

## **Affecting Women: or, On Weeping in Archives**

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**\*DRAFT ONLY – NOT TO BE CITED\***

I read, and love, but do not write, fiction. As a reader, I prefer fiction to biography any day. I'm so easily seduced by conventional narrative and plot devices: a touch of mystery, a touch of romance, a triumph of spirit over adversity. I gain enormous reading pleasure from reading aloud to my children – stories good, bad and indifferent, offering the predictability, the comfortable familiarity, of old and wellworn shoes (to say nothing of old and wellworn metaphors). I endlessly re-read Jane Austen. I love the intricate blending of plot and character by writers like Alice Munro, Margaret Atwood, Carol Shields, Geraldine Brooks. I love the feeling you get when reading a persuasive novel of character and plot, the feeling of being inside the skin of the protagonist, never questioning motive, never experiencing a jarring moment of doubt about whether an action or reaction is really plausible, never aware of the intrusion of an authorial voice to unsettle the intimate relationship you have forged with a character. I love the way a fictional character can live as a fully realised or realisable entity, somewhere within and between the imaginative spaces forged by writer and reader together.

I sometimes write biography, but for me as a reader the genre rarely engages my imagination in the same way. Reading biography, I am less able to luxuriate in the conviction of that imagined world. The threads of circumstantial, historical narrative inevitably intrude, constraining the imagination of writer and reader alike, demanding a different, more sceptical mode of reading, one that refers what is written on the page to the authority of what is already known of the person or historical context described. For some reason this seems, to me at least, to limit the imaginative pleasure of reading biography.

I define myself as an historian. When I write, and when I read, history, I seek different narrative pleasures. I am mistrustful of the free range of imagination, and instead delight in the play of intellect and analysis over the recalcitrance of the written word, that faded document that cannot be rewritten or bypassed but must, instead, be incorporated into the increasingly complex web of meaning that we call historical interpretation. In pursuit of history I pursue the shifting constellations of meaning that press upon and emanate from a person, a document, a significant, contested moment from the past.

Most often in my research I examine the historical moment through the eyes, experience, or self-representations of an individual. In recent years that individual has been Jane, Lady Franklin, whose life and life writing thread this paper. My research and writing plunge me repeatedly into the midst of a tension between the imperatives of biography and the imperatives of history. When I conceive my project as a biography, it becomes impossible, because I persist in asking historical questions that take me in different, unpredictable directions, that press always outwards from the life story. When I package those separate byways into microhistorical interpretations, my work is still charged or disturbed, sometimes constrained, by the underlying pull of biographical questions and structures.

I want to concentrate on this tension in my paper today, and explore its implications for historical practice through the idea of 'affect' and empathy. Historians and biographers have different ways of 'knowing' their subjects. And both are shadowed always by the legacies of fiction, which shape so profoundly our expectations of narrative and our understanding of character. Writers of fiction work within different constraints again. Yet despite the differing intellectual and imaginative demands of their work, biographers, historians and writers of fiction based on 'real' historical characters all occasionally share the experience of being in the archives, reading letters, diaries and other personal material, seeking the contours of a life, the constructions of self, the moments of dramatic significance or intense emotion. And in the act of reading, can enter fleetingly into relationships of affect and empathy with those long-dead chroniclers of sorrow and joy, anger and embarrassment, pleasure and pain. For the purposes of fiction, those moments

of empathy can fuel the imagination, increase the sense of getting inside the skin of a human being at once discovered and invented. For the biographer, they can help to build the picture of the complex personality that lies at the heart of the biographical project. But my question for this paper is, how do such moments serve the historian?

