

stark examples of such Soviet imaginings, Rethmann demonstrates more effectively through numerous Koriak anecdotes the disjunctures between the Koriak and Soviet worlds, as the Soviets attempted to impose political, social, and economic structures (chapter 3). Marked and rich is her attentiveness to Koriak interpretations of such disjunctures, such the complexity of local evaluations of marriage arrangements that the Soviets condemned and with which she herself at first found it hard to sympathize.

Rethmann then offers samples from several Koriak women's histories. She notes that she initially assumed such stories would corroborate and add detail to the available official histories of the region (page 70), but instead discovered whole new dimensions of the local histories in these tellings. Offering extensive verbatim quotes from interviews, Rethmann furnishes us with the voice of several Koriak women regarding the critical changes they experienced during the past several decades.

In a short mid-book chapter (chapter 5), Rethmann contemplates her own engagement with her research 'subjects' — her entanglements with their lives and relations, and the ethical dilemmas these pose. I plan to assign this chapter to future students planning fieldwork, as a succinct yet adroit reflection on the complications posed by such relations.

In the second part of the book, Rethmann turns to a more sustained focus on the stories of several women's lives, to explore the agency of women in situations of poverty, racial and gender discrimination, and imported value systems that challenge those of local origin. She first follows the lives of two women who are trying to negotiate paths to self-respect within the constraints of village-living in a mixed ethnic environment (chapter 6); she then turns to the stories of two women who seek to cement relationships with men who live on the land, through the cultural medium of sewing fur-gifts. The juxtaposition of the stories evokes the many complexities of gendered opportunities and confinements that women face in town and on the land, and the employment of 'tradition' and 'modernity' in trying to effect some personal headway. Especially lovely is Rethmann's examination of women's use of preparing fur clothing in sustaining relationships between themselves and the animals that support them, and simultaneously in pursuing relationships with the men they admire. In a final exploration of the complications surrounding, and limitations on, personal agency, Rethmann relates one Koriak woman's quest for realizing a calling of healer. Throughout these accounts, Rethman underscores both the individuality of women's interpretations of their situations, and their creativity in addressing these situations. She avoids exaggeration of their ability to overcome the obstacles that the women face, but does underscore the persistence of their attempts to mitigate the disastrous circumstances of life on the periphery of 'transition.'

If the book is occasionally marred by spotty editing of repetitive phrases and awkward wording (English not being Rethmann's native language), its prose is more often graced with wonderfully evocative passages. Photos

augment the text, allowing glimpses of the landscapes in which women and men struggle to dignify their lives. But it is especially through Rethmann's careful selection of direct quotations from the women and men of Tylmat, Ossora, Rekinniki, and other villages that she offers an opulence of local experiences of articulating with 'reforms' directed from far-away centers.

Throughout her book, Rethmann uses the *leitmotif* of mobility — traveling across distances both physical and social, passages between (changing) Koriak and non-Koriak spaces, and the departures from Koriak spaces, to the arrivals at spaces of hybridity, spaces themselves continually re-negotiated by Koriak women and men, if from a subordinate position. Centered on the locality of experiencing 'transition,' *Tundra passages* makes a commendable contribution to understanding the variegated ways in which those living in periphery, and especially women, endure and attempt to shape the forces that challenge their ability to live a life with dignity. (Gail Fondahl, Geography Programme, University of Northern British Columbia, Prince George, BC V2N 4Z9, Canada.)

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THE FRANKLIN CONSPIRACY: COVER-UP, BETRAYAL, AND THE ASTONISHING SECRET BEHIND THE LOST ARCTIC EXPEDITION. Jeffrey Blair Latta. 2001. Toronto: Dundurn Press. 320 p, illustrated, soft cover. ISBN 0-88882-234-0. Can\$22. 99.

Unfortunately the title resembles the sort of sensationalist headlines one sees in tabloid newspapers, and it promises things that the author fails to deliver. After reading the book twice I still do not know what the 'Franklin conspiracy' was all about, or what the 'astonishing secret' was.

