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"A romance based on information": The curious case of Clements Markham's Franklin Expedition novel

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Research Article

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Abstract

Sir Clements Markham (1830-1916), secretary of the Royal Geographical Society for many decades, is best known for his role in shaping the Heroic Age of Antarctic Exploration and especially the career of his protege Robert Falcon Scott. His unpublished work of Franklin Expedition fiction, a 350-page handwritten manuscript held in the collection of the RGS, is an understudied artefact which has much to say about Markham's life, work, and ideology. A work of fact-based history, yet also a fantasy on themes of chivalry, his 1899 novel *James Fitzjames . . .*, while occasionally mined for biographical information by scholars of the 19th-century Arctic, has never been fully evaluated on its own terms. An initial read reveals various preoccupations: Christian spirituality; the male body in extremis; loyalty to the imperial hierarchy; and a deep interest in establishing James Fitzjames as a heroic figure for posterity. In this paper, I aim to uncover various meanings embedded in this romance, place it into the ongoing literary afterlife of the Franklin Expedition, and demonstrate some of the insights it can offer regarding Markham's role as a vital figure in the history of polar exploration.

Introduction

In late autumn 1899, as the Boer War worked up to a fever pitch in Africa, a 350-page manuscript was delivered to the home of elderly polar explorer Leopold McClintock, famous for discovering the final—and only—record of the fate of Sir John Franklin and his expedition, 40 years previously. His wife Annette read the manuscript out loud to him, and then it was returned to its owner. The letters accompanying its return were preserved alongside it, in the archives of the Royal Geographical Society. McClintock's letter, to the manuscript's author, Sir Clements Markham, seems to stress—in a very restrained Victorian way—that its contents ought not to be shared with anyone outside of Markham's private circle: "I am most strongly impressed by it—so vigorous & yet so pathetic but I will only venture to say that, your relatives + most intimate friends whom you may allow to read it, must treasure + regard it, as the expression of your own strong personal + private convictions, upon one of the most marvellous episodes ever in English History" (1899).

The second letter, from Annette McClintock to Markham's wife Minna, is revealing in a different way. Explicitly referencing the war effort and quoting Kipling, she draws a direct connection between Markham's idiosyncratic work of historical fiction and the present-day ideology of the British Empire. "When I think of the noble heroism shown by our Fathers, our Husbands, & now our Sons, I feel proud of my Race—and long to be worthy of the men I belong to [. . .] I am sure we all feel this now as regards South Africa—& as I look on all which our younger men are doing I feel inclined to exclaim in Rudyard Kipling's words 'Truly ye come of the blood'" (1899).

What could possibly be contained in this manuscript, entitled *James Fitzjames,* to stir up such different feelings in this elderly married couple—caution versus patriotism? Why did Annette McClintock describe it as "so admirably conceived & written, as to be almost too much" and say that she "had a job to read it aloud"? It has never been published (as Markham's manuscript *Antarctic Obsession* was in 1986 by Bluntisham Books), and it is rarely cited. After reading it, it is fairly clear why. It is long, dull, of a low literary quality, and it is clearly stated to be fiction. Scholars interested in the Franklin Expedition as a historical event, rather than Markham's personal relation to it, would understandably bypass the meandering, impenetrable bulk of the "romance" after making use of a choice few factual morsels copied into the front matter by the ever-detail-obsessed author.

Markham's contributions to the history of British polar exploration have been dealt with extensively in polar literature, with an understandable focus on his mentoring of Robert Falcon Scott, and the expeditions that he had a hand in organising, mainly the British Arctic Expedition of 1875-6 under Sir George Nares and the British Antarctic Expedition of 1901-4 under Scott. However, Markham's relation to the Franklin Expedition has been underexamined. Here I aim,

by presenting an initial gloss of his unpublished novel *James Fitzjames,* to contribute to further insights into Markham's role as central connector between the Victorian era expeditions and the "Heroic Age" which followed and the ideals which that role was carried out in order to satisfy.

Clements Markham, consummate colonialist

Born in 1830, Sir Clements Markham was educated at Westminster and entered the Royal Navy in 1844 as a first-class volunteer. He served in the Pacific as well as the Arctic before leaving the service to join the imperial bureaucracy which he spent the rest of his life in dedication to. For 25 years, beginning in 1863, he was the Honorary Secretary of the Royal Geographic Society; subsequently, he was elected President of that organisation in 1896. What he is most remembered for today is his contribution to the history of polar exploration—"few men of his time could claim such prolonged involvement in polar affairs" (Holland, 1986, p. ix). He served as a midshipman on an 1851 Royal Navy expedition in search of Sir John Franklin in the Canadian Arctic and a love for the polar regions stayed with him throughout his life. He was more or less solely responsible for ensuring that the turn-of-the-century expeditions sent out by Britain were naval expeditions, hewing close to his ideals of military valour, rather than the scientific civilian expeditions that many others were campaigning for—"he made himself the chokepoint, the bottleneck, through which British polar lore passed through on its way to Scott" (Spufford, 1996, p. 277).

