

The Sea of Ice and the Icy Sea: The Arctic Frame of *Frankenstein*

Janice Cavell¹

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ABSTRACT. It has become common for scholars to understand the Arctic framing narrative of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* as a commentary on the northern expeditions sent out by the British Admiralty after the Napoleonic Wars. According to this view, the character Robert Walton is a surrogate for John Barrow, the principal organizer of the Admiralty expeditions. This article demonstrates that chronological factors make such an interpretation untenable. Yet the process through which the far North became the setting for *Frankenstein*'s opening and closing scenes is of great importance for understanding the evolution of the novel into its final complex form and with regard to broader considerations about the Arctic's place in Romantic literary culture. The article suggests other sources for the Arctic frame, most notably the 1815 plan by whaler William Scoresby for a sledge expedition toward the North Pole. Although Scoresby's lecture was not published until 1818, reports appeared in newspapers and periodicals soon after the lecture was given. There is strong circumstantial evidence to suggest that Mary Shelley read these reports. By tracing the likely influence of Scoresby and other Arctic writers on *Frankenstein*, the article both sheds new light on the novel itself and demonstrates the extent of the Arctic's presence in European culture even before the famous Admiralty expeditions.

Key words: Shelley; Mary Wollstonecraft; Scoresby, Jr., William; Barrow, John; North Pole; *Frankenstein*; open polar sea

RÉSUMÉ. Pour bien des érudits, la description narrative du cadre de l'Arctique faite par Mary Shelley dans son ouvrage *Frankenstein* fait figure de commentaire sur les expéditions nordiques organisées par l'Amirauté britannique après les guerres de Napoléon. D'après cette perspective, le personnage, Robert Walton, se veut le substitut de John Barrow, principal organisateur des expéditions de l'Amirauté. Le présent article montre que les facteurs chronologiques ne permettent pas de soutenir cette interprétation. Pourtant, la manière dont le Grand Nord est devenu la scène d'ouverture et de clôture de *Frankenstein* revêt une grande importance pour nous aider à comprendre l'évolution du roman dans sa forme complexe finale, à l'égard des considérations plus vastes quant à la place qu'occupe l'Arctique dans la culture littéraire romantique. Cet article suggère l'existence d'autres sources pour le cadre de l'Arctique, notamment le plan conçu par le baleinier William Scoresby en 1815 pour une expédition en traîneau vers le pôle Nord. Bien que l'exposé de William Scoresby n'ait été publié qu'en 1818, des reportages ont paru dans les journaux et les périodiques peu après la tenue de l'exposé. Il existe de fortes preuves circonstancielles suggérant que Mary Shelley avait lu ces reportages. En faisant le lien entre l'influence vraisemblable exercée sur *Frankenstein* par William Scoresby et d'autres auteurs sur l'Arctique, cet article jette une nouvelle lumière sur le roman même et montre l'étendue de la présence de l'Arctique dans la culture européenne avant l'avènement des célèbres expéditions de l'Amirauté.

Mots clés : Shelley; Mary Wollstonecraft; Scoresby, fils, William; Barrow, John; pôle Nord; *Frankenstein*; eaux libres polaires

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INTRODUCTION

For most of the 20th century, the Arctic framing narrative of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's *Frankenstein* received little more than passing mention in key scholarly works (e.g., see Small, 1973; Veeder, 1986; Mellor, 1988; Sunstein, 1989). The character Robert Walton, who encounters Victor Frankenstein and his Creature while Walton's ship is trapped in the ice during a fruitless quest to reach the North Pole, performs an essential mechanical function in the book as the interlocutor who hears and records Victor's story. Walton, who has his own intense ambitions and obsessions,

yet ultimately decides to turn back before disaster occurs, is also an obvious mirror and foil for Victor. The specifically Arctic element in his story, however, was long considered peripheral to the novel's main concerns.

This view is hardly surprising. Unlike Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Mary Shelley was never a devoted reader of exploration literature, and her private writings show little interest in the Arctic (on Coleridge's polar reading, see Lowes, 1951; Smith, 1956). To depict Walton's voyage, she had to undertake a program of reading on a largely unfamiliar subject. Anne K. Mellor (1988:57) therefore wrote in her magisterial study of Shelley that "Walton's

¹ Department of History, Carleton University, 1125 Colonel By Drive, Ottawa Ontario K1S 5B6, Canada; Janice.Cavell@carleton.ca
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mission is the one part of the story ... that drew on an intellectual rather than a psychological dimension of her consciousness.” Nevertheless, the scholarly consensus on the Arctic elements in *Frankenstein* was disrupted in 1997 with the publication of journalist and popular historian Francis Spufford’s bestselling *I May Be Some Time: Ice and the English Imagination*, for which he was named Young Writer of the Year by the *Sunday Times*.

Spufford took up a well-established theme in *Frankenstein* criticism—that Mary Shelley’s novel was intended as a critique of masculinist scientific culture—and applied it to Walton as well as to Victor. In his view, both Victor and Walton are examples of the “daring, definitively male experimenter.” Mary Shelley, Spufford argued, was thus “anatomising the attractions of [the Arctic] to a particular male sensibility, Romantic, self-driven, and ever willing to exceed the limits of the human body ... For her the pole [represented] destructive abstraction.” According to Spufford, when Mary incorporated a polar theme in her novel she was echoing a popular “topic of the times.” However, this device was not intended merely to increase the book’s appeal. Rather, Mary’s true motive was an urgent wish “to chill the fancy” of a reading public exposed to falsely alluring claims about northern exploration (Spufford, 1997:59, 62).

The claims were made by the second secretary of the Admiralty, John Barrow, who organized many expeditions to the Arctic and elsewhere between the end of the Napoleonic Wars and the 1840s. Barrow’s first Arctic plan, which was in general very enthusiastically received by the public, called for two northern voyages, one to search for the Northwest Passage and the other—like Walton’s expedition—to sail toward the pole itself. Both Walton and Barrow argued that the latter voyage would be feasible because the sea around the pole was free of ice. Spufford accordingly presented *Frankenstein* as one of many works in which the more sceptical members of British society pushed back against the narrative of heroic, scientifically minded Arctic endeavour promoted by Barrow. In Spufford’s view, then, Walton was not a subordinate character intended to indirectly influence the reader’s perceptions of Victor, but rather a target of criticism in himself, functioning as a surrogate for a well-known public figure.

Spufford’s book is a wide-ranging, highly readable, and generally well-researched tour de force, full of fresh insights and provocative theories. On the subject of gender and polar exploration, it offered many original and valid observations and introduced themes later taken up in more detail by academic writers. Like all wide-ranging works, however, it has its flaws and limits. The assertion that Mary Shelley’s book stood as an implicit criticism of Barrow and his Arctic enterprise is among them.