In this highly unconventional view of the Franklin expedition and searches there are many surprising interpretations (or implications), among which are the following: Franklin was not sent to find a Northwest Passage, but to find something terribly important on King William Island; he and his men spent not one, but two, winters on Beechey Island; after abandoning the ships they still had plenty of food; the cannibalism story was a fake; the notes found at Victory Point have been misinterpreted by scholars; all the official search expeditions were just a smoke-screen, sent intentionally to where they would not find Franklin; commanders were ordered to conceal any Franklin messages they found in cairns; John Rae secretly visited King

William Island and stole records from Simpson's cairn.

One is bound to wonder what the mysterious thing on King William Island was, and why the Admiralty wanted to keep it secret. But, aside from mentioning legends about the Tunnit people and a phenomenon called the 'shaman light,' and dropping rather obscure hints about radiation sickness, Latta does not give us the satisfaction of knowing. The first section of the book is entitled 'The secret' but does not reveal what the secret was. The final chapter is called 'Epilogue: proof' but contains no proof of anything. The author then states, 'This book is all about conjecture, about theorizing and wondering, asking questions and seeking answers, no matter how unusual, no matter where they might lead' (page 295). In my estimation, the questions lead nowhere, and perhaps he already knows this, for he writes, 'Without hope of proof, without predictive value, all our conjecture can be no more than a fairy tale' (page 296). But, really, the fairy tale is somewhat incoherent.

Jeffrey Latta is described on the cover as a writer of popular science and drama. The title appears to reflect his interest in dramatics, and indeed the book reads like a mystery thriller. He attempts to keep the reader guessing about what is just around the corner, poses provocative questions, ends chapters abruptly with terse one-liners, decorates facts and ideas with suggestive phrases and adjectives, and tries to plant suspicion and doubt in the reader's mind at every turn. These literary devices keep suspense up for awhile, but after a few score pages I found myself thinking: well, this is all very interesting but when do I get to learn what the conspiracy was? At last, after 141 pages, the words 'Victory Point Conspiracy' leaped into sharp focus. Was this another conspiracy when I hadn't yet discovered what the one in the title was? Or was it the same conspiracy with a different name? I couldn't tell because it wasn't explained. The same term sprang briefly into view again a few pages later, then vanished.

Headings attempt to maintain the feeling of a murder mystery: 'The secret'; 'Prelude to disaster'; 'The ghost and Lady Franklin'; 'Into the darkness'; 'Whodunit?'; 'Two bodies and a note'; 'The ghost ship'; 'Rehearsal for murder'; 'A disturbed corpse'; 'Betrayal of the blackest hue'; and 'Belcher's madness.' In Latta's colourful language, the simplest events take on ominous overtones; betrayal, conspiracy, deception, omens, and secrecy seem to hover everywhere; and ordinary objects and events are astonishing, bizarre, eerie, ghoulish, incredible, and terrifying.

It is well known that there is a very large body of literature on the Franklin searches (1848–59). Most of the expeditions were followed by at least one published first-hand narrative. Newspapers and journals included many official despatches and personal letters, as well as opinions by observers in England. Relevant manuscript documents exist in various repositories. Scores of general histories of the period have been written. Many of the Arctic explorers, including Cresswell, Forsyth, Franklin, Kane, McClure, Parry, Rae, Richardson, and John and James Clark Ross, have been the subjects of biographies or in-depth studies. A number of scholars have probed into the records to

examine particular aspects of the Franklin story. Yet Latta's references and bibliography contain only two dozen books and half-a-dozen articles, only three of which are primary sources written in the nineteenth century — the published journals of Hall, Lyon, and McClintock.