While still working at the India Office, he went out as the geographer in residence on the 1867 British expeditionary force to Abyssinia, a venture which Felix Driver selects as an exemplar of the RGS's role in the 19th century as an "intermediary role between geographical science and the imperial state" (2001, p. 43). Also at the India Office, Markham presented a plan to completely reorganise the archives according to a scheme of complex taxonomy of his own devising that "sought to produce a synoptic view of India, rendering it both known and knowable, and producing it as a singular entity in the political imaginaries of both [coloniser] and [colonised]" (Mitchell, Lester, & Boehme, 2017, p. 17). This sort of ostentatious ambition is typical of him, especially in the realms of knowledge production and exploration.

He was a controversial figure throughout his life, and made many enemies, including Shackleton and Amundsen, thanks to his caustic and domineering personality. But he led a busy social life and was popular enough to be mourned at his death at age 86 (after having accidentally lit himself on fire while reading in bed) and receive a complimentary obituary from the then-current head of the RGS, J.S. Keltie. Amidst lauding him for his accomplishments in the fields of geography and exploration, Keltie comments offhand that "one of his striking characteristics was his love for the company of young men—Westminster boys, naval cadets, aspiring explorers, and others preparing for their career in life" (Keltie 1916, p. 6).

Markham's homosexuality has been to some degree or another accepted by some researchers (most prominently Huntford and Spufford) and ignored or deemed irrelevant by others. Viewed through a modern lens, it is difficult not to "see the obvious" in Markham's documented affinities, but a degree of caution against that very thing must be maintained, while yet still allowing for the ways in which queerness as a valid lens can lend analytical depth to historical research. In his analysis of Markham's eccentricities, Spufford specifically emphasises the lack of concrete evidence, speculating that the married Markham led a "clenched life" (1996, p. 274). But as Robert Aldrich (2003) carefully explains in his landmark study of colonialism and homosexuality, "such a conclusion, implying sterile lives of fearful frustration, tortured celibacy or assignations so clandestine as to go unrecorded, places overly great weight on physical (particularly genital) satisfaction. A demand for physical consummation may not have been felt strongly by all these men, especially in an age that valued chastity and sexual abstention" (p. 100). Certainly, Markham falls squarely into the category of prominent colonialist men examined by Aldrich for whom intense relationships, whether patronage-based or otherwise, with men and boys formed a primary and necessary element of his emotional life throughout his adulthood, a category which includes other notable figures in the history of exploration as Richard Burton and James Brooke.

Though he departed the Royal Navy as an adolescent and never returned, he maintained a close affiliation with it through his participation as observer and mentor to the cadets of the Training Squadron beginning in the late 1880s (through which he first encountered Scott), as well as his promotional efforts on behalf of Naval polar exploration. Using his own manuscript as evidence, I would add that in the case of Markham, another one of these primary emotional attachments, lasting over half a century, was not to a real living man nor even one that he had ever met, but to an idea of Commander James Fitzjames which he had built up second-hand inside his head.

The manuscript

Thanks to its inherent ambiguity and open-endedness, the Franklin expedition has been at the centre of fictional explorations since shortly after it disappeared (Moss, 2006). Novels such as Mordechai Richler's *Solomon Gursky Was Here* (1989), Sten Nadolny's *The Discovery of Slowness* (1983), William T. Vollmann's *The Rifles* (1994), and especially Dan Simmons' *The Terror* (2007) and its subsequent television adaptation have brought the expedition's history to the forefront of popular culture, creating and sustaining versions of polar history in the public imagination for the late 20th and 21st century (Potter, 2013). According to Russell Potter, the first fictional adaptation of the Franklin story was published as early as 1851, and at least two dozen have been published since 1965 (Potter, 2023, p. 222).

A half-century before Markham's manuscript, Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins adapted the Franklin story into their sensational and popular melodrama *The Frozen Deep.* But for the most part throughout the Victorian and Edwardian period, however, nonfictional first-person accounts of exploration were much more important than fictional adaptations, not only as accessible and popular documentation of the events which occurred, but for dictating the frame by which those events would have been be understood and analysed, as well as for creating via authorship the idea of the explorer himself (Craciun, 2011).

James Fitzjames, the third-in-command of the Franklin Expedition and the captain of HMS *Erebus,* never became mythologised in the popular imagination the way that Sir John Franklin himself did, following the loss of the expedition. Unmarried and childless, he did not have a Lady Franklin to cannily engineer the collective emotional investment necessary for a hero to be established in the public consciousness (Jones, 2007, p. 441). And vitally, the Franklin expedition left no written records behind, so there were no first-person accounts from the expedition itself which recounted its narrative from beginning to end. "Explorers fashioned themselves as heroic figures through the

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stories they told," but Fitzjames' fate denied him this opportunity for authorship and fame as an explorer, and thus by the 1890s he had faded into obscurity (Jones, 2004, p. 27).

It is clear Markham was dissatisfied with the existing Franklin-centred history, and found it necessary to right this wrong. He would create a record of the Franklin expedition, in the form of a lengthy romance centring on, and meaning to elevate, James Fitzjames—whom, for whatever reason, he had identified as being worthy of such elevation since first hearing of him as a midshipman. A project this ambitious was not out of character for Markham by any means. As an "inveterate scribbler," Markham embodied the "distinctly Victorian pathology of graphomania" (Baughman, 1999, p. 11; Brophy, 2010, p. iii). He constantly had in print new lectures, articles and pamphlets, as well as a flow of books dedicated to various historical, geographical, and colonial subjects. His archive demonstrates the true extent of his inscriptional obsession. The preserved notebooks run from journals kept aboard his first naval posting on HMS *Collingwood* in 1844 to entries of dinner parties kept in the last years of his long life.