Let me put that dilemma into concrete terms, and in relation to Jane Franklin. Jane Franklin's diaries were many, her world was big, and her life was long. I first became interested in her as a colonial governor's wife in Tasmania during its years of penal settlement. She was a woman of extraordinary energy, full of schemes to civilise and improve the penal colony and elevate the standing, education and virtue of its women – and herself continually ridiculed and condemned for taking too keen an interest in colonial affairs, for imagining that a lady could help. As I became more familiar with her extraordinary archive, I was compelled to engage with complexities and breadth of her peripatetic existence. Her diaries extend from adolescent journeys of picturesque discovery through south England and Wales (1809-13), via a succession of tours on the Continent of Europe (1814 –28), through years of wandering about the Mediterranean and northern Africa (1830-34), followed by that interlude in the Antipodes (1836-44), to an old age consumed by anxiety about her husband's disappearance in the Arctic, in search of the North West Passage (1845-60). Her travels ended only with her death in 1875; her diaries continued almost as long, and even when she lost interest in writing, her devoted niece and companion Sophy Cracroft was there to take up the challenge, filling many archival boxes on her own account with letters to her mother and sisters as well as ample journals of her 'travels with my aunt'.

Jane Franklin's diaries and letters are not self-absorbed. They are about the things she read, the people she spoke to, the places she visited, the art she admired, the churches she saw, the societies she joined, the projects she adopted, the campaigns she managed, the people she needed to help them along. They are about her, but in ways that only make sense if you place her within the wider history of the world she inhabited and tried so hard to bend to her way of thinking. They are outwardly directed, and their interest consists in the fact that they lie at the point of interface between herself and her world – a

world she constituted in her imagination, a world of ideology and discourse which in turn forged her own subjectivity. To explore that interface of subjectivity, culture and gender I have written exploratory essays, articles and chapters that place her within a succession of oddly unrelated historical and geographical spaces. In the name of Jane Franklin (or her unmarried name, Jane Griffin) I have written on female education in early nineteenth century England, romance and tourism, travel on the Nile, gender and vice-regal authority.

Most recently I have turned my attention to her period of greatest celebrity. In 1845, Jane Franklin's husband, Arctic explorer Sir John Franklin, commanded an expedition in search of the North West Passage. Anxiety began to mount from 1847 onwards, as the two ships and 129 men failed to return. Between 1848 and 1859 a succession of search expeditions, some organised by the government and others privately sponsored, some led by experienced commanders and others completely harebrained, endeavoured to unlock the mystery of the missing Arctic mariners. Ultimately it was discovered that the ships had been trapped in the ice, that Sir John Franklin had died on board, and that after enduring two summers frozen in, the remaining officers and crew had endeavoured to escape overland. All had perished. It was a dismal story of failure, but the scenario was one of powerful and dramatic significance, which licensed multiple romantic and chivalric narratives of quest and hazardous adventure. At the heart of many of these narratives was the figure of Lady Franklin, whose insistence on the continuance of the searches long after all hope had faded in most minds made her a symbol of devoted, if stubborn, femininity.

My central purpose in this book is to explore the contribution Jane Franklin made to the discourses of masculine honour associated with Arctic exploration in mid-nineteenth century Britain. What interests me most, as an historian of gender, is the multiple ways that she entered into an otherwise masculine story. Most of the time, the press made her a heroine by emphasising her 'natural' fears as a wife, and the ways her deep and entirely understandable distress had prompted men on all sides to respond with chivalric concern,

placing their valour and enterprise in her service. To give just one of many possible examples, in February 1849 *The Times* noted that Jane Franklin,

with all the fervour of a devoted wife, is at present engaged in a pious pilgrimage to the ports whence the whale ships are likely to proceed to Davis's Straits, with a view to plead her anxieties and distresses, and to animate the daring and generous commanders of these ships in her cause.<sup>1</sup>

But Jane Franklin could not rest content with the masculine efforts that were inspired by her distress. In her view (and as the event proved) all the efforts made were woefully inadequate to the needs of the case. From the beginning, she pressed hard to 'multiply' the searches – there was no time, she insisted again and again, to wait until one expedition failed before sending another.

