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Scott of the Antarctic: The Conservation of a Story

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INTRODUCTION

ALMOST A CENTURY after his death, and after the many millions of words already written about him, the question can legitimately be asked: why write more about Captain Robert Falcon Scott? In 2003, Ranulph Fiennes noted that his own biography, *Captain Scott*, had more than 50 predecessors (xiii).¹ Yet another, *Scott of the Antarctic: A Life of Courage and Tragedy in the Extreme South* by David Crane, was released in 2005. A recent bibliography of published works relating to Scott's second expedition alone in the library of the Scott Polar Research Institute in Cambridge (hereafter SPRI) lists 625 titles (Sawtell). Reviewing a new scholarly edition of Scott's journals in 2005, Peter Speak writes that since their first publication

scarcely a year has passed without a new work being published on the life and explorations of Captain Scott ... No other polar event has appeared so iconic as this final assault on the South Pole, often seen as the last of the great heroic Antarctic expeditions; not even the news of the sinking of the *Titanic*, with the loss of 1500 lives, has kept pace with the readership of Scott and his brave associates. (177)

But facts and figures like these suggest that the initial question might be posed differently: how do we *explain* the enduring power of Scott's story? Seeking answers to this question is a central preoccupation of this study. By no means all of the copious literature, however, sees any value in the story, and in recent decades in particular the explorer "has been set upon by certain critics with a vengeance that borders on abuse" (Mickleburgh 2). In my view, such attacks have not only distorted Scott's remarkable qualities and achievements, but have also obscured the meaning of this famous saga for a contemporary audience. Today, Scott's story is in much less satisfactory condition than his huts, which are carefully conserved in Antarctica as historic monuments. The second principal object of the thesis, therefore, is to conduct an 'archaeological' survey of "Scott of the Antarctic" and to assess its current state.

¹ As it is designed for close analysis of text, MLA format is used for referencing in this thesis. A complete list and details of works cited is provided at the end, and entries there are identified in the body of the thesis by the author's surname and, in cases where more than one work by a single author is cited, by the title or abbreviated title.

Of course, contemporary interest in Scott is part of a public fascination with the heroic era of Antarctic exploration in general.² The now-legendary characters and tales of those who went south in the first two decades of the twentieth century questing after knowledge, fame and fortune, and who often suffered unimaginable hardships as their ships became trapped in the ice or as they hauled sledges across thousands of miles of formidable Antarctic wastes, have been re-examined in recent decades in a deluge of books and articles, both scholarly and popular, as well as in television, cinema, literature and the visual arts. Full studies of the famous expeditions and their leaders are still being written (Crane; Riffenburgh; Bomann-Larsen); the journals of lieutenants such as Victor Campbell have been published (King), as well as those of men like Scott's skiing instructor, Tryggve Gran, and even of men from the 'lower deck' (Williamson; Quilty and Goddard). There have been new biographies of celebrated figures, such as Lawrence Oates (Smith, *I am Just Going Outside*) and Apsley Cherry-Garrard (Wheeler, *Cherry*), as well as of 'neglected' heroes like Tom Crean (Smith, *An Unsung Hero*), who has also been the subject of a film (*Tom Crean*). Lavish scholarly volumes have appeared of the photographs of Herbert Ponting, documenting Scott's last expedition (*With Scott to the Pole*), and of Frank Hurley, documenting Shackleton's *Endurance* expedition (*South with Endurance*).

What is the reason for this collective *polarhullar*—the Danish term for the powerful attraction exerted by polar landscapes (Fiennes, "Polar Traveller" 120)? In 1990 noted Antarctic scientist and historian G. E. Fogg published *Explorations of Antarctica: The Last Unspoilt Continent* in collaboration with the artist David Smith. The subtitle of this perceptive and wide-ranging introduction to the continent hints at one answer to the question. In tourist brochures and more public texts, Antarctica is regularly referred to as 'pristine' and as 'the last great wilderness.' While its existence may have been "sensed" for millennia (D. Campbell 149), people set foot on the continent for the first time less than 200 years ago. Thereafter only occasional expeditions visited until 1957, when permanent scientific bases were first established during the International Geophysical Year. Small numbers of pioneering tourists first sailed south to 'the ice' in Lars-Eric Lindblad's *Explorer* in 1969, the same year humans first landed on the moon, and it would be a further two decades before tourist numbers began the exponential

² The terms 'heroic age' and 'heroic era' are used interchangeably in this study, as in the literature. Although different authors give the period different limits, most agree with Reginald Pound (74) that it was inaugurated by the characteristic gruelling sledging journeys which began with Scott's *Discovery* expedition in 1901. The era's close is generally dated at the return of Shackleton's *Endurance* expedition in 1916.

rise that continues today (Murray and Jabour). Now there have been scientific stations in Antarctica for half a century, and in parts of the Antarctic Peninsula cruise ships must wait their turn out of sight in order to enjoy the advertised ‘wilderness experience,’ unblemished by the presence of another vessel. But Antarctica is still, if not quite unspoiled, certainly the least spoiled continent. In this respect it is the antithesis of the congested and often degraded urban settings in which many live.

It is also a region which combines exceptional beauty and grandeur with physical conditions that are incomparably harsh for human existence: two other essential ingredients in the lure of Antarctica in general and the fascination with its heroic era in particular. Keith Shackleton’s awed description of the landscape of the Antarctic Peninsula is characteristic of the aesthetic response of visitors:

Many would say that the most spectacular scenery in all the continent, and in my view this would mean in all the world, is here. Imagine the entire upper echelons of the Annapurna Himal rising from the sea, and the picture comes close. It is certainly no exaggeration: the Lemaire Channel with Mount Scott, Mount Shackleton and Mount Peary behind; Wiencke Island and its razor-backed ridge; a low sun catching Luigi Peak through a ragged, drifting hole in the clouds; and the white summit of 9,000-feet [sic] Mount Francais, with lesser peaks of the Trojan Range soaring out of the cloud blanket covering Anvers Island. These are all sights that the Peninsular [sic] offers to every point of the compass. Their counterparts could perhaps be found in the Andes, the Himalayas, the high ground of Alaska—but not the solitude. One of the stronger emotions this landscape has to offer is the sense of privilege that goes with the seeing of it. (67-68)

On the other side of the continent in 1912, Douglas Mawson was also awed—but by the grim face of Antarctica’s Janus head. Beset by cliché as well as climate, he writes:

... the drift is hurled, screaming through space, at a hundred miles an hour, and the temperature is below zero, Fahrenheit. Shroud the infuriated elements in the darkness of a polar night ... A plunge into the writhing storm-whirl stamps upon the senses an indelible and awful impression seldom equalled in the whole gamut of natural experience. The world a void, grisly, fierce and appalling. We stumble and struggle through the Stygian gloom; the merciless blast—an incubus of vengeance—stabs, buffets and freezes; the stinging drift blinds and chokes ... We had discovered an accursed country. (83, 88)

This terrible aspect, together with the continent’s size and remoteness, long shielded Antarctica from significant human presence, and also created a made-to-order arena for human struggle. This prodigiously beautiful and dangerous place provides the striking setting for Scott’s story.

And just as Shackleton’s words quoted above seek for analogues to the Antarctic landscape in alpine regions, a reading of Robert MacFarlane’s *Mountains of the Mind: A History of a Fascination* suggests that many parallels could be drawn between the allure of

mountainous and of polar landscapes, and between the daring feats associated with the exploration of each.³ In a recent study of Scott, Max Jones also points to a connection in the public mind between these fields of action, and offers an additional reason for their attraction:

The current fascination with polar explorers, and with figures such as the Everest mountaineer George Leigh Mallory, also expresses a disenchantment with the mundane repetitiveness and moral ambiguity of modern life, a yearning for straightforward tales of heroic endeavour. (*Quest* 8)

Life today may be more morally ambiguous than formerly, but it is questionable whether it is any more repetitive (expectations are certainly different).⁴ And tales of daring and adventure clearly have perennial appeal. So while Scott's story, like any other, naturally has a particular historical context, in this thesis I focus on its transhistorical meaning. In the case of "Scott of the Antarctic," as will be seen, this is more complex than Jones's words imply.

There is, however, a further reason for contemporary nostalgia for the Antarctica of the past. The continent may still retain some of its Edenic aura, but the Earth's ultimate and longest-standing terra incognita, a blank space on maps into which human fantasy could be projected, has itself become more and more 'cognita': mapped, studied and known. I have described the history of this process and some of the loss it implies elsewhere (Murray). A place that is now seen by many as just another laboratory and which tourists visit en masse—to sip champagne on an iceberg or toboggan down a slope before retiring to heated cabins and gourmet meals: such a place has lost some of its mystique. Consequently, along with the attractions of grandeur, challenge and sanctuary from a crowded or disfigured world, there is a wistfulness for a time when there was space beyond the horizons of the known. The symbol par excellence of such a time and place is the heroic era of Antarctic exploration. This was a world where new, unimagined things like the Great Ice Barrier could still be discovered and where there were places like the Magnetic or Geographic Poles, never before visited, for men to seek out. The retelling of the stories of those

³ Before it was climbed, for example, Mt. Everest was seen as the "Third Pole" to be conquered (MacFarlane 17).

⁴ In a sermon given in London's Temple Church in 1913, a week after news of Scott's death, Henry Woods states: "We often hear men and women ... finding fault with the monotony and commonplaceness of their daily life. They seem to themselves ... to have nothing to look forward to but a continuance of spirit-breaking routine" (12).

men (as they invariably were) permits contemporary readers or viewers to participate vicariously in their journeys.

The resurgence of interest in heroic-age figures of all kinds has already been mentioned. Not surprisingly, however, it is the leaders of the famous expeditions who still command the greatest attention. In Ernest Shackleton's case, a best-selling book, *The Endurance: Shackleton's Legendary Antarctic Expedition* (Alexander), and an exhibition at New York's Natural History Museum in 1999 have helped him regain the international celebrity he first enjoyed after the return of the *Nimrod* expedition a century ago.⁵ It is in some ways unfortunate that the rise of one polar hero's reputation has often been achieved at the expense of another's, and this is especially true of the three figures who pioneered the land route to the South Pole: Robert Scott, Ernest Shackleton and Roald Amundsen. This is not to suggest that all three are equivalent. But in the last three decades in particular, biographers have exhibited a tendency to partisanship and, under the guise of writing history, to combine selective quotation of primary material and biased asides or judgements to present their subject favourably, while at the same time, subtly or unsubtly, undermining the reputation of another. Most common in this period has been advocacy of Shackleton or Amundsen accompanied by denigration of Scott. Beau Riffenburgh's laudatory *Nimrod: Ernest Shackleton and the Extraordinary Story of the 1907-9 British Antarctic Expedition* is one example of the former.⁶ Roland Huntford's *Scott and Amundsen* provides the most extreme and influential example of the promotion of Amundsen at the expense of Scott.⁷ In spite of this, Robert Falcon Scott is still probably the central figure of the heroic era, and when others are promoted it is usually by means of comparison with him. Of his two Antarctic expeditions it is the second and undoubtedly more famous which is the subject of this thesis. It is known variously as the British Antarctic Expedition 1910-13, the *Terra Nova* expedition (after the expedition's ship) or Scott's last expedition. Evidence of the perennial interest in Scott's story and *Terra Nova* in particular was cited at the beginning of this introduction. I also stated there that the thesis would attempt to offer some explanation for the enduring power of the story.

⁵ At the same time, some of the gloss of that explorer's reputation has been removed by evidence of poor morale on the *Endurance* expedition in the detailed journals of its chief scientist, James Wordie (Smith, *Sir James Wordie*), and by two recent accounts of the unhappy fate of the Ross Sea support group (McElrea and Harrowfield; Tyler-Lewis).

⁶ British and American newspapers also compared Scott unfavourably with Shackleton from the late 1990s on (P. King 11-12).

⁷ A later edition of this book carries the title *The Last Place on Earth*, and it inspired a 1985 BBC television docudrama of the same name with screenplay by Trevor Griffiths.

This aim can now be formulated more precisely as the attempt to evaluate its significance beyond the more general appeals of polar landscapes and of the heroic era of Antarctic exploration already discussed.

The expeditions that would finally lead to the South Pole were concentrated in the Ross Sea region, and at places like Cape Adare, Cape Royds and Cape Evans some of their dwellings remain, preserved as historic sites under the Antarctic Treaty System.⁸ The buildings can provide visitors with a powerful connection to the past. Author Thomas Keneally describes a visit to Scott's hut at Cape Evans, "hunched ... beneath endless subtle, overcast skies, beside the massive indifference of the Sound's ice, and the black-and-white intensity of offshore islands." A visit to this particular hut was the "central experience" of their voyage for certain of Keneally's fellow travellers, and moved some to tears (25).⁹ Keith Shackleton's description of the Peninsula illustrates how the memory of heroic-era figures (and others) is also embedded in the very landscape, in names like Mount Scott and Mount Shackleton. Both physical features and buildings, however, are also symbols that connect with stories of some kind, and it is from the stories that meaning and historical or heritage values are derived. Keneally explains the power of the atmosphere of Scott's hut by the fact that "no expedition produced such a range of known names—Dr Wilson, the two Evanses, Birdy Bowers, Ponting, Oates, Cherry-Garrard ..." (25). He could equally have said that no expedition produced so many *stories*: and together they constitute "Scott of the Antarctic." It follows, as the title of this thesis implies, that the 'conservation' of a heroic-era story may be at least as important as that of a hut. For that reason, I both assess the story's present 'state of repair' and consider some of the implications of its conservation. I will argue that the cold 'blizzards' of criticism that have assailed it are partly the result of changing intellectual fashions in biography, history and literary criticism. And I will show that it has also suffered neglect at the hands of some who have retold it (used the hut) carelessly and with little regard for its original creators. While the tale of "Scott of the Antarctic" has to some extent survived this weather and ill use, I claim that it is both of great value and in need of ongoing conservation, to which this study offers a contribution.

⁸ Scott's hut at Cape Evans, for example, is protected as Historic Site and Monument No. 16 in Antarctic Specially Protected Area No. 155 (Committee for Environmental Protection).

⁹ Such a response is not universal. Graham Collier, although powerfully affected by Scott's story, found that the hut at Cape Evans "seems to carry nothing of the spirit of the past ... It is as if the place has been crushed beneath the burden of the tragedy it has come to represent" (76).

The material, methodology and structure of the thesis all reflect the dual literary-historical nature of the subject matter: a story which is based on fact. It draws on a wide range of data: manuscript letters and journals, newspaper and magazine commentary, historical monographs, biographies, literary works and film. Archival research is followed by close textual analysis of original documents and later interpretations, and by intertextual comparison. While Part II of the study focuses primarily on historical and Part III on literary matters, texts are examined critically throughout. I begin in chapter 1 with a critique of recent scholarly commentary on “Scott of the Antarctic,” in which I identify a number of shortcomings. Most notable is the heavy uncritical use of a single influential debunking biography and the neglect of earlier sources, including Scott’s own account. Chapter 2 provides a synopsis of both of Scott’s Antarctic expeditions and places them in their historical context in order to establish a clear reference point for later discussion. The following three chapters are a chronological and analytical survey of the story’s history of interpretation, which highlights central themes and the influence of changing intellectual fashions. In chapter 3 I review some relevant theoretical perspectives in historiography and biography before discussing the earliest period of commentary—from the start of Scott’s Antarctic work to immediately after his death—and Amundsen’s *The South Pole*. Chapter 4 begins by considering the nature of diary texts and distinguishing them from published versions of events. It then deals with the accounts of participants in the *Terra Nova* expedition and with Amundsen’s autobiography. In chapter 5 I analyze the principal debunking text, Huntford’s *Scott and Amundsen*, and responses to it, as well as some recent sympathetic treatments of the story. Following that, two neglected topics are examined: the saintly reputation of Lawrence Oates, and the methods of the other contender for the South Pole, Amundsen. In Part III of the thesis I set aside judicial and historical debates in order to seek the story’s deeper resonances in its literary qualities. I consider a subject which has received surprisingly little critical attention: Scott’s widely acknowledged writing skills. The story’s tragic qualities, too, are often mentioned in passing but have never been considered in a sustained way; I explore connections with Greek tragedy as described in the *Poetics* of Aristotle and argue that a large part of the story’s transhistorical meaning subsists in its tragic nature. I conclude the chapter by discussing responses to the story in literature and film which suggest other aspects of its legacy and potential.

Before proceeding, I would like to acknowledge some limitations of my approach. I direct most attention to Scott's last expedition and to its final stages in particular, since these give his story its defining character. As a consequence, other achievements and narratives of his two expeditions must be dealt with in less detail. Similarly, my focus on the leader limits the amount that can be said about his remarkable colleagues. My main justifications for this approach are that Robert Scott is firmly at the centre of the story known as "Scott of the Antarctic," and that comment on that story has always focused on him. There has been so much of the latter, however, and for so long, that I do not claim an exhaustive treatment. For the earliest period, I have drawn considerably on the contents of the large scrapbooks of newspaper articles relating to Scott and his expeditions in the SPRI archives. These represent a spectrum of opinion which is by no means all favourable. A deficiency in the available commentary throughout the story's history should be mentioned. Although I make reference to foreign viewpoints where possible, there is a lack of material translated from other languages that might have provided fresh and interesting perspectives. Given the importance of Amundsen to Scott's story, the negligible number of Norwegian sources other than his own which are available in English is especially regrettable, as I explain in chapter 4.

I have indicated that the field I am entering is a highly contested one, and to pretend to Olympian impartiality myself would be dishonest. This study is part of a recent phase of assessment which views Scott favourably. I am arguing that he was an exceptional person who left a superlative story, and that his reputation and the legacy of the story have been damaged. Moreover, as I will explain later, one's view of Scott's story is inseparable from one's view of his character. And since he has now been subjected to an overwhelming amount of censure, I necessarily critique some of this and at the same time highlight what I believe it conceals. It is also not possible to discuss "Scott of the Antarctic" without referring to Amundsen, and in this thesis I criticize both the latter's methods and his written statements. But (while I do regard Scott's character and legacy as superior) the principal reason for doing so is that whereas Scott's every word has been scrutinized, Amundsen's texts have almost never been read critically. In the redressing of these imbalances, however, I do not believe that Scott and his story need or would be well served by any suppression or skewing of the evidence. I also accept the obvious polysemy of a tale which has engaged such a large audience for so long, and offer my own interpretations as another contribution to this rich mix.

PART ONE

Preliminary

“Listen, I gotta fight the lion. That’s what that guy Scott’s all about. I know.
I’ve studied him already.”

— *Scott of the Sahara*, Monty Python’s Flying Circus

“Scott” in academia

STORIES ARE BOTH told and commented on. In this chapter I review commentary which in recent decades has taken “Scott of the Antarctic” as its subject and which informs my own literary and historical study. But the distinction between the material considered here and that considered in the next part of the thesis, where I trace the story’s evolution, is not absolute. Some of the biographies I will discuss later, for example, also offer critical responses to previous scholarship (e.g. Fiennes; Crane) or to the original texts (e.g. Pound; Seaver), and some studies in this chapter also tell the story (e.g. Moss). But here the focus of attention is on academic treatments and on those which have commented on the story as a story. In fact, this is not a very large field, if it could be called a field at all, and the authors represented come from backgrounds as diverse as creative writing, cultural geography, gender studies and journalism. Because it is not a well-explored area, it is important to pay close attention to the studies that do exist and to examine their arguments and language in some detail. As I will show, several of these texts essentially use Scott’s story as a case study, often a cautionary tale, to make a point in their own field. As the quotation prefacing this part of the thesis implies (the sketch it is taken from is discussed in chapter 6), they are generally not well informed about the facts of Scott’s story and draw their information from very limited sources. This has been possible only because they have coincided with a simplistic negative view of Scott and his period in contemporary scholarship. All of the assessments included here postdate—and a remarkable number paraphrase—Roland Huntford’s *Scott and Amundsen* (1979), the central text in the debunking of Captain Scott. That book will be considered in its own right in chapter 5, but its influence on the texts discussed here is evident.

In 1982 Doris Lessing appended to the fourth and final volume of her ‘space fiction’ series, *Canopus in Argos*, an afterword in the form of a “sociological speculation” on the mechanisms of changing intellectual fashions that is very pertinent

to an assessment of the fortunes of Scott's story (144). This essay, she tells us, stems from a fifty-year fascination with Scott's Antarctic expeditions. The novel it follows is a bleak work about a doomed and desperate people on a planet that is freezing over. With her acute awareness of collective processes, Lessing notes both the change at the time in the British mood towards Scott and also that it was a "swinging from one extreme to another" (126). She argues that this unfortunate seesawing reaction is a process found in every sphere of human activity and results from the unquestioning acceptance of received opinion and the concurrent rejection of germinal ideas that are not part of the orthodoxy. Gradually the ideas which have been ignored or proscribed accumulate "like the slow adding of grain to grain on one side of a pair of scales ... And then [there is] a sudden reversal of the balance" (127). Then the ideas that were formerly excluded become themselves the new orthodoxy and are so "easily adopted" that they have "lost their energy" (128). In this sense, the promulgators of received opinion can be said not to use ideas but merely to be identified with them. Lessing calls for the study and greater awareness of this process in order to avoid imposing on others these "sacred necessities, in the name of some dogma or other, with results that inevitably within a decade will be dismissed with: *We made mistakes*" (126).¹⁰ She then examines certain aspects of Scott's last expedition which went unnoticed or unquestioned at the time on the grounds that "those biases that are the result of the unconscious assumptions of a time are precisely those which people later marvel at most" (132). Despite warning of the danger of misinterpreting a period so different from one's own, Lessing herself exhibits not a few early signs of what is now the condescending orthodoxy regarding that era of British history: "... class divisions, so rigid, that you read saying Oh no, it really is *not* possible," and "It was always *England* these men apostrophized, not Britain, a compromised and adulterated word, and idea" (133). Lessing admits that she has not studied Scott's history systematically and her essay contains simplifications and errors, but it is a prescient recognition of the nature of the changed attitude towards Scott and its wider significance.

Several years after Lessing, Ursula Le Guin, another novelist fascinated by early Antarctic exploration, made a suggestive allusion to the same backlash and its origins: "As an American I wasn't exposed to the British idolization of Scott that now makes it so chic to sneer at him, and I still feel competent to base my judgement of his character, or Shackleton's, or Byrd's, on their works and witness, without much

¹⁰ Throughout this thesis italics in quotations are original unless otherwise indicated.

reference to the various biases of biographers” (171). “Chic” here bespeaks a fashion, and I will argue that today this extends well beyond the attack on Scott to certain orthodoxies about the Victorian and Edwardian periods in general. Le Guin makes it plain that by the term “works” here she means books, and certainly in the often bitter debate over the rights and wrongs of the actions, motivations and characters of heroic-age figures relatively little attention has been given to close reading of their own texts and those of their associates. In part, this thesis is a contribution towards remedying this deficit, and I refer later to Le Guin’s own ‘artist’s-eye’ analysis of texts by Scott and Shackleton and the conclusions she draws from them.

In 1984 American historian Theodore Karamanski pointed to the influence of Romantic literature and the heroic ideals it embodied on the British explorers of the heroic era in “The Heroic Ideal: Romantic Literature and the British Exploration of the Antarctic, 1901-1914” (1984). Works by writers like Browning, Tennyson, Robert Service and Coleridge not only accompanied the men on their journeys but were at times also eagerly discussed and a source of encouragement or consolation in difficult times. Karamanski claims that the First World War was the great watershed, after which concepts such as honour and courage, which had previously held unambiguous meaning, came to seem hollow. He regards Antarctica as an ideal proving ground for the Romantic vision of character and believes that “Antarctic exploration can be seen as a grand test of the moral strength of the Anglo-Saxon interpretation of manhood.” (465) These are useful insights and Karamanski presents them without the stridency of some commentators on the period. He identifies Scott’s ultimate achievement, in “the crucible of the trail,” as a triumph of character, and quotes Cherry-Garrard writing that “he [Scott] conquered his weaker self, and became the strong leader whom we went to follow and came to love,” and also that ultimately “what pulled Scott through was character, sheer good grain” (466). In my view, this is an accurate assessment. On the other hand, I would question Karamanski’s claims that this ‘character’ was contingent to a great extent on literary ideals (461)—the words “good grain” themselves imply that Scott’s character was something innate—and that such self-mastery has since lost some of its meaning (467).

The theme of the ‘Romantic explorer’ of the nineteenth century is picked up by another American historian, Stephen Pyne, in a remarkable and wide-ranging discourse on Antarctica titled *The Ice: A Journey to Antarctica* (1986). Pyne, who dates the start of the ensuing heroic era earlier than many scholars—from the commencement of the

Belgian expedition led by Adrien de Gerlache in 1897-99¹¹—contradicts the claim now commonly made that Antarctic exploration correlated with “the state-making of European imperialism, as it did in South America or Africa” (89). He also makes a critical distinction between exploration in Antarctica and that in other parts of the world, including the Arctic, where there were ecosystems and native cultures which could provide support. And in this icy void, he writes, in apparent disagreement with Karamanski: “the Antarctic explorer could no longer act as the Romantic hero; he became an existentialist hero or a modernist antihero.” However, since Pyne, too, mentions heroic-era explorers taking with them visions inspired by writers like Kipling or Service, adding that as the epoch of modernism dawned, “the explorers of the heroic age were splendid anachronisms, the last and purest of a breed for which Antarctica had offered a final refuge” (89), it is not clear when heroes become antiheroes.

Pyne suggests that Antarctica’s unique environment is matched by the power of its stories, and notes that “the heroic age was populated with sagas of a number and intensity without parallel in the exploration of other continents” (93). He asserts that it is not the simple achievement of a goal which gives a story power but rather the way it was done, and that it is for this reason that Amundsen is regarded “chiefly as a foil” for Scott. In this thesis I argue that in spite of the astonishing achievements and tales of other explorers, “Scott of the Antarctic” is the pre-eminent *story* of the heroic era. Pyne goes further: “Nowhere in Western literature is there a more compelling, sustained chronicle of life, humanity, and civilization reduced to their minima” (94). Remarking on a certain literariness characteristic of British accounts of heroic-era expeditions, he states that “what spared Antarctic literature from quaintness and endowed it with a power beyond the naturalism of Jack London or Émile Zola was undoubtedly the tragedy of Robert Scott’s polar party.” Pyne believes that, with the possible exception of Richard Byrd’s *Alone*, Scott’s diary, his final letters and “Message to the Public” are unique in Antarctic literature, and all “claim the status of moral epistles. They are meditations on character, on how one faces death,” and thereby move beyond other tales of adventure and survival. He reads the “odyssey of the Polar Party” as a journey of self-knowledge and writes that not only has imaginative literature remained fixated

¹¹ In 1912 the librarian of the Royal Geographical Society, Antarctic historian Hugh Robert Mill, also regarded the Belgian expedition as having initiated “the new era of Antarctic exploration” because, along with an expedition led by Borchgrevink which overwintered on land the following year, it “effectually exorcised the demon of an unendurable winter climate in the far south” (“Ten Years” 369-70).

on that episode but that no artist “has ever approached in intensity” Scott’s rendering of Antarctica as a moral landscape (169-70).¹² All of these remarks, I believe, help to support my contention that this is a story of special significance and to justify a fresh examination of its versions and its meanings.