The manuscript I examine in this paper is one of many dozens of handwritten books which are held in Markham's section of the Royal Geographical Society archive. It is over 550 pages long, closely written in his recognisable spidery hand. The full title is as follows: *James Fitzjames: the story of the friendship, devoted zeal for the service, high souled courage, self denial, and heroic deaths of 129 British Naval Officers and Seamen—A Romance based on information and on facts so authentic and so numerous that it must be very near to the truth.* Out of all of this, an intriguing word is "information." Previously, it had meant no more and no less than the knowledge or sensory qualities through which one is informed, empirically, by the outside world, but was by the time of Markham's writing, and the rise of imperial bureaucracy that he was so closely identified with, coming to mean "knowledge beyond the range of one's experience," collected and organised in order to efficiently manage and control people and processes (Peters, 1988, p. 15-16). By invoking the then-novel meaning of "information" in the subtitle of the manuscript, Markham indicates the work's eccentric interplay between fin-de-siècle bureaucratic empiricism and the imperial imagination, and his intention to establish the work's authority as convincing narrative.

As an archivist and geographer, it was Markham's job to embody and further the "task of nineteenth-century science to radically expand the margins of the legible world" (Brophy, 2010, p. 42), as seen in his attempts to reform the archives of the India Offices, but he was also an obsessive fantasist, in that scheme as well as others. It is noted that his fantasy of a totalising system of indexical completion that would organise the entire Indian project "resembles the 'imperial archive' that Thomas Richards identifies as a presiding trope of much late Victorian fiction: a bank of data dedicated to maintaining 'the possibility of comprehensive knowledge . . . '" (Richards quoted in Mitchell, Lester, & Boehme, 2018, p. 17). His powers of imagination allowed him to conceive of this scheme and many others, such as the manuscript of *James Fitzjames*, and his powers of recall and organisation allowed him to attempt to manifest them.

In the preface, Markham justifies the unimpeachable accuracy of his book by stating: "Only one could venture upon such a narrative who has intense and long enduring sympathy, who has special knowledge of the actors in the events he undertakes to relate, and personal knowledge of the environment, and whose lips have felt the freshness of the 'fount of poesy'" (p. xiii). Supporting this "special knowledge," the manuscript begins with biographies of the officers on the *Terror* and the *Erebus*, collected from accounts Markham had in turn collected from men who knew those officers over the years. This second-hand information means that certain facts about the officers can *only* be found in this volume, but quite a bit of it is inaccurate and unreliable, making it a fraught source for historical research. William Battersby, for example, discovered Markham's misconception about the identity of Elizabeth Coningham. Elizabeth, to whom Fitzjames wrote the letters home which Markham drew on heavily for the first section of the book, was not Fitzjames's sister, but in fact his sister-in-law. Such a mistake, lifted from Markham's work and repeated elsewhere, had led to the obscuring of Fitzjames's real background for over a century until the truth was revealed by Battersby in 2010 (Battersby, 2010). (In an echo of that, Battersby in telling the story of the error mischaracterised this very manuscript as belonging to Sir Clements' cousin, Sir Albert Markham, a mistake I aim to correct here.) Another error can be seen in the fact that Markham clearly did not have access to an accurate crew list with ranks, only the muster rolls with names—possibly those held at Kew. This resulted in a chaotic jumbling-up of the roles of all men (save the officers and the Marines), such as caulker's mate Cornelius Hickey as Terror's cook, and steward Edmund Hoar as captain of Erebus's afterguard.

The book can be divided into three main sections, fronted by a preface that explains Markham's own personal history in relation to the Franklin Expedition. Firstly, Chapters I-IV, which include biographies of all officers of *Erebus* and *Terror*, and the narrative of the expedition's fitting-out and voyage as far as Disco, recreated from extant sources. Chapters V-XIX consist of Markham's interpretation of the rest of the story, based infallibly (he tells us) purely on his own knowledge of Arctic exploration and of the character of the men who participated in the expedition. This narrative winds down to its expected end, followed by epilogues in Chapters XX and XXI detailing the subsequent search expedition, including the one which Markham participated in.

For the first few years of the expedition, chronologically, Markham's narrative mainly focuses on the delightful, spirited polar adventures of his protagonist and his friends. This fictional imagining of the "lighter" side of the expedition is a reflection of Markham's experiences on the Franklin search, tinged with nostalgia for the winter spent trapped in the ice on the *Assistance.* It features as its main character Robert Thomas, the real-life 2nd mate of *Terror*, who is identified explicitly as a Markham stand-in (Markham, 1899). Markham, like Thomas, was the youngest officer on the 2nd ship of his own two-ship expedition in 1851. Thomas takes on a myriad of traits favoured by Markham: always high-spirited, mischievous, fond of theatre and music, creative and energetic, but also pious, obedient, and, most importantly, ardently worshipful of James Fitzjames. Though he is a "chartered libertine" and an "audacious young ne'er do well," he manages to effortlessly win over even the hardest-hearted of his superiors; he spends his time variously organising masquerades, playing with his cup-and-ball, and singing songs. He is adept at "the arts of laughing and making a noise" and giving out nicknames.