You will hardly forgive me if I tell you that I feel something is still wanting to the completeness of the expeditions [she wrote to James Clark Ross in 1847]. . . . If they survive a third winter, it will be a sure instance of successful endurance – how can any one speak of 1849? Therefore every thing should be done at once it is too late for successive operations.<sup>2</sup>

This characteristic tone of impatience revealed again and again Jane Franklin's lack of faith in the efforts being made, either in her name or in the name of humanity, and her own urgent desire to control and direct all ventures. Instead of gratefully accepting the chivalric response of an individual, or a nation, as all that could be asked for, she continually insisted that more should be done. As a symbol of passive suffering, Jane Franklin was the embodiment of selflessness and feminine virtue; but as an active agent, directing and demanding masculine enterprise, she was frequently depicted as both interfering and unfeminine. And from being selfless, she became inherently selfish, condemned for placing her own personal affections and interests ahead of the national good. Despite her own reluctance to appear 'exacting' and 'ungrateful',<sup>3</sup> she was conscious that both her motives and her methods were the focus of frequent criticism. As she wrote to her friend and confidant, William Scoresby, defending herself against his fear that she was glorying too much in her own sacrifices:

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<sup>1</sup> *Times* 15 Feb 1849

<sup>2</sup> Jane Franklin to James Ross 14 December 1847, MS 248/175/19

So far from any such self glory, it is painful, very painful to me to think that it should be necessary, that the small boon I had to ask from God shd not have been granted, that I shd have been forced to put myself forward, to get myself talked about and to know that I expose myself to censure for obstinacy, self-confidence, or perhaps lower and meaner feelings because I have struggled on against every species of opposition. I have had to defend the instinct, not the virtue which prompts me, as if it were a crime, and have alienated more hearts by my perseverance than ever I have gained by pity for my great trial.<sup>4</sup>

There's plenty of historical work to be done, then, about the curious and multivalent impact of the intrusion of this woman into a masculine field of endeavour, about the way her presence throws into relief the significant inflections of gender that weave through the discourses of imperial exploration, heroism and honour. But my interpretation of this powerful cultural moment closely abuts a very different story, a story that threads enigmatically through the archives and engages me in a very different mode of historical speculation. However much I attempt to set it to one side, there is a question that tugs at me and will not go away. And it is, of course, the question of Jane Franklin's motivation.

At the time, there seemed to be nothing that needed explaining to the popular mind. Jane Franklin's anxiety, grief and determination were all deemed to spring from the same source, her unwavering constancy to her husband's memory. Her sentiments were deduced entirely by reference to her situation, and writers who had little acquaintance with her – usually none at all – apparently felt comfortable inhabiting her skin for the purpose of weaving purple prose or execrable poetry. In 1849, for example, the *Athenaeum* hoped on her behalf for certain knowledge, whether good or bad.

A knowledge of the worst, if the worst is to be, will be some relief from that sickness of heart which springeth from hope deferred. . . . To *know* a loss is a single and definite pain; to dread it is a complicated anguish which to the pain of the fear adds the pain of the hope – for hope itself in that companionship takes

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<sup>3</sup> Jane Franklin to James Ross 14 December 1847, MS 248/175/19

<sup>4</sup> Jane to Scoresby 31 May 1849 – 1100/3/6

the character of the fear beside which it lives and becomes a separate pang. . . .

The misery is, that if the truth be not *known*, Lady Franklin will nurse for years her frail hope, almost too sickly to live and yet unable to die.<sup>5</sup>

What is striking in this passage is its combination of pessimism – there was little suggestion here of the possibility that the lost mariners might yet be found alive – with acceptance that Jane Franklin could not be expected to share the otherwise universal abandonment of hope. Her special status as wife of the expedition's commander invested her with a sacred right to hope on forever, beyond evidence or reason.