To what extent was Barrow’s northern project actually “a topic of the times” in 1816 and 1817, while *Frankenstein* was being written? Spufford (1997:58) mentions vaguely that the book was composed “before the return of the

Admiralty’s explorers,” John Ross and David Buchan. In fact, it was written before they set out, and before there was any indication that they would set out. In 1816 Barrow was making news with an expedition up the Congo River, for it was to Africa, not the Arctic, that he had turned in the early years of peace. Nor was there any expectation, even in naval circles, that he would shift his attention to the far North: in early 1816, John Franklin, a naval lieutenant on half-pay, applied to go on the Congo expedition because he saw no other likely path to promotion (Franklin, 1816). The open polar sea theory had a long history before Barrow took it up (see Wright, 1966; Savours, 1984; Robinson, 2007; Cavell, 2016), and there were many sources from which someone who knew nothing about Barrow’s plans might have learned about it.

Moreover, Walton’s expectation of finding land at the North Pole is directly opposed to the theories put forward in Barrow’s *Quarterly Review* articles. Barrow’s proposals were based on the belief that a deep ocean surrounded the pole. He was well aware that ice would inevitably accumulate around any land (Barrow, 1817:219, 222; 1818:449–452). Perhaps because land and an ice-free ocean were incompatible, Barrow’s Admiralty colleague John Wilson Croker (1818:381) remarked in his review of *Frankenstein* that it was unfortunate the novel had been written before the *Quarterly* “enlightened mankind on the real state of the North Pole.” Barrow was of course right about the deep polar ocean; his mistake was to conclude that its depth would prevent permanent ice from forming. Walton, then, makes an error that Barrow himself would have been the first to point out—and it is quite likely that he did point it out to Croker when the latter was writing his review. Furthermore, while Barrow’s goal was to find a passage to the North Pacific, Walton looks forward to the adventure of exploring his wondrous new land. He merely mentions the possibility of discovering a passage to show that even if the land does not exist, his enterprise will not be fruitless (M.W. Shelley, 1823I:2–4; on this edition, see Murray, 1981).

Frankenstein was begun in Geneva in the summer of 1816. The first draft has been lost, but according to Mary Shelley’s (1831:xi) own account in her preface to the 1831 edition, it did not include the Arctic frame at all, but rather jumped right into Victor’s first-person narrative with the famous words, “It was on a dreary night of November.” At Percy Shelley’s urging, she embarked on a longer, more ambitious version later in 1816. In November of that year, she “read old voyages” (M.W. Shelley, 1987I:146), no doubt to help her with the details of Walton’s expedition. There are, unfortunately, no surviving drafts of the opening Arctic section (Robinson, 2008:245n.1).

The manuscript was completed in the spring of 1817. The decision to send the two Admiralty expeditions was taken near the end of that year, when *Frankenstein* was already past the proof stage (on the production of *Frankenstein* by the publishers, see P.B. Shelley, 1964I:564–565, 572). The book was published on 1 January 1818; in a rather

remarkable coincidence, the first newspaper report on the North Pole plan appeared the same day. The Ross and Buchan expeditions sailed from Deptford more than four months later, in late April. Franklin, whose application for the Congo expedition had been unsuccessful, was Buchan's second-in-command.

Despite these facts, the existence of a link between Barrow's plans and Walton's polar ambitions was soon accepted. Three years after Spufford's book was published, Beck (2000:24) stated in the *Keats-Shelley Journal* that the Admiralty was focused on the Arctic "at the very time when Mary Shelley was writing her novel." The same theme was taken up by Richard (2003), followed by Hill (2007), Lanone (2013), and Craciun (2011, 2016). From these accounts it would appear that criticism of Barrow's project was among Mary's primary motives for writing the novel. Richard (2003:296, 307) asserts that "Victor's tale of over-reaching scientific undertakings is deliberately situated against the Arctic expeditions that were about to set sail" and that "Shelley's novel, far from simply appropriating a topic of contemporary discussion uncritically, must be counted among those voices that censured the revival of British polar exploration." Lanone (2013:29) even suggests that *Frankenstein* should be considered as an intuitive foreshadowing of the 1845 Franklin disaster. Both Richard (2003:297, 305–307) and Hill (2007:53, 56–57) argue that Mary was influenced by Barrow's article in the October 1817 issue of the *Quarterly Review*, which gave the first detailed account of the Admiralty's Arctic plans (on Barrow's long series of Arctic articles in the *Quarterly*, see Cavell, 2008; Wheatley, 2009). Richard (2003:309n.6) suggests that changes were made to the Arctic frame in the early stages of proofing, presumably after Mary read the October 1817 issue.

Such an intertextual link with famous expeditions is an exceptionally intriguing possibility for those interested in postcolonial readings of *Frankenstein* (e.g., see Bohls, 2013:173). However, there are strong objections from the chronological and other points of view. The *Quarterly* often appeared months late; the October 1817 issue was published in February 1818, more than a month after *Frankenstein* (Cutmore, 2005; Cavell, 2008:62–63). Given the date of the Admiralty decision to send the expeditions, Barrow's article was likely not even begun until November 1817, further delaying the already late publication of the new issue. Despite all the reasons for haste, the elaborate engraved map that accompanied Barrow's piece delayed things yet more (on the map, see Bravo, 1992:80–81, 84–85). Craciun (2011, 2016), implicitly acknowledging this insuperable chronological difficulty, focuses solely on an earlier article, this one in the October 1816 issue of the *Quarterly*, which was published in February 1817 (Cutmore, 2005).

Craciun states that the 1816 article announced "the four-ship 1818 expedition"—meaning the two two-ship expeditions. However, this was not the case. Although she does not claim that the article was the first inspiration for Mary Shelley's Arctic theme, Craciun (2011:437–438,

2016:85) insists that Mary was responding to a general hubristic optimism about northern discovery in postwar Britain, "as voiced by Barrow," and that her condemnation "no doubt gained momentum" from reading his article while she wrote the second draft. Thus, Walton's story was meant to serve as "a timely warning against Britain's Arctic fever."

There is no record in Mary's journal of having read this particular issue. Some other issues of the *Quarterly* are mentioned in the journal, but not the two referred to by Richard, Hill, and Craciun. Richard (2003:309n.6) acknowledges the late publication of the October 1816 issue and argues that Mary read it on 29–30 May 1817, when an unspecified issue is mentioned in the journal, rather than soon after its appearance in February 1817. However, it is far more likely that Mary was referring to the January 1817 issue, published on 20 May (Cutmore, 2005), which had no Arctic content. Therefore, the first Arctic-related issue definitely known to have been read by the Shelleys is the one dated January 1818, published on 9 June (Cutmore, 2005), which contained Croker's review of *Frankenstein* and a further article by Barrow on the Admiralty expeditions (see Barrow, 1818; Croker, 1818; P.B. Shelley, 1964II:26, 65–66).

