

## Lost White Males

Therese-M. Meyer

No easy ballad this: No knightly quest  
Drove old Sir Franklin to the Arctic waste.  
Humboldtian ambition? Overbearing wife?  
The second, third-best choice of leader, made in haste?

He took with him two ships crammed full of tins  
and men and scientific gadgets. Lead.  
*Erebus. Terror. Ice. Fate. Ignorance.*  
No shortage of what killed them, dead for dead.

The ships are gone as is his corpse  
and though a litter of remains has been collected  
(Assiduously) by a herd of fools,  
Rushing where Franklin rushed yet better fated,

There is no saying what became of him.  
A ghost, then, a Canadian spook?  
He's dead. That much is certain. Empty tin  
Piled in a cairn remains to sing of him.

An Antipodal errant knight set out  
But three years later to accomplish his  
Own vanishing on a North-West trajectory.  
A revenant to his own obituary,

Leichhardt was far more likely to return  
Again and once again when least expected.  
But then he didn't and he hasn't and he won't.  
Every last optimist must stand corrected.

Both haunt their cultures now as paper ghosts  
and crop up in the most unlikely places  
Imperial to the core – or maybe not.  
These ever-present dead remind us  
Of what is lost in what is got  
And of how Vanishing can blind us.  
(1001 signs)

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