A couple of years later, a poem by an American poet depicted her yearning grief in a way that does indeed suggest a figure of Jane Franklin wandering beyond reason, wringing her hands and talking to the wind and waves:

Tell me, ye Polar seas! that roll  
From ice-bound shore to sunny isle—  
Tell me, when next ye leave the Pole  
Where ye have chained my lord the while!  
On the bleak Northern cliff I wait  
With tear-pained eyes to see ye come!  
Will ye not tell me, ere too late?  
Or will ye mock while I am dumb? . . .

Tell me, oh dreary North! for now  
My soul is like thine Arctic zone;  
Beneath the darkened skies I bow,  
Or ride the stormy sea alone!  
Tell me of my beloved! for I  
Know not a ray my lord without!  
Oh, tell me, that I may not die  
A sorrower on the sea of doubt!<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *Athenaeum* 17 Feb p 169

I don't want to join in the sort of situational analysis of grief and hope that was so popular with Jane Franklin's contemporaries. But I find their ubiquitous glib quoting from the Proverbs – 'Hope deferred maketh the heart sick'<sup>7</sup> – inherently unsatisfying, because it conjures an image of Jane Franklin that does not fit with the woman who emerges from her own written words. In sentimental imagery she spent her time wishing godspeed to search expeditions, roaming the northern shores awaiting news of their return, and pleading for aid. All of this was true, but sits uneasily alongside the alternative image of the woman called by her Arctic friends the 'Battery', because she fired off so many salvos to the Admiralty, demanding their co-operation with her schemes – the woman who badgered bureaucracy, pleaded with Presidents, superintended her own expeditions and, above all, manipulated the debate that appeared in the press. This is the woman whom modernist Harold Nicolson, presumably in reaction to the sentimentalising of the Victorian era, is said to have described as a 'conceited prig . . . filled with a horrible restless arrogance',<sup>8</sup> and whom more recent male historians, similarly dissatisfied with the hagiographical story, have depicted as driven by the ambition to establish her husband's glory, perhaps coupled with guilt at having pressed him, for this very reason, to take the command in the first place. It's an interpretation I find equally glib and unsatisfying, and one that often seems to be driven by the masculinist conviction that her interference in Arctic matters (inherently and sacredly men's business) was inappropriate, ill judged, an ultimately damaging.

What, then, do I set in place of these two stereotyped images? Jane Franklin's diaries and letters are not at all communicative on the subject of what 'animated' her endeavours – one is left to read both her suffering and her motive force through her actions, through the recurring textual traces of her illness and bodily collapse, through the eyes and writing of her devoted niece, and, sometimes, through her own public rhetoric. All of which means that, despite my intensive research in that extensive archive, and my desire to 'correct' interpretations which are obviously lopsided and inadequate, the question of what

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<sup>6</sup> Reprinted in P. L. Simmonds *Sir John Franklin and the Arctic Regions* London: George Routledge & Co, 1851, pp. 191-2.

<sup>7</sup> Proverbs 13, xii

<sup>8</sup> cited Stone Neatby Owen but never properly attributed

particular combination of hope, fear, love, stubbornness and, maybe, indeed, guilt, drove her on, remains up for grabs, open to the workings of my speculative imagination, and therefore, inevitably, to the projection of presentist thinking.

the more I linger amongst questions about character and motive, and the more my work is animated by the problem of what animated her, the more I blend the historical enquiries that drew me to this project in the first place with the questions, methods, frames and modes of writing of biography and/or fiction. Fiction thrives on the spaces in the historical record, the vacancies that licence the writer's exercise of imagination. Just as films that acknowledge no obligation of fidelity to the novel on which they are based often succeed, as films, better than those that observe plot and dialogue with scrupulous accuracy, historical novels seem to have a better chance of satisfying the imagination when they are only lightly bound by reference to the 'known' past. About a year ago I spoke briefly to a distinguished Australian novelist who, I had heard it rumoured, was intending to write a novel about Jane Franklin in Tasmania. It would have been a good novel, though I wasn't certain it would be good history. I expressed enthusiasm – perhaps a little more enthusiasm than I honestly felt – for the idea. Her reply set me at ease: she had given up the plan. She had looked at Jane Franklin's diaries and had found that there was too much there. It was not that she was daunted by the task of reading them, but that Jane Franklin's flow of words left no room for the play of imagination. There was, she said 'no room for me'.