In 1987 historian Peter Beck, noting that it had been three-quarters of a century since Scott’s death, provided a four-page summary of the story’s fortunes during that interval in “The Legend of Captain Scott After 75 years.” Of the deaths of the British polar party he states, “polar historians, biographers and others have followed contemporary assessments of the episode in the adoption of a patriotic and heroic picture of Scott and his party” (32). Part II of this thesis, which begins by giving substance to the phrase “contemporary assessments,” will demonstrate that even in 1987 Beck’s statement was a considerable oversimplification, and that it has become completely inapplicable since. Beck suggests that Scott himself deliberately fostered such an interpretation in his writings, although the example he quotes is from the dying explorer’s last letter to his wife, which, of all his writings, was least likely to have been intended for public eyes. However, Beck correctly highlights the importance in this context of Scott’s journal account of Oates walking to his death. He shows that Oates’s bravery was a theme widely pursued at the time the story broke in February 1913 and afterwards, although he neglects to mention the boost given to the legend by its use to inspire British troops in the First World War. Beck does critique Huntford’s book and the television series based on it, but sees it as an inevitable challenge and holds the sanguine view that it “merely served to tarnish rather than destroy the legend ... [because] society needs its heroes, especially those, like Scott, who pushed forward into the unknown” (34). Although, two decades ago, Beck did not foresee how influential Huntford’s attack would be, continuing interest in the explorer also provides some justification for his optimism.

But the need for such exemplars may be more universal than exclusively British, as it is often made to appear in Scott’s case. In “‘Reducing Down’: D. H. Lawrence and Captain Scott” (1989), for example, literary critic John Turner attests to the interest of the contemporary Italian press, and quotes a message of condolence from the Italian Chamber of Deputies “on the glorious and heroic death of Captain Scott and his brave companions” (15). Turner believes that it was Scott’s journal rather than the terrible

¹² There is an interesting parallel, four centuries earlier, to Scott’s inscribing a moral universe on the blankness of Antarctica in the 1597 ‘Christian Knight’ world map of Jodocus Hondius. The map is discussed and reproduced in my article “Mapping Terra Incognita” (Murray 108-9).

events themselves which “gave them their air of tragedy” (14), although I will suggest later that events and text are not always clearly separable. The springboard for this article is a letter written by Lawrence about a week after the news of Scott’s death first appeared in the papers. At the time, Lawrence was living in Italy with his partner Frieda Weekley, under a cloud and isolated from English society. “We gather strength from Captain Scott,” Lawrence wrote, and went on to compare the gradual paring down of Scott’s life to “cold, hunger, and death” with that of his own life to a love of Frieda and the need to provide for them both (15). The quotation from Lawrence provides an interesting early example of the way in which Scott’s story has inspired and sustained others in times of difficulty. Moreover, it identifies a particularly resonant theme, one also noted by Pyne: the struggle of a life where options are reduced to the minimum. By contrast, the obscure psychological comparisons Turner draws between Lawrence’s life and Scott’s on the basis of such passing remarks are considerably forced. In addition, the dichotomy he creates between the former as an explorer of the inner world and the latter of the outer world takes no account of important features of Scott’s journey such as those highlighted by Pyne.

The 1990s produced several studies of “Scott of the Antarctic” very limited in their approach. In this period the story was co-opted as a case study in fields other than literature or history. In general these discussions are characterized by being poorly informed about Antarctic exploration in the heroic era, and the *Terra Nova* expedition in particular, and by their use of Huntford’s book as the original, sole source rather than as merely an interpretation. In an article published in a geographical journal in 1991, Cindi Katz and Andrew Kirby state plainly that “Entries from the respective diaries of Scott and Amundsen are taken from HUNTFORD, R. (1985) *The last place on Earth*,” and so too is a contemporary citation from the *Times* (269). The authors show no evidence of having read the published diaries of the explorers (although these are easily obtainable) beyond the excerpts selected by Huntford for his purposes. It is not surprising, then, that this article owes more to Huntford’s book than just its quotations. Here too, for example, Amundsen and Scott are placed in a crude opposition throughout; and the polar journey is regarded unquestioningly as a ‘race,’ although this was a term Scott and his party consistently rejected. The reliance on a single secondary source has also led to errors of fact, such as the claim that Scott, unlike Amundsen, disdained the use of indigenous technologies and “the materials of everyday life” (259). In fact, his expeditions also used wooden skis and fur mitts just as the Norwegians did, as well as reindeer-fur sleeping bags and ‘finnesko’ fur boots

adopted from the Lapps and packed with ‘sennegrass,’ a kind of Norwegian hay.¹³ Katz and Kirby declare that the real reason for the deaths in the *Terra Nova* expedition was that “Scott had placed his trust in [modern] technologies which ultimately failed” (260). It is sophistic then to argue that his preference for unaided human effort over dog sledges is actually

a characteristic mystification of the modernist project to control nature through technology ... [and] in fact a recognition of, and reaction to, an increased dependence upon contemporary technology; the more that Scott employed the trappings of modern engineering, the more he needed to aggrandize his own efforts. (261)

It is difficult to follow this reasoning, since this very effort, ‘manhauling,’ is patently the opposite of a dependence on technologies like motor-sledges—later termed “gadgetry and geejaws [sic]” (261)—which Scott is supposed to personify. Examples of such errors and contradictions could be multiplied. The article’s abstract explains the use to which the famous story is put: to connect “the modernist project to the domination of nature, using the example of Scott’s race to the South Pole” (259). A considerable amount of jargon is employed in the process and Michel Foucault and others are invoked as Western science is summarily dismissed for “dealing in objectivity and falsification” and because it “excludes and marginalizes alternative epistemologies such as marxism [sic], feminist theory, subaltern studies, poststructuralism and new ethnography” (262). However, such a procrustean use of Scott’s story to suit one’s own purposes both trivializes and distorts, and the article provides a good example of why I believe the story is in need of conservation.

A critique of Katz and Kirby’s paper appeared two years later in the same journal. Throughout their article, Paul Simpson-Housley and Jamie Scott are at pains to be polite, but their conclusions are similar to my own, as an example will demonstrate. Of the claim in the earlier paper that “Scott demonstrated the urge to dominate nature by means of technology[, whereas] ... Amundsen is seen as representing empathy with nature,” they write: “These affirmations have much validity but in our view, Katz and Kirby radically polarize Scott and Amundsen and, in so doing, tell us more about their own methodological presuppositions than about the Antarctic explorers themselves”

¹³ In addition, caution is needed in making assumptions that clothing and equipment designed for everyday use in the Arctic were equally appropriate to Antarctica and the use they were put to there. For example, Scott wrote that “finnesko give poor foothold on the slippery sastrugi”—the sharp, wind-blown ridges of ice that are the bane of Antarctic surface travel (*Journals* 120). Just before arriving at the Pole he also recorded that the finnesko had become bald after the long journey, and were causing the feet to become very cold. He remedied the problem by applying a layer of grease (374-75).

(395). Simpson-Housley and Scott, the former an author of an earlier book on Antarctic exploration, also correct several errors, the most important being the degree to which the outcomes of the two expeditions were determined by, on the one hand, the favourable weather experienced by Amundsen and, on the other, the “severe weather even by polar standards” which was the lot of the *Terra Nova* expedition (396). As the notes demonstrate, these authors have read the explorer’s own journals. They are thus also in a position to quote excerpts which contradict Katz and Kirby’s assertion that Scott viewed Antarctica as desolate and threatening, a claim that was made on the sole evidence of his famous *cri de cœur* at the Pole (“Great God this is an awful place ...”) and without paying any attention to the context. In the face of such carelessness, here too the commentators are remarkably deferential: “Katz and Kirby rightly cite the explorer as declaring the South Pole to be an awful place. But the reason he evinced such despair is found in the next clause: he had laboured there without the reward of priority” (397). Other reasons could be adduced too: such as the men’s physical exhaustion and the strange ice crystals in air which “chills one to the bone in no time” (*Journals* 376). But where the earlier article reduced the expeditions of Amundsen and Scott to a formula of premodernism versus modernism, Simpson-Housley and Scott impose their own straitjacket by wishing to explain both Amundsen’s and Scott’s *reasons* for seeking the Pole in large part through “the ambiguity and ambivalence towards the natural environment to be found in the Judeo-Christian tradition,” including “an historical antagonism to nature”—and to exemplify this they quote passages from Genesis (397). Although they avoid the simplistic oppositions that they criticize in the other paper, this still seems a long bow to draw. For one thing, Scott was agnostic; and he and Amundsen were also very different men and arguably had quite different ways of relating to the Antarctic landscape, as I will later discuss. The authors cite Fridtjof Nansen’s introduction to Amundsen’s *The South Pole*, where Nansen says the expedition was “a victory of human mind and human strength over the dominion and powers of Nature” (399). Le Guin (and I suspect Scott also) would dispute the claim that this is also how the *Terra Nova* expedition saw itself, since the central point of her essay is precisely that Scott, unlike Shackleton, did *not* personify nature as the enemy.

The problems alluded to in Katz and Kirby’s article are considerably compounded in *Gender on Ice: American Ideologies of Polar Explorations*, a book in the tradition of cultural studies, published in 1993. Lisa Bloom states in the preface that her “project” is to

“put a feminist analysis to work on U.S. nationalism and colonialism.” A formidable range of munitions is brought to bear on the enemy:

My work brings together scholarship in the humanities (ethnic studies, history of photography, literature, and women’s studies) and the social sciences (anthropology and the history of science); theories of discourse as elaborated by Michel Foucault and Fredric Jameson; studies of travel and colonialism ... theories of nationalisms ... gay and postcolonial studies ... and feminist approaches to gender, homosocial relations, technology, and colonialism.... (x)

The fact that it enters the field under the banner of a clear political agenda (Bloom sees her book as making “an intervention”) and attempts to cover such a range of disciplines may help to explain the work’s superior tone and the frequency of jargon, errors of fact and unsubstantiated assumptions. As a single example of the last, the author states that the polar regions, as the last empty places on the map, “excited a consuming passion on the part of white men of various Western countries to ‘conquer’ and make ‘visible’ these sites” (3). This claim can only be made without any supporting evidence because Bloom knows that here she is tapping into an orthodoxy, and that many of her expected readers will take this as axiomatic. As a starting point for looking more deeply at such a statement, I could offer the observation that at least one Antarctic explorer of the period, the Japanese Nobu Shirase, was not European. The opposition Bloom creates between male polar explorers as “the epitome of manliness” and women who conformed “to the role expected of [their] sex” (6) is also too simplistic. A reading of the correspondence between the strong, free-spirited Kathleen Scott and her often uncertain husband would have added at least a degree of nuance to such a view—and it could easily have been read in well-known biographies of the explorer, such as those by Seaver, Pound or Huxley.

In *Gender on Ice*’s fourth chapter Bloom turns her attention to Scott: “my fundamental thesis [is] that both Scott and Peary fabricated the events of their expeditions to suit the particular imperial and masculinist ideologies that each characterized” (13). This argument, however, is advanced through statements like: “Scott was not completely lacking in polar experience before his 1911 South Pole expedition” (122), when in fact he had already led the British National Antarctic Expedition 1901-04, the considerable achievements of which I summarize in chapter 2. Bloom’s conclusion that “the fiction of Scott’s narrative construction” made the men appear “capable of dying honorably even from the most ignoble of deaths” (125) is an extraordinarily unkind assessment, to say the least.

There is a further criticism to be made about Bloom's methodology. The statement, "... my fundamental thesis," quoted above is immediately preceded by the words "Recent revelations have confirmed ... " (13), and these revelations are equated with Huntford's book, which we are informed he "spent five years researching" (130). Bloom's own text is thick with references to this sole authority: on a single page the phrase "according to Huntford" appears four times (126) and even a quote from Tennyson's "Ulysses" is sourced to his book (118). *Gender on Ice* is an extreme, but by no means isolated, example of the misperception referred to earlier of *Scott and Amundsen* as founding text rather than interpretation. It also exemplifies once again how badly Scott's story has fared when it has been pressed into the service of an ideological agenda.

Although published as a chapter of a book on science writing, Barry Pegg's "Nature and Nation in Popular Scientific Narratives of Polar Exploration" (1993) is essentially a cultural rather than a literary study. It typifies many of the current assumptions about Scott and also the kind of dubious logic and sketchy research often employed when repeating them. The essay takes as its subject two famous episodes in British polar exploration: Sir John Franklin's quest for the North-West Passage and Scott's for the South Pole. The notes show that the author is familiar with Scott's and Amundsen's own accounts and also with the challenge posed to Huntford's debunking of the former by Wayland Young in 1980, which I will consider in chapter 5. There are, nonetheless, references to Huntford throughout, and Pegg retells the story in the same vein, adding nothing new. The generally sententious tone is yet more evidence of the presumption with which, so long after the events and with no comparable experience of their own, many authors have not hesitated to sit in judgement on Scott as an explorer. The information is vouchsafed, for example, that "clothing, shelter, and diet are all crucial where life is as fragile as a candle flame in a storm," but of these truisms Scott is supposed to have been unaware (215). And the glib conclusion is reached that "Scott's [expedition] shows the failure of blinkered nationalism in the Antarctic" (219). As in Huntford's book, Amundsen and Scott form a binary opposition in this article, but many of Pegg's claims are unconvincing. He implies, for example, that Scott as a British naval officer deliberately chose to travel south across the snow and ice "the hard way" but concealed this fact in his book "with grand phrasemaking." The phrase he quotes in evidence, however, that there is "nothing to equal the honest and customary use of one's own legs," is demotic rather than grand (220). Again, he states that Amundsen's account of his voyage through the North-West

Passage demonstrates “a surprising degree of cultural self-parody,” but the example cited contains no specific cultural references (220). (The *South Polar Times*, on the other hand, the monthly magazine produced by both Scott’s expeditions while in Antarctica, is full of self-parody and I discuss one of the best examples, penned by the leader himself, in chapter 6.) Scott is derided for supposedly basing his preference for manhauling on too little evidence, but Amundsen is applauded (again quoting Huntford) for apparently deciding the opposite on the basis of a single day’s march (221).

The polar narratives themselves are given scant attention. First Pegg claims that “only the output of expedition leaders, as opposed to their companions, appeared before World War II ... and then only in heavily edited form” (216). In fact, Priestley published his account of the *Terra Nova* expedition in 1914, Gran (in Swedish) in 1915, Griffith-Taylor in 1916, Ponting and Edgar Evans in 1921 and Cherry-Garrard in 1922—all before that date. Even if Pegg has made a slip and intended World War I, in the first three cases at least, earlier publication would hardly be expected given that the expedition only returned from Antarctica in 1913. And since the publication of Scott’s original *Terra Nova* journals in facsimile in 1968 by University Microfilms,¹⁴ readers have been in a position to critically examine, as I will in chapter 4, rather than simply repeat, as Pegg does, Huntford’s assertion that they were “heavily edited” for publication. Pegg’s comments on the published accounts of the *Terra Nova* and *Fram* expeditions similarly concentrate on arguing his case rather than on actual analysis of the text. Of *Scott’s Last Expedition*, he writes:

Edited to conform to the imperial myth, what Roland Huntford calls “an affair of heroism for heroism’s sake” (1979, 559), its two volumes were conceived as a memorial in the spirit of Tennyson’s “In Memoriam,” the Albert Memorial, or indeed the quotation from Tennyson’s “Ulysses” used on the Scott cairn near what is now McMurdo Base: “To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.” Publication had to await the discovery of the bodies and records in the polar spring.... (225-26)

The sequence here carries the strange implication that the supposed crafting of imperial myth, including the editing of Scott’s journals, came *first*, and that publication was merely delayed until the bodies were found. The impression is thus speciously created that the text is not Scott’s—unless the dead explorer somehow had a hand in

¹⁴ Quotations from Scott’s journals in this thesis are generally from the 2005 Oxford edition edited by Max Jones, which is easier to obtain and to read than the facsimiles. Where the difference between the two is significant, however, I also cite the latter; such citations are identified parenthetically as *Diaries* (rather than *Journals*, as in the case of the printed version).

editing his own journals. And while on one page Pegg states: “the evidence of *Scott’s Last Expedition* suggests quite clearly that Scott’s case was exceptional: few explorers compounded cultural rigidity with command indecision to the same extent” (227), on the next Scott’s “example” is said to be “characteristic of nineteenth-century British navy polar exploration” (228). Such contradictory, muddy thinking has characterized studies which have adopted Huntford’s views uncritically.

The final work I will consider from the 1990s also sits firmly in the debunking tradition. The title, *I May Be Some Time: Ice and the English Imagination* (1996), sets the tone of Francis Spufford’s much-cited cultural history. The first phrase is of course part of the ‘famous last words’ Scott attributed to Lawrence Oates as he walked out of the tent to his death in the last desperate days of their return from the South Pole. If Oates did in fact utter these words, they are as choice a piece of English understatement as one is likely to find, since, under the circumstances, “may” was used for utter certainty and “some time” could only mean eternity. The apposition of a phrase that has often given rise to humour with the formal statement of the book’s topic signals a certain archness of approach, and indeed the tone often seems as complacent as the attitudes and figures it critiques.¹⁵ Although Spufford’s is a work of greater sophistication than Bloom’s, it shares with the earlier book this tone and the determined promotion of a particular world view. As with several authors previously considered, the discussion is polarized with the aim of proving an unsubtle point—Amundsen versus Scott; practical realism versus sentimental Edwardian dreaming—and despite the author’s conspicuous linguistic skills, there is a tendency for this to become laboured.

¹⁵ The outspoken and flamboyant Sir Clements Markham, for example, is an easy target for Spufford and is given extensive treatment (274-89). Markham was a central influence on Scott’s career and will be referred to later in this thesis. Spufford retails the story of his supposed homosexuality, presumably following Huntford, since no evidence is offered. Nevertheless, by page 285 hearsay has become fact: “One wonders how large a part the need to conceal his sexuality played in this process.” Pointless wondering, it would seem, especially since the issue appears to be irrelevant and Spufford acknowledges as much: “His attraction came in, *if it came in*, as an additional savour of boyish company, unacknowledged as much else was unacknowledged in his clenched life” (274; my emphasis). Thus the subject is raised simply as a slur, as corroborated by the words “clenched life”—which also seems wide of the mark applied to one whom Spufford introduces as “President of the Royal Geographical Society, President of the Hakluyt Society, glutton for facts, transplanter of the quinine-producing cinchona tree from Peru to India, queen bee of polar committees, expert in so many adjacent disciplines that a moiety of the tributaries feeding the passion for the poles flowed through him ... ” (273-74). H. R. Mill, who had observed Markham for decades, gives the best-informed portrait of this complex man in *The Record of the Royal Geographical Society 1830-1930*.

I May Be Some Time is a particularly sustained example of the historicizing urge which assumes that the attitudes and perceptions it discusses are only the product of a particular time and a particular culture. To a degree this is obviously true, and the historical context needs to be taken into account. Failure to do so would lead, as Northrop Frye remarks, to a “naive translation of all cultural phenomena into our own terms without regard to their original character” (*Anatomy* 25). Equally true, however, is Darryl Jones’s comment in a recent study of Jane Austen that “only the most diehard cultural materialist would want to *deny* some quality of transhistoricity to the literary text” (28). An overemphasis on historical differences can foster a supercilious view of previous eras and, more importantly, overlook the diversity within a given period as well as what is shared between different periods. Terry Eagleton indicates the uncompromising and fashionable nature of some of this writing, and what it misses:

To historicize is indeed vital; but there is in vogue today a brand of left-historicism which seems more indebted to capitalist ideology than to socialist theory ... [S]uch theorists seem to imagine, astonishingly, that the main enemy is the naturalized, static and unchanging ... Moreover, those who insist with suspicious stridency on the malleability of things, and for whom “dynamic” is as unequivocally positive a term as “static” is unambiguously negative, tend to forget that there are kinds of change which are deeply unpleasant and undesirable, just as there are forms of permanence and continuity which are to be affirmed and admired. (*Sweet Violence* x-xi).

The transhistorical (a term usually used pejoratively by historicists) qualities of “Scott of the Antarctic” are naturally central to a study like the present one which is interested in the story’s perennial appeal.

Spufford launches his argument with a quote from a memoir by Scott’s sister, Grace, who asserts that while on the one hand her brother “had no urge towards snow, ice, or that kind of adventure,” on the other,

he felt in himself keenly the call of the vast empty spaces; silence; the beauty of untrodden snow; liberty of thought and action; the wonder of the snow and seeming infinitude of its uninhabited regions whose secrets man had not then pierced, and the hoped-for conquest of raging elements. (6)

This seems like a clear contradiction, but Spufford believes it refers to Scott’s having no desire for “exploration” but a desire for the “romance of the snow,” and the latter he dismisses as “so full a little agenda of romantic responses” (7). But it is difficult to see how “liberty of thought and action,” “piercing the unknown” and “conquering the elements” can entirely be separated from a taste for exploration in the previously unexplored Antarctic. Spufford attempts to overcome this difficulty by claiming that

the latter was probably not a personal feeling but part of “the collective imagination at the turn of the century.” If that is the case, however, why does the same observation not apply to the desire for the “romance of the snow”? I have already questioned whether Scott saw himself as involved in a “conquest of raging elements”—there is little in his diaries to suggest he did—and Spufford does not consider the obvious possibility that some of what his sister wrote in her memoir might say more about her than about Scott. Nevertheless, on the basis of this assumption, the book sets out to “explain where Scott’s feelings came from” (7). Spufford insists that they are specifically *English* feelings, and in his argument takes for granted a dichotomy between the personal and the collective and between the Edwardian era and our own. On the other hand, as indicated in my introduction, many people today also feel the lure of Antarctica’s “vast empty spaces,” “silence,” “wonder of snow and seeming infinitude of its uninhabited regions,” as well as finding a certain romance in space exploration and discovery. And certainly not all of those with such susceptibilities are English, or ever were.

In support of his claims about the historical and national specificity of these responses, Spufford cites Edmund Burke in the eighteenth century, imagining the destruction of London by fire or earthquake: disasters which, while no one wished for them, “would still bring ‘numbers from all parts’ to admire the ruins” (28). He comments that Burke’s “careful sentences fit, remarkably well, the terms on which Victorian readers might allow themselves to enjoy catastrophe ... and ... illuminate ... the psychology of the Edwardian audience for polar feats.” Although the comparison seems considerably strained, the important word here is “fit.” Moreover, it seems that a psychology Spufford claims is unique to Edwardians could equally ‘fit’ twenty-first-century television viewers of the destruction of the World Trade Center buildings in New York and the crowds that visited the site afterwards. An inevitable embarrassment of taking a template view of an era is that, sooner or later, one has to make exceptions to one’s own rules. Spufford, for instance, is forced to ask the question: “Can Sir Clements Markham be claimed as an Edwardian?” (278)—since his quarry was born in 1830 and, as the author points out, the term is usually applied to “those born between about 1865 and 1890.” It is necessary for Spufford’s thesis, however, that Markham *be* an Edwardian and so Markham is somehow made to fit: “Clements Markham may have abhorred the dress, manners, recreations, and modes of travel of the early twentieth century but he needed its florid appetite for bravery, its bravura self-deceptions” (279). Such questionable pigeonholing reduces the credibility

of Spufford's central contention that his characters are products of a specific time and way of thinking. Many of the themes I have already referred to in other authors are repeated in this book: the incompetence of Scott (104), the imperialistic, "bumbling English" (250, 191), the idolizing of Amundsen (231) and the idealizing of native peoples (225, 234).¹⁶

I alluded earlier to Spufford's skill as a writer. A particularly seductive example is the conclusion to the third chapter, where he describes a prop representing an iceberg that was used as Antarctic scenery in a "monumentally silly" tribute to Captain Cook:

... a harlequinade went polar, and London, in a fetching frock, gambolled upon the ice. Once admitted to public view that iceberg, so obviously made of lathe and white papier-mâché, floated preposterously on through the nineteenth century, its bulky outline visible in surprising places, its little wheels squeaking. (47-48)

While admiring the bravura use of language, the reader may well be distracted from noticing the degree to which Spufford himself is creating the meaning here with terms like "monumentally silly" and "preposterously" and the amusing images of London gambolling in a frock and the fake (though it could hardly have been otherwise) iceberg with "its little wheels squeaking." It is not surprising that such an adroit writer perceives and describes with great clarity the effect of Scott's diaries on their readers:

Everyone who read Scott's diaries, as they became available, wished for the safety of the doomed party that they thought they had come to know. A biographer recorded the odd hope he experienced, each time he re-read the documents, that *this time* things might turn out differently, *this time* they might make it home. Empathy was vital to the response of the audience. (27)

The "odd hope" that the biographer felt may not be so odd, or restricted to readers a century ago. It is an important fuel of tragedy which I will return to when discussing that genre in chapter 6. Spufford himself is gesturing towards tragedy when he comments that the misfortunes on the return from the pole "come in as downward turns of events that seem almost stipulated by the story's structure" (4), and towards empathy when he notes that "the perpetual present tense [presumably referring to Scott's diary] in which the story happens every time keeps hope helplessly alive" (4-5). Empathy is indeed vital if tragedy is to work, but Spufford shows little for Scott. He

¹⁶ There is an awkward slip in Spufford's post-colonialism, however, when he describes John Rae as commanding "small parties of Canadian Indians, Inuit and half-breeds ..." (194). The *New Oxford English Dictionary* describes the term 'half-breed' as "offensive"—it would be more appropriately applied to livestock—and, positioned next to the word "Inuit," it cannot be read as from Rae's perspective.

passes judgement on the inner lives of the explorer and his wife (298) and the book concludes like a schoolmaster's report: "Scott lacks the technical, the tactical, and the cultural qualities which ease progress." The dunce is then contrasted with the favourite: "If he were Amundsen, schooled by the Inuit, ingenious and perfectionist, he could take the continent at a dog-powered glide" (317). We turn now towards a new millennium.

