel narratives, is "perennially deferred in the traveler's relation of further anecdotes" (2–3). Polar exploration by ship could not manage to proceed beyond 81° N. latitude. Although polar discourse, especially in its late phase at the start of the nineteenth century, appears to be about progress, it is stuck in one geographical spot, rehearsing the past, speculating about the future—telling tales. Barrow's narratives, filled with ever-proliferating opinions, tales, and arguments about attempts to reach the pole, cannot describe the end of the quest, the perennially postponed Paradise beyond the pack ice.

Postponement is constitutive of romance; "when the end is defined typologically, as a Promised Land or Apocalypse," argues Parker, "'romance' is that mode or tendency which remains on the threshold before the promised end, still in the wilderness of

wandering, 'error', or 'trial'" (5). Romance shapes the narratives of polar exploration; those who support polar expeditions continually discuss the zone before the 81st parallel, and how a ship might push past this zone. When the polar explorer makes his voyage, he lives on the threshold of attainment, wandering blindly among icebergs, working from incomplete maps and error-prone instruments of observation, hoping at every moment to see a fissure leading out of the wilderness of ice into the open sea. He is often physically trapped on the threshold which is romance, his ship surrounded by ice floes.

Shelley's Walton searches for a Paradise that is not simply the pole, but a polar Eden, a "Promised Land"; in the borderland of romance, however, in "the wilderness of wandering," he meets Victor Frankenstein, hears his tale, and eventually meets the product of his quest, the deformed, alienated Creature. The goal of Walton's voyage is not only deferred in the relation of Victor's tale, but is superseded by what is told in the zone of romance. During the relation of Frankenstein's tale, the reader may forget the North Pole frame altogether; if not, one harbors no hopes that Walton's arctic quest will come to any fruition after Frankenstein has told his story. But the fact that Frankenstein's tale subsumes Walton's polar quest, that the polar narrative remains nothing more than the frame for a tale of wonder, is itself in keeping with the histories of polar exploration on which Shelley drew. Two hundred years before *Frankenstein*, Henry Hudson noted, alongside latitude and longitude observations in his published journal, and without further comment, that his men saw a mermaid by the side of their boat (Barrow, *Chronological* 184). Looking for his own improbable creature in the Arctic, Shelley's Frankenstein recognizes the peculiar propriety of his tale to this polar "zone of the marvellous" in the 1831 edition when he confesses to Walton, "Were we among the tamer scenes of nature, I might fear to encounter your unbelief, perhaps your ridicule; but many things will appear possible in these wild and mysterious regions" (321).

The Creature's own polar journey did not partake of the romance of the "zone of the marvellous," but of the romances of vengeance and suicide. He did not deliberately lead Frankenstein to "these wild and mysterious regions" in hopes of discovering Walton's polar paradise, his "country of eternal light." The paradise the Creature had hoped to inhabit with a female creature was in the hot "vast wilds of South America" (173). Denied this, he flees as far as he can from the civilization that has rejected him. As Griffin notes, "for the Monster the mountains and glaciers [are] an unmixed evil, a place of exile" (54). The Creature does not seek to penetrate the polar region; instead of trying to push through the pack ice, he lightly traverses its surface with a sledge and dogs. His successful voyage thus highlights the likely failure of Walton's quest—and that of the expedition of 1818—for an open polar sea. Like Walton, the Creature too seeks the North Pole, but only for self-immolation: "I shall seek the most northern extremity of the globe; I shall collect my funeral pile" (246). Griffin suggests his funeral pyre would be "a bitter parody of both Walton's and Frankenstein's dream of the fire in ice, underscoring the sorrow and fatality in that dream" (69). Furthermore, the Creature's polar voyage condemns Walton and Frankenstein for pursuing the enticements of science at the expense of the social ties for which the Creature longs by revealing the polar region to be nothing but "the seat of . . . desolation," the last place Walton should be searching for the warmth of a temperate sea or of male friendship.²¹