Biographers tend to be similarly aware of the importance of the creative imagination to their work. This is made explicit in a collection of extracts from essays and reflective works on the art of biographical writing, titled *Biography as High Adventure*, which was published in 1986.<sup>9</sup> In this collection the reflections of a predominantly male group of writers, originally published during the 1960s and 1970s, are bent upon the relationship between the archives and the creative imagination. They all recognise that biography is at best a construct, not a truth: it is a 'simulation',<sup>10</sup> a 'life myth',<sup>11</sup> 'the illusion of a life',<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Stephen B Oates (ed) *Biography as High Adventure: Life Writers Speak on their Arts* Amherst: Uni of Massachusetts Press, 1986

<sup>10</sup> Paul Murray Kendall 'Walking the Boundaries' in Oates p 45 Reprinted from Kendall *The Art of Biography* 1965.

a 'plausible, idiosyncratic surmise'.<sup>13</sup> They recognise that that illusion of a 'real' life, of the essence of the self, will be achieved in the art of the writing. And the majority agree that the illusion can be achieved only by suppressing the appearance of the author in the text; by ordering things in a way that conveys the natural inevitable sweep of an existence but in fact is highly contrived to serve a particular analytic purpose; by writing, in the end, not from the compilations of a dusty archive but from imaginative understanding. All claim – implicitly at least – the superiority of the creative imagination of the biographer over the 'gaps and gabble', the 'imperfect paper trail', the 'ledger book',<sup>14</sup> the archives that cause them to 'groan',<sup>15</sup> the 'historical materials . . . loaded with duplicities and evasions',<sup>16</sup> the 'words, words transcribed, written, uttered, words, words, and more words, which the biographer must shape and select and reorder, until a figure begins again to live in our imagination'.<sup>17</sup> For that imaginative understanding to carry conviction, it must be protected from exposure to critical review. Which means, in practice, the suppression of the process of interpretation. As Paul Kendall puts it:

thematic groupings cannot be permitted to block or deform the sweep of chronology, the sequential heart-beat of a life, the 'faring onward' of our tragicomic journey. They cannot be deployed like the topics of an expository essay – exposition is the enemy of biography, dead tissue encumbering a living organism.<sup>18</sup>

Of course this view of biography has not gone unchallenged – especially by feminist biographers in the past decade. And yet, as Sheila Kineke has observed, 'the silencing of the biographer's process and the goal of 'truth' have been difficult conventions to slough off'. Kineke notes that the most interesting discussions of the problem of the subject by feminist biographers still appear in reflective essays, not in the biographies themselves. In the completed work, she argues:

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<sup>11</sup> Leon Edel 'The Figure under the Carpet' in Oates op cit 23-4

<sup>12</sup> Paul Mariani, 'Reassembling the Dust', in Oates, p 104

<sup>13</sup> Justin Kaplan, 'The "Real Life"', in Oates, op cit, p 70

<sup>14</sup> these three all from Kendall.

<sup>15</sup> Edel

<sup>16</sup> Justin Kaplan, 'The "Real Life"', in Oates, op cit, p 70

<sup>17</sup> Paul Mariani, 'Reassembling the Dust', in Oates, p 104

<sup>18</sup> Kendall p 47

We still fail to see problematized the notion of truth-value or the 'real Me' of the biographical subject, and we still fail to hear the story of how the subject is constructed within the biographical text.<sup>19</sup>

She suggests instead a 'methodology of contrast, of contradiction, of different and inconsistent versions of a life positioned side-by-side without trying to tie up all the loose ends; a method, in other words, that writes the possibility of irreconcilable differences both within and among portrayals of the subject'.<sup>20</sup>