The young Thomas, Markham asserts that he heard from someone who knew him personally, had rejoiced in the nickname of "The Baby" and so that becomes how he is referred to throughout the narrative. This frequently results in eyebrow-raising sentences such as "'O Baby! Baby,' thought Fitzjames, 'you young tempter'. and 'Come to bed Baby' cried the Commander out of his wraps" (p. 200). The Baby's best friend is his opposite number on *Erebus,* mate Robert Orme Sargent.

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Together they swear fealty to "Sir James Fitzjames," The Knight of Snowden (p. 225) (referencing Sir Walter Scott's *The Lady Of The Lake,* in which James Fitz-James is the true King in disguise, and after whom Fitzjames the man may have actually been named) and, eventually, devote themselves to him unto death.

Needless to say, Fitzjames is the very last to die at the end of the narrative, but not before he takes up the role as leader of the expedition, one which Markham imagines he had always been destined for:

> "Naval discipline does a great deal towards the creation of a perfect ships' company, but there must also be the calm control, the intellectual courage, the hearty sympathy of a man rarely gifted such as Fitzjames . . . " (p. 233)

Markham acknowledges the inspiration he took from his own experiences on the Franklin search to depict the men of the lost expedition, their relationships and hierarchies, how they spent time amusing themselves during the Arctic winter, and the geographical and meteorological specifics of how they navigated the polar archipelago. His biography, written by his cousin Admiral Albert Markham, offers further insight into how Markham's earlier adolescent experiences in the Royal Navy inspired the depiction of the relationship between the Baby and Fitzjames. One Lieutenant Peel aboard the HMS *Collingwood* was a 14-year-old Markham's mentor throughout his maiden voyage, and Markham came to adore him. When he departed the ship at Valpairaso in order to carry despatches to England, Markham wrote in his diary: "My heart is like lead. I went down into one of the cabins, and shed bitter tears." Albert Markham goes on to state that "the intensity of his interest in the Navy considerably diminished after the departure of Lieutenant Peel," and indeed he began to contemplate leaving the service at this point, having served less than a year, though in the end he would stay long enough to participate in the 1850-51 season of the Franklin search (Markham, 1917, p. 40–41).

This romanticised mentorship is seen in the narrative as a repeated motif: between the Fitzjames and "his young esquire" the Baby and also notably in the loyal Boy Chambers who refuses to leave Edward Couch, carefully nursing his "young master" in the boat at the Boat Place until he at last becomes "A boy hero! Setting out to his death to save his master" as he leaves to hunt for food and never returns (p. 269-70). Earlier in the story, after the death of Braine, who had previously been Couch's servant, Boy Chambers "came to Couch's cabin one evening, and begged to be taken as his servant" (p.140).

In addition to depicting pivotal scenes at the Boat Place and Victory Point, the narrative, as it moves forward past the abandonment of the ships, accounts for every single relic recovered by search expeditions, as well as for a large proportion of the Inuit testimony acquired by John Rae and Charles Francis Hall that detailed the movements of the expedition post-1845. Markham also used his professional knowledge of geography and cartography to map out the various hunting, sledging, and exploring routes taken by the expedition. This method of narrative construction connects Markham's novel to the contemporary genre of "Franklin novels" described above and to the genre of polar exploration fiction as a whole, which "explores the gaps, contradictions and subtexts of polar expedition records" by incorporating real textual records and expedition documents (Leane, 2023, p.5). The authoritative and realistic elements of the lengthy account exist inseparably from and support the idealised, stereotyped interactions between the characters, which provide a utopian view into Markham's conception of the past and future of polar exploration.

The male romance

While Markham establishes in his prologue that the concept for *James Fitzjames* had been a subject of contemplation ever since his own journey to the Arctic in the 1850s, it took him nearly a half-century to get it written down. By the time he did, he had been active in the promotion of British Antarctic exploration for six years. Since 1893, he had been constantly writing letters and lobbying for funding, and for the most part, he had been unsuccessful, but slowly the tide was beginning to turn (Baughman, 1999). The literary juncture at which his manuscript (at least this final draft of it) arrived was a critical one, as the 1890s was the peak of the imperial adventure story. Michael Saler's account of the New Romance is helpful here. The New Romance, beginning with *Treasure Island* in 1887, had "the expressed intention of combining the objective style of realism with the fantastic content of romance" (Saler, 2012, p. 59). Somewhat coterminous with the "King Romance" genre as defined by critic Andrew Lang at the time, the New Romance in all its imperial glory was deeply interested in maleness, strength, and re-capturing or rescuing a "lost" British race from the perils of perceived fin-de-siècle emasculation (Arata, 1996). Notable works of this period included Haggard's *She* and *The Mines of King Solomon,* as well as Kipling's works. According to his diaries, Markham was a habitual reader of novels, so it's likely he osmosed the trappings of this genre. The combination of romance and adventure was a very specifically imperialist form during this era. In the manuscript, Markham intermixes realism with emotional description of the Franklin Expedition's noble sacrifice. This has the effect of making narratively explicit the sense of loss and pre-emptive grief which the broader genre of male romance was imbued with (Arata, 1996).