I think a writer should carry out much better research before coming out with new interpretations. Depending on popular histories that are based largely on other popular histories is risky because important facts and clues may have been distorted or discarded, and sources of information may not be cited, making it difficult to assess reliability. An examination of original documents, on the other hand, enables a writer to avoid errors that have persisted through uncritical repetition, and may reveal other interesting aspects, or lead to other interpretations. I suspect that if Latta had studied first-hand accounts and unpublished Admiralty records, rather than what a few writers have chosen to cull from other secondary sources, he would have written a quite different book.

Failure to consult more reliable sources probably accounts for a number of incorrect statements, including the following: icebergs wrecked HMS *Fury* in Prince Regent Inlet (pages 31, 43) and nearly destroyed HMS *Terror* in Foxe Basin (page 50); James Clark Ross' two ships were towed through Baffin Bay (page 68); the Admiralty provided two of its ships for Penny's search expedition (page 77); the first Grinnell expedition intended to penetrate Smith Sound (pages 79, 84); Lady Franklin hired William Penny for the Admiralty expedition (pages 91, 114); the wood found by Penny in Queen's Channel 'almost certainly' came from Franklin's ships (page 113); and Kennedy's crew included 'several Canadian crew members' (page 118). The small yacht *Mary* on Sir John Ross' 1850 expedition is described as 'a tender' (page 87), but in fact she was towed (unmanned) by the larger *Felix*, and left in the Arctic. Latta writes of explorers travelling 'up' the Back and Mackenzie rivers to their mouths, and 'down' to their sources (pages 71, 153, 161, 187, 281), but rivers cannot flow uphill.

One can only applaud efforts to make historical writing more interesting, and to get the reader actively involved. But Latta's practice of posing rhetorical questions in headings and in the text becomes irritating. 'Could it be that...?' 'Is it not more likely that...?' 'What if...?' 'One wonders whether...?' 'Is it possible that...?' After being bombarded by no fewer than 263 questions (yes, I counted them), I felt as if I had just emerged from an examination.

Of course, lots of things are *possible*! Indeed, some readers may imagine possibilities that even Latta has overlooked. But what the reader really wants to know is which particular possibility is confirmed — or strongly supported — by the evidence, and what that evidence is. It is frivolous and pointless to mention (without proof) the *possibility* that Parry 'constructed a false narrative' of *Fury* being wrecked at Fury Beach in order to hide the fact that he had sailed to King William Island (page 48); the *possibility* that the real purpose of James Ross' expedition was 'to misdirect any future searches' (page 73); the

possibility that Collinson intended 'not to succour the lost expedition, but to seek, remove, and conceal the records they had left' (page 128); the *possibility* that Forsyth was ordered to 'effectively sabotage the only expedition dispatched to search in the right place' (page 86); the *possibility* that Belcher had been ordered to 'ensure Franklin was not found, whatever the cost' (page 141); the *possibility* that the Admiralty destroyed the ship *Resolute* 'in a clear and deliberate act designed to keep her from doing what so clearly had to be done' — that is, find Franklin (page 163); the *possibility* that the Admiralty arranged for the murder of Thomas Simpson in the American Great Plains in order to obtain and suppress 'papers which revealed the secret of the Northwest Passage' (pages 290, 294); and many others.

In his confusing web of speculation, Latta has tried to connect such disparate events as the replacement of the Dorset culture by the Thule culture, John Ross' sighting of the mythical Croker Mountains, the discovery of a pair of gloves on Beechey Island, the contradictory translations of Inuit testimony at Cape York, Bellot's drowning, Simpson's suicide or murder, the recovery of the derelict *Resolute*, and a stone grave seen on the Barren Grounds in the 1930s. But he does not provide a logical sequence of events, offer solid evidence that they were connected, or explain why the Admiralty might have wanted to send Franklin to King William Island and then prevent any discovery of his location. It is 'all about conjecture,' as he tells us at the end.