Despite numerous such calls for biographies that are more innovative in both conceptual and stylistic terms, the majority of those that hit the bookshops are written in narrative if not heroic mode and assume a stable, unified subject, knowable and – more – empathetically comprehensible to writer and reader alike. I suspect part of the resistance to a more textured and problematised biographical mode lies with publishers, and their perception of what readers will enjoy and, more importantly, buy. As Kineke acknowledges, consistently deconstructive methodologies in biography not only weaken its power to provide context but, if not skilfully managed, very easily lead to the loss of the 'pleasure of narrative' and the reader's sense of identification with the subject. If with that loss of identification the reader also loses the power of imaginative engagement with the subject, a vital relationship has likewise been lost.

For the contributors in *Biography as High Adventure*, that relationship can be destroyed either by the attempt to tell the life as it was lived (or at least as it was written), with all the chaos of everyday lived experience too palpably present – or by too intrusive a tone of exposition and interpretation. For the deconstructive biographer, the challenge is different – here exposition is perhaps the natural mode, and the reader must be enticed into a teasing mystery of multiple stories that shift coalesce and re-form but never come together into what might be claimed as a complete, 'true' picture. For this to work demands an extraordinary level of writing skill, to draw the reader into the pleasures of narrative while continually refusing the narrative structure.

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<sup>19</sup> Sheila Kineke, 'Subject to Change: The Problematics of Authority in Feminist Modernist Biography' in L. Rado (ed) *Rereading Modernism* New York: Garland 1994, p 260

But where does any of this leave the historian? Or rather, to step from the safety of grandiose universalisation, where does it leave me, and where does it take Jane Franklin?

My difficulty is that I am always fascinated by the chaos of everyday life, and relatively uninterested in reducing its complexities to a singular narrative. My difficulty is that Jane Franklin wrote so much. Every diary seems to open up a different world, filled with the complexity of her textual inventions and derivations, the fascination of a 'self' fashioned from fragments of cultural meaning, the movements of that self through a world shaped by her imagination and yet simultaneously pressing upon her in unpredictable ways. My difficulty is that even though I endeavour to read her text with the sensitivities, questions, the conceptual and intellectual framework of an historian, even though I seek both to deconstruct and contextualise her narrative structures and frames of reference, even though I instinctively distrust and repudiate the siren song of the 'life myth' – in spite of all this protective coating, I am still conscious that when I read Jane Franklin's diaries, I read them as if they were novels, and I relate to my imagined Jane as if she were a stable subject, real, knowable to my imagination in a way that only a fictional character can be knowable; as if she were my own imaginative possession as Jane Austen's Elizabeth Bennett is mine. When I write, it is that imagined Jane who lends assurance and authority to my words. And with these, perhaps, some possibility of reaching, in turn, the imagination of my readers.

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What happens when I turn my reader's imagination to the problem of Jane Franklin's persistence in defiance of reason is something like this:

For years she had to steel herself to meet the gushing praise and condescending counsels that accompanied every mention of her name in the press. They were complacently certain they could read her mind, look into her heart, even predict her future. Some

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<sup>20</sup> Kineke 'Subject to Change', p. 265.

condemned her to a life of pallid misery, nursing a frail and sickly hope; some, more robustly, counselled her, at each new reverse, to despair. Eventually some papers became irritated by her steadfast devotion and refusal to face reality. They still doled out her due moiety of praise for her persistence, they still acknowledged her suffering, but they condemned the impact she had on public sympathy, which had prolonged vain searches far beyond a reasonable period. Better by far to face the truth and stop risking the lives of more good men in fruitless, sentimental quests.