Even if Mary did read Barrow's October 1816 article in late May 1817, it is difficult to see how it could have had any profound influence on *Frankenstein*, which was then nearly finished. The article said nothing about an intention to revive the open polar sea theory. It forcefully stated Barrow's belief that there ought to be a renewed search for the Northwest Passage by a two-ship expedition, but it gave no indication that any such expedition was actually being planned (Barrow, 1816:166–172; see especially 169). There was in fact no planning for either of the 1818 expeditions until November 1817 (see Bravo, 1992:85–86; Jackson, 2009:xxviii–xxx).

If Barrow had mentioned the possibility of a North Pole voyage, and if Mary read his article, then on the basis of information she had gained from her other reading by 1817, she might well have considered him dangerously rash. But since there was no actual indication of what was to come with regard to the North Pole at a date early enough to have influenced the Arctic sections of *Frankenstein*, any connection between Barrow and Walton must be considered either non-existent or extremely weak. Further support is given to this conclusion by the fact that reviews of *Frankenstein* did not mention Barrow's expeditions, except in a few offhand comments such as the *British Critic's* observation that Walton seemed to have "had his imagination fired by an anticipation of the last number of the *Quarterly Review*" (Anon., 1818d:433). In contrast, James Montgomery's *Greenland*, published in 1819, evoked extensive remarks on the timeliness of its Arctic theme (e.g., see Anon., 1819:210).

Nevertheless, it is important to examine what Mary likely knew or believed about the Arctic in 1816–17 and how her beliefs shaped the framing narrative of *Frankenstein*. It did

not require Barrow's intervention to make her aware of the region. As her biographers Emily Sunstein (1989:430n.34) and Miranda Seymour (2000:76–78) have pointed out, during the time she spent in Dundee between 1812 and 1814 young Mary Godwin would almost certainly have heard about northern whaling voyages from that port to Greenland and Spitsbergen (Svalbard), and perhaps even about the rumours which had circulated since the 18th century that some whaling ships had found open water and proceeded to within a few degrees of the pole. (Seymour further argues that Mary wrote a story featuring Walton while in Dundee, but of this there is no proof.)

Moreover, even though Barrow's project was not yet a matter of public interest and discussion when *Frankenstein* was begun, the novel still likely drew on contemporary scientific source material. In March 1815, another Arctic authority, the whaling captain and scientist William Scoresby, had put forward a daring plan to reach the North Pole. Rejecting the theory of an open polar sea, Scoresby proposed instead to journey from Spitsbergen by sledging over the frozen surface that, he correctly insisted, covered the ocean in high northern latitudes. His lecture was widely reported and, given Percy Shelley's keen interest in both science and geography (see King-Hele, 1992; Alvey, 2009), it might be considered surprising if he and Mary Godwin—with whom he had eloped in July 1814 and whom he would marry in December 1816—did not read about it.

In July 1816, not long after Mary had begun her first draft, she and Percy visited Mont Blanc and the famous glacier known as the Mer de Glace or Sea of Ice. The visit was a major life experience, which they subsequently incorporated into letters, poetry, travel writing, and fiction. Percy composed his poem "Mont Blanc," while Mary chose this sublimely icy spot as the setting for the central episode in her expanded novel. On the Mer de Glace, Victor, having deserted his creation, is forced to confront both the Creature and his own responsibility for the Creature's evil actions, especially the murder of Victor's young brother, William.

The importance in Mary Shelley's imagination of Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner"—which, as a child, she had heard recited by Coleridge himself—is well known, and the poem was almost equally loved by her husband, who often repeated it with "wild energy" (P.B. Shelley, 1839III:72; see also West, 2007:126). In the novel, Victor quotes the Mariner's description of his terrors as the best way to convey his own state of mind immediately after he has fled from the newly animated Creature (M.W. Shelley, 1823I:103). The frightened and guilt-ridden Victor, then, is in a situation analogous to the Mariner's. Since this was so, and if the draft of what Mary had originally conceived of as a short tale was to be transformed into a well-structured novel, then Victor required an interlocutor.

From the sea of ice that the enraptured Percy and Mary had just visited and the Mariner's voyage into the Antarctic pack, it was only a short imaginative journey to Scoresby's icy sea. Moreover, if—as seems extremely probable—the "old voyages" Mary read in November 1816 included

those that Scoresby drew on in formulating his plan, she found there both a model for the Creature's flight from the northern coast of Russia across the polar ice and the name Walton, along with a discussion of why a ship voyage toward the pole would be foredoomed to failure.

What better place, then, could there be for Victor to encounter his version of the Wedding Guest than on the Arctic sea, with Victor traveling by sledge and the deluded Walton by ship? The central confrontation between Victor and his Creature on the Mer de Glace would thus be framed by opening and closing scenes in a strange and far-distant yet eerily similar environment, and by two other confrontations, one between Victor and a figure sharing many of his own traits, and another final confrontation, after Victor's death, between this figure and the Creature. Mary drew on a standard device in travel literature, the epistolary form, when she had Walton record the words of both Victor and the Creature in letters home to his sister (see Smith, 1998). As many scholars have observed, the multiple viewpoints layered into *Frankenstein's* structure give the novel its exceptional richness and ambiguity (see Dunn, 1974; Newman, 1986; Favret, 1987; O'Dea, 2003; Benford, 2010).

The Arctic in and of itself, therefore, was likely never of more than peripheral interest to Mary Shelley, just as Mellor and other literary historians once assumed. While there are only a few fleeting references to the region in her journals and letters, both the Ancient Mariner and the Mer de Glace remained emotional touchstones throughout her life. Yet the process through which the far North became the setting for *Frankenstein's* opening and closing scenes is nevertheless of great importance, both for understanding the evolution of the novel into its final complex form and with regard to broader considerations about the Arctic's place in Romantic literary culture.

During the 1820s, representations of a region to which very few Europeans ever actually traveled became omnipresent in texts that varied from cheap periodicals, such as the *Mirror of Literature, Amusement and Instruction*, to the poetry of Byron (Lloyd-Jones, 1996; Cavell, 2008:141–152). These representations were appropriated from many imaginative sources. One was undoubtedly personal experience of icy mountain scenery in the centre of Europe—which became increasingly common as peacetime conditions allowed British travelers to cross the Channel once again after a 20-year hiatus. Indeed, the very familiarity of many readers with such sublime scenes may have contributed to the appeal of Mary Shelley's novel.

When seeking for the texts through which popular images of the Arctic were conveyed, scholars have tended to turn first to the published narratives of the Admiralty-sponsored explorers, particularly Edward Parry and John Franklin—both of whom, with Barrow's backing, set out in 1819—and to the popular literature derived from these books. While such texts were undoubtedly of major importance, Scoresby and a few others (see Moss, 2007)

achieved considerable cultural authority without being naval men.

