

the potential of Inuit oral tradition to “fill in” the gaping lacunae in history books. Unlike preceding sections, there is little dialogue here between explorer and Inuit recordings of events; Franklin’s side of the tale is absent save for hints left by the expedition’s residual scatterings of sailors’ skeletons and ship artefacts. Inuit accounts of the expedition’s demise, on the other hand, are as numerous as they are chilling. In her review of Inuit oral history dealing with the Franklin tragedy, Eber concentrates on three main issues: the whereabouts of Franklin’s grave; the location of the two ships used in the expedition; and the crew’s last, desperate march across the Arctic. While many new avenues of explanation and possibility are opened up through these accounts, it is likely that most will lead to dead ends. After all, conflicting descriptions of recovered ship goods, ghostly sightings of sailors, and fireplace trails may pique the curiosity of readers but inevitably do little to lift the shroud of ambiguity that continues to hang over Franklin’s disappearance.

Ultimately, *Encounters on the Passage* is both a captivating and useful read for a general audience as well as those with more vested interests in Arctic history and the dynamics of cross-cultural encounter. It delights in its subtle details of Inuit contact with European explorers and traditions, and its use of oral narratives permits an intimate view of the ways that the early European presence became imprinted on the lives, imagination, and cultures of Arctic populations. Most important, however, the book acknowledges and helps preserve Inuit voices of the past, voices which succumb each day to new, challenging encounters with the demands of global society.

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Arctic Spectacles: The Frozen North in Visual Culture, 1818–1875. By **Russell A. Potter**. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2007. ix + 258 pp. Illustrated.

This book is a visual delight. There have been too few books on Arctic history that deserve to be described as “lavishly illustrated.” The large format of *Arctic Spectacles* (8.5” x 10”) and the many colour illustrations place it in a league of its own. Its only real competitor in this area is Ann Savours’ *The Search for the North West Passage* (St. Martin’s Press, 1999), which, indeed, has even more pictures. However, the reproductions in Savours’ book are considerably smaller, thus diminishing their impact. In Potter’s volume, the reader is easily convinced that, for nineteenth-century

audiences, the Arctic could be truly an overwhelming visual as well as literary spectacle.

Potter's book, then, ventures into a relatively unstudied aspect of nineteenth-century Arctic history with what, at first glance, seems to be commendable verve. The author's enthusiasm for his subject shines through at every turn—an attractive feature not always found in academic books. Potter's account of the 1834 panorama of Boothia, which draws on the unpublished diary of its creator, Henry Courtney Selous, is particularly fascinating. But unfortunately the text as a whole is uneven, often inaccurate, and based on several questionable assumptions.

Potter begins with a very broad and entirely unsubstantiated claim: that visions of the Arctic “dominated popular art forms, among them fixed and moving panoramas, magic-lantern shows, and illustrated books and newspapers” (4). This, quite frankly, is nonsense. The search for the Northwest Passage undoubtedly provided one of the most fascinating and long-running stories of the nineteenth century, but it was very far from being the dominant subject of the years from 1818 to 1875. Robert David pioneered the study of popular Arctic visual culture in *The Arctic in the British Imagination, 1818–1914* (Manchester University Press, 2000). His book, though visually drab in comparison with Potter's, is based on far more detailed research about the wider context of the times. David concludes that Arctic representations were a regular feature in the world of nineteenth-century panoramas and illustrated papers, but he does not claim that they were either the most frequent or the most popular items. Anyone who has browsed through the popular periodicals of that time will agree that many subjects engaged the public mind with equal and occasionally even greater force. Lord Byron, the Duke of Wellington, David Livingstone, and Florence Nightingale (to give but a few examples) were popular figures whose renown easily matched that of Sir John Franklin, in both print and visual media. Images of African exploration were at least as prevalent as images of the Arctic, and Livingstone's narrative outsold Arctic books.

Within the space of a fairly short introduction, Potter blithely puts forward several other equally unsubstantiated claims. He insists that despite the large amount of print dedicated to northern exploration, “it was principally through the technologies of *vision* that the Arctic was most keenly and energetically sought” (4); that the audiences for Arctic shows included a “varied social cross-section” that “could hardly be found in any other venue” (8); that the fame of Elisha Kent Kane on both sides of the Atlantic was due mainly to the images of his adventures

found in popular visual culture (10); and that this supposed obsession with the visual was somehow related to the disastrous endings of some British Arctic expeditions (13). Potter's dismissal of purely literary representations seems cavalier and unwarranted, especially in light of the well-documented practice of reading aloud. He asserts that panoramas and other shows were more accessible to the poor than was printed matter, ignoring the fact that slum dwellers often pooled their resources to buy penny papers, which would then be read aloud to the illiterate. No such strategies were possible to gain admission to the shows at a fraction of the ordinary price. Moreover, books and periodicals could pass from hand to hand for decades, growing cheaper at each step, but the lifespan of a panorama ended when the doors closed after the final showing. Oddly enough, among the English illustrated papers, Potter focuses on the most expensive, the *Illustrated London News*, while the far cheaper *Mirror of Literature, Amusement, and Instruction* and *Penny Magazine* are ignored. Nor does he say anything about the extensive textual material that often accompanied the pictures in the *ILN*, claiming instead that the pictures were the sole attraction of that very popular periodical (96–97).