In "Cooling Memories? Why We Still Remember Scott and Shackleton" (2000) Dave Burnham explores possible explanations for the second part of his article's title. Some of the conclusions reached are similar to those I put forward in my introduction. First is "the romance of the adventures and the sheer cold heroism these men showed" (17). Noting that such tales move in and out of vogue, Burnham states that "the self-consciousness of the heroism strikes a jarring note today" (18), but unfortunately does not expand on that suggestive observation by giving examples of what he means by "self-consciousness" in this context. He adds that, nonetheless, interest in tales of derring-do is likely to have become more widespread following the rapid rise after the 1970s in the numbers of people engaged in activities such as hiking, climbing and skiing—people who could be supposed to have at least some acquaintance, however slight in comparison to Scott's and Shackleton's, with physical and climatic challenges. The second reason advanced for the fascination with these two explorers is that they were going to places no one had been to before, and going there in wooden boats. Burnham points out that although both were interested in modern technologies and took with them such things as motor vehicles and an aerial survey balloon, they nevertheless relied essentially on wooden sailing ships, animals and manhauling for transport, and for long periods were completely isolated from the outside world. This echoes the point made earlier by Pyne about the heroic-era explorers being "splendid anachronisms," but Burnham's line of argument is clearer: "So the Heroic Age represents in some ways a glorious remnant of the distant past lodged within a century dominated by technological advance," and by 1920 developments in motor transport, radio and flight would banish "forever the dangers that make the Heroic Age so memorable" (18). Burnham argues that World War I led to the virtual enslavement of individuals by systems, to which the autonomy of the heroic explorers provided a sharp contrast and, further, that "Scott's life and death is an enduring metaphor for a view of life that came to an end so shortly after he did" (19). Here again I question the claim that such people and such a view of life were entirely functions of a particular era and are not possible today. Certainly there is such a thing as a *zeitgeist*, but Scott was

in many ways an extraordinary man, and as such cannot be regarded simply as an Edwardian ‘type.’¹⁷ And if there were such a gulf between eras it is unlikely that many people would still respond so strongly to Scott.

Burnham claims that the two polar explorers shared the attitudes and behaviours of their contemporaries, including, for example, “treat[ing] foreigners with varying degrees of contempt ...” (20). But he gives no example of Scott or Shackleton treating a foreigner with contempt and I know of none. On the contrary, in a letter to Victor Campbell (commander of the *Terra Nova* when the English, to their dismay, came upon Amundsen’s party in the Bay of Whales) Scott wrote: “I heartily approve ... your courteous conduct towards Amundsen ...” (qtd. Campbell 83). And if Scott was ever tempted to be rude to a foreigner, it was then.¹⁸ At this point in his article, Burnham admiringly and uncritically repeats several of Huntford’s views, and even goes so far as to assert that the Scott legend had only remained intact before Huntford because of “collusion from [sic] historians and previous biographers” (20). But if that was the case, the collusion lasted for nearly sixty years, and was between authors both living and dead.

After these remarks Burnham returns to the strength of his article: exploring reasons for the enduring appeal of the two explorers’ stories, a topic which is also central to this thesis. Scott’s in particular, he concludes, “is bound to endure because it is a perfect retelling of the age old myth of the questing hero.” Burnham finds support for this view in the work of Joseph Campbell and also tentatively suggests that the physical journey might be regarded as an allegory for an inner journey. I will return to these matters in chapter 6. After contemplating such universal possibilities in Scott’s example, somewhat paradoxically Burnham renews his emphasis on the two explorers’

¹⁷ This is at least as true of his remarkable wife, Kathleen, as her autobiography, *Self-Portrait of an Artist*, and biography (Young, *A Task of Great Happiness*) abundantly demonstrate.

¹⁸ I will cite two further cases to counter the unsubstantiated claim about contempt for foreigners. Scott’s second-in-command, Edward Evans, included in his account of the expedition a description of how Cecil Meares had obtained the dogs in Russia and Siberia. It is entirely respectful, grateful for the help received and also admiring of the native people encountered: “A settlement of ‘fish-skin’ Indians was visited in the dog search, and Meares told us of natives who dressed in cured skins of salmon[sic]. These people were expert hunters who trekked weeks on end with just a pack of food on their backs, their travelling being done on snowshoes.” Evans clearly uses the word ‘Chinaman,’ to which Burnham objects, merely to indicate a Chinese person, as in: “Russian soldiers and Chinamen were detailed by the Governor-General to assist the procession [of dogs] through the streets of Vladivostock to their kennels here” (28). And Shackleton’s editorial for the May 1902 volume of the *South Polar Times* ends: “We all hope that the Germans, our nearest neighbours ... are equally comfortable, and have also settled down into safe winter quarters. They are often in our thoughts for we and they are cut off in the same way from all connection with the outer world and are both pursuing the same objects for the same end” (2).

'Britishness.' He stresses a national ideal of "glorious failure," but admits that this view may be partly ironic "as we British struggle still with the consequences of our imperial past." This confirms, albeit from a different angle, Le Guin's point about the filters through which contemporary Britons contemplate Captain Scott. Burnham also notes the factionalism in contemporary discussion of heroic-age figures mentioned in my introduction, and adds the observation that it excites readers, as well as writers, to "pick sides." In spite of his efforts to emphasize the particular national qualities of Scott and Shackleton, Burnham closes with the ringing declaration that their memory "will never fade. There is too much of the archetype about their characters and actions for that" (21-22). It is for precisely that reason that I would like to direct attention to the universal aspects of Scott's story rather than, as is more usual today, the local. Burnham's comment contains an implication that will be further explored: the nexus between real action (actual events, decisions, outcomes and so on) and the narrative of the events—since a single, isolated action or event could not be regarded as archetypal.

In 2002 Scott and Amundsen were the subjects of two very interesting articles from the perspective of cultural geography by John Wylie. In "Earthly Poles: The Antarctic Voyages of Scott and Amundsen," Wylie argues that the British and Norwegian expeditions had quite different ways of moving through and relating to the Antarctic landscape. He refers at the outset to recent studies by cultural geographers and literary and cultural historians regarding the perception of landscapes and observes: "Clearly, a concern to interrogate the imaginative geographies of exploration and empire has been at the heart of the ongoing critical project of rewriting geographical histories." He cautions, however, that it is "important to recognize that such an analysis itself proceeds from a particular set of epistemological assumptions ..." (169-70), a point I too have emphasized in this review. Likewise, Wylie notes that recent discourse on heroic-era Antarctic exploration has "a particular tendency to position and interpret exploratory experience in terms of self-contained discursive ensembles," and cites Pyne and Spufford as examples. The thesis of the former he identifies as the insistence on the superordinate influence of the physical ice in Antarctica, and of the latter as the isolation of "the peculiarly Victorian and Edwardian discursive filigrees," which supposedly prefigured and were the prime mover for what was to become, in Wylie's neat phrase, "Scott's *textual* death" (170). He observes that meaning in both cases is thus regarded as being constructed "*a priori* ... before the explorer reaches the continent's shores" (171), while the experiences in and responses to Antarctica itself are neglected.

Wylie wishes to avoid “an overly idealist and textual understanding” and to emphasize rather the “spatialities of exploratory being” (171-72). This leads him to conclude that the most important difference between Scott’s and Amundsen’s expeditions was their methods of travel (174). By contrast, it is precisely an “idealist and textual” approach that I will take in this thesis in order to highlight differences I regard as more significant. One of these, as explained, is the contrasting legacies of their character and stories; another is the corresponding differences in their narratives. Wylie does make some comments about text. He finds “a calculating, almost robotic quality” in Amundsen’s diaries and offers a caution (very rare in the history of interpretation of “Scott of the Antarctic”) against easy acceptance of the explorer’s claims about the ease of the Norwegian journey to the Pole (175).¹⁹ In addition, Wylie suggests that although textual evidence can easily be found to support Spufford’s contention that the English viewed Antarctica through the lens of the sublime, these expressions may be little more than conventional literary tropes. A comment such as “Scott’s ultimately straight-forward appeals to nation, family, fellowship emerge almost miraculously in the final reel of a complex narrative” (181) reveals a new detachment from seeing Scott’s story through “Huntford’s ... vitriolic eye” (176). In Wylie’s view, although the Norwegians were more successful travellers than the British, the latter were better at imposing their own meaning on the landscape, and did this in a way “that possessed style and conviction” (181). Scott’s diary writing, “his ability to translate the complexities of their Antarctic sojourn into a tale of fellowship, patriotism, and a classically ‘understated’ British gentlemanliness” (182), is a central part of that convincing and stylish imposition.

The second article by Wylie, “Becoming-Icy: Scott and Amundsen’s South Polar Voyages, 1910-1913,” expresses views similar to those in “Earthly Poles” about the different British and Norwegian relationships to the Antarctic landscape. “Becoming-Icy,” however, is of particular significance to my own work as it highlights in a creative way the importance of ‘story’ in our responses to these two men. Recognizing that a purely critical approach to this subject misses something vital, the author aims to supply this lack by offering his own narration. First, the legendary status of the

¹⁹ Nevertheless, Wylie himself seems at times to be seduced by this view, as when he states that the Norwegians’ “movements over the surface had a tight and graceful economy, purged of waste and excess” (175). But such a description would certainly not apply to their scramble back to base after starting their run for the Pole too early in the season, or to their passage through the labyrinthine crevasses of what they called the “Devil’s Ballroom” on the way up through the Transantarctic Mountains (Amundsen, *South Pole* 2: 103).

expeditions themselves is acknowledged: “... few episodes in the annals of European exploration were to become more celebrated than these two rival voyages.” Then Wylie alludes both to the history of the story, its “extensive discursive afterlife” and “series of critical debunkings,” and also to its durability and standing today: “the voyages of Scott and Amundsen still arguably retain an emblematic aura within histories of adventure and exploration” (249). The journeys and tales of the two men are conflated here, whereas I will argue that they are distinct in crucial ways. And while Amundsen is certainly an essential factor in Scott’s story, the reverse is much less true. The latter point Amundsen himself made subtly and perhaps rather unkindly when he reduced the significance of the brief encounter with the British at his base in the Bay of Whales to a trivial irritation: “We made a strange discovery after this visit. Nearly all of us had caught cold. It did not last long—only a few hours—and then it was over” (*South Pole* 1: 205).

Of particular interest in this paper are Wylie’s decision to embed his critical viewpoint in a narrative and his explanation for this approach. “It is almost as if there is something ineffable about this story,” he writes, “some quality which prompts otherwise sober, critical and ‘factual’ accounts to reach for speculative and poetic insights” (250). I hope to indicate something of that quality in the final chapter of this thesis. In his own conclusion Wylie, too, considers earlier explanations for the enduring fascination of the story. He notes that all these “centre upon Scott” (262) and that cultural analyses like Huntford’s or Spufford’s, “through scripting exploration as an historical discourse rather than a timeless tendency, as an ideological device rather than a universal ethos,” may have uncovered the less important meanings. Finally, he turns to the “purposive, dramatic quality” of the original story, fuelled by the “imperative—the Pole itself ...” (263). The observation that subsequent imaginative renderings all “eventually describe, once more, the arc delineated by the intertwined trajectories of Scott and Amundsen” parallels Pyne’s claim that Antarctic literature remains arrested at the final scenes of Scott’s journey. In chapter 6 I will offer one explanation of this repetition by elucidating the story’s formal tragic aspects.

British historian Max Jones began his substantial contribution to the scholarship on Scott’s story in 2000 with an article exploring the public commemoration of *Terra Nova* (“Our King Upon His Knees”). “Heroic myths,” Jones states,

have been interpreted as instruments of empire, which legitimated imperial expansion by subsuming ambiguities and doubts about imperial purpose within idealised narratives of

individual heroism ... [However,] this emphasis both on empire and on deliberate fabrication requires qualification. (105)

The author examines four ways in which tribute was paid to Scott's expedition. He finds, for example, that Huntford's claim that "censorship" of Scott's journals was used as a means of creating his heroic reputation is "misleading" (108). The changes were few, the text was published after all the major tributes had commenced and it reached only a relatively small number of people. Jones points out that the press coverage of the expedition and attitudes towards it varied (118). "A variety of communities invested Scott's story with different meanings ... through the language of sacrifice," he concludes, but "Scott's story was not harnessed to a hegemonic discourse of empire or Englishness" (119).

Three years later, in *The Last Great Quest: Captain Scott's Antarctic Sacrifice*, Jones offered much valuable insight into the kinds of response the ending of Scott's story elicited from his contemporaries and the reasons for those responses. Jones is of course well aware of the subsequent history of debunking,²⁰ and writes of the attitude towards Scott today that "Huntford's incompetent fool is the new orthodoxy ..." (8). *The Last Great Quest*, on the other hand, is part of the recent reassessment of that history which I will discuss in chapter 5, and this carefully researched book offers convincing challenges to several of the "entrenched stereotypes about Scott's story," such as:

that Scott's scientific aims were a façade, concealing his primary concern with national glory; that Scott chose not to take additional dogs to the Antarctic, because he considered manhauling more noble; that Amundsen's achievement went largely unacknowledged in Britain; that the celebration of Scott's death was primarily motivated by hurt national pride; that the British were unique in their glorification of suffering and failure ... that Scott's heroic reputation grew out of an establishment conspiracy, which suppressed details of his incompetence and created the legend of Scott of the Antarctic through the skilful editing of his sledging journal by his friend J. M. Barrie, author of *Peter Pan*. (9)

Jones, in common with several of the authors already discussed, proceeds from the assumption that people are essentially products of their time, and therefore emphasizes the differences between contemporary readers and historical characters: "The legendary figures who first ventured into the unknown remain impenetrable, unless we apprehend the world which made them" (9). In apparent contradiction, however, the book's peroration announces: "the tragic story of the men who lost the race to the

²⁰ I refer to Jones's more recent comments on the topic, from the introduction to his scholarly edition of Scott's *Terra Nova* journals, in the next part of the thesis.

South Pole will endure ... [and] in our jaded, disorienting times, some will always seek enchantment in the south with Captain Scott, turning the pages of the last great quest” (293). Moreover, since “jaded” and “disorienting” are also the impressions Jones has created of the Edwardian era, it may be that the earlier period has more in common with our own time than the author argues. As I read their journals or published accounts, I do not find the characters of Scott, Wilson and other members of the *Terra Nova* expedition “impenetrable,” and so my interest is rather in the aspects of their experience that we can share or respond to today. Indeed, one of these is implied in the title of Jones’s book, which reiterates Burnham’s suggestion that “Scott of the Antarctic” belongs to the perennial category of quest narratives. The title derives from the *Illustrated London News* of 18 May 1912, which characterized the “conquest of the South Pole,” as “the last great quest” (6, 299), and Jones himself asserts that “nowhere else [on earth] could inspire a comparable enterprise, combining the fulfilment of an ancient quest ... with pioneering scientific research” (277). *The Last Great Quest* also contains brief comments of a more literary nature. Jones suggests that “tales of chivalry offered both a vocabulary and plotlines for the story of Scott of the Antarctic” (240), which he sees as a “distilled version” of the genre of male quest romance (241). He also alludes to Christian sources for “the language of sacrifice” and to classical models for narratives of disaster (242), but reference to tragedy is restricted to hints such as: “Scott’s anguish as the party struggles to return from the Pole is intensified [for us] by the reader’s awareness of the impending tragedy” (177). Like Karamanski and Burnham, Jones observes that the notion of heroism is suspect today and, thus, “Captain Scott is out of fashion” (293).

The work of Jones and Wylie reflects a broader reappraisal of “Scott of the Antarctic” currently taking place. Significant new biographies have also appeared, such as those by Susan Solomon and Ranulph Fiennes, and I will discuss these later when I trace the story’s history. But the new assessments are still a long way from penetrating mainstream scholarship, as the final two texts to be reviewed will illustrate. Huntford’s orthodoxy remains influential, and the facts of the story are still disregarded. Elena Glasberg, for example, makes a series of errors about the most basic facts during a 2002 commentary on Le Guin’s “Sur,” an imaginary tale about a team of women who reach the Pole before Amundsen or Scott but conceal the fact. Glasberg introduces her own summary with: “The material facts of the race to the pole are as easy to trace as tracks in fresh snow.” Immediately following this statement we read that Amundsen arrived at the Pole on “11 December 1911” (the explorer tells us that he arrived in the

vicinity on 14 December and fixed the position on 17 December [*South Pole* 2: 120, 132]); that the entire British polar party died at their last camp (Evans and Oates died earlier); the tent was twenty miles from the depot (she means kilometres: Scott gives the famous, and endlessly cited, distance twice in his last diary entries as 11[geographical] miles [412]). Most extraordinary of all is the erroneous claim that Shackleton “located and removed the corpses” (101), when in fact Shackleton was not even in Antarctica at the time, and the actual search party deliberately left the bodies where they lay. So it is perhaps ironic that Glasberg’s comment that “even as knowledgeable a polar historian as Le Guin remains riveted by the story of Scott’s disaster” contains the suggestion that the well-informed should be less impressed. Glasberg repeats standard debunking views such as “the greater the failure, the greater the heroism” (102), but concedes that “although the Scott expeditions were bad exploration, they make a good story” (118).

Sarah Moss’s *Scott’s Last Biscuit: The Literature of Polar Travel*²¹ appeared in 2006 but repeats unadulterated the views Huntford had expressed almost three decades earlier. As the most recent illustration of just how persistent those views are, and how trenchantly they are still expressed, it needs to be discussed in some detail. The advertisement on the back cover of “literary readings” of the accounts of polar explorers seems at last to promise the close engagement with the text of Scott’s diary that has been notably lacking in the literature reviewed in this chapter. But for most of the section dealing with Scott, Moss simply tells the story yet again and there is scant literary analysis: what there is I will consider shortly.

Moss takes little or no account of more recent scholarship, and Huntford’s monochrome view and slurs are simply repeated: “[his men] could see that Scott was irresponsible but obeyed him unquestioningly as he led them to their deaths ...”(97); “Sir Clements Markham ... liked personable young men...” (99), and so on. The author’s stated purpose is: “not only to analyze what went wrong—a well researched topic—but to look at the mythmaking that began even before the dying Scott scrawled ...” (99-100). A vast amount has indeed been written about ‘what went wrong.’ There are few writers who have not offered an opinion on the topic from the moment news of the explorers’ deaths was received to the present, and for that reason alone one would need to be well informed before attempting to add anything. But on these questions Moss cites no author subsequent to Huntford. Solomon’s authoritative

²¹ This is from the title page: the book’s cover has “*Exploration*” instead of “*Travel*.”

analysis of the contribution of the abnormal weather to the disaster, for instance, is not even mentioned. It is therefore not surprising that this book also contains simple errors of fact. Scott did not meet Amundsen at the Bay of Whales, for example, as Moss asserts; that was Victor Campbell. Nor did he “refuse ... to take any notice of Scandinavian and American success with skis and dogs” (101): a Norwegian ski instructor and an expert Russian dog-driver accompanied *Terra Nova*.

It is true that *Scott's Last Biscuit* has a broad topic and deals with a variety of writers, not all of whom the author could be expected to be equally familiar with. Yet she has chosen Scott for her title, and her many judgements upon him show no sign of being tempered by uncertainty. The only recent author Moss does cite is Spufford. And where Huntford was the source for ‘what went wrong,’ Spufford, who had previously covered the same ground, appears to be the source for much of the second part of her stated aim: looking at the mythmaking. Her declaration “Scott certainly did his own mythmaking, but the point of mythmaking is to attract and deploy cultural energies that are already there” (99) is no more than a summary of the earlier author’s thesis. In addition, Moss pursues a theme of death as deliberate and staged: “At its height, this Anglo-American cultural investment in the poles as spaces of absence, of death and disappearance, was so great that survival was seen as positively inappropriate” (94); “explorers are careful to die as they wish to be found” (96). And if those claims appear somewhat flippant, the point of a comment like the following, on Scott’s decision to take four men with him to the pole, is even more dubious: “This was his most obvious misjudgement (assuming that he wanted everyone to survive) ...” (106).

Moss regards the “Explorer’s Last Journal” as a genre, and also as a performance “interchangeable” with the corpse, and states that the journal “only makes sense as part of the account of the finding of the body ... and so we must also have the story of the expedition that went looking for and/or found the lost expedition” (96). In Scott’s case, it may be something of overstatement to say it “only makes sense” in this context, because the account of their last weeks is complete in itself. But of course the journal had to be found somehow, and Moss’s observation is borne out to the extent that tellings of the story characteristically end with Scott’s final diary entries followed by a short epilogue describing the finding of the bodies and the return of the expedition carrying the news to the outside world. She also points to the fact that, after repeated retellings and interpretations, the events become a “cultural myth rather than a text” (96). This is certainly true in the case of Scott, who often became either

National Hero or Incompetent Schemer, but Moss herself simply chooses and reinforces the latter.

At the same time, Scott's own text is largely disregarded in *Scott's Last Biscuit*. Moss does quote the journals at greater length than her predecessors, but this is mostly to justify her criticism of their author as a man and an explorer rather than to examine them as writing.²² Even so, some of the readings are puzzling, as when Moss states that "[Scott] writes confidently, 'I think our plan will carry us through without the motors (though in that case nothing else must fail)'" (102). The expression "I think" combined with the parenthetic proviso seem to make this a characteristic statement of uncertainty in the often diffident Scott, rather than one of confidence.²³ Again, Moss comments: "This notebook ends hubristically, 'The future is in the lap of the gods; I can think of nothing left undone to deserve success'" (103), when the first clause is the exact antithesis of hubris. Her observation that Scott feels he is entitled to success is fair; but given the enormous amount of time, money, effort and care he had invested, this appears to be an ordinary human response. Moss, however, is unrelenting: "... but polar success—like other kinds—is not determined by what one deserves." A long quotation on pages 104-05 contains ellipses which, when restored from the original, qualify the assertion that Scott's tone, here and in general, is "petulant" and that he is convinced that "the Antarctic owes him good weather."²⁴ Between the expressions of frustration about the continuing storm that halted the British party in unpleasant conditions for four days, more matter-of-fact or optimistic comments are omitted, such as: "There cannot be good cheer in the camp in such weather, but it is ready to break out again. In the brief spell of hope last night one heard laughter." Also excised is the explorer's review of his planning, by which he justifies his hope for success: "I

²² On pages 107-08, for example, a passage of more than 30 lines is quoted, with no analysis beyond the introductory comment: "... over the following week Scott, now oddly matter-of-fact, charts their disintegration."

²³ This impression is supported by the words immediately before and after those Moss quotes: "I feel that our organisation will not be found wanting, yet there is an immense amount of detail, and every arrangement has to be more than usually elastic to admit of extreme possibilities of the full success or complete failure of the motors. I think our plan will carry us through without the motors (though in that case nothing else must fail), and will take full advantage of such help as the motors may give" (*Journals* 282).

²⁴ More than 65 years previously, in a text which is still easily available, the distinguished Antarctic biographer George Seaver argued the opposite. After warning that any discussion of weather conditions on this polar trek must take into account the detailed journal of the exceptionally hardy Bowers (who also kept a scrupulous meteorological log), he finds that Scott, by comparison, "far from complaining unduly, is in fact putting the best complexion on a bad business. He never fails to record with gratitude every gleam of sunshine and it is only rarely that an outburst escapes him such as, 'Our luck with the weather is preposterous'" (*Scott* 149-50).

cannot see that any plan would be altered if it were to do again, the margin for bad weather was ample according to all experience, and this stormy December—our finest month—is a thing that the most cautious organiser might not have been prepared to encounter” (*Journals* 340).²⁵ Despite some more encouraging signs in the recent literature, then, *Scott’s Last Biscuit* provides a striking example of the harsh and cavalier treatment Scott’s texts and his story still regularly receive.

§

The foregoing review of scholarly literature has highlighted the extent to which Huntford’s 1979 book continues to influence commentary on “Scott of the Antarctic,” and provided evidence of considerable faulty reasoning in that commentary. It has also identified several more independent and sympathetic appraisals which have furthered my own study. I have not indicated problems in the scholarship gratuitously, but rather in order to reveal a pattern of disregard for the story that parallels the early treatment of Scott’s hut. Irrespective of the value or otherwise of Huntford’s book itself, which will be assessed in chapter 5, by attacking such a celebrated figure it inevitably achieved a certain prominence and thus has to be taken into account. We have seen that highly polarized, aggressively partisan attitudes towards Antarctic explorers, which *Scott and Amundsen* best exemplifies and which were alluded to in my introduction, were especially common in the 1990s and still persist. In addition, with the debunking orthodoxy and “prejudices against the Edwardian *Zeitgeist*” (King, “Review” 356) as stalking horses, Scott’s story has been pressed into the service of a variety of agendas by writers many of whom have only a passing knowledge of the facts. But “Scott of the Antarctic” is a complex tale, and now has a long history of dispute and hearsay. It is therefore necessary at least to be well informed—perhaps even a specialist—in order to engage usefully with this story at all, and this survey of recent literature has demonstrated its fate in the hands of those who are not. Reviewing a Scott biography in 2001, historian T. H. Baughman wrote:

²⁵ Later, Moss’s “literary reading” becomes even more suspect when she claims that the Winnie-the-Pooh story “In Which Christopher Robin Leads an Expedition to the North Pole” is a transparent satire on Scott—rather than a whimsical treatment of exploration in general and much else. The argument is pure surmise, and to read this playful tale as pious parody is like walking several times around a tree, following your own tracks in the snow (as Pooh and Piglet do in another story) while believing that you are hunting a Woozle. Frederick Crews’s two books, *The Pooh Perplex* and *Postmodern Pooh*, demonstrate how these stories can be press-ganged by any agenda—and despite her awareness of their existence (227), Moss seems to have fallen into the same Cunning Trap.

The book will be a painful read for anyone who has an understanding either of Scott or of “Heroic Age” exploration, so flawed are the author’s interpretations ... Pity Scott, a genuine tragic hero; too bad the tragedy of Antarctic historiography continues in the guise of works such as this one. (72)

That sometimes ‘tragic’ history of the interpretation of Scott’s story is the topic of Part II, and my aim in presenting a selection of that material is to encourage better informed responses to the story today.

This review has also revealed that little attention has been paid to the founding texts themselves, and even less from a literary perspective. I will, therefore, cite Scott’s journals throughout this thesis, as well as Amundsen’s accounts of his expedition and the diaries of Wilson and Bowers, Scott’s partners in the final stages of the journey. Cherry-Garrard’s influential *The Worst Journey in the World* is discussed in chapter 4 and I assess Scott’s journals and story from a literary point of view in chapter 6. But first it is necessary to provide an outline of the events of Scott’s expeditions, notably confused by some of the authors considered in this chapter, and to place these in context. This will provide a basis for then examining the story and its interpretations.