The case of *Frankenstein* is especially valuable because it was published just before Barrow's first polar expeditions set out, and it therefore illustrates the hold that the far North had taken on the Romantic imagination even before Ross and Buchan sailed in 1818. By brilliantly using the polar tropes established by Coleridge's poetry and by northern exploration literature, Mary Shelley turned a brief tale of horror into an intricately structured novel characterized by what Favret (1987:21) has called "unsettling ambivalence." It is, perhaps, all the more testimony to the growing cultural allure of the Arctic that a writer who was neither personally fascinated with the region nor responding to a major official initiative could nevertheless make such effective literary use of it.

THE ICY SEA: WILLIAM SCORESBY'S ARCTIC LECTURE, 1815

William Scoresby Jr. (1789–1857), the son of a successful whaling captain, first went to sea at the age of 10. In the summer of 1806, while he was acting as first mate to his father, they took their ship to the record latitude of nearly 81½° N (Scoresby, 1820I:307). This feat was mentioned in some of the reports on the 1815 lecture. The younger Scoresby was a man of intense scientific curiosity. His father recognized the value of William's scientific observations and sent him to the University of Edinburgh. Robert Jameson, who taught natural history there, became Scoresby's mentor and patron. Scoresby delivered several papers on the northern seas to the Edinburgh-based Wernerian Natural History Society, of which he became a fellow in 1809. Scoresby's first book, *An Account of the Arctic Regions*, was not published until 1820, but well before that year he had established a solid reputation in the scientific world (Stamp and Stamp, 1975; Bravo, 2006; Jackson, 2010).

Scoresby's North Pole plan was put forward to the Wernerian Society in March 1815. Bravo (2006:537n.35) points out that, although the date of the presentation is given as 11 March 1815, the paper, which is extremely long, was in fact read over three different meetings of the society. The paper itself was not published until 1818, but earlier reports had appeared in newspapers (see Anon., 1815a; this account was reprinted in other papers) and in journals that Percy Shelley and Mary Godwin are likely to have read (e.g., Anon., 1815b:246, 1815c:145). The link is particularly likely given Percy's interest in scientific matters and Mary's connections with Scotland: not only had she spent the better part of two years living with friends in Dundee, but her stepbrother, Charles Clairmont, had worked for Archibald Constable's publishing firm in Edinburgh (Constable, 1873:47–98). Mary's experience of a busy whaling port would have made her receptive to reports about Scoresby, with his increasingly well-known combination of practical experience and scientific study.

Scoresby gave numerous details about the northern ice and argued against the theory of the open polar sea, which had enjoyed intermittent periods of popularity ever since it was originated by the Bristol merchant Robert Thorne during the reign of Henry VIII (in Hakluyt, 1598:212–220). The northern geography found in the maps of Gerardus Mercator and others in the later part of the 16th century showed land around the pole and passages to the Pacific along the northern coasts of Asia and North America. Accordingly, most Arctic expeditions sought for either the Northwest Passage or the Northeast Passage. However, following the 1596 discovery of Spitsbergen—which had an unexpectedly moderate climate for its high latitude—a few voyagers sent out by the Muscovy Company investigated the possibility of a more direct route across the pole itself (Wallis, 1984:454, 457). Despite their lack of success, the possibility of an open polar sea was never entirely rejected. Advocates of the theory in the 17th and 18th centuries included Joseph Moxon (1674) and Daines Barrington (1775), both of whom were members of the Royal Society. Further attempts to sail directly north from Spitsbergen were made by John Wood in 1676 and Constantine Phipps in 1773. Both were stopped by heavy ice, but advocates of the open polar sea theory argued that these attempts had been made in unfavourable seasons. Moreover, there were abundant rumours that certain whaling ships, entering the area in better years, had proceeded far to the north.

Scoresby, as the periodical accounts mentioned, rejected these tales and turned instead to the story of Alexei Markoff, who in 1715 had reportedly "travelled from Siberia, in a sledge drawn by dogs, near[ly] 400 miles northwards, over a surface of packed ice. He was obliged to stop about the 78th degree, on account of the provisions for his dogs falling short." Scoresby proposed to venture north from Spitsbergen by the same method, turning the barrier of sea ice into a highway. As the *Annals of Philosophy* reported, "his reasonings, and the statements founded on his own experience, went a great way in removing the objections of some of the most distinguished Scottish philosophers" (Anon., 1815c:144–145). Scoresby's standing as a scientist is demonstrated by the number of journal articles that upheld his theories against Barrow's in 1818 (e.g., see Anon., 1818b, c; Malte-Brun, 1818:279–281).

In March 1815, Mary Godwin was undergoing the most traumatic experience of her life up to that point. Having given birth to a premature daughter on 22 February, she lost the child less than two weeks later, on 6 March. A connection has been suggested between her dream that the baby revived when warmed beside the fire and Victor Frankenstein's desire to bestow "animation on lifeless matter" (M.W. Shelley, 1823I:89; Moers, 1976:95–96). If Mary sometimes attempted to take her mind off her loss by reading, Scoresby's bold plan to venture over the ice into a frozen realm of potential death may well have lodged in her memory; or, since periodicals could easily be kept until (or borrowed at) a later date, the reports may have caught her eye at any time between March 1815 and the moment

when she decided to turn the first draft of *Frankenstein* into something more ambitious.

“A DIRECT PASSAGE OVER THE POLE”:
SCORESBY, SIR JOSEPH BANKS,
AND JOHN BARROW, 1817

Scoresby’s lecture did not fade quickly either from the public mind or from the minds of other scientists. When its impending publication was finally announced late in 1817, periodical editors were quick to print long and enthusiastic commentaries on the news (e.g., Anon., 1817b, 1818a). Prominent among Scoresby’s scientific contacts was Sir Joseph Banks. Scoresby was thus willingly drawn into what Fulford et al. (2004:36) have described as the “web” of correspondence and publications which the wealthy, influential Banks “dedicated not just to spreading scientific knowledge but to fostering Britain’s international growth.” This connection was crucial for the genesis of the 1818 Admiralty expeditions, since Barrow was one of Banks’s close associates at the Royal Society.

Through Banks, Barrow gained information from Scoresby that helped him to convince his superiors the time had come for new northern expeditions. In the summer of 1817, Scoresby had found far less ice than usual off the eastern coast of Greenland. He told Banks that these conditions should afford the opportunity to make new discoveries in Greenland and to settle the question of the Northwest Passage (Scoresby, 1836:97). Since Barrow had been advocating a new attempt to find the passage for some time, Scoresby’s letter was both timely and welcome.