To take a fresh look at the Franklin expedition and search is a worthwhile objective, and Latta has applied a spirit of inquiry to many of the rather strange aspects of the search, such as the absence of messages from Franklin along his route, the curious tale told by Adam Beck, and the apparent lack of Admiralty interest in the bits of wreckage found near Victoria Island by Rae and Collinson. But he has not satisfactorily explained these things. Despite its title, the book is really about what *might* have happened. It is closer to 'virtual history' than to history, and I think this should be indicated in the title. But I wonder why he chose this approach. With his inquisitive mind, vivid imagination, flair for the dramatic, and familiarity with Arctic exploration, he might have combined many of his fanciful speculations into a fascinating historical novel. There are some excellent precedents for this, including Mark Adlard's *The Greenlander* (1978), Andrea Barrett's *The voyage of the Narwhal* (1998), James Houston's *The white dawn* (1972), and — specifically on the Franklin theme — Mordecai Richler's *Solomon Gursky was here* (1989), Rudy Wiebe's *A discovery of strangers* (1995), and John Wilson's *North with Franklin: the lost journals of James Fitzjames* (1999). (W. Gillies Ross, Department of Geography, Bishop's University, Lennoxville, Quebec J1M 1Z7, Canada.)

A LITTLE PIECE OF ENGLAND: MY ADVENTURES AS CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF THE FALKLAND ISLANDS. Andrew Gurr. 2001. London: John Blake Publishing. 290p, illustrated, hard cover. ISBN 1-903402-37-9. £16.99.

I enjoyed this book. It is light-hearted, and its declared

purpose is simple: Andrew Gurr narrates his varied experiences as the former Chief Executive of the Falkland Islands government between 1994 and 1999. A great deal changed in those five years. When Gurr took up his post, the Falklands was classified by the British government as a 'dependent territory,' but by the time he left, it was simply an 'overseas territory.' But there is more to this book than simply unreconstructed nostalgia, as the unfortunate title might initially imply. Gurr also shows himself to be a shrewd observer of the changing contours of the Falklands and Anglo–Argentine relations. The best chapter is unquestionably 'Pinochet, poaching and politics,' which deals with the political fallout for the Falklands following the arrest of General Pinochet in London during October 1998, following a request from Spanish authorities investigating alleged human-rights abuses. I had a fascinating interview with the author in December 1998, and we were able to reflect upon this saga as well as the reforms planned for the Falkland Islands government.

Gurr was appointed Chief Executive to the Falkland Islands in 1994, following a rigorous appointment procedure in the UK and the Falklands. After spotting the initial advertisement in *The Sunday Times*, the particulars attached to the post stressed the need for a developed sense of humour. Following on from his successful interviews, he and his wife Jean travelled to the Falklands in June 1994 to begin their five-year posting. Gurr is keen throughout the book to demonstrate that he did indeed possess a capacity for humour, and this is somewhat forced after the first chapter. However, when he focuses on his posting and, *inter alia*, the challenges of implementing pay and conditions for the civil servants following the Hay Report, he offers an informative overview of how much the Falkland Islands government has changed in the last 20 years. Life has become more complicated as affluence has diffused across that society, and administration of everyday life has grown accordingly. The Falklands, like many other places, is now an 'audit society.' I also liked the fact that he provides an insight into the social and cultural life of the Falklands, even if it is clearly shaped by his position as a highly paid expatriate. Some of these insights may seem a little trivial, but I was genuinely interested to read about what lay behind the door that divides the VIP waiting lounge at Mount Pleasant Airbase from the rather plain lounge in which I have spent many hours waiting for the northbound Tristar. I was pleased to read that it could never compete with a civilian airport's executive lounge! Other readers may enjoy his accounts of visiting penguin colonies, military culture in the Falklands, and the pitfalls of travelling in the Camp.

Constitutionally, as Chief Executive, Gurr liaised closely with the elected Falkland Islands Councillors and the Governor of the Falkland Islands. He was privy to many debates surrounding the economic and political future of the Falklands. The prevailing context is thus important here. When Gurr arrived in 1994, the Islands' economy had been thoroughly metamorphosed by fishing licensing, and public infrastructure was similarly trans-