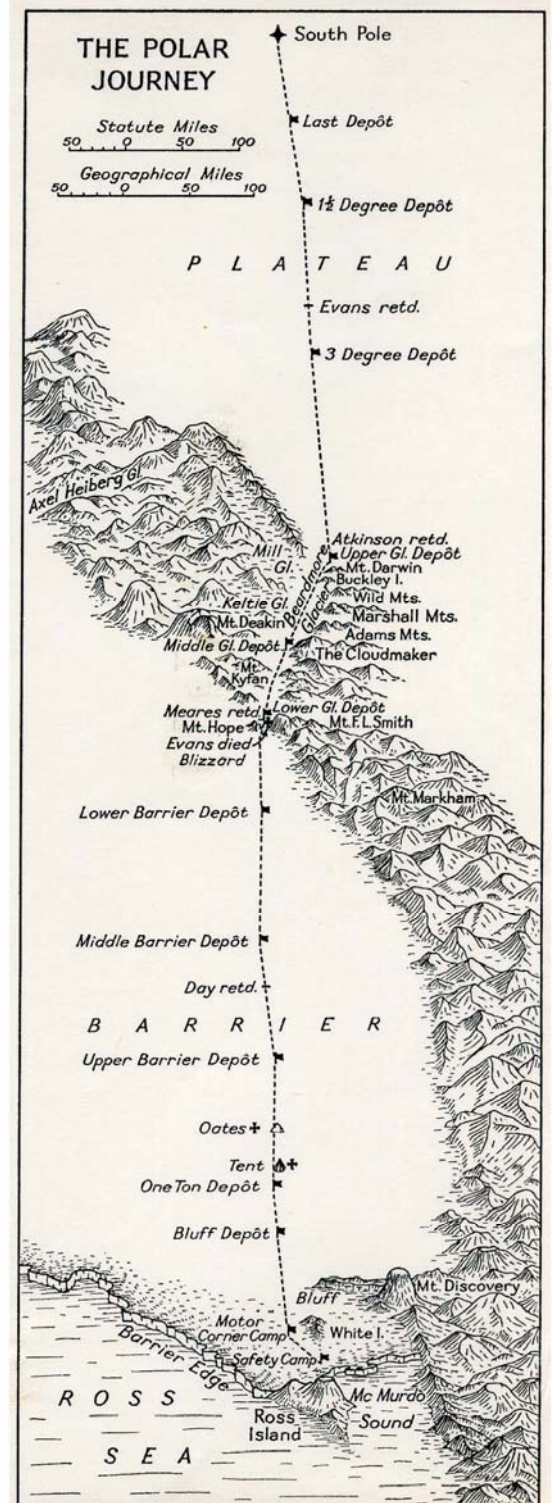
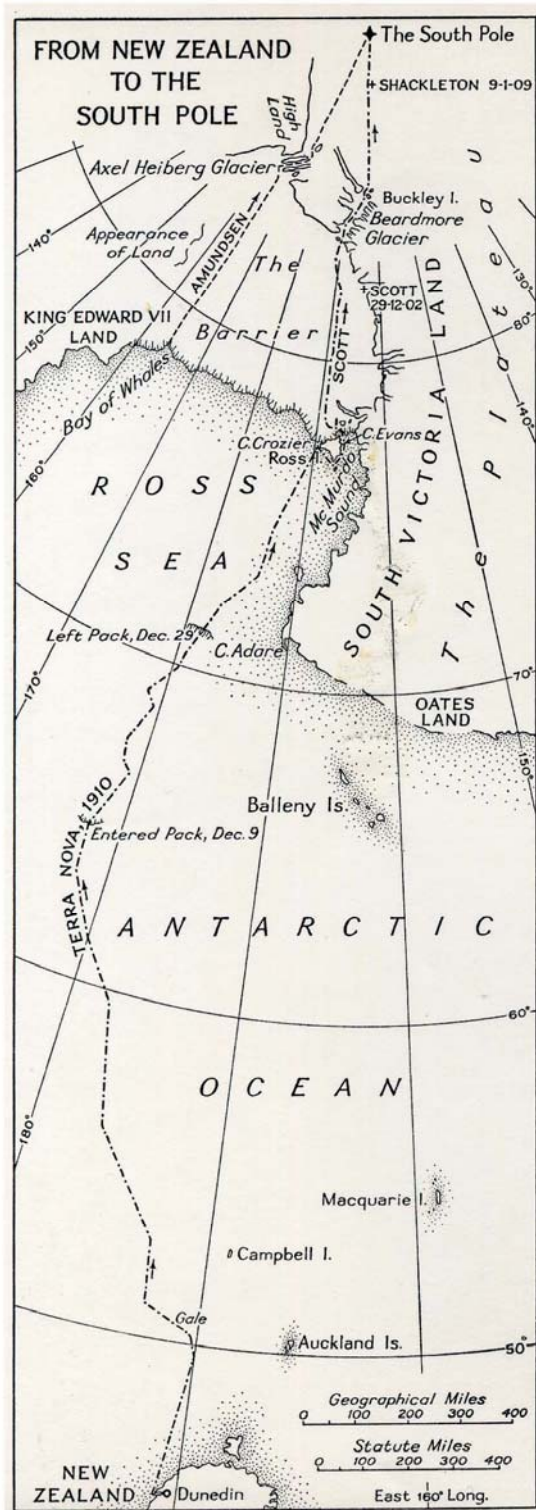


Fig. 1. Scott's route to the Pole: from New Zealand and from Cape Evans.

Terra Nova in context

THE HEROIC AGE was an exceptional decade and a half in the history of Antarctic exploration, and Scott's expeditions form the centrepiece of that age. What follows is a brief sketch of the achievements of some of Scott's forerunners, a slightly fuller treatment of his first expedition and its background, and a synopsis of the main events of his last expedition. This material is well known and has been recounted many times in different ways. Nevertheless, some recapitulation is necessary in order to place the *Terra Nova* expedition in context and to provide a clear point of reference for matters which will be discussed later. The aim here is more descriptive than analytical: to set out with minimal interpretation the essential facts which are not disputed. This is loosely analogous to certain distinctions made by narratologists between 'actual' events and events as they are narrated. Gérard Genette, for example, contrasts the order in which events actually occurred (*histoire*) with the order in which they are related (*récit*). Here, it is the former that will be emphasized; the latter, an aspect of the different ways a story is told, will be considered in chapter 6. However, the following summary is not purely chronological, since at times hints are given of the consequences of what is being described.

The existence of a great landmass in the Earth's south was postulated by the ancient Greeks at least as early as the fourth century BC, and for centuries before anyone actually went there it was 'mapped' in remarkable ways (Murray). In the late eighteenth century Captain James Cook wrote:

Whether the unexplored part of the *Southern Hemisphere* be only an immense mass of water, or contain another continent, as speculative geography seemed to suggest, was a question which had long engaged the attention, not only of learned men, but of most of the maritime powers of Europe. (ix)

The great object of Cook's second voyage in 1772-75 in the aptly named *Resolution* was to answer that question. David Campbell reminds us that at the time this voyage was "equivalent in scope and novelty to the flyby of the outer planets of the solar system

by the Voyager spacecraft” (158). Cook circumnavigated the Southern Ocean in high latitudes, crossed the Antarctic Circle for the first time and, braving storms and mountainous icebergs in his small wooden ship, reached an astonishing ‘furthest south’ of 71° 10' S, a record that would stand for the next half-century (McGonigal and Woodworth 389). Although this was well south of most of the East Antarctic coast, in the west, where Cook was at the time, the continent shrinks back towards the Pole, and he narrowly missed sighting land. Nevertheless, he had finally shattered the centuries-old dream of a fertile, populated, Asia-sized southern continent, and proved that if any large landmass did exist in the far south (he believed it did) it must lie within the icy confines of the Antarctic Circle. For this epochal feat of ‘non-discovery,’ Daniel Boorstin has dubbed Cook the greatest “negative discoverer” of all time (282). And writing in 1905, after his own first Antarctic expedition, Scott called Cook’s second voyage “the most important incident in the history of Antarctic research” (*Discovery* I: 6).

It was not until 19 February 1819 that a British sealer, William Smith, made the first documented sighting of Antarctica or, more precisely, the South Shetland Islands. This was confirmed by landings the following year, when Smith and Edward Bransfield also sighted and charted a section of the Antarctic Peninsula (D. Campbell 162; McGonigal and Woodworth 395). During his remarkable circumnavigation, whose main aim was “to approach as closely as possible to the South Pole, searching for as yet unknown land ...” (Martin 79), the Russian explorer Thaddeus von Bellingshausen crossed the Antarctic Circle for the first time since Cook, and may have sighted the continent itself shortly before Smith and Bransfield. Different candidates have been proposed for the honour of being the first person to set foot on Antarctica proper, but the first documented landing was made on the Antarctic Peninsula on 6 February 1821 by John Davis and the men of *Cecilia*, a tender to an American sealing fleet (D. Campbell 179). In the following two decades sealers and whalers were very active in Antarctic waters. During this period, notable Antarctic expeditions were led by James Weddell, Jules Dumont d’Urville and Charles Wilkes. But it was veteran Arctic explorer James Ross who in 1841 first showed that the Antarctic pack ice could be penetrated—“the bare attempting” of which, Cook had written, “would be a very dangerous enterprise” (322)—and thus opened the way to the continent for later land expeditions seeking the South Pole. Beyond the pack Ross discovered a sea (now eponymous) flanked by mountainous land to the west. His ship, *Erebus*, pushed south until it was finally stopped by a wall of ice, towering higher than the ship’s mast and

extending indefinitely to the east. To give his countrymen a vivid sense of the barrier that now confronted him, Ross remarked: “we might with equal chance of success try to sail through the Cliffs of Dover.” The ice wall was later revealed to be the leading edge of a country-sized sheet of ice, now called the Ross Ice Shelf, floating on the Ross Sea. But the explorer himself wrote: “What was beyond it we could not imagine ...” (qtd. Brandt 132, 131). At the start of the heroic age sixty years later its nature was still a mystery, and it was known as the Great Ice Barrier or simply the Barrier. Fused to its western edge, Ross found the island—later also named after him and dominated by the active volcano, Mt Erebus—from which Scott and Shackleton would set out for the Pole. After Ross there was little interest in Antarctic exploration for several decades, and attention focused instead on the long search for Sir John Franklin, famously lost in the Arctic while seeking the fabled North-West Passage. Nevertheless, scientific interest in the region persisted (Martin 96-99), as most notably demonstrated, and further stimulated, by the famous *Challenger* expedition of 1872-76 in sub-Antarctic waters.

It is often stated that the immediate trigger for the resurgence of Antarctic exploration, ushering in the heroic age in which Scott’s two expeditions were to play such a central role, was a resolution passed at the Sixth International Geographical Congress in London in July 1895. In words reminiscent of US President J. F. Kennedy’s famous promise in 1961 to land a man on the Moon before the end of the decade, the congress declared:

[T]he exploration of the Antarctic Regions is the greatest piece of geographical exploration still to be undertaken ... [T]he Congress recommends that the scientific societies throughout the world should urge, in whatever way seems to them most effective, that this work should be undertaken before the close of the century. (“The International” 292)

The wording was by a committee nominated by the chair of the congress, Sir Clements Markham, whose long passion for polar exploration began while serving as a midshipman during an 1850-51 search for Franklin. Markham had also organized the British Arctic Expedition of 1875-76, and had been the secretary of the Royal Geographical Society (hereafter RGS) for 25 years before being appointed its president in 1893. He makes it clear that his own scheme for an Antarctic expedition went back at least a decade before the 1895 Congress and also acknowledges the contributions of others in promoting the idea (*Obsession* 1-2). With Markham’s appointment as RGS president an opportunity to act presented itself, and he “resolved that the Antarctic

Expedition should be despatched during my presidency”(5). Renewed international competition was an added spur. The Congress had listened as Carsten Borchgrevink, a Norwegian resident of Australia, listed the achievements of a voyage earlier the same year on the whaler *Antarctic* led by Norwegian businessman Henryk Bull.²⁶ These included the first documented landing on East Antarctica, at Cape Adare on 18 January. Borchgrevink also proposed a new Antarctic expedition to locate the South Magnetic Pole. Subsequently he secured lavish financial support from British publisher Sir George Newnes, to the dismay of Markham, who himself had been trying for five years to raise funds (Baughman, *Pilgrims* 8). In 1898 a Belgian expedition with a cosmopolitan staff led by Adrien de Gerlache made new discoveries in the Peninsula area. The Norwegian Roald Amundsen, in the Antarctic for the first time, was third-in-command. Their ship, *Belgica*, became frozen into the pack ice, and thereby the first exploring vessel to overwinter in Antarctica. Borchgrevink returned to Cape Adare early in 1899 and the following year proceeded into the Ross Sea. The Great Ice Barrier was climbed for the first time at a low point. For the expedition’s Australian physicist, Louis Bernacchi, the Barrier was “the most marvellous sight I had ever seen in my life; no words can adequately describe it” (*South Polar* 261). And we get at least an impression of what he saw and felt at the top, as he surveyed the future centre stage for the dramas of Scott, Amundsen and Shackleton, from his description of a climb further north:

The sight that met our eyes was ineffably desolate. Nothing was visible but the great ice-cap stretching away for hundreds of miles to the south and west. Unless one has actually seen it, it is impossible to conceive the stupendous extent of this ice cap, its consistency, utter barrenness, and stillness, which sends an indefinable sense of dread to the heart.
(250)

In the company of two others Borchgrevink made the first brief sledging trip south to approximately 78° 50', beating the latitude record set by Ross.

Scott’s first Antarctic expedition

Meanwhile, three coordinated national Antarctic expeditions had been in preparation, to operate in three designated sectors of the continent: the Germans under Erich von

²⁶ The captain of the *Antarctic* was in fact Leonard Kristensen, but Bull had organized the expedition with his friend, the veteran Norwegian shipowner Svend Foyn. Quartermain comments that Bull’s position was “not very clearly defined” and that relations between him and Kristensen were problematic (54).

Drygalski were to explore the Indian Ocean sector, the Swedes under Otto Nordenskjöld the region of the Antarctic Peninsula, and the British under Robert Scott the Ross Sea sector. The last of these would become the National Antarctic Expedition 1901-04, also known as the *Discovery* expedition, after its purpose-built ship.²⁷ Preparations were long and complex. The RGS contributed substantial funding and additional money was raised from private sources and, eventually, the government. Early on, Markham made what he later admitted was the “fatal error” of combining forces with the prestigious Royal Society (RS) in the misguided hope of attracting more funds. He has left an amusing account of both the origins of the expedition and the intrigues that ensued as the two societies entered a tug-of-war in support of their own preferred leader and objectives (*Obsession* 8). His point of view, characteristic bluntness and colourful turn of phrase are all evident in the following protestation: “We initiate the whole thing, raise all the funds, for geographical exploration, and then these mudlarkers [the biological sub-committee] coolly ask us to turn our expedition into a cruise for their purposes” (qtd. Crane 79-80).

The relevance of these matters to the present study is the legacy they left for Scott’s second expedition. The tensions between the RGS’s goals of exploration and the purely scientific interests of the RS were never satisfactorily resolved. The RS had fought for the prominent geologist Professor J. W. Gregory to be leader of the expedition, and regarded the ship and its commander simply as the scientists’ means of getting to and from Antarctica. But the RGS (viz. Markham), which had arranged the funding and also constructed *Discovery* to be much more than a ferry, had chosen Scott, a naval lieutenant and torpedo expert, as the expedition leader.²⁸ In the event, Gregory angrily resigned on the grounds that with Scott in charge “there would be no guarantee to prevent the scientific work from being subordinated to naval adventure” (qtd. Markham, *Obsession* 167). Scott, meanwhile, sought the advice of the Norwegian Fridtjof Nansen, the doyen of polar travel, and also of von Drygalski, and *Discovery* eventually sailed with a scratch but dedicated scientific staff. On its return, some of the

²⁷ There are recent accounts of Scott’s first expedition by T. H. Baughman (1999) and David E. Yelverton (2000). Scott’s diaries were incorporated into his book, *The Voyage of the Discovery*, and Edward Wilson’s, edited by Ann Savours (herself the author of a 1992 book on the expedition), have also been published. There are diaries of several other expedition members, including Shackleton, in the SPRI archives.

²⁸ Markham wrote that Scott also “had a thorough knowledge of the principles of surveying and of surveying instruments, as well as of electricity and magnetism” (*Lands of Silence* 448).

painstakingly gathered meteorological data was questioned,²⁹ and as a consequence of all this Scott was determined that his next expedition should be both free from the machinations of committees and beyond reproach scientifically.

Its difficult birth and the inexperience of all its members notwithstanding, the National Antarctic Expedition was regarded by most as a great success. Scott was promoted to post-Captain and later appointed Commander of the Victorian Order,³⁰ and in his welcoming speech Markham proclaimed: “Never has any polar expedition returned with so great a harvest of scientific results” (qtd. Huxley 139). They had established the general nature of the Barrier and coasted it to its eastern limit, where they had discovered and named King Edward VII Land, although it had not been possible to explore it. There had been twenty-eight sledging journeys with scientific objectives, in conditions never before experienced—and gruelling enough to provide a fitting opening to Antarctica’s heroic age. Large sections of unmapped coastline had been filled in, and the polar plateau and ice-free valleys (now called the Dry Valleys) both seen for the first time. Significant new information had been gathered in the fields of meteorology, terrestrial magnetism, glaciology and biology, and the men of *Discovery* had wintered nearly five hundred miles (Mill, “Ten Years” 372) further south than any before them and also reached a record southern latitude. The journey during which this new ‘furthest south’ was achieved was to have far-reaching consequences.

On 2 November 1902 Scott, Dr Edward Wilson and Ernest Shackleton left base, in the wake of a supporting party, with sledges pulled by nineteen dogs.³¹ For Wilson, being chosen to accompany Scott was at first “rather too good a thing to be true” (although he later felt it would be much less interesting than “sketching the newly discovered coast line to the southwest”), and it was his friend Shackleton’s “one

²⁹ Yelverton deals with this issue in detail (409-12). It appears that the criticism was largely based on errors made by the Meteorological Office itself. Scott pushed for a full enquiry but, although this never occurred, his objections to the criticism were later published.

³⁰ He was already a Member of the same order, and many felt he should have received a knighthood, but the government did not even send congratulations. Prime Minister Balfour had been angered by the unexpected call later made for additional government funds to provide a relief ship (Jones, *Quest* 67, 72); he was probably also influenced by the attitude of the Royal Society (Baughman, *Pilgrims* 240-41). Consequently, when Scott addressed a glittering dinner at Balmoral at the King’s invitation shortly after, he was astounded when the Prime Minister declared that “he regarded himself as *Father of the Expedition!!!!*” (qtd. Crane 312). Nevertheless, the explorer received a gold medal from the RGS, a special decoration from King Edward, honorary Doctor of Science degrees from Manchester and Cambridge universities (“Scott Died”), and was showered with high honours from France, Belgium, Russia, America, Denmark and Sweden (Huxley 142).

³¹ Scott published the first account of “The Southern Sledge Journey” in the Midwinter edition of the *South Polar Times* on 22 June 1903.

ambition” (*Discovery Diary* 150-01, 195). Their object was to penetrate as far south as possible, and at their wildly enthusiastic send-off they may even have dreamed of reaching the Pole. When the three men parted from the support group thirteen days later in unknown land, Scott wrote: “... our hopes ran high for the future ... Confident in ourselves, confident in our equipment, and confident in our dog team, we can but feel elated with the prospect that is before us” (*Discovery* 18). From that point, however, their fortunes reversed. The dog teams “seemed to lose all heart,” and soon the party had to carry half their load ahead and return for the rest, thus covering three miles in order to advance one. As they laboured on, the dogs had to be whipped to get them to move and some grew sick and died or were shot to feed the others. Scott also realized that the men had not taken sufficient food for themselves (50). They suffered from agonizing snow blindness and developed symptoms of scurvy. Shackleton was in the worst condition, at times coughing blood, collapsing and being carried on the sledge. They returned to base after ninety-three days, alive but exhausted and with no dogs. They had covered 960 miles and pushed the latitude record three hundred miles further south, to approximately 82° 17' (Huxley 96). With *Discovery* immovably frozen into the sea, the expedition prepared to stay for a second winter, but Shackleton was invalided home with others on the relief ship *Morning*. “There is no journey in polar history,” writes David Crane, “except Scott’s last that has generated as much argument as this first Southern Journey” (217). A large part of that controversy concerns the supposed poor relations between Scott and Shackleton, and the latter’s actual anger that the fact of his being carried on the sledge was mentioned in Scott’s book about the expedition.³² What is not in question is that chagrin over his breakdown on this journey, combined with the taste for pioneering exploration it awoke in him, fuelled a desire in Shackleton to return to Antarctica. The southern journey also cemented a remarkable friendship between Scott and Wilson.

Scott returned to England in September 1904, but not before, to his consternation, *two* ships had been sent for the second relief of the expedition.³³ He was granted leave

³² See also note 131.

³³ The details of the skein of horse-trading and recrimination between Markham and the government that had led to this outcome are not relevant here. But since the expedition was in no danger at all, Scott was utterly dismayed at being “suddenly and overwhelmingly ‘saved,’” as he put it in a letter to his mother on 28 March 1904 (qtd. Pound 108). Some of his feeling was reported to the British press from New Zealand, and although Scott denied he had ever publicly expressed displeasure with the government, he was anxious about the effect this report would have on his naval career. Accordingly, on the way home from New Zealand he wrote a letter of apology to Sir William Wharton, the Admiralty’s chief Hydrographer (Huxley 126-27), and he also treated the matter very tactfully when writing *The Voyage of the ‘Discovery’*.

by the Admiralty to write an account of the expedition and *The Voyage of the 'Discovery'* was published a year later. Shackleton sent a welcoming letter to Scott and met him on his return (Crane 310), and despite claims sometimes made to the contrary (e.g. Mickleburgh 77) there is no evidence of anything but friendly relations between the two at this time. Problems certainly arose in 1907 when Shackleton announced a new Antarctic expedition of his own with the principal aim of reaching the South Pole. The rights and wrongs of this announcement and its sequel have been vigorously and at times bitterly disputed ever since. Here it can simply be said that Scott was also planning to return to Antarctica and requested that his former Third Lieutenant not use Ross Island, where the *Discovery* expedition had established its headquarters, as his base. After reluctantly agreeing to operate considerably to the east, Shackleton later did base his *Nimrod* expedition on the island, giving force majeure as the reason. In 1909 news reached London that, among other important achievements, he and three companions had struggled to an extraordinary new furthest south of approximately 88° 23', but had not reached the South Pole.³⁴ On 13 September Scott formally announced that his new British Antarctic Expedition would depart the following year with the dual aims of reaching the Pole and carrying out scientific research. That same month two Americans, Robert Peary and Frederick Cook, both claimed to have reached the North Pole.

Scott's last expedition

Fund-raising for Scott's new, private expedition proved especially arduous and it would never be free from financial problems. Lieutenant Edward (Teddy) Evans, who had served on one of *Discovery's* relief ships, offered to withdraw his own proposed Antarctic expedition and contribute the funding he had been promised on the condition that Scott appoint him second-in-command, and this was agreed. Other members were chosen from nearly 8000 volunteers (Evans, *South* 8). Among them were Petty Officer Edgar Evans, who had served on Scott's earlier expedition, Lieutenant Henry Bowers from the Royal Indian Marine, and two wealthy young men who both offered to contribute £1000 and work without pay: Apsley Cherry-Garrard and army captain Lawrence Oates. With the memory of the criticisms of *Discovery's*

³⁴ Scott's displeasure at Shackleton's breaking his word apparently did not cloud his appreciation of the other man's work. Replying to an invitation by the RGS president, Major Darwin, to attend functions in Shackleton's honour, he wrote: "The private feeling incurred by past incidents cannot affect my judgement of his work. That excites my interest and admiration to an extent which can scarcely be felt by those who have no experience of polar difficulties."

meteorological results still rankling, the scientific staff was selected with particular care and, under the direction of Edward Wilson, included three geologists, a physicist, a meteorologist and two biologists. Scott's new expedition vessel, *Terra Nova*, which had been one of the rescue ships sent for *Discovery*, set out from Cardiff on 15 June 1910. The leader stayed behind to continue raising funds and to complete arrangements with Central News for newspaper rights to their story, and he joined *Terra Nova* in Cape Town. In Melbourne, the next port of call, additional funds were secured and Scott received a terse but fateful telegram: "Beg leave to inform you Fram proceeding Antarctic. Amundsen" (Figure 2). Despite its importance to Scott's story, to my knowledge the exact nature of this telegram, and of the circumstances under which it was sent (see chapter 3), have not previously been explained.³⁵ No record exists of how Scott responded to this news at the time (Huxley 200), but it was completely unexpected, since Amundsen, famous for being the first to navigate the North-West Passage in 1905, had previously announced and secured funding for further Arctic exploration.³⁶ When Cook and Peary both claimed the prize of the North Pole, his former project appeared commercially unattractive and Amundsen decided to aim for the South Pole instead. However, he had concealed the change of plan from everyone except his brother until finally announcing it to his crew—and then to Scott—after *Fram* had reached Madeira. Although Amundsen's entry was a surprise, during the planning of his expedition Scott had been aware of, and in some cases agreed to cooperate with, potential rivals from the United States, Japan, Germany and Scotland, as well as another expedition contemplated by Shackleton (Quartermain 193-95).

Terra Nova continued to New Zealand, where dogs and ponies obtained from Siberia were embarked, and then sailed south on 29 November. The ship was very heavily laden. According to Teddy Evans, the upper deck looked like a "floating farmyard":

³⁵ The wording is from a facsimile in the National Maritime Museum's *South: The Race to the Pole* (60). That publication gives no further information about the telegram or its provenance. The form is printed in Norwegian and so the copy is presumably from the sending office, "Kristiania" (Oslo). The text of the message, the place of origin, date ("5/10/1910") and Scott's name and address are all handwritten. Most commentators have stated that the telegram was sent from Madeira, but that was where Amundsen gave it to his brother, to be sent later (see chapter 3). Alternative wordings have often been published. Evans omits the word "Fram" in *South with Scott* (48), presumably as the result of a slip or minor editing. But Cherry-Garrard has "Madeira. Am going south, AMUNDSEN" (40), and Gwynn (168), Crane (423) and others have followed him. Pound has the same without "Madeira" (201). It is possible that Cherry-Garrard, more than a decade after the event, was relying on memory.

³⁶ His aim had been to use Nansen's ship, *Fram*, to investigate the "extent, depth, and character of the polar basin" and his plans had been published in detail in the *Geographical Journal* of April 1909 ("Proposed" 440).

Blanket No. 1.