Yet Banks and Barrow were not completely in accord with their informant. Scoresby did not believe the change in the ice was permanent, but Banks and Barrow developed a sweeping theory of climate change based on the mistaken idea that the 1816 “year without a summer” was the result of southward-moving ice set free by Arctic warming (Bravo, 1992:77–78, 85–89). Both the unusually cold weather in Europe between 1815 and 1818 and the warmer than normal winters in the Arctic were in fact caused by atmospheric dust from the 1815 eruption of Mount Tambora in the Dutch East Indies (Wood, n.d.).

Moreover, at some point Barrow decided that the route between Greenland and Spitsbergen directly north to the pole might also hold promise. A letter that Banks (no doubt in close consultation with Barrow) wrote to the Admiralty on behalf of the Royal Society on 20 November 1817 suggested only a Northwest Passage voyage and a circumnavigation of Greenland, in accordance with the plans sketched out by Scoresby (in Weld, 1848:275–277). The First Lord of the Admiralty, Lord Melville, announced the plans for the two expeditions to the Royal Society in a letter dated 10 December 1817 (in Weld, 1848:279).

A brief, untitled newspaper paragraph about the Northwest Passage expedition had already appeared in the *Morning Chronicle* on 22 November 1817. The decision to

add a North Pole voyage was therefore presumably taken between 22 November and 10 December. The *Morning Chronicle* reported the two-expedition plan in another untitled paragraph on 1 January 1818. The author of a book published in early 1818 was confounded by the news of the North Pole voyage, which he certainly did not recognize as something that had long been in Barrow’s mind (O’Reilly, 1818:149–151). The plan to seek “a direct passage over the pole” (Barrow, 1817:204) therefore seems to have been added at the last moment, following Barrow’s sudden conversion to the open polar sea theory.

Barrow habitually adopted whatever theories were likely to help launch his expeditions, without necessarily believing in them all (Bravo, 1992:90–91), and indeed the emphasis in his *Quarterly* article on both the recent changes in the ice and the old claims about an open sea smacks of opportunism. Barrow himself put forward an explanation of the Admiralty’s unexpected decision in an article written in April 1818 as a response to critics of his project. He noted that the Northwest Passage expedition would likely have to pass through “narrow channels” that might be “choked up with ice” and explained that it was “to guard against a failure from such a possibility ... that the polar expedition has been planned; in order that ... another chance may be afforded of reaching Behring’s Strait by a more direct route” (Barrow, 1818:440). To give this backup plan legitimacy, Barrow became a strong public advocate of the idea that there had always been open water around the pole. The new stance made him more Scoresby’s antagonist than his ally. (There are numerous accounts of this antagonism, most of them highly critical of Barrow; e.g., Martin [1988]. Jackson [2007:7–14] offers a more even-handed analysis.)

As Bravo (2006) has pointed out, Scoresby’s vision for the Arctic combined geographical discovery, science, and commerce in the pursuit of national greatness. Even though Barrow and Scoresby disagreed on the nature of the north polar sea and climate, in broad terms their similarities may well be considered more important than their differences. The two men were equally anxious to see new British expeditions in the far North, and moreover it was Scoresby, not Barrow, whose Arctic plans had first impressed the reading public. Like *Frankenstein*, the 1818 North Pole project developed from the scientific interest in the Arctic sea initiated by Scoresby between 1815 and 1817, and Mary Godwin’s response predated Barrow’s.

THE SEA OF ICE:
VISITING THE MER DE GLACE, 1816

Her famous 1816 stay in Switzerland was among the happiest and most formative experiences of Mary Shelley’s life (see Vincent, 2016). The tale of how Lord Byron, Percy, Mary, and Byron’s doctor, John Polidori, all agreed to write ghost stories is well known. With reference to *Frankenstein*, it is worth noting that Polidori had studied medicine in Edinburgh between 1811 and 1815 (Macdonald, 1991:15),

and that as a man of scientific interests, he might have known about and perhaps even attended Scoresby's lecture. According to Polidori's diary, the reading of ghost stories and the ensuing resolution occurred on 16 June; the next day all but Polidori set to work (Rieger, 1963:467–470). On 21 July, Percy and Mary left Geneva to visit Mont Blanc and the Mer de Glace, a spot with which they were already well acquainted through Coleridge's "Hymn before Sunrise, in the Vale of Chamouni" (see Webb, 1977:136–142; Randel, 1984; West, 2007:73–98).

This visit was Mary's first close encounter with spectacular scenery that included snow and ice. It was, in fact, the closest she could have come to experiencing what has been called the Arctic sublime (Loomis, 1977) without leaving Europe. Both the mountain and the glacier—"beheld," as Percy later remarked, "in the enthusiasm of youth"—impressed the two writers profoundly, more than satisfying expectations that had "scarcely acknowledged any boundary." On the mountain, "pinnacles of snow, intolerably bright," and "precipices of ice of a dazzling splendour" all "pressed home to our regard and to our imagination." Percy's description of the Mer de Glace focused on how the ice, at first glance all frozen stasis, was perpetually in motion: it was "as if frost had suddenly bound up the waves and whirlpools of a mighty torrent," yet because of the glacier's relentless forward movement, "every thing changes ... some undulations sink while others rise; it is never the same" (P.B. Shelley, 1817:v, 141, 150–155, 166–167; see also P.B. Shelley, 1964I:495–502).

Mary was already writing the first draft of her novel when she arrived at the Mer de Glace, and the new scene was promptly incorporated into her story. In *Frankenstein*, Geneva is Victor's home, but his experiments are carried out at Ingolstadt. After Victor abandons him, the Creature is able to make his way to Geneva, where he murders young William Frankenstein, then hides among the mountains. When the grieving Victor makes a trip to the Mer de Glace, the two encounter one another for the first time since the night when the Creature came to life. The ice, Victor remarks in an echo of Percy's description, is "like the waves of a troubled sea"; over this jagged surface the Creature moves with "superhuman speed," undeterred by either the physical obstacles or the cold (M.W. Shelley, 1823I:202–203). The final text of the novel retains an incongruity that provides evidence of slight carelessness on Mary's part when she incorporated the Mer de Glace portion: the first part of the Creature's narrative contains several references to suffering from the cold, but elsewhere he is presented as impervious to it, thus gaining a symbolically charged affinity with the realms of ice.