Yet by leading Frankenstein through the polar regions to his death, the Creature inadvertently validates Walton's voyage by giving him a marvellous tale to record. Writing his journal, Walton, an ardent reader of travel narratives since childhood, is

conscious of the literary trappings of the polar enterprise. He is anxious about the literary conventions of his chosen subgenre, the sea narrative, and wants to follow what he perceives to be the literary form of “experienced navigators” (56). That the captain would keep a journal on board with a view to publication was a long-standing tradition. Hakluyt, one of the first compilers of travel narratives, repeated a legend that the crews of two of the three ships searching for a Northeast passage under the command of Sir Hugh Willoughby in 1554 froze to death in various positions denoting their occupations on board, such as pulling ropes, playing cards, and adjusting sails, with Captain Willoughby frozen “as he sat at his cabin table, writing his journal” (Vaughan 58).²² Given such precedents, we can understand why Walton expresses some concern, in his third letter to his sister, that he has no impressive incidents to report beyond “one or two stiff gales” (56). But in his next letter, Walton is compelled to write; he “cannot forbear recording” the appearance of Frankenstein in his sledge, an appearance that is at once unlikely, and, within the conventions of polar narratives that report mermaid sightings and promulgate improbable anecdotes contradictory to empirical experience, completely unsurprising (56). One can sense Walton’s excitement as he begins the writing which, based on his romantic conception of the explorer, qualifies him as a true adventurer, one who has experienced the “unqualified wonder[s]” in the map’s zone of the marvellous and has a tale to tell (57).

The market for polar travel narratives was strong throughout the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth century; if the explorer was compelled to write, it seems the public was eager to buy.²³ Like many eighteenth-century novels, voyages that were not funded by the government were generally paid for by private subscription, an investment which was repaid not with the lucrative route to the East that the subscribers may have hoped for, but with a published narrative of the voyage. Barrow affixed to his *Chronological History* a preface explaining that his book could be used as a sort of introduction to “the narratives of the present voyages, which, whether successful or not, will be expected by the public” (2).²⁴ The demand for polar narratives became almost absurd in the decades following *Frankenstein*’s publication. In 1845 the prominent explorer Sir John Franklin (who had commanded one of the ships on the 1818 expedition) and his crew were lost in the Arctic on a polar expedition. Search parties were unable to trace the ships, but his wife, Lady Franklin, refused to give up on her husband, and for the next fifteen years, expeditions paid for by her or by friends embarked regularly in search of Franklin. Nearly everyone, it seems, published narratives of the searches, generating a secondary, or epiphenomenal, genre of travel-rescue narratives. Captains, mates, ship’s doctors, all printed their versions of Franklin’s disappearance and suggested new possible locations of his remains. The open polar sea quest was clearly hopeless. The genre Walton so loved, the narratives of polar voyages by ship, eventually spent itself out in competing accounts of a single lost ship.²⁵

The details Shelley gives us of Walton’s behavior as the captain of a polar expedition make it clear that her use of the Arctic frame narrative was meant to critique Barrow’s romance of polar exploration. Not only does he embark at a time and from a location that guarantee the failure of his expedition, but when in danger, Walton speaks the language of romance rather than that of a responsible captain.²⁶ In Equiano’s account, as soon as Phipps’s ice-locked ships were free, the expedition did not try to push on northward, but turned immediately toward England. Walton’s crew does not have confidence that their captain would make the same choice. Trapped in ice, they look to him for reassurance, but he has “none to bestow” (236). In the 1831 edition, Walton realizes that the loss of his men’s lives would be his fault; in the 1818 text he

plans simply to mouth Stoic platitudes in the face of death.²⁷ He evades assuring the crew-members that he will do his best to preserve their lives. When they demand he promise “that if the vessel should be freed, I would instantly direct my course southward,” he hesitates to answer and hopes that Frankenstein’s passionate description of the situation in terms of a romance quest will change their minds: “This ice . . . cannot withstand you if you say that it shall not.” The romance of polar exploration has made Walton careless of his life; although he would “rather die than return shamefully,” his crew, “unsupported by ideas of glory and honour,” does not seem to share the romantic, nationalist ideology of discovery that fuels Walton, and prefers life (239).

When Shelley added the polar frame to her manuscript, then, she gave her novel’s caution about scientific quests a specific contemporary application. By placing Walton’s voyage in the 1790s, she writes him into, and thus highlights, the series of failed polar expeditions in the eighteenth century whose history Barrow was narrating in the *Quarterly Review* and in his *Chronological History* as a romantic quest. Throughout his accounts, Barrow emphatically reiterated that his interpretation of centuries of failed polar voyages was commonly held and reasonable: “That the North Pole may be approached by sea, has long been an opinion entertained by both experienced Navigators and by men eminent for their learning and science” (231). But his strenuous efforts to gain public support for polar exploration in 1817 and 1818 did not go uncriticized. In early 1818, Bernard O’Reilly published a book on Greenland in which he pointedly concludes:

Sailing to the North Pole has long been a very favorite subject for closet lucubration; and as long as a man . . . chooses to amuse himself harmlessly, or entertain his friends with his effusions through the medium of a magazine, such pursuits are altogether allowable, but where such visionary schemes are in contemplation, as would mislead the public mind, in the same manner as the writer misleads himself, not pausing over the facts, and maturely weighing the consequences, the prudent will be careful how they admit his opinions. (243, qtd. in M.J. Ross 33)

On August 15 1818 the *Times* extracted an essay printed in the *Edinburgh Review* in June 1818 that refuted many of Barrow’s claims, and critiqued Barrow’s most famous article in the *Quarterly Review*: “much of its reasoning depended on no surer foundation than vague tradition, or the still more uncertain authority of poetical description.”

Criticism of Barrow’s enthusiasm for polar voyages also came from the *Quarterly Review* itself. John Wilson Croker, First Secretary to the Admiralty and Barrow’s superior, sarcastically dismisses the flurry of publications on polar matters in, of all places, his review of *Frankenstein*. Summarizing the book’s plot as “a tissue of horrible and disgusting absurdity,” Croker mocks Barrow, Barrington, and Beaufoy, as well as Shelley’s novel:

The monster, finding himself hard pressed, resolves to fly to the most inaccessible point of the earth; and, as our Review had not yet enlightened mankind on the real state of the North Pole, he directs his course thither as a sure place of solitude and security; but Frankenstein, who probably had read Mr. Daines Barrington and Colonel Beaufoy on the subject, was not discouraged, and follows him with redoubled vigour, the monster flying on a sledge drawn by dogs, according to the Colonel’s proposition. (381)

Croker’s point is that the Creature would not have fled to the pole if he had read Barrow’s *Quarterly Review* articles, because he would have known that the pole is covered by open water and thus could not afford him sanctuary; of course Croker

highlights their use of sledges, which implicitly disproves the open polar sea theory that Barrington, Beaufoy, and Barrow all advocate.

Though Croker did not realize it, Shelley's novel, far from simply appropriating a topic of contemporary discussion uncritically, must be counted among these voices that censured the revival of British polar exploration. In fact, the much vaunted expedition of 1818 was a failure. The captains, Buchan and Franklin, did not reach even as far north as Phipps had in the 1770s. The supposed thaw in the polar ice did the explorers little good; their ships were locked in ice several times, and they finally sailed for home on August 30, 1818. Though explorers continued to search for a Northwest Passage and to chart the topography of the Arctic, the 1818 expedition was the "last attempt by the Royal Navy to sail a ship across the Arctic Ocean" (Holland, *Arctic Exploration* 182). The British seemed finally to accept this empirical experience as proof that the polar sea was neither open nor navigable. The improbable romance of a polar passage by ship was returned to the realm of "closet lucubration" and imaginative creation. When the Admiralty sent its next expedition to the pole in 1827, under the command of William Parry, it equipped him with sledges (like those Frankenstein and the Creature use, which Scoresby had recommended as early as 1815) to carry the crew across the inevitable ice. In the wake of the failure of the 1818 expedition, Shelley's critique of polar exploration became even more overt in her 1831 revisions, where she heightens Walton's polar enthusiasm and expectations of glory and fame as an explorer.²⁸ Skeptical of romantic enthusiasm generally, by framing her novel with a narrative of a polar voyage, Shelley availed herself of the fantastic visions that polar narratives licensed, but at the same time exposed the "uncertain authority of poetical description" on which Walton's—and Barrow's—polar projects depended.

IV. CONCLUSION

For the Romantic poet, writes Marlon Ross, poetry is a means of "settling borders of self-potential and civilizing the new territories of social enterprise" (31). As Walton's alternating dreams of a paradise of poetry and an open polar sea show us, such metaphors are not accidental. William Wordsworth and Percy Bysshe Shelley saw the enterprise of scientific exploration as constitutive of Romantic poetry; for Wordsworth, poetry "is the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all Science" (396). For Percy Shelley, poetry is created in opposition to "the cultivation of those sciences which have enlarged the limits of the empire of man over the external world [while], for want of the poetical faculty, proportionally circumscrib[ing] those of the internal world" (qtd. in Marlon Ross 44). Whether poetry expresses the wonders of science or intangibles to which science has no access, Wordsworth and Shelley celebrate poetry's unique powers. As Ross argues, both poets "are concerned with establishing the reign of imagination in a time when conquest itself has become overwhelmingly the province of the scientist" (44). Mary Shelley is much more skeptical of a reign of the imagination. Her critique of the creative enterprise of polar exploration condemns rather than honors poetry; Walton's polar and poetic paradises both originate in "the egoism that Shelley associates with the artist's monstrous self-assertion" (Poovey 122). If *Frankenstein* illustrates "the dramatic turn against imaginative self-assertion that marks the rest of Shelley's career," reading the novel in the context of the era's raging debates about polar exploration gives us a new way to read such a rejection of Romantic claims for a reign of the imagination (Poovey 149).