Indenlandsk Takt:

1. Almindelige Telegrammer: 50 Øre for 10 Ord og 5 Øre for hvert Ord mere, Ord over 15 indtil 30 Bogstaver eller Tal over 5 indtil 10 Ziffer regnes for 2 Ord o. s. v. Sprøgstredige Ord sammensætning kortlæst uden afbrydelse.
2. Lokaltelegrammer: Halvdelen af den almindelige Takt med Afregning opad til med 5 deleligt Tal.
3. Hølegrammer: Trøstebelt Takt; betegnes ved (H) foran Adressen.
4. Telefoning af Telegrammer: (Ved enkelte Stationer).
 - a. Med Aarsabonnement: For indtil 200 Telegrammer (afsendte og modtagne) 10 Øre pr. Telegram og for hvert Telegram udover dette Antal 5 Øre. Mindste Afgift pr. Aar Kr. 10.00. Ankomne Telegrammer kan ogsaa erholdes telefoneret gratis eller nærmere Aftale med Telegrafkontoret.
 - b. Uden Abonnement: 20 Øre pr. Telegram.
5. Flere Adresser: 25 Øre (Hølegr. 75 Øre) pr. 100 Ord for hver Ekstraafskrift. (Tm) foran Adressen, hvor x betegner Antallet af Adresser.
6. Viderebefordring: (Post): 10 Øre; rekomm. Brev = (Pr.): 20 Øre; Express (Xp): 30 Øre pr. Kilom.

Angivelser som:
(Rp) eller Svar betalt, Post eller Post betalt, (Pr) eller Post rekommenderet, (Xp) eller Express betalt sættes foran Adressen; Forkortelserne tæses for et Ord.

Afsenderens Adresse:

Adressen:
(Indskrives tydeligt)

Den norske Rigstelegraf. Sendt til

Telegram

Kl.

Sign.: _____

Klass: _____ Afsendestations *Kristiania* af: _____

No. _____ Ord Kl. _____ midd. *5/10* 190*6* Tjeb.: _____

Udfyldes af Stationen.

Captain Robert F. Scott
G. S. Fina Nova, Melbourne

Big leave to inform you than
proceeding Antarctic.
Amundsen

Skriv tydelig! Alteset Bistyringer og Rettelser!

NB! Gjælder kun for ørebetalt Tilbagebetaling om at Telegrammet er uafleveret eller lignende.
Deres Adresse for Svartelegram maa forlanges indført i Telegrafkontorets Adresseliste, derom Deres Kupon er ukendt for Kontoret.
Thorsen & Co's Bogtrykkeri 1907.

Fig. 2. Amundsen's telegram informing Scott of his intention to go south, 5 Oct. 1910.

We had piled coal in sacks wherever it could be wedged in between the deck cargo of petrol. Paraffin and oil drums filled up most of the hatch spaces, for the poop had been rendered uninhabitable by the great wooden cases containing two of our motor sledges.³⁷ (*South* 31)

Such a heavy load rendered the ship especially vulnerable when, two days out to sea, a storm struck. The pumps became blocked and the ship was filling with water and in real danger of foundering; but finally the storm subsided, the pumps were cleared and they could continue south. Further delay was caused by heavy pack ice, which the *Terra Nova* took three weeks to negotiate (on Scott's previous expedition this had taken four days), and on 4 January 1911 the ship finally arrived at Ross Island (Figure 1). A large hut for winter quarters was erected at Cape Evans, at a greater distance from the route up the Barrier than the old *Discovery* hut at Hut Point, and a line of depots was laid south across the Barrier to supply the journey to the Pole that would depart the following spring. The depot laying proved very debilitating for the dogs and even more the ponies, some of which died, and the final large store of supplies was deposited 130 miles from Cape Evans, at One Ton Depot, destined to become "the most famous of all the Antarctic's invisible landmarks," at 79° 28½' S (Crane 466). More ponies died when a small party became stranded on floating ice while returning to Cape Evans. Meanwhile, the ship deposited the western geological party under Griffith Taylor on the western shore of McMurdo Sound and then proceeded eastwards along the Barrier to land a party led by Victor Campbell to explore King Edward VII Land—Scott's original choice as the base for his Pole attempt before he finally decided in favour of Ross Island. Campbell's group was shocked to encounter Amundsen's party established on the eastern edge of the Barrier itself at the Bay of Whales, sixty miles closer to the Pole than Cape Evans. Campbell, who spoke Norwegian, was dissuaded by his colleagues from setting up his own camp nearby³⁸ and, after noting the promising state of their preparations and leaving the news for Scott, his eastern party became the northern party and was landed far to the north-west at Cape Adare as the ship returned to New Zealand for the winter.

Scientific work and preparations for the southern journey continued throughout this sunless period at Cape Evans. Wilson also persuaded a reluctant Scott to allow

³⁷ Shackleton had taken a motor car on his expedition and Scott had hopes that his own three experimental motors, which were fitted with revolutionary caterpillar tracks and had shown promise during trials in France and Norway, would form a useful part of the transport arrangements.

³⁸ Scott's brother-in-law, the naval lieutenant Wilfred Bruce, who was on board, explains that this was because "the relations between the two expeditions must be strained" ("Reminiscences" 324).

him, Bowers and Cherry-Garrard to make a sledging trip to Cape Crozier at the opposite end of Ross Island, the first ever undertaken in Antarctic winter cold and darkness. Their object was to study the emperor penguin colony there and in particular to collect eggs, which were laid only at that time of year. The appalling hardships of this five-week journey—west across the frozen sea to the Barrier, around the southern side of the island and back again—were later famously recounted by Cherry-Garrard in *The Worst Journey in the World*, which also took its name from that experience. The sun appeared once more above the horizon on 22 August but was obscured by blizzards until the 26th. Attention was now focused on the southern journey and several short preliminary trips were made. The plan was to follow Shackleton's route for 425 miles across the Barrier and a further 125 miles up the Beardmore Glacier to the polar plateau at an altitude of 8000 feet. From there it was a further 350 miles to the Pole (*Journals* xxviii). Transport arrangements would depend to some extent on how the motor sledges, dogs and ponies all performed, but Scott thought it likely that the men would have to haul the sledges themselves from the glacier on. The general plan was for the two remaining motors³⁹ to set off first, travelling as far as possible with the heaviest cargo. If they broke down, their crew would then continue manhauling to slightly south of One Ton Depot to meet the main pony party, which would start last. Scott had originally hoped to take the dog teams the whole distance to the Pole but had lost confidence in them during the depot-laying the previous autumn, a feeling probably reinforced by his unhappy experience with the animals on his 1902-03 southern journey. The dog teams, therefore, would start second and go only as far as One Ton. Later, they would resupply that depot and then go out a third time to two or three degrees south of One Ton to meet the polar party on its return. Since the ponies were more vulnerable to the cold than the dogs and were an important part of his transport arrangements, Scott knew he could not leave as early in the season as Amundsen, who was using only dogs. Amundsen himself was forced to retreat, with the loss of several animals, after starting for the Pole too early in the season. The Norwegians set out a second time on 19 October 1911 and reached their goal on 14 December. They then rapidly returned to base and arrived in Hobart on 7 March 1912 to cable the news to the world (Amundsen, *South Pole*).

While other members of *Terra Nova* remained at Cape Evans to continue scientific work and further explore Victoria Land to the west (Taylor, *With Scott*), the motor

³⁹ One sledge had been lost through the sea ice as it was being unloaded from the ship.

sledges started south towards the end of October 1911. They had already broken down a short way out on the Barrier by the time Scott set out on 1 November with the main party of sledge-drawing ponies. Two weeks later a final decision was made not to attempt to get the ponies up the Beardmore Glacier, and consequently the dogs were taken further south than first planned (Quartermain 235-36). The party advanced at a steady 15 miles a day during the last half of November and the beginning of December before a blizzard forced them to stop for four days just short of the glacier. During the blizzard, rising temperatures melted the ice on their gear, causing everything to become soaking wet, and Scott's comment on 6 December, "miserable, utterly miserable," is echoed in the diaries of others (*Journals* 339). Here, at "Shambles Camp," the surviving ponies were shot. The dogs were sent back from the bottom of the glacier and other supporting parties departed at stages after the polar plateau was reached, until Scott, Wilson, Oates, Bowers and Evans⁴⁰ remained for the final push to the Pole. They arrived at their goal exhausted on 17 January 1912 to find the tent left by the Norwegians 34 days previously. After verifying the latitude and collecting a note Amundsen had left for Scott and a letter for the King of Norway, they began the long return journey in rapidly falling temperatures. Despite some delay due to blizzards they made good progress across the plateau to the top of the glacier. But they were suffering from a shortage of food and from ailments, and Evans in particular was deteriorating alarmingly. After negotiating huge crevasses on the approach to the glacier, they reached Mt Darwin at its head, where they enthusiastically collected geological specimens. Food and fuel supplies were just sufficient to last from one depot to the next with little margin for error, and at the Upper Glacier Depot a day's supply of biscuits was found to be unaccountably missing. As with the support parties before them, finding a path down the crevassed glacier proved especially difficult, and towards the bottom Evans collapsed and died. Pony meat was added to their food supply at Shambles Camp, but lack of the expected following wind for their sledge's sail and excessive friction from the ice surface slowed their progress.

On 1 March they reached the Mid-Barrier Depot to find a shortage of the paraffin which was vital for providing warm meals and melting ice for drinking water. Scott was

⁴⁰ This was Petty Officer Edgar Evans, who on the *Discovery* expedition had been one of Scott's two companions on a pioneering sledging journey on the polar plateau the season after the southern journey. Lieutenant Edward (Teddy) Evans, Scott's second-in-command on *Terra Nova*, led the last supporting party to return to Cape Evans (named by Scott in his honour), nearly dying from scurvy during the punishing journey. He was invalided home but returned in 1913 to take charge of the final stages of the expedition.

by now the only one keeping a diary; Wilson had stopped a few days earlier and Bowers a month before, although he continued to make full entries in the meteorological log until 2 March and brief notes for another ten days (Quartermain 248-49). The surfaces over which they were hauling the sledge now became “awful beyond words” (*Journals* 405); there were occasional headwinds and temperatures were often as low as -40°. Oates was in the worst condition, with badly frostbitten feet. At the next depot there was again a shortage of fuel: it was 9 March and they were sixty miles from One Ton Depot with its abundant supplies and the chance of being met by the dog teams. But despite Wilson’s “self-sacrificing devotion in doctoring Oates’ feet” (*Journals* 406), for some days the latter had been unable to pull the sledge or take any part in the camp work, and the group was managing only a few miles a day.

Oates finally made his famous exit from the tent out into the blizzard and died on 16 or 17 March.⁴¹ The others struggled on, advancing only eight miles in two days until a final effort on the 19th added another ten, and brought them to within eleven miles of One Ton Depot. By this time their fuel was almost finished and one of Scott’s feet frozen. Bowers and Wilson had planned a desperate attempt to reach the depot and return with supplies, but the attempt was never made. Blizzards kept the men in their tent with “fuel to make two cups of tea apiece and bare food for two days on the 20th” as they wrote their farewell letters and Scott the “Message to [the] Public” that gave his reasons for their now-certain deaths. The final short entry in Scott’s diary, after a six-day gap, bears the date 29 March (*Journals* 412).

An attempt had been made to meet the returning polar party, as they were desperately hoping, with a dog team, but it had reached One Ton on 4 March and departed north again on the 10th. Edward Atkinson, the naval surgeon now in charge at Cape Evans, made a short trip south with one other man on the 26th, but was convinced by the cold conditions that the polar party had already perished and returned to base six days later. By the following spring Campbell’s northern party, previously relocated from Cape Adare further south by the *Terra Nova*, had not returned either, but a decision was taken to search for the remains of the polar party first.⁴² The search party located the snow-covered tent containing the bodies of Scott, Wilson and Bowers on 12 November 1912. There too were the diaries and letters

⁴¹ Scott begins the diary entry dated thus with “Lost track of dates, but think the last correct” (*Journals* 410).

⁴² Campbell’s group, having lived through their own extraordinary ordeals, later returned to Ross Island (*Wicked Mate*).

explaining what had happened after they parted with the last support group on the polar plateau: these were the only record of the crucial ending of Scott's story, a record without which it would have remained unknown. On 18 January 1913 *Terra Nova* returned to Cape Evans and bore the expedition back to New Zealand, where on 10 February the first account of the story was transmitted to the world. In the next part, I discuss the story's changing fortunes in the more than nine decades since that telegram was sent.

PART TWO

Historical “Scott”

Observe now your own epoch of history as it appears to the Last Men.

— *Last and First Men*, Olaf Stapledon

Genesis and exegesis

THE MOMENT OF conception of “Scott of the Antarctic” could probably be traced to the fateful first meeting in 1887 of Sir Clements Markham and the young midshipman he subsequently ‘chose’ as its protagonist. Contemporary contributions to the latter part of the story’s gestation, its birth in 1913 and its infancy are the subjects of the present chapter. These are also topics of *The Last Great Quest*, discussed in chapter 1, which considers the story’s history as far as the First World War (with additional brief comments up to the 1930s). But although Jones’s study and my own are thus partly complementary to that point, they approach the matter of the story’s early history with different aims. Jones seeks to locate contemporary responses within their historical context in order to answer his “central question: why did the death of five men in the Antarctic cause such a sensation ninety years ago, not only in Britain but around the world?” (9). By contrast, I am interested in the ways in which those contemporary responses, along with subsequent ones, developed the story, and how they might help to challenge the view of Scott which has become “the new orthodoxy”: in other words, “Huntford’s incompetent fool” (Jones, *Quest* 8). So I will be seeking to identify and analyze—at times with the aid of primary sources such as letters or diaries—early comments on themes that would become prominent in later debates. I hope that engaging with and presenting material that predates Huntford in this chapter and the next will help to avoid the danger of merely becoming, in Jones’s words, “locked in dialogue with Huntford, doomed to revolve on an endless revisionist cycle” (Introduction xl). Nevertheless, since this chapter and the two following are to some extent a revisionist history, they will be prefaced by a consideration of recent developments in historiography and biography.

I alluded in the introduction to the partisan quality of much writing about the heroic age in the last three decades. Preferences for and antagonisms towards one explorer or another manifest more or less subtly, and are either expressed occasionally or in extreme cases hammered home page after page. This is the “tragedy of Antarctic historiography” which Baughman laments (72). Such an oppositional field presents certain problems for a reviewer, not the least being an awareness of one’s own partisan

tendencies. I acknowledged at the outset that this study is part of a recent phase of reappraisals which are sympathetic to Scott's story and, as such, it will critique earlier criticism. At the same time, I will attempt to avoid sitting in judgement as far as possible; to acknowledge the achievements of explorers other than Scott; to give greater benefit of the doubt, at this distance in time, to those who were closest to the actual events; and therefore to pay particular attention to the earliest texts. Even so, pointing out errors and bias in Scott's critics may invite the accusation of 'hagiography' (currently a term of opprobrium in biography).⁴³ Later, I will also contemplate the possible exemplary value of Scott's character and life, and today the advocacy of the concept of an exemplary life is likely to attract the same epithet. For both of these reasons the notion of hagiography is also examined in the following discussion of historiography and biography.

Historical and biographical writing

In a famous study written in 1973, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, literary critic and historian Hayden White not only analyzes the classics of nineteenth-century historical thought but also theorizes about the nature of historical consciousness and the historical work. He deals with the latter as narrative discourses in which "the historian performs an essentially *poetic* act" (x)⁴⁴ and argues that the theories employed to give historical accounts their explanatory characteristics in fact rest on poetically derived modes. White thus circumvents the traditional antithesis between the historical and the mythical, and the debate about 'realistic' representation, which is "*the* problem for modern historiography" (3), and arrives at the conclusion that "the best grounds for choosing one perspective on history rather than another are ultimately aesthetic or moral rather than epistemological; and ... the demand for the scientization of history represents only the statement of a preference for a specific modality of historical conceptualization ..." (xii). This thought-provoking assertion emphasizes the personal rather than objective nature of any historical viewpoint, since it is claimed that all are *chosen* on the basis of personal preference. However, it goes further and asserts that the best choices are aesthetic or moral (both of which are essentially personal affairs). A moral choice carries the additional

⁴³ It did invite such an accusation, for example, in a review of David Yelverton's study of Scott's first expedition. The reviewer also complains that Yelverton "dismisses Huntford's remarks to a series of footnotes that could easily be overlooked" (Speak 170).

⁴⁴ Roland Barthes had speculated along similar lines some years earlier in his essay "Le Discours de L'Histoire."

implication that values and personal responsibility are involved; and from this it follows that the choice of perspective made by a writer or historian will also reveal something about them, and possibly even more about them than about their subject. These are interesting possibilities to bear in mind in surveying the often-polarized discussions of Scott.

White's remarks problematize the relationship between the actual past and its narration and imply a certain 'textuality' of historiography. From the 1960s, when structuralist theory began to influence historical writing, there has been considerable interplay between the fields of literature and history. Preoccupations with language were also central to the influential poststructuralist movement, which both challenged and developed the views of writers like Barthes and White (Passmore). The textual view of history is exemplified by historian and literary scholar Brian Stock's statement in 1990 that "to be literate in any sense is also to be literary ... [since] there is no way of separating events from the language in which they are described" (10). Psychologist and language theorist Jerome Bruner adds that "plots and hypotheses lurk" in history writing. For this reason, the "infamous hermeneutic circle" (where we justify the supporting facts we select because they fit our overall interpretation so well, while at the same time applauding the interpretation for encompassing those facts so well) demonstrates the need for caution in assessing factuality (20). "Facts," he concludes, "live in context; what holds most human contexts together is narrative" (26).⁴⁵ Advertising, historical novels and docudramas have all contributed to a widespread blurring of the line between fact and interpretation.

White claims that at the end of the nineteenth century European historical thinking veered into "the Ironic condition of mind," provoking what is sometimes referred to as "the crisis of historicism." Irony, he adds, "has continued to flourish as the dominant mode of professional historiography ... ever since" (xii). The ascendancy of such a sceptical, antagonistic attitude (as White describes it [37-38]) helps to explain why, for example, by 1931 Herbert Butterfield had rejected the idea of English progress through the centuries and branded it the "Whig Interpretation of History." An "impulse to repudiate," which Roger Scruton explores in his recent lament, *England: An Elegy* (250), increasingly gained ground, and today, as a reviewer of Scruton's book notes, the concept of "Englishness" itself is "seen as problematic" (Kearney 251; see also Paxman). White acknowledges that his mode is Ironic, too, but

⁴⁵ Others have challenged the role of narrative in historiography, and Kearney provides an overview of some of these viewpoints in *Poetics of Modernity* (93).

adds that it is consciously so and thus reflexive. And his stated aim in his enquiry into historiography expresses a similar spirit to that informing mine into the fate of Scott's story:

If it succeeds in establishing that the skepticism and pessimism of so much of contemporary historical thinking have their origins in an Irony frame of mind, and that this frame of mind in turn is merely one of a number of possible postures that one may assume before the historical record, it will have provided some of the grounds for a rejection of Irony itself. (xii)

These words were written just six years before the appearance of the principal text in the debunking of Scott. I would argue that that highly influential interpretation, which viewed everything about the explorer through the most sceptical and cynical of lenses, has resulted in a similarly monolithic attitude to his story. If I can show that this condemnatory attitude is a personal choice and not the only way to see Scott, I too will have “provided some grounds” for the rejection of such an attitude.

Certain historians have objected to White's focus on the literary nature of their craft. Natalie Zemon Davis, for example, internationally famous as the author of the ‘micro-history’ *The Return of Martin Guerre*, believes that he neglects “the efforts historians make and the rules of evidence they follow in order to argue their case.” And Davis champions “the conventions in prose writing that were developed in the two thousand years of writing history ... which allow our readers to know when we are speaking with assurance, when we are doubtful about an argument, or when there are multiple points of view” (qtd. Pallares-Burke 70). However, these are not things that should be taken on trust, since the deployment of such conventions will depend on the quality of the particular historian. There are writers who rarely express any doubt or contemplate alternative points of view, and ‘evidence’ itself can obviously be manipulated. Other sides of the ‘case’ may not be heard, for example, or may be quoted selectively or out of context; false inferences can be drawn, and so on. The responsibility here again rests with the author and we are reminded of White's suggestion that the writer's choice of perspective should be a moral one. The previous discussion of the way facts are shaped by language and narratives should not be taken to imply that one history is as good as the next and that we cannot discriminate between them. As John Thompson points out in *Critical Hermeneutics*, “while a text may allow of several interpretations, it does not follow that all of these interpretations are of equal status; and the elimination of these inferior interpretations is not a matter of

empirical verification and proof, but a rational process of argumentation and debate” (53).

Questions of evidence and logic are of obvious relevance to the present study. In chapter 1, I gave examples of arguments that were unsubstantiated or based on a single source or faulty reasoning. I will also critique the interpretations presented in this part of the thesis and, with some provisos, place greater emphasis on the accounts of eyewitnesses. Peter Munz, by contrast, rejects the distinction between primary and secondary sources, and refuses to regard the former as “more genuine sources of information about what happened than later accounts” (854-55) on the grounds that “facts which can be culled from the sources are narrative-laden” (868). However, the argument that no narrative can approach the facts more closely than another simply because all stated facts have a certain constructed quality seems to come close to the belief in “the totality of fiction” he critiques in others (855). Munz himself opts instead for “approaches to objectivity” which involve “the recovery of generalizations” employed by people in the period being described (869). It is not apparent, however, in what way these are to be more reliably ‘recovered’ than facts. Certainly, the accounts of eyewitnesses are also constructed and, as I will discuss at the beginning of the next chapter, cannot simply be taken at face value. But information supplied by the participants in events has an evidential value that secondary sources cannot match.

White’s rather bleak comments on contemporary historical thinking were made in a context when, according to Michael Bentley in his general introduction to *Companion to Historiography*, “at some point between 1960 and 1975, ... history took a turn towards theory” (xviii).⁴⁶ As well as bringing with it “an embarrassing sense of self-consciousness,” Bentley writes that this change had profound, ongoing consequences for historians:

They began a journey (still continuing) away from telling the “truth” about “the” past towards a view that there are infinitely many sorts of past to talk about and towards a deep scepticism about the possibility of discerning the truth about most of them. For some, it has been a frustrating, even appalling transition and the period certainly provided more than one instance of *chic*, superficial fashion overriding patient

⁴⁶ The significance of this statement today is amplified by the fact that the editors of a general text, *Writing History: Theory and Practice*, published in 2003, begin their book with the words: “Like it or not, historians cannot avoid theory” (Berger, Feldner and Passmore xi). One historian who does like it is Elizabeth A. Clarke, who argues in a recent study, *History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn*, that the variety of contemporary theoretical perspectives represents a renewal of opportunities for her discipline rather than, as some of her colleagues believe, its ‘death.’ The book’s title reflects the close nexus that now exists between history, theory and analyses of ‘text.’

research. Others, however, have found in it a new plausibility for the subject and a liberation for the individual attempting its study. (xiv)

Although he does not employ the term, Bentley could be describing the postmodern sensibility of any number of fields.⁴⁷ The literature reviewed in chapter 1 has already revealed examples of the superficial treatments Bentley refers to. Texts discussed there invoked what I argued is a chic condescension towards the Victorian and Edwardian eras in toto, and/or the fashion of debunking Scott without troubling to examine the evidence. Paradoxically, while they may exhibit a veneer of the new freedom Bentley describes, such works actually reflect the attitudes of pre-1960 historiography, which “like theology, [was] the study of error”: when modern writers were correct and earlier writers incorrect, ‘superseded’ and not to be taken seriously (xiii). The liberation Bentley means is something quite different: “The patronizing of past historians for having got the story wrong ... turned into a genuine curiosity about *why* their pictures and models looked so strange to us and *why* they seemed persuasive to the particular audience for whom they had been intended” (xiv). Nevertheless, in literature dealing with Scott and his context, the line between genuine curiosity and patronage has often been crossed, and poststructuralism’s critique of essentialism often ignored.

The field of biography has naturally not been immune to the challenges confronting history writing generally, and this is indicated by both the contents and title of a compendium of essays published in 1988: *The Troubled Face of Biography*, edited by E. Homberger and J. Charmley. Coming just nine years after Roland Huntford’s *Scott and Amundsen*, it affords a useful perspective on the climate of biographical writing at the time, and the picture it paints of biographers struggling to find their place in the public, academic and literary worlds might help to make the extreme nature of the earlier work more understandable. The editors of the anthology make another point that is suggestive in this context: that biographers are not usually academics and “reflect less the institutional concerns of a discipline than a range of more traditional and sometimes personal motives: wanting to tell an interesting story, to resurrect a wronged or neglected reputation, to reinterpret the role of an individual ...” (ix). Roland Huntford, Diana Preston and others who have written biographies of Scott had backgrounds in journalism, which certainly values a good story, and this is evident in their work. And, for example, Huntford, Fiennes and I myself, as previously indicated, are all motivated to a greater or lesser degree by the wish “to resurrect a

⁴⁷ Kevin Passmore points out, however, that postmodernism refers to a broad “range of tendencies in contemporary culture” and suggests that it is more useful to apply the narrower term ‘poststructuralism,’ with its special contribution of a theory of language, to historiography (119).

wronged or neglected reputation”: Amundsen’s in the case of Huntford and Scott’s in the other two cases. But Homberger and Charmley’s comment also implies that academic writers may be freer from personal motives than others; the literature I reviewed in the first chapter suggests that this is not necessarily so.⁴⁸ And even the most impeccably scholarly writer may still wish to tell a good story or redress a perceived wrong. In any case, the actual distinction between writers and biographers who are scholars and those who are not is often far from clear in the literature on Scott and therefore needs to be used with caution. Homberger and Charmley themselves—while suggesting that all biographies be subtitled “A Story” to make this fact apparent (xv)—emphasize and applaud the literary nature of good biography, which in their view is “a kind of novel.” They explain: “Like a classic novel, a biography believes in the notion of ‘a life’—a life as a triumphal or tragic story with a shape ...” (xiii). I will examine the tragic trajectory of “Scott of the Antarctic” in my final chapter.

The editors of *The Troubled Face* observe that the twentieth was “a century distrustful of exemplary lives in the heroic sense,” and supply examples of a demand to see the great levelled, especially through the revelation of the details of their private lives. They suggest that this peculiarity of our time may well “seem derisory to a later age” and salute, as an exception to this bias, the tendency of feminist biography to portray admirable or heroic women (xi). These comments provide a useful frame in which to view the biography of Scott during the past century, and indicate that the debunking of this particular hero was part of a wider fashion. Moreover, with the decline of Britain as an imperial power, former ‘imperial heroes’ became obvious targets. David Livingstone, for one, provides some interesting comparisons with Scott. As Felix Driver states, after Livingstone’s death “he was virtually beyond reproach” (22) and regarded as the “summation of the manly virtues of empire: selfless devotion, heroic valour and scientific mastery” (70). But by 1973 biographer Tim Jeal found “such excessive adulation and reverence hard to understand, for Livingstone appears to have failed in all he most wished to achieve.” Jeal then set out respectfully to “explain how apparent failure was claimed as success” (1, 4). Deservedly or not, other erstwhile heroes fared less well. T. E. Lawrence, for example, received in Ranulph Fiennes’s words “as bad a mauling as Scott” (405). Fiennes adds that harsh biographical treatments were especially common in the 1970s.