On the Mer de Glace, the Creature recounts his story of rejection and emotional suffering, attributing his crimes to the bitterness of one abandoned by his parent. In the tale-within-a-tale-within-a-tale structure of the book's final form, the encounter on the glacier and the Creature's narrative are the very heart of *Frankenstein*. Such a story would already have had considerable appeal for readers,

in many cases speaking to their own experiences. Byron and the Shelleys were not the only English travelers to discover the joys of sublime mountain scenery in the years immediately after the Napoleonic Wars. As the *Edinburgh Review* observed in 1817, "countries which, two or three years ago, were wholly locked up from our inspection, or only accessible to persons of a more than ordinarily adventurous spirit, now lie as invitingly open ... as Margate or Brighton," and the Swiss lakes and glaciers were becoming as familiar to English tourists as the Peak District. In terms of travel literature, then, "an account of what almost all English readers have either seen themselves, or heard their friends converse upon, loses its interest" (Anon., 1817a:371). But in fiction, the combination of the familiar with the uncanny was a formula for success.

That the framing story should involve a polar voyage harked back to the Ancient Mariner and the general influence of Coleridge's most famous poem on Mary Shelley's imagination. Like Victor, Walton quotes from Coleridge: he names his destination as the "land of mist and snow," then playfully promises his sister that he will "kill no albatross," and assures her that his safe return is therefore certain (M.W. Shelley, 1823I:16). When she added the Arctic frame to her tale, Mary introduced yet another dimension to the appeal of her mountain setting: besides the gothic frissons of Victor's gruesome experiments and subsequent ordeals, *Frankenstein* offers the multilayered appeal of a quest journey. This journey is directed toward a formerly unknown region in which the sublime qualities of the Mer de Glace are present to an even higher degree. Walton's voyage into the ice and the Creature's flight across it evoke both Coleridge's Antarctic scenes and Scoresby's innovative plan to reach the North Pole—a plan that had already caught the imaginations of many English readers.

Artistic considerations, then, made an Arctic voyage the ideal frame narrative, echoing and amplifying the central setting, images, and themes of the novel. But while Mary Shelley could draw on intensely felt personal experience for the central Mer de Glace episode, to portray an Arctic expedition convincingly she needed to use the writings of others. This practice of borrowing freely from travel and exploration literature was so frequent among, and considered so unproblematic by, Romantic writers depicting places they had not themselves visited that it sometimes verged on plagiarism (see Mazzeo, 2007:122–125).

Percy and Mary returned to England in September 1816 and took lodgings in Bath. The library of the local Literary and Philosophical Society provided an opportunity for research, and Mary began to read exploration literature. A few titles are given in her journal, but most are lumped together as "old voyages." It is therefore impossible to know with absolute certainty what her sources were. However, on the assumption that she wanted to learn more about the background to Scoresby's Arctic plans, especially the story of Alexei Markoff's journey over the sea ice north of Russia, it is possible to guess some of the unnamed titles. The material in these works provides strong circumstantial

evidence that Mary did indeed follow this line of research. Given the originality of Scoresby's project, it is difficult to see how a young novelist with little prior knowledge of the Arctic could have imagined a sledge journey toward the pole entirely on her own, nor could she have known much if anything about the open polar sea theory unless she had read the works discussed in the next section.

READING OLD VOYAGES:
THE ARCTIC FRAME, 1816–17

In Bath, Mary attended a course of scientific lectures at the Literary and Philosophical Society Rooms (Seymour, 2000:166). Either from the people she met there or from Percy and his friends, it would have been relatively easy to find the source of the Markoff story: the English translation of Gerhard Friedrich Müller's book on Russian voyages to Alaska (Müller, 1761:xviii). The book's introductory section summarized the various Russian attempts to complete the Northeast Passage, which, Müller argued, undoubtedly existed but likely could never be navigated because of the icebergs "which oftentimes congeal together in such a Manner as to form a new Continent, as it were, and freeze the Ships, that are unfortunate enough to be surrounded by them, fast for several Weeks together" (Müller, 1761:vi). Markoff's journey was brought forward to illustrate the extent and continuity of the ice. Müller further opined that similar ice existed near the pole, rendering attempts to find a route from England directly across the top of the world to the Orient futile. In this connection, Müller referred to Captain John Wood, who had set out on such an attempt in 1676, only to renounce all belief in the open polar sea upon his return (Müller, 1761:22–23).

Here, then, was material for both the Creature's journey and Walton's doomed mission. Moreover, here Mary found a surname for her Arctic captain in the list of officers who served under Vitus Bering in 1733–41: Peter Lassenius, William Walton, Dmitri Laptiew, Jego Jendauro, Dmitri Owzin, Swen Waxel, Wasili Prontischischschew, Michailo Plautin, and Alexander Scheltinga. Walton, the sole Englishman on this list of exotically named foreigners, was in command of the *Hope* (Müller, 1761:15, 26; on William Walton, see Cross, 2007:177–178). The ship's name reflects the most prominent characteristic of the fictional Walton, whose first name, Robert, may have been taken from Robert Thorne, the 16th-century originator of the open polar sea theory. Even though Walton's theories about the Arctic are opposed to Scoresby's, Mary may have intended to acknowledge Scoresby's status as both a whaler and a man of science when she had Walton train himself for his chosen career through whaling voyages.

To learn more about the open polar sea theory and its advocates, Mary would inevitably have turned to Daines Barrington's (1775) *The Probability of Reaching the North Pole Discussed*. If she was not already familiar with Thorne's foundational role, she would have learned about

it from Barrington (1775:78). Thorne was also mentioned by Constantine Phipps (1774:1–3), who had attempted to prove Barrington's theories during his 1773 voyage. A new edition of Richard Haklyut's famous compilation (1809–12) had recently been published, so Mary might also have looked up Thorne's original statements. Barrington repeated numerous optimistic accounts from sailors who had allegedly gone far to the north of Spitsbergen, and these were no doubt the stories to which Walton refers for authority when he declares that he will "trust in preceding navigators" (M.W. Shelley, 1823I:2). Barrington also told the story of Captain James Wilson, who reportedly had an opportunity to reach the pole, but was forced to turn back because of his crew's fears (Barrington, 1775:42).

Since John Wood was the one explorer mentioned in this literature as having definitely renounced his belief in the open polar sea (see also Barrington, 1775:26–28, 72), Mary might have decided to look up his original account. Wood gave both an outline of his initial convictions and a strong expression of his later disillusionment. The former included a carefully reasoned statement in favour of a relatively warm climate at the pole itself. Wood's arguments were not original, but rather went back to those made in the 16th century by Martin Frobisher's chronicler, George Best (in Collinson, 1867:44–70). However, Wood expressed them more succinctly and vividly than Best or other writers.