According to John Miller (2012), the contradiction between realism and fantasy is an essential element of imperial romance: "the documentary [candour] required by colonial discourse in its romances finds itself haunted by elements of fantasy that combine with these sober intentions" (p. 28). It is clear that despite his deep authorial affection for Fitzjames and his young wards, Markham cannot allow himself as a rational geographer and man of science, to delve at all into pure romantic fantasy—in the sense of imagination, speculation—and ask the question, "what if they had been saved?" But vitally, he carefully avoids the specific kind of moral frailty which brings failure in the imperial Gothic tales of Conrad, in which "adventure turns sour or squalid" (Brantlinger, 1988, p. 239). Absent throughout the manuscript are any hints of the cannibalism and mutiny which feature prominently many fictional interpretations of the expedition, which shows Markham's desperate wish to prove the civilising effect of religion and naval discipline even at the ends of the earth. Instead, the failure of the expedition is carefully delineated as being absolute and inevitable due to factors outside of the protagonist's control. Failure is caused initially by the agedness of Crozier and Franklin —too inflexible and bull-headed to take note of the spry and intuitive Fitzjames's correct advisement on their route, and then magnified by the poison contained in the canned foods supplied to the expedition by Stephan Goldner (even though Goldner had been exonerated years prior in court—see Carney, 2020). Finally, blame is assigned to Inuit encountered by the expedition members, who only appear briefly in a violently racist depiction which jars against their total prior absence in the narrative. This depiction contrasts with the encounters of trade, entertainment, and hospitality which Markham surely would have read of in the narratives of Parry's earlier expeditions. Characterised as universally bloodthirsty

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thieves, the Netsilik as xenophobically caricatured by Markham are much worse even than Charles Dickens' canard of "covetous, treacherous, and cruel" and are depicted as solely responsible for the brutal murder of innocent crew members. This depiction has much in common with the tale of the massacre of Franklin survivors by Inuit as told by interpreter Adam Beck to Sir John Ross in 1850; Markham would have heard this story on the Assistance as it spread between ships of the search fleet and may have embedded in his personal narrative of the expedition's fate then and there, unable to be dislodged by subsequent conviction of Beck as a liar by Ross and Austin (Woodman, 2015).

The displacement of blame, and the characterisation of the expedition's failure as wholly inevitable, emphasises how noble sacrifice is central to the narrative and does not damage but in fact upholds the imperial ideals of the expedition. In this way, Markham wholly abjures himself of any relation to the actual fantastic and instead is able to state with perfect self-assurance that "They never prayed for deliverance or safety, but only that they might be given strength to bear themselves like true Englishmen, and to do useful and loyal service to the leader they loved so dearly" (p. 240).

This forbearance and seeming passivity are far from incompatible with the heroic ideal of the Victorian polar explorer, and in fact are characteristic qualities of the masculine, Christian hero braving the unforgiving environment which had been well established in the post-Franklin era (Cavell, 2008, p. 134). By combining this existing narrative with the contemporary, popular framework of the New Romance, with all of its tropes and trappings, Markham thus attempts to re-templatise the existing legend of the heroic sacrifice of Sir John Franklin, erasing Franklin and instead centring Fitzjames and his young ward, Markham's self-insert.

Not only did Markham attempt with this manuscript to produce a realistic portrait of the historical figure of James Fitzjames but also he aimed specifically to uplift him into this more recently reified category of imperial hero, by relying on imagery of virtue and self-denial familiar from the literature of heroism of the late 19th century, and thereby evoking popular figures who "invariably wedded the Christian and the military virtues that were so characteristic of the age" such as Havelock and General Gordon (MacKenzie, 2017, p.15). This is the rhetorical device that Annette McClintock was responding so emotionally to in her letter to Lady Markham, which conjured up vivid images of the young men then engaged in the fight against the Boers.

To support his narrative, Markham relies on hard bureaucratic "information": experience, material artefacts, and transmitted knowledge. Almost as if anticipating hypertext, he underlines all proper names in red, and inserts page references to other appearances of that name in the margin, as if beckoning readers to click (by page-turning) and explore. The emphasis on indexical completion, not to mention the cartographic perfection of his maps, invokes "a promise of perfect fidelity resulting from direct commerce with natural phenomena" (Brophy, 2010, p. 50), and attests to the true, correct reality of the idealised English bodies which Markham compulsively dwells upon. This then permits an alternative "exaltation of the hero" through righteous and uncomplaining death. Spufford (1996) suggests that Markham's recourse to collections of facts "stimulated his emotions without him having to look at the emotions' source" (p. 281) and while that may be true, perhaps moreso in the wholly nonfictional narrative of the *Discovery* expedition that Spufford examined, readers of the romance of *James Fitzjames* are able to perceive a great deal of emotion. Markham argues the factuality of the affecting scenes he presents, using the hard bureaucratic reality of organised information in order to support the dangerous, redeeming, and imperial nature of his ideal form of exploration:

> "Never was there a braver and finer body of men. They would all face death in the service of their country without fear. Yet its form was terrible, not as on the battlefield, but coming slowly and stealthily. It called for more than a warrior's courage and resolution to meet death without flinching when it came in such a form as this" (p. 222)

And imagination and fantasy are especially visible in the text in the clear passion for the relationships he depicts, most prominently those between the Baby and Sargent, between the two boys and Fitzjames, and between Fitzjames and his loyal men:

> "The powers of Arctic nature were mighty and terrible, but they had their limit. They could kill, but they could not conquer. The humblest boy in the expedition, with his heroism and self-devotion, rose above them and scorned the worst horrors. Fitzjames had almost joyfully witnessed this. But never had he been so proud of his gallant followers, as when they came forward to face danger for their helpless friends" (p. 277).