⁴⁸ A comment by historian Paul Cartledge, for example, identifies a common and more personal academic motivation: “conscious or subconscious definition of the group addressed in ideological terms can be an important or even the major goal of historiography” (8).

Robert Skidelsky traces the genesis of the debunking spirit in modern biography to the publication of Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians* in 1918.⁴⁹ Before that time, by contrast, "[b]iography was regarded as exemplary. The Victorian age was one of hero-worship." The reason for this, according to Skidelsky, was that "[i]n a period of religious doubts, morals increasingly needed the support of exemplary lives: lives which ... stressed the strong connection between private virtue and public achievement" (5). But if periods of religious and moral uncertainty produce a need for exemplary lives, it is difficult to account for the debunking impulse in the twentieth century and the corresponding decline, for example, in Scott's reputation. Questions of historical specificity aside, however, I will argue that Scott's story has potential value as an exemplary life. Some consideration must therefore be given to that notion and to the epithet of 'hagiography' which may now be used to condemn the attempt to write about one.

The term hagiography, traditionally reserved for a type of discourse referring to saints, is now applied to biography which is perceived to ignore any shortcomings in its subject. Michel de Certeau regards it as existing "[o]n the outer edge of historiography, as its temptation and betrayal," because, although it claims only to deal with actions, these actions "take on instead the character of signifiers in the service of a truth which draws their organizing ground plan, using them to 'edify' its own manifestation" (269). In other words, it is another instance of the hermeneutic circle. In a century in which debunking was the preference it is not difficult to find criticism of the practice. Lord Birkenhead fulminated against the "appalling practice" of mid-Victorian hagiography in 1962, on the grounds that it concealed the truth about the subject, often to appease the surviving relatives; Skidelsky points out that it was also to avoid offending contemporary feelings about what should be discussed in public (4-5). And Malcolm Bradbury states that "contemporary scepticism and psychoanalytical awareness" allow the biographer to escape the indignity of being a "hagiographic slave" (133).

Blind adoration is clearly undesirable in a biographer. But hagiography has also become a term of abuse which can be levelled at any work which shows strong admiration for its subject. Other modalities are thereby excluded—and more than three decades ago Hayden White was already questioning what he saw as entrenched

⁴⁹ In a comment that again reveals the tense relations between form and content in contemporary historiography, Robert Blake finds a speciousness in the 'father' of the debunkers himself: "[Strachey] was, for all his brilliance, glitter, irony and wit, an unsound biographer: he was concerned with effect rather than truth" (76).

attitudes of scepticism, irony and pessimism. Ann Thwaite, for example, biographer of A. A. Milne, admits to a different inclination when she writes that although she tries to remain objective towards her subjects, “as I get to know them really well, I become more and more sympathetic” (31).

Indeed, in a 1990 study, *Saints and Postmodernism: Revisioning Moral Philosophy*, philosopher Edith Wyschogrod argues that contemporary society needs more saintly example. In addition, she proposes that life narratives offer an alternative to theory in modern philosophy, which, according to Heidegger, is “derived from the ontology of modern science and, as such, assumes that truth is to be exhibited in propositions that assert causal relations, that these linguistic chains of argument directly or indirectly mirror the world, and that they explain phenomena.” Narratives of saintly life, Wyschogrod believes, avoid this presumption. But, like all narratives, they themselves must be scrutinized: “[I]f the nomological character of moral theory is to be avoided, the presuppositions of narrative cannot be taken for granted and must be exposed through literary analysis of narrative structure” (xxii). Although this is a book about saints, the author comments that “hagiography is a widely disseminated discursive form found not only in religious literature but in biography, autobiography, and the novel” (6). Her comments, therefore, are pertinent to other narratives which may have inspirational aspects, and I will suggest that Scott’s story may legitimately be read in this way.⁵⁰ There are probably few who do not take inspiration from the lives of others, and this cannot be found from seeking only to discover their errors. But in drawing attention to Scott’s good qualities I will attempt to avoid the kind of ‘self-edifying’ discourse De Certeau refers to. Scott himself, as I will show in chapter 6, mocked this kind of writing, in a piece written for the *South Polar Times* in which he imagines a returned Antarctic hero laying the foundations for his own hagiography. Having prepared the ground in this review of some relevant questions in the writing of history and biography, I proceed now to consider the explorer’s story as it was told by others.

§

⁵⁰ Doris Lessing, for example, having cast a critical eye over what she calls the “stupid things” Scott and his men did, focuses her admiration on Edward Wilson and asks: “Was this man not a saint? Surely he had all the qualities of saints, in or out of monasteries? What do saints possess in the way of strengths, love of God, self-tamings, love of their fellows, that Wilson did not possess?” (142).

Contemporary commentary on Scott's last expedition falls generally into four stages. It began, of course, before *Terra Nova* ever set sail: after the announcement of the expedition and while preparations were in progress. Subsequently, there were responses when it became known that Amundsen was sailing south rather than north, as he had previously announced. There were further reactions when it was known he had been first at the Pole and, finally, to the news of Scott's death. Such contemporary comment has important documentary value: as evidence of the facts as then perceived, of the sequences of events and of the views expressed closest to the time the events took place. All of this formed the soil in which Scott's story took root. This documentary evidence can at least tint the monochromatic images constructed of the Edwardian period by certain recent authors referred to in chapter 1. And since some of this material is naturally far less accessible than later accounts, particularly those in book form, it can also be used to qualify pronouncements on Scott made by those who have drawn only from later sources. For all of these reasons, commentary from this period will be quoted in some detail.⁵¹

Exploring aims and motives

After news was received in London in March 1909 that Shackleton had not reached the South Pole, Scott began planning his own return (Huxley 179). At a celebratory dinner for the former on 19 June he made his intentions public. The *Times* reported that, after warmly praising the guest of honour and adding that "it was impossible for any one following after Mr. Shackleton to do much more than he and his party had accomplished," Scott stated that,

for the honour of the country, they must get to the South Pole; he was sure that every Englishman wished for that. (Hear, hear.) Personally, he was prepared, as he had been for the last two years, to go forth in search of the object. (Cheers.) ... [I]n the immediate future, before other countries could step in and take credit for Mr. Shackleton's great work, this country should come to the fore and organize another expedition. (Loud cheers.) ("Mr. Shackleton at the Savage Club.")

⁵¹ Most of the press comment has been sourced from the rich resource of large unpaginated albums of clippings in the archives of the Scott Polar Research Institute. For these, standard MLA referencing could not be provided and has therefore been modified as follows. If the author is known, the article is listed under the author in the reference list. Otherwise, in-text references give the article's title or shortened title, and these are then listed alphabetically in the reference list. Also included there are the name of the newspaper or magazine as given in the album (in some cases these may be abbreviated) and the article's date and title, if known. (In cases where no title is available, the article is listed under the name of the newspaper.) The SPRI manuscript number of the album is also given. Articles from the *Times* are also listed by title if no author is named.

Rumours were then printed that the two men were planning to compete for the Pole, and Scott wrote to Shackleton to make sure that after their previous difficulties over territory there would be no misunderstanding. Letters also passed between the RGS president and vice-president as they sought the best public stance for the Society, which could only approve scientific aims but nevertheless hoped the English would be first at the Pole (Pound 168-69). Scott announced the new expedition in the press and opened an office on 13 September 1909.

The following month, the *Geographic Journal* reported that preparations were in train: “Every one interested in the exploration of the South Polar region will be glad to learn that Captain R. F. Scott is now prepared to complete the work so well begun by himself, and continued by Mr. Shackleton, in the Ross quadrant of the Antarctic continent.” The editorial conceded that only about 100 miles remained to reach the Pole and that the place itself may not be of particular scientific interest, but assured its readers that Scott had proved he would not take a “narrow view of his duties.”⁵² Moreover, it is useless to deny that there is a widespread feeling that this feat should be accomplished by an expedition sailing from this country.” The Society could, therefore, “as geographers, legitimately take full use of this opportunity of obtaining public assistance for Antarctic exploration.” The expedition’s objects were: “(1) To reach the South Pole.⁵³ (2) The further scientific exploration of the Ross sea [sic] area” (“A New British Antarctic Expedition”). It was also stated that it would have bases both in McMurdo Sound and in King Edward VII Land, and that, depending on circumstances and distances, either of these could be the headquarters for the attempt on the South Pole. The remainder of the editorial stressed the prospects for scientific research. This article is significant not only as a public statement of aims but also as the first made under the imprimatur of the RGS, which, while not sponsoring or significantly funding this expedition as it had *Discovery*,⁵⁴ nevertheless lent its support. It reminds readers that Scott had originated the quest for the Pole in 1901, and also that the Ross quadrant was the area of British operations in the Antarctic, as had been

⁵² Scott confirmed this in a speech justifying his plans to an RGS meeting, when he promised “to achieve the greatest possible scientific harvest which the circumstances permit” (qtd. Jones, *Quest* 75).

⁵³ The order of priority had been unequivocal from the outset. When announcing the expedition on 13 September 1909, Scott had stated: “The main object of this Expedition is to reach the South Pole and to secure for The British Empire the honour of this achievement” (qtd. Crane 397).

⁵⁴ The RGS had contributed a record sum of £8,000 to *Discovery* (Markham, *Lands of Silence* 445), but only granted £500, and approved a further £350 left over from the *Discovery* fund, to *Terra Nova* (Mill, *Record* 176). Scott gratefully acknowledged by letter even this iota of his needs, and at the same time renewed his promise not to neglect scientific research, a promise he would never forget (“British Antarctic Expedition”).

agreed upon at the time of the International Geographical Congress in 1895. Because of that tradition and public opinion, reaching the Pole must take priority, but there could still be important scientific results. It is clear from this that Scott had not escaped the dual aims which plagued his first expedition. On the other hand, given his own passions for both science and exploration, he may not have wanted to, or seen them as incompatible. At any rate, there was now no question about ‘finishing off the Pole,’ and funding for the expedition depended on it. This announcement and the earlier ones are also important for the information they gave readers, including, crucially, Roald Amundsen. In order to explain the significance for Amundsen, it is necessary first to backtrack several months, to his own public announcement of plans for a north polar expedition.

As mentioned in chapter 2, the Norwegian explorer had given a detailed account of his intentions in an address to the RGS in London on 25 January 1909. In his audience were prominent figures associated with polar science and exploration, including Sir John Murray, who had been on the *Challenger* expedition, and Dr H. R. Mill. The address and their comments were published in the *Geographical Journal* in April 1909, six months before Scott’s plans, under the title: “A Proposed North Polar Expedition.” Amundsen stressed that his was to be a scientific mission. Its principal goal was oceanographic research, but meteorology, terrestrial magnetism and auroral observation would be “of almost equal importance” (453). He planned to leave in early 1910 and would be equipped for seven years. In justifying his expedition he made the following comment:

Many people think that a polar expedition is only an unnecessary waste of money and life. The idea of a polar expedition is connected in their minds with that of a record, of reaching the pole or farther north than any of its predecessors; and *if that is the case, I agree with them. But I must most emphatically assert that this storming of the pole will not be the object of this expedition.* Its chief aim will be a scientific study of the polar seas itself, or rather an investigation of the bottom and oceanographic conditions of this very great basin. (454; emphasis added)

This was the clearest possible public statement that Amundsen would be operating in the Arctic (he also outlined his intended route), that his mission was scientific, and that he repudiated the idea of competing for a record latitude. In his welcoming speech the RGS president, Major Leonard Darwin, outlined Amundsen’s previous achievements and added: “It is, I think, clear that Captain Amundsen has already shown that he ought to be classed as belonging to the first rank of scientific explorers” (457). This is a

plain example of a prominent member of the British establishment according a foreign explorer great respect to set against claims I referred to in chapter 1 that the British at the time held foreigners in contempt. Also published with Amundsen's address were the discussion that followed and endorsements from some who had been unable to attend: these included Fridtjof Nansen, who stressed the scientific value of Amundsen's plans and, in futuristic phraseology, referred to him as "a scientific explorer of the right stuff" (457), and Clements Markham, who also welcomed the proposals of "my friend Amundsen" as "a grand conception, worthy of the first navigator of the north-west passage" (458-59).

Amundsen subsequently obtained the loan of Nansen's ship, *Fram*, from the Norwegian government, and the RGS contributed a small amount to his expedition. Nansen had himself hoped to mount an expedition to the South Pole, but had been delayed by other commitments. Amundsen then asked him to postpone this plan while he himself used *Fram* in the north, which essentially meant the older man sacrificing his South Polar hopes. Nansen agreed and fully supported Amundsen in his preparations, but told his sons that when he saw *Fram* setting out on a preliminary voyage "it was the bitterest hour of his life" (Quartermain 307). Despite such support and the emphatic statements that his aims were scientific and that the North Pole was not his objective, when news came in September 1909 of the claims that the North Pole had been reached, Amundsen decided instead to attempt the South Pole himself. He concealed this change of plan from everyone, including Nansen and Scott, until well after departure.

Scott's public statements—together with his previous attempt and Shackleton's near miss—meant that Amundsen knew for certain that the British were aiming for the Pole, so from the moment he decided to do likewise he saw it as a race and could plan accordingly.⁵⁵ From that point on, as he makes clear in *South Pole*, he had one aim only: to reach the Pole first, and this overrode all other considerations. Scott, by contrast, did not know of Amundsen's competition for a further year, by which time *Terra Nova* was already in Australia. Even then, the telegram he received gave the barest possible information, "Fram proceeding Antarctic," and Scott assumed Amundsen was approaching from South America (Quartermain 197-98), which would have made him seem much less of a threat. For that reason, Scott's team never accepted the idea of a

⁵⁵ Amundsen later made this plain in *South Pole* (1:43). From Madeira, when he first made his intentions public, Amundsen sent letters to the Norwegian Geographical Society and to King Haakon stating that he was going "to compete in a race for the South Pole" (qtd. Quartermain 198).

‘race to the pole,’ although it was naturally picked up by the press at the time and so by commentators ever since. In addition, it was clear that the British had a large team which included scientific staff, and could not avoid including scientific work in their plans. Amundsen himself could jettison such concerns, since he would no longer be embarking his own scientific staff in San Francisco, as previously arranged for the northern voyage, which was to have approached the Arctic from the Pacific Ocean (Quartermain 309). In addition, when he chose to set up his own base on the eastern part of the Barrier, he knew that the British would be operating in the area from Ross Island in the west to King Edward VII Land in the east. His decision to place his headquarters in between regardless—in order to be as close as possible to the Pole—had serious consequences for the British expedition. Campbell’s eastern party encountered Amundsen at the Bay of Whales while looking for a base of its own, and was forced to move its operations far to the north-west. Such an eventuality was quite predictable, and in Antarctica at the time was somewhat analogous to a *Voyager* space probe arriving at an outer planet after great expense and effort, only to encounter a spacecraft secretly sent by another country.

Although the claiming of the North Pole had no bearing on Amundsen’s aims as he had stated them in the *Geographical Journal*, Quartermain (307-08) and others (e.g. Turvey; Sverdrup) have accepted at face value the explorer’s later justification for changing his plans. Amundsen explained that he would have had difficulty afterwards financing his long Arctic drift, and so needed to claim the South Pole in order to attract funds for that to proceed. No doubt the explorer was disappointed at the news of Cook’s and Peary’s claims and there were financial consequences for him. But justifying his secret decision on these grounds alone is to deny the validity of any but personal concerns and to disregard the consequences for others. Scott saw clearly the implications for him, and wrote to his New Zealand agent, Kinsey, on 28 October 1911, just before setting out for the Pole:

I am fully alive to the complication of the situation by Amundsen, but as any attempt at a race might have been fatal to our chance of getting to the Pole at all, I decided long ago to do exactly as I should have done had Amundsen not been down here. If he gets to the Pole he is bound to do it rapidly with dogs and one foresees that success will justify him and that our venture will be “out of it.” If he fails he ought to hide! Anyway he is taking a big risk and perhaps deserves his luck if he gets through.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ H. R. Mill included an edited version of this passage in an article in the *Geographical Journal* in May 1912. The expression was formalized and the phrases “... and that our venture will be ‘out of it.’ If he

Under the circumstances, Scott's last comment is generous. In addition, the quotation shows no illusions about Amundsen's likely speed using dogs and is remarkably prescient about the outcome. As I will discuss later, it was indeed success that justified Amundsen, and still does, in the eyes of many.

It was not that Scott would not tolerate competition. The *Standard* published a friendly and respectful exchange of letters between him and Peary, whom he admired, about the prospect of an American challenge. Peary thanked Scott for his

big, manly, characteristic attitude, as shown in the letter. I did not for a moment think that you would feel any objection to an American expedition on some other route than the one which Great Britain has already made classic, even as you did not for a moment imagine that any expedition with which I might be associated would enter the region which you have made your own.

If there is any irony here it is not shown elsewhere in the letter, and thus seems to be a clear acknowledgement by Peary of Scott's prior claim to the Ross Sea region. Scott had also spoken publicly on the subject to several newspapers in February 1910. The *Yorkshire Post*, for example, quoted him as saying:

I am only too glad to welcome such an effort, and the comparison of the observations made in two different places by the two expeditions—they approaching from Cape Horn and we from New Zealand—will be of great interest and great scientific importance. The rivalry will be very friendly, but ... I hope every Englishman will be able and glad to know that it was a British subject who had been the first to get to the South Pole. ("Captain Scott's South Polar Expedition")

This was followed by further patriotic comments prefacing an appeal for urgently needed funds. As mentioned in chapter 2, the Americans were by no means the only prospective competition, and Filchner's German expedition was announced the following month. Shackleton was much less restrained on the subject, and was reported by the *Standard* on 29 November 1909 as saying that "he might be a Jingo or an Imperialist, but he felt the Antarctic regions belonged to us, and that when 30,000 years had passed they would still belong to us, as they had done from the beginning."

In general, comment in the press was favourable towards Scott's enterprise and noted his careful preparations and modest demeanour. Unsurprisingly, there were echoes of RGS president Darwin's assertion during a farewell luncheon that "Captain Scott and

fails he ought to hide!" and the word "perhaps" removed ("The Antarctic Expeditions" 455-56). Scott himself altered "but one guesses" to "and one foresees" in the original.

his expedition were going to prove that the manhood of the nation is not extinct, and that the natural characteristics to which the existence of this Empire was due still flourish ... amongst us" (*Westminster Gazette*), and it is such comments that some later commentators have seized upon in their use of Scott's last expedition as an exemplar of British nationalism and imperialistic ballyhoo.

Other views, however, were also expressed. Wilson, questioned about why science was needed at the South Pole, replied that conditions there were unique and it was "man's duty to find out all he possibly can of the earth on which he live[s]." The assertion is often made today that this was a period when the concept of duty was unquestioned, but in fact the article comments: "That is the scientist's creed: in terms of duty it sounds strange, but in terms of human interest it is sound and makes its appeal. We do somehow want to know all these things ..." ("The South Pole"). A newspaper today might assess the claims of space exploration similarly. And in Cardiff, the city from which *Terra Nova* departed and which took great pride in the conspicuously generous support it had given the expedition,⁵⁷ the *Western Mail* expressed some amazement at why the men would want to go so far away and to such a desolate and dangerous place at all, and calls for a "psychological analysis" of their motives. The article, "Quest of the Unknown: Captain Scott's Dash for the South Pole," critiques other aspects of the expedition that are sometimes believed to have been unquestioned at the time. Traditions of chivalry, for example, are treated with more than a touch of irony. The writer calls Scott "this new Ulysses" and says of his "devoted followers":

They could, if they like, earn their living for the next three years much more comfortably, much less perilously, but they have a chivalrous devotion to their leader and the cause, and it is of the essence of chivalry—of quixotism, too, some might add—to set the goal of effort and aspiration and to seek it with undeviating fidelity.

After this suggestion of quixotism in the expedition, national pride is targeted:

Captain Scott belongs to a hardy British breed. He belongs to the men who, by virtue of stamina, training, and determination, can go anywhere and do anything. He fears no foe—whether in shining armour, or whether it be the relentless, implacable forces of the Antarctic climate. He is a popular hero, and the public expect him to accomplish something more signal and notable than anything hitherto known in the world's record of

⁵⁷ According to Anthony M. Johnson "... it can be argued that without Cardiff's support the Scott Expedition might never have left Britain on time ..." (1). Stephanie Pain, writing in *New Scientist* in 2000, believed it might not have left at all. Her article describes the 300 tonnes of compact patent coal that were one of the city's important gifts to the expedition.

adventure ... Commander Peary's success at the North Pole ... has given the final spur to the present effort. British prestige in Polar exploration must be re-asserted. If the nation could speak with one voice to Captain Scott its message would be, "You must get there."⁵⁸

There is a hint of irony in this cameo of a "breed" of can-do British heroes with the reminder, in the words "shining armour," of the quixotism mentioned earlier. The article demonstrates a considerable degree of cultural reflexivity in its assessment of the expedition and, more importantly, acknowledges the forces of public and national expectation acting on Scott. On one level these appear little different from those felt by, for example, Olympic athletes or sports stars today. But Scott was also bound by a vast network of obligations which he felt personally to the many people and organizations that had contributed in some way to the expedition. Amundsen, with his much smaller and more secret operation, was largely free of all this.

Appraising the competition

Following his brother's instructions, on 2 October 1910 Leon Amundsen informed the press of the Norwegian expedition's change of plans (Quartermain 309). Shackleton, a celebrated Antarctic authority after the achievements of the *Nimrod* expedition, was dismissive when interviewed: "I cannot conceive ... that the Norwegian expedition is intended to be a serious competitor to the British expedition under Captain Scott. The last information we had regarding M. Amundsen ... was that he was going to take the Atlantic drift to the Arctic Ocean..." These remarks also reveal how little of the Norwegians' plans and movements was known or guessed, and there was much speculation in the press about their intentions. Shackleton expressed surprise that Amundsen had "so considerably altered his plans without giving a more explicit explanation," and reveals the current wisdom which guided Scott's choice of transport in the comment: "I cannot see how Amundsen can hope to reach the South Pole unless he has a large number of ponies on board. He may have dogs, but they are not very reliable. I consider it now almost a *sine qua non* that any expedition trying for the South Pole should have horses ..." ("Dash to South Pole").

When preparing for Antarctica, Scott could hardly have been unaware of the emphatic and often expressed views on the indispensability of ponies of his former colleague, now celebrated for having travelled further south by far than anyone else.

⁵⁸ That Scott himself was only too aware of this is shown by a comment in a letter he had written on 26 October 1909 to Joseph Kinsey, his friend and agent in New Zealand, where he states: "We must on this occasion get to the South Pole, if not at the first attempt, then at the second but the enterprise must not be relinquished till the work is done."

He had remained flexible, however, and arranged for dogs as well, even hoping to take them all the way to the Pole. Shortly after the British expedition arrived in Antarctica the illustrated *Sphere* newspaper ran an article entitled “How Captain Scott is Attacking the South Pole With His Army of Ponies, Dogs, and Men,” accompanied by an evocative double-page diagram of the campaign. An inset gives Scott’s plans for the following spring with the comment: “by that time we shall know what reliance can be placed respectively on the ponies, the dogs, and the motor sledges.” The words “by that time” should be borne in mind when considering the endless criticism made of Scott, all of it after the event, for not, like Amundsen, relying exclusively on dogs.

In late March 1911, after *Terra Nova* had returned to New Zealand, several British newspapers simply reported with no particular comment the fact that the Norwegians were at the Bay of Whales and aiming for the Pole. The *Daily Chronicle*, for example, observed matter-of-factly: “So, then, the British expedition is wintering at one spot, and a Norwegian expedition, under Captain Amundsen, is wintering at another. Which, if either, will be the ‘winner’? The rivalry will make each the keener to reach the coveted goal” (“News from the Antarctic”). As with the words of the RGS president quoted above, this is very different from the jingoism and hatred of foreigners that some claim pervaded British opinion throughout the life of the expedition. Amundsen is referred to respectfully by his title; he was, after all, famous for achieving the North-West Passage. One of those who did publicly state his disapproval of the explorer’s behaviour was not British:

Professor Otto Nordonskiöld [sic], the well-known Swedish explorer, has expressed in the Swedish press ... his grave doubts as to the propriety of Captain Amundsen’s action in encroaching upon what is considered to be Captain Scott’s “sphere of influence” in the Antarctic. He criticises severely the secrecy which he maintained concerning his South Polar project, and holds that unless he has ulterior scientific motives for his dash in competition with Captain Scott it will be difficult to find an excuse for him. It would be very regrettable, says Professor Nordonskiöld, if Scott, arriving at the South Pole, found that Amundsen had reached it a week before him, taking the British route and making use of previous British discoveries. In such circumstances it would be no great honour for Amundsen to be first at the Pole. (“Race for the Pole”)

Although Amundsen did not take the British route, at least not after reaching the Barrier, he certainly made use of previous British discoveries—as he had in completing the North-West Passage. Nordenskiöld’s statement is significant because it is that of a contemporary, someone who is not British, and who had himself led an Antarctic expedition in 1901-04. It confirms that there was a code of conduct among explorers

which respected previous work and the right to continue it in a particular region. And while Riffenburgh, for example, derides Scott for asking Shackleton not to use Ross Island as his base on these grounds (*Nimrod*), we have seen that Shackleton himself later proclaimed the whole of Antarctica to be inalienably and everlastingly British.

After Amundsen's intentions were known, and following a letter from Nansen to the *Times* justifying his countryman's conduct, mild criticism was voiced in the *Field*, which noted that in his eagerness to find a way out of his financial problems Amundsen had become "careless of the means he adopted." The article points out that the explorer had accepted RGS funding for a scientific expedition in the Arctic. It remarks that a French court had recently ordered a French explorer to refund money subscribed for the same purpose because, despite his having completed the expedition, it judged that some of the funds had been misapplied. All the same, the *Field* piece concludes:

Capt. Scott is engaged, to put it bluntly, in a sporting attempt to break all previous records and establish a new record which cannot be broken. If another explorer comes along and proposes to add to the sporting interest of the effort by making a race of it, while keeping clear of the British base, so that there may be no confusion at the start, the rivalry must be accepted.

