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Finding Franklin: The Untold Story of a 165-Year Search by
Russell A. Potter (review)

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with thinking about Victorian narrative in the present moment and with the ways in which our moment is constructed by Victorian narrative. “Start” is the final word of *Good Form*, and Rosenthal’s is a book about pulling readers through fiction that tends to its “Afterward” with a beginning (191). Rosenthal’s finale makes a presentist commitment, never buried earlier in the book, especially explicit. “To the extent that nineteenth-century realism becomes a key site for formal narrative analysis,” Rosenthal claims, “it does so because it most fits the model of a story that makes sense, that works according to a narrative grammar that we understand” (193). There is a crucial looping quality to Rosenthal’s argument; our ideas about form are shaped by narrative theory, a theory that is shaped by its understandings of the nineteenth-century novel, and that same realism shapes the theories that elucidate its form. The looping quality to time throughout the book reinforces Rosenthal’s claims about how realist novels unfold their narratives from beginning to end. As Brooks observes, detective fiction famously loops narrative through plot as the retreading of the criminal’s steps—a process that defines a detective’s work—brings the order of events as told in the story in line with the order of events as they unspool in time.¹ Readers of *Good Form* experience something similar; understanding how narratives create trajectories that “feel right” is mediated not only by fiction itself but by our theories of narrative, which are informed by fiction. So it is that a novel’s ending is but a place to start.

Notes

- 1 Peter Brooks’s *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* is the touchstone for Rosenthal’s argument about narrative patterns and time frames in Victorian detective fiction.

Works Cited

Brooks, Peter. *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative*. Vintage Books, 1985.

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Finding Franklin: The Untold Story of a 165-Year Search

by Russell A. Potter; pp. 280. Montreal:
McGill-Queen’s UP, 2016. \$39.95 cloth.

THIS BOOK looks at the series of obsessive efforts to solve the most famous mystery of polar exploration—the disappearance of the Franklin expedition. Led by Sir John Franklin, this British Admiralty expedition departed

London in 1845 in the ships *Erebus* and *Terror* in search of a northwest passage connecting the Atlantic with the Pacific Ocean. By 1848, when no contact had been made with the expedition, a diverse array of people and institutions across the world mobilized to plan, direct, and participate in search and rescue expeditions that mapped much of what is now the Canadian Arctic. By the mid-1850s, when it was clear there could be no survivors, the aims of the Franklin searchers switched to collecting Inuit testimony about what had happened and locating documents, burial sites, artifacts, and even the elusive ships in an effort to reconstruct the expedition's events.

In a clear and free-flowing writing style, Potter's *Finding Franklin* focuses first on the types of evidence that have haunted Franklin searchers for generations—the bones and grave sites that have been located, the canned food the expedition carried, and the sparse documents recovered—namely the “Victory Point” record and the “Peglar Papers.” He then moves on to cover the efforts of dozens of Franklin searchers and researchers, such as Dr. John Rae in 1854, showing how each contributed new evidence and hypotheses that, mosaic-like, have allowed us to reconstruct much of what happened.

Books about the Franklin expedition are numerous but largely repetitive. For much of the twentieth century, most historians reconstructed events based on information contained in the “Victory Point” record recovered by Leopold McClintock's expedition in 1859. This traditional account argues that a general sickness (lead poisoning, botulism, or scurvy) decimated the crew and that the ships were abandoned in April 1848 near King William Island before a death march south toward the Great Fish River and the Canadian mainland. Aside from these arguments, there were debates about the value of the Inuit testimony collected by Rae and the American searcher Charles Francis Hall, the evidence for or against cannibalism, and whether Franklin and his men were bumbling imperialists with little knowledge of, or care for, local means of inhabiting the Arctic environment. Potter's achievement is to show, in a methodical fashion, how Inuit accounts from the 1840s and 1850s led directly to the location of the *Erebus* in 2014 by Parks Canada.

The key methodological shift in Franklin expedition scholarship in recent years came with David Woodman's *Unravelling the Franklin Mystery: Inuit Testimony* (1991). Woodman went back to Hall's notes and journals from the 1860s to challenge the traditional account of the disaster and carefully piece together a narrative based on the oral testimony of Inuit. Woodman also emphasized the location of relics, bodies, and other artifacts to paint a picture of multiple abandonments of the ships and multiple groups moving in different directions, some of which returned to the *Erebus* and piloted it south to where it sank in the Utjulik region. This narrative would account for stories of separate groups of white men encountered by Inuit far from the Great Fish River and stories of survivors still interacting with Inuit well into the 1850s. As Potter points out, Woodman connects historical scholarship and

respect for oral testimony on the one hand with the upsurge in field expeditions using side-sonar scanning equipment to search for the ships in the 1990s and 2000s on the other. Although Woodman did not locate the ships himself, his work, along with the consultation of the Inuk historian Louie Kamookak, were crucial in allowing Parks Canada to successfully narrow their multi-vessel searches to particular areas.

Like Woodman, Potter believes Inuit testimony about the expedition to be “the single most important body of evidence we have” (106). Potter is a careful historian whose analyses about the oral and material evidence are detailed without being obscure. However, he is also canny enough to know that not all testimony is equal. He recalls an episode in a speakeasy in Gjoa Haven when the proprietor told him a story of Franklin survivors that Potter excitedly believed to be close to nineteenth-century accounts. Potter writes, “Where had he heard these stories? Could he take me to some of the elders who still remembered them? He shook his head, laughing, then reached behind the counter and pulled out a battered copy of Woodman’s *Unravelling*” (203).

Potter brings our knowledge of the Franklin disaster up to date by highlighting the role of the Internet, the digitization of primary sources, and social media in assisting researchers and connecting communities in the Canadian north. The book is a paean to the efforts of the Franklin searchers—from the endurance and obsession of Victorian explorers like Hall and Frederick Schwatka to the work of archaeologists, forensic scientists, Inuit, and assorted amateur investigators in more recent years. It is unfortunate that *Finding Franklin* was published just as the *Terror* was located in September 2016, but it is consistent with Potter’s fine study that it was a tip-off from an Inuk crewman that led to its discovery.

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British Settler Emigration in Print, 1832–1877

by Jude Piesse; pp. 228. Oxford:

Oxford UP, 2016. \$115.50 cloth.

IN HER persuasively lucid monograph *Settler Emigration in Print, 1832–1877*, Jude Piesse quotes from George A. Sala’s sprightly account of emigrant embarkation: “They are all pressed for time, they are all going, cheerily, cheerily; they are all, if you will pardon me the expression, in such a devil of a hurry” (38). Amid the chaos of departure, journey, and settlement experienced by