Throughout the book, the truth of Potter's claims is assumed rather than proved. This in itself is enough to cast doubt on the rigour of his scholarship, and the frequent factual mistakes he makes do nothing to allay such fears. One wonders how many exploration narratives Potter has actually held in his hands. He states that most of them were issued in folio editions—the largest size of book produced at the time (8, 56). In fact, not a single nineteenth-century Arctic narrative was published as a folio. Instead, they were either quartos or octavos. Potter describes Edward Parry's religious faith as "almost maniacal" because the explorer prayed every day (52). Though unquestionably pious, Parry was only moderately so in comparison to the Methodists and other Evangelical sects of his time. Potter adds that Parry was more popular than John Ross because Ross "came from a relatively humble background, at least when compared to Parry, the dazzling doctor's son." In fact, Ross was from a long-established, if not especially wealthy, family of Scottish gentry. (Ross himself was rigidly and rather snobbishly conservative in his political views, with a pronounced dislike for any sort of self-assertion by the lower orders.) Parry's father, though successful in his profession, would have been regarded as something of a parvenu. At the time, doctors had no such social standing as they possess today. Instead, it was a maxim that only four professions were fit for gentlemen: the army, the navy, the law,

and the church. In many great houses doctors were expected to use the servants' entrance.

Similar mistakes and offhand, poorly informed judgments are scattered throughout the book. Potter's quick summaries of the various expeditions are replete with amusing phrases, but often at the expense of historical accuracy. On the subject of the paintings and panoramas themselves he does much better, but even where accurate information is provided, the reader is often left wondering about its significance. For example, Potter states that between 1818 and 1883, "no fewer than 60 Arctic shows ... were presented to the public" (12). But without some idea of the total number of shows, the figure is meaningless. A moment's thought is enough to indicate that it can hardly be an impressive statistic, or one that backs up Potter's claim about the dominance of the Arctic in nineteenth-century visual media. If there were sixty Arctic shows over a sixty-five-year period, the average was less than one per year. Considering the great popularity of such shows, it seems reasonable to assume that the total number of them in Britain and the United States over such a long period may have been in the thousands. Therefore, the figure Potter presents as the clinching proof of his central thesis in fact casts doubt on it.

Finally, it is necessary to question Potter's choice of visual materials for study and reproduction. Potter follows in the well-worn footsteps of Chauncey Loomis and others who have seen visual representations of the Far North chiefly in terms of the "Arctic sublime." Accordingly, the great majority of the illustrations in his book fit into this category. There can be no doubt that the thrill of the sublime did contribute greatly to the appeal of Arctic pictures, but, as the illustrations in Ann Savours' book amply demonstrate, both Arctic narratives and papers like the *Illustrated London News* contained many pictures of the domestic side of life in winter quarters. Scientific and ethnographic investigations were another popular visual theme that Potter all but ignores. And what about visual depictions of individual Arctic heroes, most notably in the portraits by Stephen Pearce? Every historian has to limit his or her focus, especially in these days when long books are not welcomed by publishers. However, Potter fails to explain or justify his choices, thereby irritating specialists and leaving general readers with a distorted impression of Arctic visual culture.

Potter ends his account of British Arctic painting with an analysis of Edwin Landseer's *Man Proposes, God Disposes*, which is reproduced in a colour plate extending across two pages. It is a stunningly and chillingly beautiful picture. But, on the other hand, how much can it tell us about

how the nineteenth-century public saw the North? As Potter admits, the painting was not popular in its day. John Millais' *The North-West Passage*, in contrast, was frequently exhibited. Yet Potter does not mention *The North-West Passage* at all, let alone reproduce it. This seems especially odd considering that Millais' picture was first exhibited in 1874, right at the end of the period covered by *Arctic Spectacles*. Given its great popularity, it would have provided a very suitable subject for the book's conclusion.

Overall, then, this is a disappointing treatment of a very promising theme. Potter presents some important new information on Arctic panoramas and similar shows, and anyone with a serious interest in the cultural history of exploration will want to browse through the illustrations he provides. The appended list of Arctic shows is a useful resource. But in the end, what could have been an exceptionally engaging work of historical reconstruction is little more than a glorified coffee-table book.

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Settlers on the Edge: Identity and Modernization on Russia's Arctic Frontier. By Niobe Thompson. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008. xiv + 289 pp. Notes, bibliography, index.

Niobe Thompson, himself from a *priezzhi* (newcomer) family to the Canadian North, has produced a wonderful ethnography of settlers to one of the most distant and isolated territories of Russia. The vast and sparsely populated Chukotka region in the northeast corner of the country is remote even for Siberia. Thompson spent a substantial amount of time in the region in the early 2000s studying and intermingling with various social groups. Supplementing this ethnographic research with wide-ranging secondary literature, he presents his work as a corrective to the neglect and negative portrayals of non-indigenous migrants to northern regions common within Arctic anthropology. When they have not been ignored outright, settlers like the ones he studies have often been portrayed as agents of imperialism or transient exploiters disconnected from native life and the local environment. By contrast, Thompson's work responds positively to recent calls by some anthropologists to include a wider cross-section of residents in the study of the North, while simultaneously addressing important theoretical issues of indigeneity and nativeness. Indeed, *Settlers on the Edge* presents a sophisticated account of how practical interactions with the tundra landscape engendered a sense of belonging among certain