More than ladylike reticence, Shelley's turn away from the claims of Romantic poetry is informed by her reading of science as a dangerously similar enterprise of creation. Walton's polar quest shows us the risks of a hubristic ethic of exploration, whether poetic or scientific, that irresponsibly creates "regions of beauty and delight" out of a world that is stark and cold.

NOTES

I am grateful to Susan Wolfson for her critical commentary on this essay. An earlier version was delivered at the North East American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies meeting, 2000.

1. In the 1831 edition, Walton writes to his sister, "You will smile at my allusion [to the Ancient Mariner]; but I will disclose a secret. I have often attributed my attachment to, my passionate enthusiasm for, the dangerous mysteries of the ocean, to that production of the most imaginative of modern poets" (318).
2. Other "imaginative minds" that have been "profoundly stirred" by childhood reading of polar voyages testify to the poetic power of these narratives. Joseph Conrad "claimed to have been inspired as a writer by the diary of a polar explorer"; Conrad also endows Marlow in *Heart of Darkness* with a similar childhood fascination for maps of the North Pole (Bloom 138n.). Of one of his favorite polar narratives, Leopold McClintock's *The Voyage of the "Fox" in the Arctic Seas* (1859), Conrad wrote, "There could hardly have been imagined a better book for letting in the breath of the stern romance of polar exploration. . . . [It] sent me off on the romantic explorations of my inner self" (Conrad 16–17; see also Murfin 7–8). The 1976 Nobel Prizewinner for Physiology or Medicine, Baruch S. Blumberg, who did ground-breaking research on hepatitis B and now heads NASA's Astrobiology Institute searching for microorganisms on other worlds, avidly read polar exploration histories as a child: "Amundsen, Peary, Scott, Shackleton, Rae, Nansen were common names in my circle of friends. I believe this had an effect on my seeing science as discovery" (Wakefield 32).
3. For discussions of the classical references to the mythical Hyperboreans, see Romm, and Beck. Eric Wilson (who generously shared with me his forthcoming work on the spiritual history of ice) examines recurring dreams of a tropical Eden in the southern hemisphere in ancient, medieval, and Renaissance writers.
4. Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, explores the relationship between imaginative creation and conquest in her fantastic tale of a young woman who travels to (and beyond) the North Pole. She concludes that since the worlds one creates in imagination are as good as real, actual travel and conquest are unnecessary: "What, said the Empress, can any Mortal be a Creator? Yes, answered the Spirits; for every human Creature can create an Immaterial World fully inhabited by Immaterial Creatures, and populous of Immaterial subjects, such as we are, and all this within the compass of the head or scull; nay not only so, but he may create a World of what fashion and Government he will, and give creatures thereof such motions, figures, forms, colours, perceptions &c. as he pleases. . . . And since it is in your power to create such a World, What need you to venture life, reputation and tranquility, to conquer a gross material World?" (Newcastle 96). See Campbell's discussion of this work (202–218). Penny Fielding, in an analysis of James Hogg's "gleefully Gothic" polar adventure tale, "The Surpassing Adventures of Allan Gordon," argues that the North Pole is "a region both of the imagination and of the failure of an imagination confronted by an impossible topography" (47, 49). Thanks to Antony J. Hasler for pointing me towards Hogg's tale.
5. Andrew Griffin notes, in the most extensive analysis of the polar frame narrative, "Whether in the landscape or in the laboratory, both he [Frankenstein] and Walton seek to penetrate

ground that seems unredeemably dead, searching for a core of vital warmth unseen before" (59). He also argues that since Walton is attracted to the pole by "an impossible conjunction of hot and cold . . . it is on this Romantic vision, not on the cold fact of the ice-floes proper, that the novel really opens" (54). My analysis of narratives of polar exploration historicizes Griffin's evocation of the visionary poetics of the North pole. Rudolf Beck briefly notes the topical significance of polar exploration at the time of *Frankenstein's* publication but argues that *Paradise Lost* is the most important source for Walton's polar fantasies. Similarly, Christopher Small argues that the psychological significance of Walton's "Arctic of the mind" is more important than the historical context (43). Brief discussions of the polar frame narrative can be found in Brooks, Favret (176–196), Mellor, Ozolins, Spufford (58–62), and Ziolkowski.