As Wood (1694:149) explained, he had once hoped that in the summer the area immediately around the pole might be

as warm as under the Artick or Antartick Circle, or warmer than with us in the Winter time; for under the Pole it self [sic], in June the Sun being 23 degrees high, and having no Depression towards the Horizon, but always swimming about at the same h[e]ight, might illuminate that part of the Hemisphere with more heat than it doth ours in Winter, when he is no more th[a]n 15 degrees high, when he is at the highest ... and not more than eight Hours above the Horizon; or that it might be as hot as any place near either Polar Circle, because there the Sun hath a Declination towards the Horizon, and so the Atmosphere hath almost as much time to cool, as it hath to heat, which under the Pole should have no intermission. And one Argument to favour this Opinion, was the Relation of most Greenland Traders, who affirm, that the farther North they go on the Coast of that Land, that they meet with more green Herbs and Grass, than they do to the Southward, and consequently more Deer [caribou].

This passage could easily have been the source for Walton's enthusiastic prediction that because at the pole "the sun is for ever visible, its broad disk just skirting the horizon, and diffusing a perpetual splendour," there would be no extensive ice, "and, sailing over a calm sea, we may be wafted to a land surpassing in wonders and in beauty every region hitherto discovered on the habitable globe" (M.W. Shelley, 1823I:2–3).

Wood further mentioned his interest in magnetic science: he was correctly convinced that the magnetic pole did not coincide with the geographic pole, and he therefore expected that observations of compass variation at the geographic pole would be especially valuable. Because Wood (1694:150–151) was “not ... so fully satisfied as I might be” about his theories on magnetism, the desire to test them at the geographic pole “prompted my Inclination, as far as any other Argument whatever, to Attempt this Voyage.” By the early 19th century, it was accepted that the magnetic and geographic poles were widely separated, but Wood’s narrative may nevertheless have been the source for Walton’s vaguely explained aim of “ascertaining the secret of the magnet, which, if at all possible, can only be effected by an undertaking such as mine” (M.W. Shelley, 1823I:4).

It is reasonable to conclude that Barrington provided much of the basis for Walton’s optimism, along with a hint of the mutiny that might be threatened in the face of such a daring attempt, while Wood contributed both the captain’s vision of Arctic “beauty and delight” and his main scientific goal. When combined with Müller’s evidence that Walton’s plan would fail, Mary had all she needed to complete her Arctic frame, even if she never read a word written by Barrow. Moreover, when she submitted *Frankenstein* for publication in the summer of 1817, she could expect forthcoming works by Coleridge and Scoresby to increase readers’ interest in the book’s key locations: Mont Blanc and the polar seas. Coleridge’s *Sibylline Leaves* included both his “Hymn Before Sunrise,” which had not previously appeared in book form, and a revised version of “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” in which the famous gloss (that is, the explanatory marginal comments) appeared for the first time. Even more significantly, the printed version of Scoresby’s 1815 lecture would make the Creature’s journey toward the North Pole topical as well as plausible (Scoresby, 1818).

“I SHALL KILL NO ALBATROSS”: WALTON AND VICTOR

In the novel, Walton is allowed some degree of success: he has reached an unspecified “very high latitude” when he writes Letter III on 7 July and has presumably reached an even higher one by 5 August, the date of Letter IV. But on the latter date, the ship is surrounded by “vast and irregular plains of ice,” which seem “to have no end,” just as Müller prophesied (M.W. Shelley, 1823I:19, 22). This scene, of course, also evokes the situation of the Ancient Mariner’s ship when “the ice was all around.” The ice will allow the Creature to reach the pole by sledge in Markoff/Scoresby style, while Walton must turn his ship back to avoid mutiny.

Strangely, however, Walton makes no reference to any disillusionment caused by the evident falsity of his theories. Rather, Mary Shelley casts aside the whole question of the nature of the Arctic sea, instead placing Walton’s interactions with Victor in the foreground. In the

final section of the novel, Walton’s thwarted ambitions are important only insofar as they highlight his similarities to and differences from the central character. In the end, the comparison is strongly in Walton’s favour. Richard asserts that the “details Shelley gives us of Walton’s behaviour as the captain of a polar expedition make it clear that her use of the Arctic frame narrative was meant to critique Barrow’s romance of polar exploration” (Richard, 2003:305; see also 299, 301, 304, 307; Hill, 2007:64, 67; Craciun, 2016:83). However, this interpretation is not consistent with the chronology of the novel’s creation or with the views of other literary scholars. Poovey (1980:332–334), for example, observes that Walton provides “an alternative to Frankenstein’s antisocial ambition ... his ability to elevate concern for others above selfish desire stands as Shelley’s most explicit critique of Frankenstein’s imaginative self-indulgence” (see also Thompson, 2004).

The similarities between Victor and Walton are plain. Both are exceptionally ambitious, both embark on doomed quests, and both have great achievements to their credit: Victor has actually created life, and Walton, presumably, has attained a higher northern latitude than any previous explorer. Yet in pursuit of their goals, both cause unexpected suffering, danger, and even death to others—Victor to the Creature and his own family and friends, and Walton to the members of his crew, several of whom have died by the time Walton writes his letter dated 2 September. Nevertheless, in the 1818 text, Victor does not offer his narrative as a timely warning for Walton. Instead, he merely remarks, “You seek for knowledge and wisdom, as I once did ... I do not know that the relation of my misfortunes will be useful to you; yet, if you are inclined, listen to my tale” (M.W. Shelley, 1823I:35–36).

Walton does listen with sympathetic belief to the apparently incredible story, but the very structure of the book undermines the authority of Victor’s narrative voice (see Newman, 1986; Favret, 1987; Benford, 2010). Walton records not only Victor’s words, but also those of the Creature, most notably his long narrative spoken on the Mer de Glace. The contrast between the two tellings of the same story alerts the reader to Victor’s egotism and capacity to delude himself. When Victor has finished recounting his version, these self-delusions remain intact. He declares that after “examining my past conduct” he does not find it “blameable,” since the Creature is, he asserts, an eloquent liar whose pleas for compassion and understanding are merely a cover for his malice.

Victor exhorts Walton both to continue his northern voyage despite all obstacles and to kill the Creature: “Hear him not ... and thrust your sword into his heart” (M.W. Shelley, 1823II:241–242, 261–264). Even though Victor’s charismatic personality has gained a strong hold on him, Walton does neither of these things. Instead, he gives in to the demands of his men, telling Victor that he cannot take them into danger against their will (M.W. Shelley, 1823II:261). Although he bears some guilt for the deaths that have already occurred on his expedition, at this crucial

point, as Poovey (1980:340) observes, “Walton ‘kill[s] no albatross’; he realizes that denying his ambition will be painful, even humiliating, but he does not commit the antisocial crime of indulging his egotistic curiosity.” Victor, in contrast, is ready to resume his mission of vengeance, and he is prevented from doing so only by death.