Amundsen continued to be referred to respectfully by the British press, which warmed to the theme of a sporting contest. Many articles now included photographs, diagrams and discussions of tactics and odds. Respect was also shown to a third possible contestant, the Japanese expedition led by Shirase:

From many points of view the Japanese party is the most interesting of the three ... Certainly the Japanese have a leader who is not likely to be deterred by difficulties. Lieut. Shirase was the sole survivor of Lieut. Gunti's expedition to the Kurile Islands in 1893. He spent two terrible years on the island of Shinishu. All his companions died one by one of cold and starvation. He was finally rescued by a Japanese warship. ("Race to the South Pole")

Nansen also wrote a long article for *Scribner's Magazine*, dated 26 November 1911, at a time when he expected both expeditions might be converging on the Pole. The article, only published the following March, makes no reference to the rights and wrongs of Amundsen's conduct. Instead, Nansen assesses the strengths and weaknesses of the two groups and remarks prophetically that, achievement of the Pole notwithstanding, scientific work in Antarctica is just beginning.

Amundsen's acclaim

On the 22nd and 23rd of December 1911, the date Scott had stated he hoped to be at the South Pole, many British newspapers asked the question: has Captain Scott reached the Pole today? They were very generous, nonetheless, when the Norwegian expedition returned to Hobart on 7 March 1912 and the world learned of Amundsen's achievement. The *Daily Telegraph*, in an article headed "Conquest of the South Pole: Amundsen's Triumph," acknowledged some natural disappointment "in geographical circles" that it had not been an Englishman who had been there first, but expressed "satisfaction that it has been left to a Norwegian—a fellow-countryman of Nansen—to accomplish this feat."⁵⁹ The paper congratulated him on his "brilliant achievement":

No man who admires courage and adventure will grudge him any portion of the praise he has so amply deserved. No nation has a vested interest in any part of the undiscovered regions of the earth. The prize is for all comers; and though we would rather that an Englishman had won, we can offer our full tribute of homage to that race, always hardy in maritime endeavour, which has kept its flag flying in most of the navigable seas, and cherished as a sacred heritage the blood of its Norse ancestors.

Once more, such wholehearted praise belies claims (e.g. Huntford 549) that the British press belittled Amundsen's achievement, and that the British believed they held a lien on Antarctica. Jones gives further examples, but points out that in two cases the papers had a financial interest in the Norwegians' success (*Quest* 89-90). That is not to say that everyone was thrilled. Markham wrote to the *Times* on 1 April stressing that, for the British expedition, there had been "no question of racing or conquering. The grand object was very far from that: it was valuable research in every branch of science." The two expeditions were therefore "essentially different" and should not be compared. The assertion about racing is accurate, but to that about conquering it could obviously be objected that reaching the Pole had been the expedition's first stated aim. Markham added, perhaps through gritted teeth: "Captain Scott would, I believe, wish success to my friend Amundsen, as I did; but there was no race." Scott's wife, Kathleen, made similar statements.

Terra Nova, meanwhile, had departed from Antarctica at a time when the return of the polar party was still expected, and brought news in April that the expedition would

⁵⁹ In addition to the high regard in which Nansen was universally held, this comment reflects the special relationship between Britain and Norway. There had long been a "close and friendly understanding" based on maritime trade (Royal Institute of International Affairs 199), and Queen Maud, the wife of Haakon VII, who became king of the newly independent Norway in 1905, was a daughter of Edward VII (Derry 201, 204).

remain for another year. During this period, therefore, although the claiming of the Pole was known, Scott's fate was not. In April, RGS librarian Hugh Robert Mill reviewed recent Antarctic exploration for the Society's journal. He acknowledges Amundsen's "splendid journey" ("Ten Years" 369), and his article is followed by the text of a telegram to the explorer from Lord Curzon, the new RGS president, "On behalf of Council Royal Geographical Society I congratulate you upon your magnificent journey and successful attainment of the South Pole," with the statement that this was endorsed with applause at a Society meeting (375). In addition, Mill details the achievements of many who paved the way, and notes that Amundsen "had the records of the two previous expeditions [*Discovery* and *Nimrod*] on the Barrier ice to serve as guides and warnings" (373-74).⁶⁰ And there may be some oblique criticism in his conclusion that "perhaps the best result of the attainment both of the South Pole and the North is that there is no farther occasion for sensational 'dashes' and acrimonious discussions between rival claimants" (375). While the latter obviously refers to the Cook-Pearry controversy, the former may also be directed at Amundsen. A second article by the same author the following month reports the last news brought by *Terra Nova* and shows early signs of an attempt, in the face of Amundsen's triumph, to salvage something for British pride. The work conducted from Cape Evans, including the winter journey to Cape Crozier, is pronounced "an unqualified success and enough to make the reputation of any expedition" ("The Antarctic Expeditions" 454), and the rescue of the desperately ill Teddy Evans in the last returning party "certainly one of the smartest pieces of work ever done in the polar regions" (458). The face-saving is more obvious in an article by Markham, which assumes from the report of the last returning party that Scott, "our chosen leader," had reached the Pole five months previously. Markham opens grandly and proprietorially: "The time has arrived for explaining briefly the plan and objects of the renewal of the Antarctic exploration which I, as President of the Royal Geographical Society, originated in 1893, in concert with my expert polar advisers" ("Review" 575). He calls Scott, accurately enough, "the creator and founder of Antarctic sledge travelling" (577), and goes on to claim that the polar journey, "without the aid of dogs or ponies, from the foot of the glacier to the pole, is by far the finest in the annals of polar discovery ..."

⁶⁰ The same point was made by *The Year 1913 Illustrated* in a chapter called "The Great Polar Disaster," which noted that Scott's southern journey in 1903 had "... disclosed the character of the land about the South Pole. It made it possible for Shackleton, some years later, to approach still nearer the South Pole. And let us not forget also, it made it possible for Amundsen to discover it a few days before Scott himself got there" (51). (In fact, the Norwegians reached the Pole 34 days before the British.)

(578). No reference is made to Amundsen, beyond reminding readers that Scott and his team are still in the middle of their work, and so

the attention of all who are interested in Antarctic discovery ought not to be diverted from our gallant countrymen, who have already achieved such great success, and are preparing for still greater efforts in the coming season. They are not the men to scamper to the pole and scamper back for the reward. Their watch-word is “thorough.” (579)

In addition to the acid in the allusion to the Norwegians and their dogs ‘scampering’ to the pole,⁶¹ this statement embodies a very practical need. This expedition, like all others after the renewal of Antarctic research in 1901 (with the exception of *Discovery* and *Gauss*), was essentially privately financed. And as Markham well knew, it was still so short of funds that many members, including Scott, were foregoing their salaries. Without the prize of priority at the pole, it would be even more difficult to raise the needed money. In December 1912 *Terra Nova* sailed south again.

Meanwhile, Amundsen’s two-volume book, *The South Pole*, had appeared, already translated from the Norwegian and with a dedication dated 15 August 1912. Nansen contributed a truly hagiographical introduction. Peppered with words italicized for emphasis, it overlooks all awkward questions and introduces the main elements of the Amundsen legend. The great man is first shown struggling in the face of indifference and lack of support from “little men” (xxix), whom Nansen, Zarathustra-like, admonishes. Columbus is mentioned by way of comparison. The possible geographical and scientific value of the Norwegian expedition are brushed aside (“Oh no; *that* will come later for a few specialists”) in favour of the hackneyed trope of triumph in the battle against Nature: “A victory of the human mind and human strength over the dominion and powers of Nature” (xxix). Success was due to the genius of the leader, and the expedition proceeded like clockwork: “But *everything*, great and small, was thoroughly thought out, and the plan was splendidly executed. It is the *man* that matters ...” (xxx). There was no question of luck: “Let no one come and prate about luck and chance. Amundsen’s luck is that of the strong man who looks ahead.” And the hero made the polar trek look like “a holiday tour in the mountains” (xxxi). All of these themes were elaborated much later by Huntford and his successors.⁶²

⁶¹ I am assuming the Norwegians were the targets here; but Hayes in 1928 refers to Markham making such a comment about Peary (197).

⁶² And some much earlier. In a 1928 obituary for Amundsen in *Nature*, H. R. Mill is almost quoting the explorer when he writes that the *Fram* expedition “went like clockwork, everything happened as planned

In addition, they all originated in Amundsen's own account, which in general fosters the belief that the expedition proceeded without a hitch and was 'all in a day's work.' Such a vision of triumphant easy progress to a goal has appealed to certain readers; but there are clearly important omissions. One such is a major crisis that occurred after an aborted early start for the South Pole.⁶³ Amundsen was furious when Johansen—famous as Nansen's companion in an earlier Arctic ordeal—rebuked him for abandoning the others and racing back to base. The leader isolated Johansen at once, did not speak to him again, and reorganized the expedition so that he would not go to the pole but to the east instead, under another man. *South Pole* glosses over all this with: "circumstances had arisen which made me consider it necessary to divide the party in two" (1: 398). In general, the book has a self-congratulatory tone, probably due partly to the fact that it is written by the 'victor,' after the event and comfortable in the knowledge of his success. The following example is characteristic:

I worked out the plan ... at my home ... near Christiania ... and as it was laid, so was it carried out to the last detail. That my estimate of the time it would take was not so very far out is proved by the final sentence of the plan: "Thus we shall be back from the Polar journey on January 25." It was on January 25, 1912, that we came into Framheim after our successful journey to the Pole. (1: 53)

The understatement "not so very far out"—when plainly the author wants the reader to understand that the match between his plan and the result was exact—is also characteristic.⁶⁴ What Amundsen does not mention is that he delayed the final section of their return journey from the Pole so that the two *would* match (Hayes 180). Nansen's battle metaphor, too, reflects Amundsen's own use of the language of conflict and violence when speaking about geographical discovery. He describes early explorers setting out "across the ocean, aiming to strike the Antarctic monster—in the heart, if fortune favoured them" (1: 3). And the chapter explaining his own preparations begins with the quotation: "The deity of success is a woman, and she insists on being won, not courted. You've got to seize her and bear her off, instead of standing under her window with a mandolin" (1: 42). The image of the South Pole as a

... the return journey was as smooth and successful as that outward" (516). As we saw in chapter 1, Spufford (317) and others perpetuate the same erroneous (see below) view today.

⁶³ Further details of this episode are given in chapter 6 when I discuss Kåre Holt's *The Race*, which first made it known.

⁶⁴ In all analysis of Amundsen's writing I acknowledge that stylistic, although presumably not factual, changes may have occurred in translation. Nevertheless, the kind of understatement referred to here occurs throughout *South Pole* and seems to represent more than a stylistic quirk on the part of the translator.

waiting woman appears at other times in the book (e.g. 1: 179; 1: 194), and the view expressed here that ravishment is the best means of attainment may offer some insight into the lack of scruples Amundsen exhibited in achieving his Antarctic desire.

Amundsen's book is the major, almost the sole, source of information about the Norwegian expedition in English⁶⁵ and, as I have said, has almost never been read critically. I will therefore examine two questions arising from it in some detail, since they have an important bearing on the interpretation of Scott's story: here, Amundsen's justification of his change of plan, and in the next chapter his treatment of his dogs. In *South Pole* the broken promises of the Arctic expedition are acknowledged and then brushed aside "with a clear conscience" on the grounds of financial imperatives (43).⁶⁶ Amundsen's "mind was soon at rest," too, about not informing his sponsors: this decision he dismisses with the observation that "they were all men of position, and above discussing the application of the sums they had dedicated to the enterprise" (43-44). It seems the explorer is hoping that, in combination with his fame as the first man to the South Pole, this breezy flattery will discourage any of these men from objecting to his actions because, if they did, they would forfeit the patrician character he has ascribed to them. To make it additionally difficult for any one of their number to call his bluff, Amundsen adds a touch of group pressure (and hyperbole): "And I have already received countless proofs that I was not mistaken."

Amundsen's defence of his actions in terms of the effect they could have on other explorers must be quoted in full since this became a major point of debate. It needs to be remembered that at the time of publication there was no inkling in the public mind that Scott had come to grief:

Nor did I feel any great scruples with regard to the other Antarctic expeditions that were being planned at the time. I knew I should be able to inform Captain Scott of the extension of my plans before he left civilization, and therefore a few months sooner or later could be of no great importance. Scott's plan and equipment were so widely different from my own that I regarded the telegram that I sent him later, with the information that we were bound for the Antarctic regions, rather as a mark of courtesy than as a

⁶⁵ I elaborate on this point at the end of chapter 4 (note 115).

⁶⁶ Although Amundsen refers to "many of the contributors who had so warmly supported ... my original plan," he says that "the altered circumstances" (claims on the North Pole) meant that he now had "small prospect ... of obtaining funds for my original plan" (43). But since he also acknowledges that the support he had received was given for a purely scientific expedition which had explicitly rejected aiming for the North Pole, it is not clear why his financial prospects were reduced by claims that it had been reached. In any case, the difficulty of financing polar exploration was a problem by no means unique to Amundsen, and I have already mentioned that Scott himself laboured constantly under the same burden.

communication which might cause him to alter his programme in the slightest degree. The British expedition was designed entirely for scientific research. The Pole was only a side-issue, whereas in my extended plan it was the main object. On this little *détour* science would have to take care of itself ... Our preparations were entirely different, and I doubt whether Captain Scott, with his great knowledge of Antarctic exploration, would have departed in any point from the experience he had gained and altered his equipment in accordance with that which I found it best to employ. For I came far short of Scott both in experience and means. (44-45)

These remarks are, to say the least, disingenuous. Although Scott did in fact refuse to change his plans when he learned that the Norwegians were at the Bay of Whales, the obvious reason, as he explained to Kinsey in the letter quoted above, was that by that time it was too late to turn *Terra Nova* into a race. And I have shown—previous British attempts aside—that it was public knowledge that the Pole was no “side-issue” for Scott. This had been stated in the newspapers and in the same journal where Amundsen’s own Arctic plans were published. There was no question that *Terra Nova* expedition was “designed entirely for scientific research,” and Amundsen knew this very well. He was equally well aware, however, that polar expeditions needed scientific justification; he had himself complied in detail with this requirement when explaining his proposed Arctic venture. In a similar move to the one he made with his financial backers, he now subtly places the British expedition in the position of having to downplay its scientific objectives if it is to contradict him. Perhaps he also realized that, since he had taken the main prize, the British would be less inclined to diminish the scientific results that would now represent most of the pride they could salvage.

It was clearly for tactical reasons that he had sent Scott only three words of information: “*Fram* proceeding Antarctic.” Yet he now describes this as “inform[ing] Scott of the extension of my plans.” This is the only reference in *South Pole* to the crucial telegram. In his autobiography Amundsen says more about it, but is even less candid:

Captain Scott had the fullest possible notice of my intentions, both before he left Australia and again after we had both established our base camps in the Antarctic. When I sailed from Madeira in the fall of 1910, I left with my secretary a sealed envelope containing a cablegram to Captain Scott in Australia, which he, in accordance with my instructions, sent a few days after we were safe at sea, and which fully disclosed my intention to compete with Captain Scott for the South Pole. (*My Life* 65-66)

There are several prevarications here. In their English translation, at any rate, the words “the fullest possible notice” imply warning which was both given as far in advance as possible and contained complete information. Not surprisingly, the three

words gave Scott little idea of Amundsen's intentions. He cabled Nansen to ask if it meant Amundsen was attempting the South Pole and received the reply "Unknown" (qtd. Mill, "Discovery" 322), and until the Norwegians were finally discovered in the Bay of Whales, he believed them to be on the other side of the continent. So the second "fullest possible notice" occurred only after both expeditions were already in Antarctica, and then only by chance. Amundsen states that the telegram was sent "a few days" after his departure from Madeira, *Fram's* last port of call before Antarctica. In fact, he left Madeira on 9 September and the telegram was not sent until twenty-six days later, on 5 October—presumably also in accordance with the instructions he mentions. Moreover, he had concealed his plan for a year before that, and avoided Scott when the latter visited him in Norway to give him equipment to allow simultaneous magnetic observations to be made during their Arctic and Antarctic voyages.⁶⁷ In *South Pole* Amundsen reduces the import of the telegram to a mere "mark of courtesy," rather than "a communication which might cause him to alter his programme in the slightest degree." But it was so minimal and delayed for so long precisely *in order* that Scott would have nothing which might possibly help him to modify his plan. Amundsen waves aside the "few months sooner or later" as "of no great importance," but they were vital. As his book shows, Amundsen raced all the way to Antarctica, all the way to the Pole and all the way back to Hobart to send news of his victory. He quotes the common thought in camp while the Norwegians were waiting to start for the Pole: "I'd give something to know how far Scott is to-day" (378). The urgent need to beat Scott led him to set out far too early in the spring, and he was forced back to base and had to wait a further 41 days before conditions allowed him to start. Even so, he arrived at the Pole only 34 days before Scott, considerably less than the "few months" he dismisses as of no importance.

The story is born

As *Fram* reached Hobart with news of the Norwegian victory, two young members of the British expedition had been waiting for four days with a dog team at One Ton Depot to meet the returning polar party. But men and dogs were long back at base when Scott, Wilson and Bowers made their final camp, 11 days later, just short of the

⁶⁷ Trygve Gran had arranged the meeting, in March 1910, through Amundsen's brother, Leon, and took Scott to Amundsen's house. When they arrived Amundsen could not be found, and Gran writes: "If Scott was deeply disappointed, I was deeply embarrassed, and I can only add that the solution to the mystery emerged almost a year later [when Amundsen's change of plan became known]" (*The Norwegian with Scott* 12).

depot. Although it was soon apparent to those at Cape Evans that the polar party must have perished, nothing more was known until their tent was found seven and a half months later. And it was not until 10 February 1913, when *Terra Nova* returned the expedition to New Zealand, that the rest of the world finally received news of the deaths of Scott and his companions. When it did, there was an extraordinary international response of shock and grief. US President Taft, for example, sent condolences to King George V (Lashley 157), and Cherry-Garrard, who had survived, was astounded by and possibly even jealous of the attention given to the men who had died. He wrote somewhat cryptically in his diary after disembarking on 12 February 1913: “There is evidently a tremendous feeling of admiration for the Polar Party everywhere, quite beyond anything I have ever imagined—I suppose we have been out of the world too long.” The same day, the *Evening News* declared: “People think of nothing else, talk of nothing else, read nothing else” (qtd. Jones, *Quest* 102-03), and the previous day almost the entire edition of the *Times* had been devoted to news of the expedition.

“The British Press,” as Jones observes, “were the first narrators of the story of Scott of the Antarctic” (*Quest* 98). Secrecy was essential initially in order to protect the exclusive rights of the Central News Agency in London to the story and its distribution.⁶⁸ The earliest news of the disaster, transmitted in code to London on Monday, 10 February from Oamaru, *Terra Nova*’s first landfall in New Zealand, had been only a tantalising few lines. Authorized by Teddy Evans, who was now in command, these appeared in London’s evening papers, but stated only the facts of Scott’s party reaching the Pole after the Norwegians, and the dates and causes of their deaths on the return march.⁶⁹ The ship then continued north while two men went ahead by train, taking a longer report to Scott’s agent in Christchurch. Before releasing it, Joseph Kinsey sent notice to the relatives of the dead. A flurry of telegrams, dated 11 and 12 February, between him and John Gennings, general manager of Central News, reveal the first signs of a predictable tension—one that would continue to

⁶⁸ It was simple commercial forces that were at work here, rather than anything “imperial,” as Allan Bell implies in his analysis of the New Zealand press coverage (51).

⁶⁹ This text of this first telegram was also included in the *Times*’s extensive coverage the following day (“The First News of the Disaster”). Jones states that “the exact timetable of the transmission of news to London is obscure” (*Quest* 97), but offers a possible reconstruction. Some of the confusion may be explained by the fact that England and New Zealand are in opposite time zones and thus, for half of each day, telegrams would show different dates.

influence this story—between the feelings of friends and families of expedition members and the public demand for information:

I shall telegraph message tomorrow morning in one section only, consisting of 2500 words. Calamity explains brevity. Telegraph instructions immediately with regard to Australian Press Asscn.

Kinsey.

Replying to your telegram, telegraph immediately nature of calamity, whatever occurred. Will be disastrous our contract if you do not cable at least 7,000 words, other papers will obtain fuller account on arrival of "Terra Nova." Imperative you should prevent leakage until you have telegraphed fullest. Insertion of 2500 entirely inadequate.

Gennings.

Regret unable to increase cable. Surely this contains enough sensation without describing distressing details. Feelings of friends and relatives must be considered.

Kinsey.

Quite appreciate your feelings, but must emphasise we owe paramount duty public and also memory Scott. He would have sent us last year scientific details etc. in addition to personal details. Earnestly request you for the same. Must have text of Scott's diary continuing account from last year to the disaster. Scott would have desired this. If you do not personally feel equal to undertaking make arrangements admit our correspondent Drummond "Times" Christchurch aboard, and ensure him 12 hours start with information procurable by him.

Gennings.

Your silence inexplicable. Please reply immediately to our telegram of this morning. Fullstop. Where is ship?

Gennings.

Regret must decline inspect or take extracts of sacred diaries belonging to those perished without instructions from Speyer [the expedition's treasurer]. Evans concurs. Fullstop. Hope to be able to telegraph few further particulars tomorrow morning, but your proposal with regard to Drummond quite impracticable. I am anxious to assist every reasonable way, but while endeavouring to serve public I must regard memory of Scott. Ship arrived this morning.

Kinsey.

Speyer telegraphed Evans authorisation telegraph fuller report. See that everything Evans sends us goes also Australian Press.

Gennings.

[To Speyer]

Central News are making unfair and impracticable suggestions to me in order to obtain certain news. I would like you to understand that Evans and I are alive to necessity carrying out agreement, and we will do everything reasonable assist them. Stop. Ship arrived this morning.

Kinsey.

The tensions in these texts also help to explain why there was at first an impression in London that something was being covered up (Jones, *Quest* 110). The newspaper chief, who had paid £2,500 for the rights to the story and now had a scoop like this on his hands,⁷⁰ finds the agent's reluctance to supply him with material unacceptable and incomprehensible. The words "whatever occurred" indicate that he presumes that there is something about the disaster itself which the expedition members are attempting to conceal. Kinsey, who had been Scott's agent for both his expeditions and had hosted him and his wife in New Zealand, feels that Gennings is pandering to public voyeurism and should understand the need to protect the feeling of family members. It is easy to appreciate both points of view in this tense series of messages, and to see how misunderstandings arose under such circumstances, especially when telegrams were the means of communication.

Kinsey's reference to the diaries of the dead men as "sacred" is revealing. On the one hand, it refers to the way the diaries were treated practically. Scott had left a note at the front of the last volume authorizing the finder to read them:⁷¹ a necessity so that the essentials of their story could be known. According to Cherry-Garrard, who was present, Atkinson, leader of the search party, "said he was only going to read sufficient to know what had happened—and after that they were brought home unopened and unread" (*Worst Journey* 498) until they were handed over to Scott's wife. On the other hand, Kinsey's word also reflects the sense of reverence surrounding the deaths and the relics. Wright, who sighted the tent, later said he had used hand movements to attract the attention of the other members of the search party: "I was most conscious of a feeling that to do so by shouting would be like desecration." The search party set up its own camp "a couple of hundred yards away" for the same reason (qtd. Pound, *Scott* 297). Neither the bodies nor the tent were moved, and the Norwegian Tryggve Gran recorded in his diary the solemnity of the funeral service and that it was "strange to see all men bareheaded whilst the wind blew with -20°" (*Translation*).

⁷⁰ Jones quotes the opinion of a press historian in 1917 that the right to cover Scott's last expedition was "one of the greatest 'exclusives' ever achieved by a news agency" (*Quest* 98). The news value of the story, even before the disaster, is also shown by an anticipatory advertisement by the Gaumont Company, which had an agreement to distribute Ponting's film of the expedition. The title of the advertisement (*Quest* 80) has a tiny "Any day now we may hear that," a medium-sized "CAPT. SCOTT, R.N.," a tiny "has" and a huge "REACHED THE SOUTH POLE!!" The choice of font size also makes it clear where the public interest in the expedition lay.

⁷¹ The slightly unsteady text, doubtless among the last words Scott wrote, reads: "Diary can be read by finder to ensure recovery of Records etc but Diary should be sent to my widow" (*Diaries*).

The promised 2,487-word report, prepared before reaching New Zealand by a committee of six of *Terra Nova*'s officers and signed by Teddy Evans, duly arrived in London, and Jones names it the "founding text of the story of Scott of the Antarctic" (*Quest* 99). That is strictly true, since it was the first extended *public* rendering of the "Scott of the Antarctic" and, in that sense, also the first interpretation. However, "Scott of the Antarctic" would not exist without Scott's diaries, which also later became public. Since the report includes verbatim quotation from them of the account of Oates's death and the full text of the "Message to the Public," I regard Scott's original as the founding text. It too, of course, is an 'interpretation' of events.

The *Geographical Journal* of March 1913 devoted many pages to "The Antarctic Disaster," the first twenty-two framed in thick black borders of mourning. It reports that King George V, Patron of the RGS, and Queen Alexandra both sent messages of condolence to the president, Lord Curzon, on "the loss to science and discovery" (220). The King, in addition, had attended the memorial service in St Paul's on 14 February, thereby making an exception to the custom of attending only royal funerals.⁷² The cathedral was brimful, with 10,000 people left outside. The issue begins with the full text of Scott's "Message," and four short boldface sections are of special interest as aspects of the story that the RGS found most noteworthy. One highlights the fact that these Englishmen (Edgar Evans was in fact Welsh) had helped one another and endured hardship "with as great a fortitude as ever in the past." This picks up a theme often mentioned by Scott, Curzon and others that the efforts in Antarctica in some sense represented a regeneration of qualities which a decadent nation had forgotten. In another passage Scott recalls the topic of English pride, before making his plea that the nation would provide for the relatives of those who had died. The other two refer to reasons for the disaster, which would be debated endlessly from that time on. First is Scott's assertion that the weather conditions the group had encountered were abnormal and could not have been foreseen: "no one in the world would have expected the temperature and surface which we encountered at this time of the year." It would be almost ninety years before meteorologist Susan Solomon would authoritatively vindicate this claim in 2001. The second point was the "shortage of fuel in our depôts for which I cannot account," and although various theories have

⁷² *The Year 1913 Illustrated* observed that he was there "as a fellow sailor rather than as King. There was no State entry, he was simply greeted at the south door by the Bishop of London and the Dean of St. Paul's, and by a small number of the clergy. Immediately the King had taken his seat there began one of the most exquisitely simple and homely services ever held in the beautiful cathedral" (63-64).

subsequently been advanced with confidence to explain this shortage, they cannot be proved.