6. The narrative frame, in which Walton meets Frankenstein while on a North Pole expedition, was not part of Shelley's first draft of the story in the summer of 1816, but was added in some form sometime between September or October 1816 and April 1817 (Robinson xxv–xxvi). Because the first four of Walton's letters are not extant in the surviving draft manuscript, we cannot determine whether Shelley wrote the Walton frame after reading the "old voyages" noted in her journal (Nov. 16 1816), or after reading Barrow's first account of the search for the Northwest Passage in the *Quarterly Review* (Barrow's article appeared in Feb. 1817; Shelley recorded reading the *Quarterly* on May 29 & 30 1817), or if the frame existed in some form and then was modified after this reading. Furthermore, Percy or Mary Shelley could have altered the novel's opening in early stages of the proofing in September 1817, when North Pole exploration was beginning to be a topic of some moment. The editors of Shelley's journals suggest Pinkerton's seventeen-volume *General Collection of the Best and Most Interesting Voyages and Travels in all Parts of the World* . . . as the type of "old voyages" to which she refers (Feldman and Scott-Kilvert 1: 146).
7. See Fleming for a recent account of Barrow's long career promoting British exploration as Second Secretary to the Admiralty; both Fleming and Lloyd draw on Barrow's *Autobiographical Memoir*.
8. The Shelleys read the *Quarterly Review* throughout the period of the final draft of *Frankenstein* and of Barrow's articles on the pole (Feldman and Scott-Kilvert 1: 100). Mary Shelley specifically notes reading the *Quarterly* on Aug. 27 1816, Dec. 5 1816, May 29 & 30 1817, and Oct. 24 1818, Aug 6 1819, and June 24 & 25 1820 (Feldman and Scott-Kilvert, 2: 668). The issues she read in 1817, 1818, and 1819 all featured articles on polar exploration by Barrow.
9. Since the Treaty of Tordesillas, in 1494, gave the Spanish and Portuguese primary control over the New World routes to the East, English and Dutch navigators had to seek alternative routes to the riches of India and China (Vaughan 54).
10. "Archangel" carries a surplus of Miltonic signification for *Frankenstein*, evoking both the fallen, over-reaching archangel Lucifer and the disciplinary pedagogue-archangel Michael who sends Adam and Eve forth from Eden after the fall. Arkhangel'sk was officially founded in 1584 as the fortified monastery of the archangel Michael.
11. For the unlikelihood of discovering a new route north of Arkhangel'sk, see Vaughan (114). Walton's journey cannot be pinned to an exact year, but takes place sometime in the 1790s; his letters are dated "179–" and he quotes "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (1798) in Letter II (55).
12. Equiano was followed 135 years later by Matthew Henson, a black American who accompanied Robert Peary on his trek to the North Pole in 1909. In his narrative of their expedition, Henson charts a romance of racial pride analogous to the romance of national pride that drove the British and later the American polar explorers when he describes the

moment when he and Peary planted the American flag at (what they thought was) the North Pole, “on the peak of a huge paleocrystic floeberg the glorious banner was unfurled to the breeze, and as it snapped and crackled with the wind, I felt a savage joy and exultation. Another world’s accomplishment was done and finished, and as in the past, from the beginning of history, wherever the world’s work was done by a white man, he had been accompanied by a colored man . . . and I felt all that it was possible for me to feel, that it was I, a lowly member of my race, who had been chosen by fate to represent it, at this, almost the last of the world’s great *work*” (Henson 136).