Staging *Fitzjames*

Amidst Markham's biography, one characteristic feature is his obsession with theatre. In his *Arctic Navy List,* an exhaustive 1875 publication which details the biographies of every Royal Navy officer who served in the polar regions up to and including the members of the 1875 Nares expedition, Markham includes not only each man's service record and the islands and capes named after him, but also the roles he played in the all-male productions put on during expeditions. In *James Fitzjames,* the idyllic first half of the romance records a great deal of play-making and masquerading: "She Stoops To Conquer" and "Blue Beard" are performed by the officers, and it is even noted the Baby is "gorgeous in his eastern costume, as 'Fatima'" (p.133).

These depictions of performance reflect Markham's nostalgia for the shipboard plays and masquerades that he enjoyed on board the *Assistance.* The tradition of polar theatre was established by W. Edward Parry in part to ward off the possibility of non-normative, disruptive behaviour and disease amongst expedition members during the polar winter. It diffused a potential build-up of homoerotic impulses by providing, via the medium of cross-dressing performers, acceptably heterosexual outlets for desire (Mossakowski, 2015). On the *Assistance,* Markham participated in the staging of the only original play written aboard a Franklin search ship, "Zero: Or, Harlequin Light," penned by the ship's purser. The play was enthusiastically reported and reprinted in his 1853 volume *Franklin's Footsteps,* as a centrepiece of his remembrances of the expedition. Heather Davis-Fisch examines how the performance neutralised the threats of the Arctic environment, showing how frostbite and scurvy "could become, through the slap of the imperial bat, as familiar and domestic as the archetypically British characters of Clown and Pantaloon" (2012, p. 59). In the manuscript, the Baby finds an appropriate outlet for his mischief in his participation in shipboard entertainments. He even seeks special permission from Fitzjames to put on an entertainment featuring a mixed group of officers and men, a transgression of hierarchy which is allowed and encouraged as an innovative idea by a young officer.

Another reflection of his passion for the theatre is how Markham also often deploys stage devices in his own text: "The scene changes to a few hundred yards to the ships," he writes as the

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men beat a retreat to *Terror* after their initial walk-out (p. 273). Viewing this work *as* a type of performance aligns it with the idea of "performances [. . .] that testify to experiences" (Davis-Fisch, 2012, p. 15) situating it within a personal repertoire of emotion and interpretation on the part of Markham's naval and Arctic past. It also calls forward to his ongoing performance, during and after the completion of the manuscript, as the loud and forceful leading voice behind the promotion of Antarctic exploration at the turn of the 20th century.

The attempted recovery of the "real" story of the Franklin expedition as centrepiece of Markham's literary effort engenders the "same structures of substitution and surrogation that characterise theatrical performance" (Davis-Fisch, 2012, p. 17). He makes use of the story of the Franklin Expedition to put on a play, so to speak, which uses Arctic as an empty stage for a performance of colonial erotics. This performance has as its central dramatic theme the claim that the horrors of the expedition, as reported, did nothing to diminish the true English spirit of loyalty, bravery, and adventure—and that it allowed or even actually enhanced the expression of loyalties and intimacies demonstrated between his depicted characters. Like the polar balls and masquerades which allowed Markham and his fellow officers "significant license [.] to rematerialise their personas and explore other subjectivities" (Mossakowski, 2015, p. 91), the process of writing *James Fitzjames* involved Markham inhabiting the subjectivities of the Baby, Fitzjames, and other members of the Franklin expedition, in a performance which explicitly emphasised his authority and expertise, and implicitly revealed his emotional and ideological priorities.

Throughout the story, the characters of *James Fitzjames* again and again express Markham's romantic ideals. The narrative acts as a total refutation of what Patrick Brantlinger (1988) describes as the central themes of the "imperial Gothic," which included during this era apocalyptic themes of "individual regression or going native; an invasion of civilisation by the forces of barbarism or demonism; and the diminution of opportunities for adventure and heroism in the modern world" (p. 230). The death scene of Charles Frederick Des Voeux exemplifies this "anti-Gothic" approach: "The Captain [Fitzjames] loved him as his own son, and had formed the highest opinion of his abilities and qualities as an officer. 'I did my best Sir! the service was my first thought'. These were his last words. He had done his best" (p. 296a). The lengthy sequence of the doomed walk-out in the manuscript is a montage of the homoeroticism of military death, the "bodily intimacy in times of physical extremity [leading] to a state of nakedness" (emotionally speaking) that would subsequently come to be a hallmark of trench warfare (Das, 2002, p. 53). It reaches a fever pitch when Fitzjames tenderly cares for Boy Young in his last moments, shortly before he himself dies at last:

> "The boy put his arm around his Captain's neck to raise himself. 'God bless you dear Master!'
>
> he whispered, and fell back dead. Fitzjames kissed the dead lad's forehead and rolled the body
>
> up carefully in blankets. Alas! he had no strength to do more." (p. 321)

Shortly after the completion of this novel, Markham organised the publication of the *Antarctic Manual,* a lengthy volume produced for and carried by the *Discovery* expedition, meant to provide guidance on every possible opportunity and obstacle that might be met in the Antarctic regions. As a fictional counterpart to the *Manual, James Fitzjames* presents in amateur, passionate form Markham's outline for the specific way in which polar disasters should proceed. The subjectivity of the explorers depicted in his narrative is thus strictly templatised, never permitted to overstep the boundaries into transgression, but allowed a great deal of physical intimacy as occasioned by proximity to death. Though *James Fitzjames* never circulated widely, it is substantial evidence of Markham's broader endeavour to write the history of polar exploration in two parallel but interrelated ways, in accordance with his personal set of ideals: as it was ongoing, in his role as expedition organiser, as well as retroactively, in the form of his Franklin expedition retelling.