“CAPTAIN PARRY
WAS NOT SO EASILY DETERRED”:
ARCTIC EXPLORATION, 1818–27,
AND THE 1831 EDITION OF *FRANKENSTEIN*

In the years that followed the publication of *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley’s journal, letters, and fiction yield no evidence of strong ongoing interest in the Arctic, despite the triumph of Parry’s 1819–20 expedition, which proved the existence of a Northwest Passage (although without actually sailing through it), and the combination of success and disaster in Franklin’s 1819–22 overland venture. Mont Blanc and the Mer de Glace, in contrast, remained sites of profound meaning for her. When she returned to England from Italy in 1823 after Percy’s death, Mary “felt his presence ... vividly during my journey through the ravines of the Alps” and fondly remembered his “delight ... at seeing these wondrous piles of earth’s primæval matter,” especially Mont Blanc (M.W. Shelley, 1980:360). In her novel *The Last Man*, narrator Lionel Verney and his only remaining friend bury the last victim of a plague that has nearly destroyed humanity in an ice cave under the glacier’s “seas of congelated waters.” Verney comments on the suitability of such a scene “to close the drama. Nature, true to the last, consoled us in the very heart of misery. Sublime grandeur of outward objects soothed our hapless hearts, and were [sic] in harmony with our desolation” (M.W. Shelley, 1826:249–250).

As for Barrow’s northern project, there is little evidence that Mary followed its progress, and none that her contemporaries ever considered the novel as a critique of the Admiralty expeditions. These expeditions, which ranged from relatively successful to disastrous, continued until Parry’s failed 1827 attempt to reach the North Pole over the ice, using a plan somewhat like Scoresby’s (Parry, 1828:x–xi). Mary’s assumption when she wrote *Frankenstein* appears to have been that the pole could indeed be reached, even if not by ship. In contrast, Barrow’s initial response to Scoresby’s 1815 plan was that “even supposing the polar sea to be frozen, it would present a surface so rugged and mountainous, as to make it an easier task to drive a broad-wheeled waggon over the summit of Mont-Blanc” than to reach the pole by sledge (Barrow, 1818:451n). But in 1827, at the urging of Humphrey Davy and the Royal Society, Barrow and the Admiralty adopted Scoresby’s plan after all. Parry nearly reached 82½° N, a result that set a new record, but left him about 500 miles short of his goal.

Scoresby (1828) himself argued that Parry had failed only because he did not follow the 1815 plan closely enough. However, in retrospect it is clear that Scoresby, like Barrow, had seriously underestimated the difficulties inherent in his project (Jackson, 2009:xxvii–xxviii). Not only did Parry find the ice nearly as rough as Barrow had predicted, but it was continually drifting south with the prevailing current. In 1909, the tough and experienced American explorer Robert Peary attempted to sledge to the pole from a base on northern Ellesmere Island, which is farther north than Spitsbergen. Peary’s route enabled him to avoid the worst effects of the transpolar current, and he used an elaborate system of supporting parties. Yet although he claimed success, the claim was almost certainly false (see Herbert, 1989).

Mary once referred to Parry’s 1827 attempt in apparently admiring, if lighthearted, terms: she wrote to a man who had tried to call on her, but was not able to find her house and so gave it up: “You despair easily—Captain Parry was not so easily deterred from seeking the Norths [sic] Pole. Will you not make another attempt[?]” (M.W. Shelley, 1983:62). But despite her failure to give the Admiralty expeditions more than passing mention, Mary must have known about them in a reasonable amount of detail, since they were extensively reported on in newspapers and periodicals. If she was repelled by Barrow’s willingness to send men into danger even after repeated failures, she had the opportunity to express such feelings indirectly when she revised *Frankenstein* in 1831.

Mary did indeed make important revisions to Walton’s part of the story: his expressions of ambition are intensified, while Victor now presents his narrative as a cautionary tale for Walton’s benefit. When faced with the threat of shipwreck, Walton stubbornly tells Victor that he would sacrifice his very life for success. Victor responds: “Unhappy man! Do you share my madness? ... Hear me, — let me reveal my tale, and you will dash the cup from your lips!” Victor’s remarks before he begins his narrative are amended to: “You seek for knowledge and wisdom, as I once did ... I do not know that the relation of my disasters will be useful to you; yet, when I reflect that you are pursuing the same course ... I imagine that you may deduce an apt moral from my tale” (M.W. Shelley, 1831:15, 17). However, Victor himself soon loses sight of the “apt moral.” His final refusal to blame himself and his pleas that Walton continue northward and that he kill the Creature remain unchanged.

The strictures Victor directs at Walton in the revised edition may, therefore, have been intended merely to heighten the reader’s awareness of Victor’s own self-delusion and inconsistency, thus placing Walton’s subsequent actions in an even more favourable light. This interpretation is supported by the fact that even before Walton’s crew demand to return, he expresses remorse “that the lives of all these men are endangered through me. If we are lost, my mad schemes are the cause” (M.W. Shelley, 1831:191–192). Consequently, the evidence for a

close relationship between Barrow's persistence in sending out Arctic expeditions and Walton's quest in the 1831 text is ambiguous at best.

CONCLUSION

If Mary Shelley used *Frankenstein* to criticize official Arctic expeditions, she did so only in 1831, after years of failed efforts, and indeed after the failure of the method she herself seems to have considered feasible in 1816–17. Therefore, Barrow's northern project cannot be seen as the source for the novel's Arctic frame. Instead, the central episode on the Mer de Glace—a place associated with both Coleridge's poetry and one of Mary's most memorable life experiences—suggested a framing narrative set in a similarly icy environment. The Arctic frame resonated subtly yet very effectively with the central Alpine setting of the story and with the various journeys undertaken by Victor and his Creature. This choice was apparently motivated by artistry rather than by any polemical intention.

Mary Shelley pieced together Walton's story by drawing on "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and also, in all likelihood, on a range of other sources, from periodical reports of William Scoresby's lecture to John Wood's obscure narrative. The northern scenes in *Frankenstein* illustrate how before 1818 the Arctic was still on the periphery of the Romantic imagination, but was gradually gaining a more prominent place through its parallels and similarities to familiar places such as Switzerland as much as through its exoticism, distance, and difference.

When Mary Shelley decided to place the key episode of her novel on a Swiss glacier, the cultural material for an Arctic framing story was readily available to her. Barrow's *Quarterly* articles were not the only contemporary texts likely to spark visions of the Arctic sublime. Even before his Arctic obsessions were known to the public, the moment was propitious for imaginative writing that linked Europe with its remote northern periphery. Mary seems to have responded positively to Scoresby's bold proposal for a dash over the ice to the North Pole, and thus it is questionable whether the Arctic frame was intended as an unequivocal rebuke to imperialist geopolitical projects. Yet at the same time, her novel endorses an ambitious British explorer's decision to turn back in defeat. The high Arctic, with its utterly unknown yet fiercely debated geography and climate, was for many reasons the ideal environment in which to begin and end Mary Shelley's ambivalent fiction.

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