13. Barrington moved even further from certainty, changing “probability” to “possibility” on the title page of later reprints of his polar tracts, though he continued to maintain adamantly in the text that his theory was sound (Barrington, *Miscellanies* 4).
14. See Hacking, especially Chapter 10, “Probability and the Law” (85–91).
15. See also Douglas Lane Patey, *Probability and Literary Form* (56–61).
16. Bloom suggests that the white world of the pole “literalized the colonial fantasy of the tabula rasa where people, history, and culture vanish. The absence of land, peoples, or wildlife to conquer gave polar exploration an aesthetic dimension” (2).
17. See Mellor (“Feminist Critique of Science” 307).
18. This vision provides a polar parallel to a sixteenth-century allegorical engraving of America as a naked native female passively watching the prows of three ships advance toward her (Montrose 180).
19. Suggesting again the synergy between polar travel narratives and poetry, Coleridge, the poet whose polar voyager, the Ancient Mariner, haunts Walton’s imagination, was reading Purchas when he wrote “Kubla Khan” in 1797 (Coleridge 296).
20. Compare Barrow’s national polar romance to Pope’s reference to polar exploration in his national pastoral, *Windsor Forest* (1713): “Thy Trees, fair *Windsor!* now shall leave their Woods, / And half thy Forests rush into my Floods, / Bear *Britain’s* Thunder, and her Cross display, / To the bright regions of Regions of the rising Day; / Tempt Icy Seas, where scarce the Waters roll, / Where clearer Flames glow round the frozen Pole” (1: 189, lines 385–390). Pope, in turn, draws on Addison, who celebrated the search for a polar route to the riches of the East in *A Poem to His Majesty* (1695): “Where-e’er the Waves in restless errors rowle, / The Sea lies open now to either Pole: / Now we may safely use the *Northern* gales, / And in the *Polar Circle* spread our sails; / Or deep in *Southern* climes, Secure from wars, / New Lands explore, and sail by Other stars; / Fetch Uncontroll’d each labour of the Sun, / And make the product of the World our Own” (lines 115–22; quoted in Audra and Williams, 189n.).
21. See Eric Daffron’s discussion of male friendship in *Frankenstein*.
22. Like Walton, Olaudah Equiano was well aware of the literary conventions of the voyage narrative. He seems to have modeled his account of his experience with the Phipps expedition on Phipps’s own published account (Edwards 179). Equiano’s reliance on Phipps suggests the very tendency in polar narratives that allowed Barrington to make light of the Phipps’s expedition’s failure, namely to grant authority to previously published accounts rather than empirical experience.
23. The popularity of polar narratives carried over to the stage as well. See, for example, John Thomas Haines, “The North Pole: or a Tale of the Frozen Regions. A Melo-drama in Two Acts” (London, n.d.), c. 1830s, about a polar expedition in which the pregnant wife and the mistress of two crew members disguise themselves as men in order to go along on the voyage. At the end, stranded on an ice floe, the voyagers are rescued by the famous explorer

Capt. W. E. Parry. Haines “suppl[ied] the minor theatres of the metropolis with innumerable melodramas of the ‘blood-and-thunder’ type” and specialized in sea-plays (*Dictionary of National Biography* 3). Charles Dickens collaborated with Wilkie Collins on a polar melodrama called “The Frozen Deep” in 1856; the authors played the two male leads in amateur and semi-professional productions, even at royal command, to much acclaim (Peters 165–86).

24. Excerpts of these popular polar narratives can be read in Kitson.
25. The British, Norwegian, and American races to the North and South Poles in the early twentieth century revived the narrative of polar exploration as a commercially viable genre, and the recent reprinting of books by and about Amundsen, Scott, and Shackleton testify to its enduring appeal. See also Barrett’s fictional account of an American expedition in search of the open polar sea and Franklin’s remains.
26. Walton is also unusual in comparison to other English explorers in two ways: he finances his expedition with his own money instead of relying on government subsidies or private investment; and he obtains his ship and assembles his crew in Russia instead of in England. A private gentleman with a passion for polar geography might well fit out an expedition, but it was very unusual that he would also apprentice himself to whaling ships to learn sailing and Arctic geography, and then actually serve as captain of the polar voyage.
27. Walton’s imagined stoic death anticipates Robert Falcon Scott’s famous final entry in his diary as he faced hypothermia in a tent in Antarctica, 11 miles from a supply depot in 1913: “It seems a pity, but I do not think I can write more” (Scott 1: 595). According to Roland Huntford’s critical account of Scott’s journey and the national myth built up after his death, Walton may also have anticipated Scott’s incompetence as an expedition leader and his fatally romantic view of polar exploration.
28. Kitson notes that various failed voyages to find a Northwest Passage in the 1830s significantly “dampened the enthusiasm of the British public for Arctic exploration” (xix).

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