Markham as artist, Markham as fan

Markham was a professional, a consummate one, with multiple prestigious postings and a knighthood, but in the context of this manuscript he was an amateur in all senses. He was a fan, even, with a "love of camp horseplay" which extended from his affinity for polar theatricals through to the dramatic excesses of the expeditions he shepherded (Mossakowski, 2015, p. 83). Spufford (1996) observes with regard to his role in polar affairs that "[even] as he produced it—made it happen—he consumed it, like a star-struck impresario who knows exactly what is happening backstage but falls for the magic of the performance every time" (p. 279). I argue that *James Fitzjames* provides vivid proof that not only did he consume the Franklin expedition as a fan, but he *transformed* it as one too. Creating this odd work involved participation in a one-man community, what Lisa Gitelman (2014) in her study of 19th-century Amateurdom calls a "self-imagined realm of belonging [. . .] in opposition to the larger public sphere" (p. 149) in which Markham "textually poached" all possible available facts of the expedition, up to and including the name of each individual crew member from the muster rolls (Jenkins, 1992).

Borrowing and inflecting the Franklin Expedition as Victorian mass-culture phenomenon, and thus transforming it into his own personal fantasy devoted to the worship of its title character as a hero, Commander James Fitzjames, whom Markham never actually met in life, Markham produced a singular document which could well be described as a "fanfiction" per Francesca Coppa's definition (Coppa, 2017). The 21st-century concept of a "transformative work" provides a useful lens through which to understand Markham's approach in conjunction with the genre background of the New Romance. To say Markham was a fan—one might call him a *fanboy* specifically of Fitzjames, to emphasise the youthful origins of his obsession in his experience as a midshipman on the *Assistance* in the Arctic—and was engaging in a practice based on his own affinities for the world of the Franklin Expedition, is not to downplay the importance of this manuscript as a vital artefact in understanding Markham's psychology. Precisely the opposite: after all, fan play and pleasure "can demand engagement with some of our own and other people's most disturbing feeling, memories, and desires, and can invite and withstand rigorous analysis" (Moon, 2012, p. 4). And the serious pleasure Markham took in creating the work is more than evident, in the elaborate nature of the manuscript, and its peritextual effusion of poems, photographs, quotations, drawings, maps, and charts. Additional evidence of pleasure can be found in the act of self-insertion, which is an activity often performed by modern-day fans who write themselves into stories alongside their favourite characters, often as love interests (Sapuridis & Alberto, 2022). By drawing a parallel between himself and the Baby, whom affection is lavished on by Fitzjames, Markham underscores the desiring nature of his own text.

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Another lens through which to consider Markham's opus is that of outsider art. While Markham was rich, privileged, socially prosperous, renowned, and held a great deal of power to affect the world around him—the very inverse of the poor, isolated American outside artist Henry Darger (1892–1973)—commonalities can be identified. The obscurity of the production, for one, being composed alone and shared with few others (one can assume) after its return from the McClintock household. Like Darger, Markham had a fixation with youth and innocence; like Darger he was densely prolific, a compulsive writer and creator, in whom scholars have identified the possibilities of a repressed sexuality. Tracing the various cultural sources that Clements Markham drew on to create *James Fitzjames* provides the opportunity to construct a kind of pop-cultural genealogy, just as Michael Moon does in his study *Darger's Resources*: such as the characters the Baby assigns to the various officers for the masquerade, including the celebrated dandy Beau Nash (The Baby), Rowlandson's Dr. Syntax (Gore), and the swindler Jeremy Diddler from 1803 farce *Raising The Wind* (Fitzjames).

Markham's Arctic experiences on the *Assistance* are accepted to have "permanently shaped [his] thoughts on how a polar expedition ought to be conducted" and thus influenced the Heroic Age expeditions (Holland, 1986, p. xii), but less known and accepted is how the Franklin expedition story also impacted his life and his Antarctic organising career. Because Markham received the story of the Franklin expedition second-hand, and subsequently appropriated it into his own creative works, viewing him as an outsider, an amateur, and a fan can provide a useful framework for acknowledging this influence, and it can also complicate understandings of his accepted role as a authoritative leader and consummate professional.