None doubted that what drove her was hope. But hope is not the emotion that burdens Jane Franklin's writing throughout this period. It was not hope, nor even the fading of hope, that drove her to a fever of the brain in the early months of 1851, so that Sophy feared for her life. It was not hope that led her to press James Clark Ross with all the force her pen could command: 'If they survive a third winter, it will be a sure instance of successful endurance – how can any one speak of 1849? Therefore every thing should be done at once it is too late for successive operations.'<sup>21</sup> It was not hope that breathed through the words she addressed to the US President in 1849 as she pleaded for his help in searching for the lost mariners 'in the time . . . of their greatest peril, in the day of their extremest need'; as they entered, perhaps, 'upon a fifth winter in those dark and dreary solitudes, with exhausted means of sustenance, while yet their expected succor comes not!'<sup>22</sup>

What I read in Jane's words is not hope but a terrible, haunting, inescapable fear: a fear that those men, her husband among them, had not, after all, been overtaken by a terrible catastrophe, that they had not died, that they were still alive in circumstances of hideous suffering, enduring, as she also wrote, 'a lingering fate which the mind sickens to dwell on'.<sup>23</sup> I read her fear that while well-meaning friends advised her to 'do nothing' so that others would do more for her; while the Admiralty shuffled, economised and bungled;

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<sup>21</sup> Jane Franklin to James Ross 14 December 1847, MS 248/175/19

<sup>22</sup> The Lady of Sir John Franklin to the President, 11 December 1849, printed in 'Message from the President of the United States to the 31st Congress, 1st Session, Ex. Doc. No. 8, communicating correspondence with the lady of Sir John Franklin . . . SPRI Pamphlet File (\*41): 91(091) p. 11

<sup>23</sup> Jane Franklin to the President of the United States, 4 April 1849: correspondence tabled in US Congress 4 January 1850; copy held in SPRI Pamphlet file (\*41): 91(091).

while whalers sailed for the northern seas in total ignorance of a government reward that was not announced till after they had all departed; while gallant but inefficient commanders dashed off promising her that they would not return till they had searched every channel in the north and then came back within the year, complaining loudly of obstacles she (perhaps unreasonably) deemed petty; while men who knew nothing of the Arctic counselled despair and her own stepdaughter, John Franklin's daughter, adopted a superior attitude of pious resignation – that, in short, while England failed ignominiously to do anything of practical value to relieve or even trace the missing expedition, her husband and his companions still lived, within miles, perhaps, of rescue if only someone, just one ship, would look in the right place.

It was a fear that exploded repeatedly into anger. With no expertise in Arctic matters, no experience in organising or equipping an expedition, no desire to assert herself in the public domain, she felt driven by the arrogant inefficiency of the male 'experts' to sketch out competent plans for a co-ordinated search effort, to exert every ounce of leverage she could find to force action and open budgets, to plan and equip her own expeditions, to rebut and refute the growing despair of the press. At every step she was forced to rely on men. Every step gained was gained through her flattering dependence on men's expertise, gallantry and protection. Every man she relied on failed her. Perhaps the task was too hard – but she was never given proof that even prompt effective action at the outset would have failed, because she never saw prompt effective action. It did not take her long to realise that her campaign would win her as many enemies as friends, but she also realised that she had nothing to lose, since passive dependence would have galvanised only the most token of efforts. So she urged, goaded, threatened the Admiralty, firing off twelve page letters that sizzled with anger, indignation and stern rebuke.

I could not weep with Jane Franklin, heartsick with hope deferred. But I quiver with her anger as I read her words, and I recognise the fear that pounds the mind with relentless images, that clutches the gut with cold, sick fingers. As I write *Arctic Romance: Lady Franklin and the Lost Polar Expedition*, (a title that increasingly seems to me to be riven with ironies), I frame my argument with a feminist politics and support it with an

historian's evidence. But I experience Jane Franklin's fear and anger with my body, and know it through the force of my imagination. I like to think the blend enriches my historical analysis. I recognise the possibility that instead, it dilutes it. But I can't write the book any other way.

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