Conclusion

John Miller identifies a "psychoanalytic ripeness" of the genre of imperial romance, commenting that "[r]omance in the imperial context might be about opposition, confrontation and ultimately victory, but it also about liminality, ambivalence and regression" (2012, p. 30). The relegation of any and all violence solely to the shadowy, savage figures of Inuit makes a clear statement about Markham's wish to propose a certain innocence essential to the white imperial male body—even and perhaps especially those who, like Fitzjames, had participated in the brutality of the Opium War mere years prior. Unlike the scenes of hunting, killing, and cathartic masculine brutality which characterise the adventure fictions of H. Rider Haggard and his ilk, which deploy tropical and equatorial landscapes as their stage, Markham's imperial romance relies on an utterly bloodless yet totally consuming submission to the dominance of fate and God's will, with his characters amidst the desolation of the Arctic clinging closer to each other in repetitive scenes of pious speechifying:

> "[Fitzjames]: The evils [. . .] which now surround us, have brought out the highest and noblest qualities of those under my command, including those of yourselves boys, as no less danger could have done. In that I discern 'some soul of goodness'. Moreover I see that we are given a quick and merciful end, in proportion to the greatness of our sufferings, 'good being again the final goal of ill.'" (p. 294)

The deepest psychoanalytic ripeness here certainly presents itself in the relation between its title character James Fitzjames and its protagonist Robert Thomas/the Baby, a character explicitly identified with Markham himself. The affective process which led to Markham's lifelong obsession with the "ideal knight" (p. 306), James Fitzjames, as evidenced in his narrative, had a clear effect in terms of his efforts to relaunch a new golden age of British polar exploration. It is ironic that Markham's text explicitly connects Fitzjames' failure to be made leader of the expedition with the expedition's tragic end, a mistake he actively tried to correct in his own work. But that very correction also ended in tragedy. In his idealisation of Fitzjames's youth, inexperience, and ability to inspire loyalty, one can recognise the same priorities which led to his insistence on a young naval officer with no previous Arctic experience—Robert Falcon Scott—being chosen to lead an expedition on 19th-century principles, during the very years that this manuscript was being written. "Surely no more heroic band ever went forth to die, nor one led by a truer and more perfect knight" (p. 251) writes Markham, regarding Fitzjames, unintentionally anticipating not only the loss of Scott and his polar party but the subsequent cultural incorporation of Scott as a tragic hero.

Following Davis-Fisch, Markham's novel could be understood as a literary performance, appropriating the story of the Franklin expedition and the heroic persona of Fitzjames in order to process personal and cultural grief about the loss of the Franklin expedition, taking it upon himself to give the story an "accurate" ending which aligned and was coextensive with his own experiential and ideological knowledge. As Carolyn Dinshaw (2012) notes in her study of queer temporalities of history, "some kind of desire for the past motivates all our work, regardless of how sharp-edged our researches eventually become" (p. xiv). Markham's loving attempt to resurrect Fitzjames, with a goal of reinstating "the perfect knight" into a corrected history in which that larger-than-life figure could take a rightful and heroic precedence over the looming legend of Franklin himself, did not succeed. But the desire which Markham had for that outcome (and perhaps to some extent for Fitzjames himself) is visible, as is the effort which went into collecting the extensive corpus of details, evidence, information, and "truth" which the narrative rests on, and constructing that corpus into a narrative based on the exciting, appealing "imperial quest" of the New Romance. Polar explorers were both inspired by and the inspiration for such genre narratives, which "informed and reinforced both the public's and the men's own conception of their actual endeavours" (Leane, 2009, p.18), and Markham played a role in this cycle of inspiration.

His fictional narrative can provide insight into how he recalled and reused his own 19th-century polar experiences, but it can also be used to interrogate Markham's relation to polar exploration in the early 20th century. As Elizabeth Leane points out, the "urge to repeat and retell has focused on two expeditions in particular, both of which ended in tragedy and death"—Franklin's lost expedition and Scott's last expedition (2023, p. 5) The almost-supernatural forbearance, perseverance, and loyalty with which Markham's Fitzjames meets his end are the same qualities that would be explicitly invoked in Scott's final diaries over a decade later.

The way that Sir John Franklin nearly immediately "provided the principal model for Captain Scott, with comparisons heightened by the parallel between the dutiful grieving widows, Jane and Kathleen" (Jones, 2004, p. 220) may have frustrated Markham. If his manuscript had been published, perhaps Scott might have been compared by the media to his favourite Fitzjames rather than to the legendary Franklin, whom he saw as incompetent. The manuscript's proof of how the character of James Fitzjames was Markham's ideal polar leader provides a measuring stick by which to compare the performances of subsequent explorers through Markham's eyes, in addition to past ones. His critical attitude towards Antarctic explorer Carsten

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Borchgrevink is a prominent example of a failure to live up to the Fitzjamesian ideal, as is his heel-turn regarding Ernest Shackleton, viewed at one point by Markham as a promising officer, and subsequently as an upstart threat (Baughman, 1999, Riffenburgh, 2005). Scott, on the other hand, is often said to have been a better writer than he was an explorer. Though chosen by Markham for his ambition and capability, his lasting legacy was that he managed to write his own ending—in the end successfully avoiding the fate of forgotten Fitzjames which Markham had so intently sought correction for.

In conclusion, Markham's novel *James Fitzjames*, which has heretofore gone almost completely unstudied by polar historians, offers many avenues for further research. The manuscript provides an opportunity to centre emotion and affect in polar history, within political contexts, by emphasising the inextricability of embodied states such as nostalgia, desire, enthusiasm, and obsession, as they relate to the intensity of the pursuit of geographic exploration and imperial conquest on the part of their most prominent and privileged advocates. As a central connector between the Victorian era of polar exploration dominated by Franklin and the "Heroic Age" of Scott, Markham is an essential, if controversial, figure, and his self-representation in the context of his authorship and presence inside *James Fitzjames* provides a fascinating, strange, but undoubtedly enlightening source text.

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