The journal also stated that the King had accorded Kathleen Scott the same title and privileges as if Scott had been made a Knight Commander of the Bath. (At the time, she was travelling by sea to New Zealand to meet the expedition and was still unaware of her husband's death.) Tributes to the characters of all the men of the polar party were printed and a long list of those who had sent messages of condolence: kings and queens, an international collection of government officials, geographical and scientific societies and explorers, clubs, schoolchildren and—the “Walthamstow Property Owners' Association” (221-22). A specially prepared narrative was read out to schoolchildren across the country, timed to coincide with the memorial service in St Paul's. In the first half the author, Arthur Machen, explains that Scott and his men went to Antarctica, “this dreadful country,” out of “curiosity about the world” and the Englishman's “love of adventure and doing dangerous things.” He then quotes Scott's “Message to the Public” verbatim, with a small addition from his diary describing the death of Oates, and concludes with a brief comment that now the children know why these men are called great: because they were not afraid, did not complain, did their best, were willing to die for each other and finally faced death “bravely and calmly like true Christian gentlemen.”

Early public comments on the disaster by fellow Antarctic explorers have particular authority, since they can be presumed to have had the greatest familiarity with and understanding of the circumstances in which Scott and his men found themselves. These remarks also highlight aspects of the story which would be taken up by later commentators. Shackleton was reported to be amazed at the news: “I cannot believe it is true ... It is inconceivable that an expedition so well equipped as Captain Scott's could perish before a blizzard” (“The Polar Disaster”). The *Times* also mentioned equipment, but while acknowledging that “naturally they would be as lightly equipped as possible,” added that “as these blizzards often last for days at a time it is to be feared that the equipment was insufficient” (“Antarctic Disaster”). Strangely, Amundsen's “first and only signed statement regarding ... this most awful of tragedies ever enacted on the wastes of the polar ice-fields” (“Heroic Death” 29) assumes that the men had been unable to locate their final supply depot, rather than unable to reach it (33). Amundsen, who goes on to remark on the difference between the Norwegian and British means of transport, begins with a self-effacing tribute to Scott's character: “Robert F. Scott, by the declarations in his diary, has left as a monument a record of a

man, a man as sincere, as honest and as modest as the world has ever seen—a greater record than any mere ‘discoverer’ could ever hope to equal” (29). While this is certainly a tactful statement under the circumstances, there is no reason to doubt its sincerity. Often, in the commentary to come, admirers of Scott would emphasize his character, and in particular the same qualities Amundsen identifies; and George Seaver would give his 1940 biography the indicative subtitle: *A Study in Character*.

Amundsen’s remarks included an implied warning, one which is not often heeded: “The record of that returning flight will never be told. It is beyond the power of men so to do” (30). From his own experience—and in obvious ways there is no one who could assess it better—the explorer understood that there was something ineffable about the suffering and death of the men of the polar party. Perhaps for that reason, a few authors have been content to leave it for Scott to tell in his own words. Many more have chosen to analyze, dissect and retell the tale according to their own understanding. In a summary of Amundsen’s comments the *Daily Mail* printed a parallel point made by Borchgrevink: “No one without personal experience of what Antarctic cold means can speak about it or understand it.” (“Captain Amundsen’s Views”). Charcot, a great admirer of Scott, was also quoted; the French explorer was rhapsodic:

Scott has conquered the Pole. The public, ill-informed, will say that he reached his goal only second, but those who know—Amundsen and Shackleton, I am sure, among the first—will say that it was Scott who opened the road to the Pole and mapped out the route; and a halo of glory, shedding a reflecting glow on his country, will surround his name ... For tomb they [the polar party] have the whole fantastic architecture of the Antarctic continent, a tomb such as no Pharaoh could have dreamed of; and at the summit of the world, dominating all, flies the flag of the great nation for which they lived and died.

Similarly florid tributes were paid by others, including Arctic explorer, Nansen, and the Swedish explorer of Asia, Sven Hedin (“The Last Photographs”).

References to the story’s tragedy and comparisons with heroes of Greek and Roman antiquity were common from the start. Typical is the best-selling 21 May issue of the *Daily Mirror*⁷³—the first to publish the photographs taken at the Pole and of the ice cairn the search party raised over the dead men’s tent—which calls it “one of the greatest tragedies in the world’s history of high adventure” (“Disaster in Blizzard”). In the caption to the striking front-page photograph of the tall cairn on the empty ice

⁷³ This special issue sold 1,342,000 copies, making it “one of the best-selling editions of any daily newspaper published before the war” (Jones, *Quest* 103).

plain, topped by a cross and silhouetted against a cloud-streaked sky, the newspaper suggests that “perhaps the most tragic note of the whole Antarctic disaster” was the fact that the men had so nearly reached the supply depot. The publisher of *Cornhill Magazine*, Reginald Smith, agreed:

There seemed to be a touch of superhuman irony in the fate that let him struggle undaunted to his goal, yet step by step undermined his well-laid plans, to lay him low at the last ... almost within hand's reach of the reserve [One Ton Depot] that meant reviving strength and lifelong glory ... It spells the high tragedy of human skill and forethought crushed by the irresistible onset of cosmic forces. (410)

Smith adds that “the powers of destiny” which had let Scott escape death in the ice once refused to let him do so a second time. *Field* magazine (“The Death”), Curzon and others found similar tragic, supramundane elements in the story.

Selfless heroism was another common theme in the early commentary. On the first Sunday after the news was heard, Henry Woods, Master of the Temple Church, gave a sermon, *Heroism: The Apotheosis of Duty*, which is considerably less predictable than its title might suggest. First, like others at the time, he raises the question: “To what purpose is this waste of human life?” (6; see also Jones, *Quest* 191). The men’s lives were not wasted, according to Woods, because of their heroic example of self-sacrifice in looking after their companions in a desperate situation, when they “could probably have saved their own lives, had they had pushed on regardless ...” (8). Then, in a way that might seem more modern than Edwardian, he acknowledges that heroism can be found in all professions and social levels, and need not be as obvious as the Antarctic example: there are, for instance, “all the heroisms of private life, often little known and sometimes not known at all” (11). Woods believes that the spirit in which people have responded to “the drudgeries of life” produces deep moral differences in their characters. Some drift along without purpose and use opportunities merely for their own pleasure and benefit, while others remain alert, live with aims and principles and concern for others (14). And the preacher proposes Scott and his men as an inspiring instance of the latter. Markham, who was after all eighty-three at the time, wrote a tribute pursuing the same theme of unselfishness in a more chivalric note. At the end he calls Scott “a true and spotless knight” whose “glorious deeds and heroic death will live forever in his country’s annals” (“Adeste Fideles” 464). He emphasizes that the arrangements for the expedition had been “perfect” and that the only factor which could not be prepared for was “unavoidable risk,” a factor which Scott had recognized

and accepted.⁷⁴ *Symons's Meteorological Magazine* also pointed to the fine line separating life and death in polar regions, adding that Scott "was well aware of the nearly equal balance of the chance of winning or of losing" ("The Disaster" 22). It reminded readers that he and Wilson could easily have suffered the same fate on the *Discovery* expedition, when they had looked after Shackleton during the southern journey. Others echoed these themes of heroism, selflessness and the inherent risks of Antarctic exploration.

Lawrence Oates became perhaps the story's most conspicuous emblem of self-sacrifice. The sentiment expressed in an elegantly printed booklet sold for a shilling contribution to the memorial fund is typical:

No message that comes later from the ice-ringed fields of death can add to the poignancy and splendour of the few simple words of Captain Robert Scott's diary with its record of Captain L. E. G. Oates's heroic selflessness: "I am just going outside, and I may be some time." (Mansion House 3)

This comment is another example of the view (which Machen had emphasized to the schoolchildren) that Scott had told it best, and the editor prefaces the quotation from the diary with: "It is better to give without any embroidery these few last words just as they stand...." The booklet reproduces from the *Daily Mail* a very bad poem, "England's Debt," which again singles out Oates as the best symbol of a sacrificial interpretation of the story: "sure no greater love was ever shown." The soldier's exit from the tent, soon to achieve iconic status, is described in an unfortunate line of cackling 'hee-hees': "They bade him stay, but he, he would not heed." And Oates makes "that last, perfect, noble sacrifice. / In vain! The wild storm shrieks around its prey ..." (25). The poem concludes with the fundraising gambit that England owes a "sacred debt" to provide for the bereaved relatives. The memorial fund, the response to Scott's final plea, "For Gods sake look after our people" (*Diaries*) started slowly but eventually raised the enormous sum of £75,000 (Jones, *Quest* 107). This was almost double Scott's first estimate of the total cost of the expedition, £40,000, a figure which he had laboured so painfully to meet.

⁷⁴ The justice of this observation was reinforced by the news of the deaths of Mertz and Ninnis on Douglas Mawson's contemporaneous expedition. Curzon was among those who made the comparison: "What I said just now about the risks and perils attendant upon Polar research has received a further and not less tragic illustration during the past few months. The admirably organized Australian expedition under Dr. Mawson, operating in a more northerly part of the Antarctic region, has lost two of its best men, and the leader only escaped by a display of fortitude and endurance almost without parallel in the history of exploration" ("Address to the Royal Geographical Society" 3).

The sacrifice made for the nation and for each other by the polar party and Oates in particular was held up as an inspiration to British troops during the First World War. In 1992 John MacKenzie characterized some of the cultural and literary traditions underpinning British attitudes to warfare in the nineteenth century as: “the enthusiasm for knightly virtues, the adventure tradition of heightened moral absolutes, a fascination with individual heroic action in the service of the state ...” (3). The second half of that century, in particular, was “an age of mythic heroes, figures who achieved almost impossible tasks in exotic settings, rendering them worthy of a form of imperial sainthood ...” (15). In such a context it is easy to see how aspects of the polar party’s story could be deployed as inspiring examples of sacrifice during a war that began little more than a year after news was received of their deaths. In that cause, an article in the *Treasury* in January 1916 provides an example of true hagiography. “The Precursor” maintains that the dead explorers had been John the Baptists, both prefiguring, and preparing England for, the Passion of the coming war. But with the country by then in the midst of the terrible conflict, it reminds readers that “we have so many heroes among us now, so many Scotts and Wilsons and Oates ...” that it is easy to forget those men who “fired the beacon for us.” In studied biblical cadences the writer declaims: “It ought not to be so; the memory of them is good” (Castle 324). There is some confusion in the religious references, however, and it is unclear who exactly Christ’s “Precursor” is: Scott or Oates or all of them. Scott himself is portrayed as saint- or even Christ-like:

The dream in his faraway blue eyes was scarcely so much success as sacrifice. He did not so keenly strive towards achievement as towards example ... The more other people blew noisy trumpets, the more this man of splendid exploit held his peace.... (323, 324)

Perhaps the hint of ‘man of peace’ is intentional. In any case, the last page encourages the comparison with Christ by including a poem about Mary holding her dying, thorn-crowned son on her breast. It is easy to see how such excesses offended later commentators. There were others, like Henry Leach writing in *Chambers’s Journal* in 1914, who expressed the strongest admiration for the explorer somewhat less hagiographically. Leach, who knew Scott, refers to the inspiration to be derived from reading the diaries, and even to the “towering nobility and beauty of his character, and the sweetness of it ...” (49) without becoming mawkish.

Post-mortems

Contemporary comment on the expedition was not all praise and adulation, however. As Jones has stated, “the press speculated widely about the causes of the disaster, acknowledging the superiority of Amundsen’s methods” (*Quest* 11). This comment encapsulates two salient features of the critique of Scott, both by his contemporaries and since. Firstly, most of it has attempted to determine why the men died and what could have saved them.⁷⁵ And secondly, because Amundsen did not die, his methods have often been seen as exemplary, while important factors such as luck and the different weather the two parties encountered have been downplayed or disregarded. The topics first queried by the press Jones summarizes as: “the breakdown of Petty Officer Evans; the failure of the relief party led by Cherry-Garrard to reach Scott; fuel shortages at the supply depots; and the incidence of scurvy among the polar party” (110). I will now discuss three of these, leaving the question of Cherry-Garrard to the next chapter.

The issue of scurvy, in particular, was one which could be taken to reflect on Scott’s leadership, and it is something for which he is still blamed (Katz and Kirby 260). On hearing news of the men’s deaths, Shackleton, who had himself suffered severely from the disease, stated his belief that it was the cause but implied no fault (“Sir E. Shackleton”). The simplest thing that can be said on this much-debated point is that at the time of the expedition the causes of scurvy were not known.⁷⁶ Scott’s detailed diary record of a lecture on the subject by Surgeon Atkinson shows that he was well aware of the confusion (“the disease is anything but precise”) and also of the

⁷⁵ Over the years there has also been occasional speculation about what the polar party’s future might have been had they returned safely from the Pole. The *Times* obituary of 11 February 1913 stated that Scott would likely have had a brilliant naval career even without going to Antarctica. It seems clear, however, that in the absence of the extraordinary events there he would not have achieved the same fame as a man or as a writer. In 1996 Francis Spufford noted that “it is always tempting to wonder what would have become of the five men ... if they had survived” (265). He finds it difficult to imagine these ‘Edwardians’ in the changed world that followed their deaths, but regards David Thomson’s vision of the future Scott as an earnest but naïve minor politician as at least plausible. Ted Tally’s play *Terra Nova*, which I discuss in chapter 6, imagines an intriguing scenario for the surviving polar party.

⁷⁶ Overlooking this fact in 2000 led medical professor and Antarctic historian Michael Rosove to write anachronistically of *Discovery*’s southern journey: “The men could not bring themselves to eat their canine companions, *even though the fresh meat was an antiscorbutic*” (96; emphasis added). The best medical analysis of the relevant history and Scott’s responses is by H. E. Lewis, who concludes: “There is nothing that does not confirm Captain Scott as a wise and meticulous leader, and a man of his time—no better, no worse” (42). Michael Stroud, expedition doctor for a 1985 re-enactment of Scott’s walk to the Pole, believes that “sheer starvation” contributed more to the deaths than vitamin deficiency (“Scott: 75 Years On”: 1653). And in *Antarctic Science* D. W. H. Walton comments: “Remarkably, the polar party, even after a vitamin C-free diet for 21 weeks, did not apparently show any signs of advanced scurvy but died of starvation, weakness and frostbite” (16).

danger (“one feels that no trouble can be too great or no precaution too small to be adopted to keep it at bay”) (*Journals* 269, 270). He had made similar comments in *The Voyage of the ‘Discovery’* (1: 403-06).

The debate over Edgar Evans was about the nature of his collapse and about Scott’s attitude to it. Evans was the most powerfully built member of the final group, and had been one of Scott’s companions on the gruelling journey on the polar plateau during the *Discovery* expedition. What had Scott meant by his diary reference to the petty officer’s ‘failure,’ asked the *Daily Express* (“The Problem”). Was he referring to physical or mental failure? Scott’s use of the term to describe Evans’s breakdown could, for example, be construed in the impersonal, physical sense: “the action or state of not functioning” (“Failure,” def. 3) and, in the verbal form: “break down; cease to work well”; “become weaker,” as in ‘failing health’ (“Fail,” def. 3). Instead, some chose then (and now) to interpret Scott’s meaning in the personal, moral sense of “the omission of expected or required action” or “a lack or deficiency of a desirable quality” (“Failure,” def. 2).⁷⁷ While conceding that “probably the tragedy which underlies Captain Scott’s reference to him will never be known,” the paper cited the view of “an eminent mental specialist” that “it is an uneducated man who would feel most acutely the mental strain and dreary, monotonous life amid eternal snows” because he would have fewer memories to draw on for stimulation.⁷⁸ This statement is an example of the acceptance by some early commentators that there were aspects of the expedition that would probably remain a mystery—without thereby becoming suspect. Few later commentators have taken this view. Instead, they have sought final answers to all the questions raised. In some instances, however, these are simply not possible: we do not have all the facts and cannot know with certainty the thoughts and motives of either those who died or those who survived to tell the story. All pronouncements on such things, therefore, can be no more than suppositions.

Several papers referred to the inexplicable shortage of fuel, one of the factors in Scott’s “Message” which the *Geographical Journal* had highlighted. And the term ‘failure’

⁷⁷ Jones, who discusses the “scapegoating of Evans,” himself employs this interpretation, stating that Scott “pointed an accusing finger at Evans” in the “Message” (*Quest* 110-12).

⁷⁸ As a non-specialist I find that this suggestion has at least some plausibility. Jones, on the other hand, believes that such comments made Evans the scapegoat of “Edwardian concerns about the relationship between physical strength, mental capacity, and social status” (*Quest* 111). Commentators have generally argued that Evans died of a combination of starvation, scurvy and concussion received during a fall. A novel proposal was added in 1987, when R. C. F. Falckh suggested, from a re-examination of Scott’s and Wilson’s diaries, that “the primary cause of his death was anthrax, contracted from contact with the expedition ponies or their equipment” (397).

reappears in another article in the *Daily Express* two days later titled: “Why Captain Scott Failed: Lost Fuel Mystery Explained by His Successor.” Here the word seems to be intended in the neutral sense of “a lack of success”—in this case returning alive (“Failure,” def. 1). Teddy Evans’s use of the term in his cited explanation of the critical fuel shortage is probably less neutral. It was the result, he says, of the “failure of the [polar] party to keep up to the average speed expected on the return journey.” Evans, as we will see, was at pains to protect the reputations of the survivors, including his own. The newspaper was sceptical: “Here, then,” it comments, “is the official explanation of the mystery. It still leaves unexplained the mystery of Scott’s phrase ‘for which I cannot account’.” A later column reports a statement by a London manager on the careful calculation, checking and cross-checking of fuel quantities, including by Scott himself, and the author concludes that the five words themselves hold the key: “Now try to read between the lines. The writer [Scott] ... is himself puzzled to account for the shortage, knowing, as he doubtless did, that he had distributed the fuel in the various depots, and that it was sufficient.” The implication here is probably that the returning parties used more than their allocation, something the men themselves strenuously denied. When Scott’s journals were first serialized in the *Strand Magazine*,⁷⁹ edited and with connecting text by Leonard Huxley “and carefully read and revised by Commander Evans”⁸⁰ (“To the South Pole” 365), Scott’s comment on the missing fuel was explained in the following way in Part 4 in the October number: “Apparently the fierce cold had injured the stoppers and much of the oil had vanished” (379). While this is quite different from the “official explanation” Teddy Evans had given to the *Daily Express* in February, both deflect blame from the survivors.

Correspondence some years later between Surgeon Atkinson (in charge at Cape Evans after Scott departed south and Evans returned home sick on the *Terra Nova*) and Cherry-Garrard, who at the time was writing his book on the expedition, gives an

⁷⁹ In *Quest* Jones states correctly that the serialization in the *Strand* began in July 1913 (121, 173, 319). In what Geraldine Beare calls the “magazine coup” of the year, the *Strand* had paid £2,000 for the story and photographs, and the four monthly instalments ran from July to October under the title: “To the South Pole—Captain Scott’s Own Story” (xxi, 736-37). Unaccountably, in his new edition of Scott’s journals Jones has them appearing from “25 June” to “30 September” (Introduction xliii). He does not mention that *Everybody’s Magazine* serialized the diaries simultaneously in the United States, the first issue also appearing in July. The title was changed to: “The Uttermost South: The Undying Story of Captain Scott: From His Diaries,” but the editor’s introduction differs only slightly from that in the *Strand*.

⁸⁰ Wheeler states that on the return voyage to New Zealand, Atkinson told Cherry-Garrard that “Evans wanted to doctor Scott’s ‘Message to the Public’ before it was cabled to the world at large. Specifically, he wanted to omit the references to the oil shortages. Atch [Atkinson] was determined to stop him” (*Cherry* 151).

indication of unpleasant behind-the-scenes politics that may have been there from the start. "I want ... to give you one word," writes Atkinson on 17 April 1919, "T E [Teddy Evans] is just itching at present for trouble. If you have anything in the least disparaging about him he will be out for trouble of the worst sort and of course we want to avoid all that." And on 5 December:

I don't know if you know that there were several letters (private letters) written by the owner [Scott] condemning Evans in no unmeasured terms, saying he was being "sent home as he was unsuitable" and that he ought "never to have made him second in command of the Expedition"⁸¹ ... Evans to my mind is being bolstered up on a publicity which is false. In his lectures he makes statements of which he has no record of whether they are false or not. But he has got the eye of the public and knows how to work the newspapers. At the same time he is dangerous and out for trouble. But for that fact I am certain he would not be. If he knew the evidence against him and if it could be produced: in case it were needed. I have felt the whole affair most damnably ... The only thing that has held me quiet is the Service point of view and unfortunately at present I am dependent on that...

Cherry-Garrard's own diary of the expedition had contained angry comments about his wish to see Teddy Evans "branded the traitor and liar he is" (qtd. Wheeler, *Cherry* 150), and Kathleen Scott's record various dramas involving the second-in-command and his wife which almost prevented the expedition from leaving New Zealand at all. Nonetheless, Evans went on to have a stellar naval career and was made an admiral and a peer. And he was not the only expedition member eager to protect his reputation. Cherry-Garrard, for example, was at pains to have a public statement made to refute the opinion some expressed that he could have gone out further south with the dog teams from One Ton Depot and possibly saved Scott, Wilson and Bowers.

All of this represents a caveat about the reliability of contemporary comment, including that by expedition members. Apart from those who might have wished to protect their reputations, careers or egos from the possible consequences of scrutiny of certain actions in Antarctica, there is the degree of error or spin which accompanies newspaper reporting in particular.⁸² A useful reminder of this is to be found in a book

⁸¹ One such letter was to Kinsey on 28 October 1911. Here, at least, Scott does not "condemn" Evans, but writes: "Teddy Evans is a thoroughly well meaning little man, but proves on close acquaintance to be rather a duffer in anything but his own particular work. All this is strictly 'entre nous,' but he is not at all fitted to be 'Second-in-Command,' as I was foolish enough to name him. I am going to take some steps concerning this, as it would not do to leave him in charge here [Cape Evans] in case I am late returning [from the Pole]." Scott's attitude here is consistent with that in his diary.

⁸² In *The Myth of the Explorer* Beau Riffenburgh emphasizes the role of sensationalism in the creation of myths about explorers in the popular press.

of press clippings donated to the archives of Scott Polar Research Institute by Sir Peter Scott, the explorer's son. The last page includes a press photo of his mother, Kathleen, disembarking on her return to England: "Lady Scott's Return: Widow of Famous Explorer Arrives in England." The caption, purportedly Kathleen Scott's own words, reads: "I must be brave; as my husband would wish me to be." This has been crossed out and the word "Lie!" scribbled next to it. Another clipping with the same quotation has been treated similarly, with the words "She didn't." Presumably these annotations are by Peter Scott himself. Kathleen Scott's diaries, which are in the archives of the University of Cambridge Library (published as *Self-Portrait of an Artist*), and which record her thoughts and actions throughout the life of the expedition, also suggest that it is highly unlikely that this strong, free-spirited and unconventional woman could have made so sentimentally conventional a wifely statement.

This leads to the much broader question of interpreting events which are even more remote in time and place, and access to which is even more second-hand: the events in Antarctica, especially those involving the men who died there. We have already seen examples of the willingness of some later authors to sit in confident judgement on the conduct of the expedition—usually on Scott's actions—without even reading the contemporary commentary. It would still be difficult to better the advice in this regard given early in 1913 by the RGS president, Lord Curzon, in his first address to the Society after the outcome of the expedition was known:

I turn now to certain aspects of the Expedition, upon which much speculation has been indulged in, and about which a few words may not be out of place. First, as to the cause of the disaster. I think we shall do well to accept the balanced judgement of the Commander of the Expedition himself, recorded in circumstances which render deception impossible. ("Address by the Right Hon. Earl Curzon" 212)

Not only did Scott have more detailed information about every aspect of the expedition than anyone else, but he was also *there*—and he was the only one still writing in his diary during the last stages of their journey. The "circumstances" Curzon refers to are Scott (who, unlike Bowers and Wilson, did not believe in an afterlife) facing his own imminent extinction from cold and starvation, next to companions who were dying or already dead. In contrast to the survivors of the expedition, therefore, when Scott wrote his final entries, letters and "Message," he knew beyond doubt that he had no future or career to look forward to or protect. So Curzon's advice seems reasonable, unless his last point is discounted and one chooses to believe instead, as Huntford and others have, that Scott wanted to deceive in order to craft an

undeserved reputation for the future. But it needs to be remembered that such an ungenerous premise is an assumption, not a fact and, in addition, inverts the customary process of systems of justice which presume a person to be innocent until proven guilty. Curzon lists speculations about the “contributory or ulterior causes of the disaster” that had already been made within a month of hearing the news: the unplanned inclusion of an extra man in the polar party, the month’s delay in starting caused by the use of pony transport “and above all the decision of Scott to rely mainly upon human haulage in preference to dogs” (213). Taking Bowers as an extra man in the polar party was to become one of Scott’s most consistently criticized decisions. In view of Bowers’s remarkable dedication and physical prowess up to that point, it seems likely that he was chosen to strengthen the group. Certainly, events were to justify the choice—and perhaps also the argument (e.g. Mill, “The Discovery” 324) that one of the others should have been dropped. On the other hand, it is possible that Scott expected that five would move faster than four, since he did not doubt the condition of any of them at the time. Curzon concedes that all of the “surmises” he lists may have some validity, but points out that “it is easy to be wise after the event”⁸³ and reminds his audience that “it should be borne in mind that only 11 miles separated the final trio from safety, and that, had they won through, criticism would perhaps have assumed a very different form” (213). In sum, the RGS president is warning that all such criticism, however plausible, is surmise and made with the benefit of hindsight. Further, if the men had returned safely, as they nearly did, much of it may never have arisen at all: success would have justified them—as Scott had predicted it would Amundsen.

Barely a week after the fatal end of the polar party first became public, the *Daily Mirror* carried an excellent cartoon which satirized the second of these points (Figure 3). “When Heroes Meet With Disaster” portrays a series of elderly monocled gentlemen, effete or overweight, smoking or taking snuff in the comfort of their parlours while making sage comments about how *they* would have prevented the disaster. In the final panel a throng of asses and dunces adds to the chorus of “illuminating” commentary. Of course, most comment on this story, my own included, is made in comfortable surroundings and without any commensurable experience. (The rare exceptions may be books by those who have undertaken extreme Antarctic

⁸³ In his diary Scott himself admitted being wiser after the event in one regard: “Cooking for five takes a seriously longer time than cooking for four; perhaps half an hour on the whole day. It is an item I had not considered when re-organising” (*Journals* 367).

journeys themselves: for example, by Fiennes or Mear and Swan. But even in such cases, the responsibilities and psychological conditions were very different from *Terra Nova*.) As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, such comment may still attempt to be well informed and to avoid becoming pontifical. At the very outset, however, this cartoon and Curzon's comments had the measure of much of the armchair criticism of the time and also of that which would follow in the next ninety years.

WHEN 'HEROES' MEET WITH DISASTER—

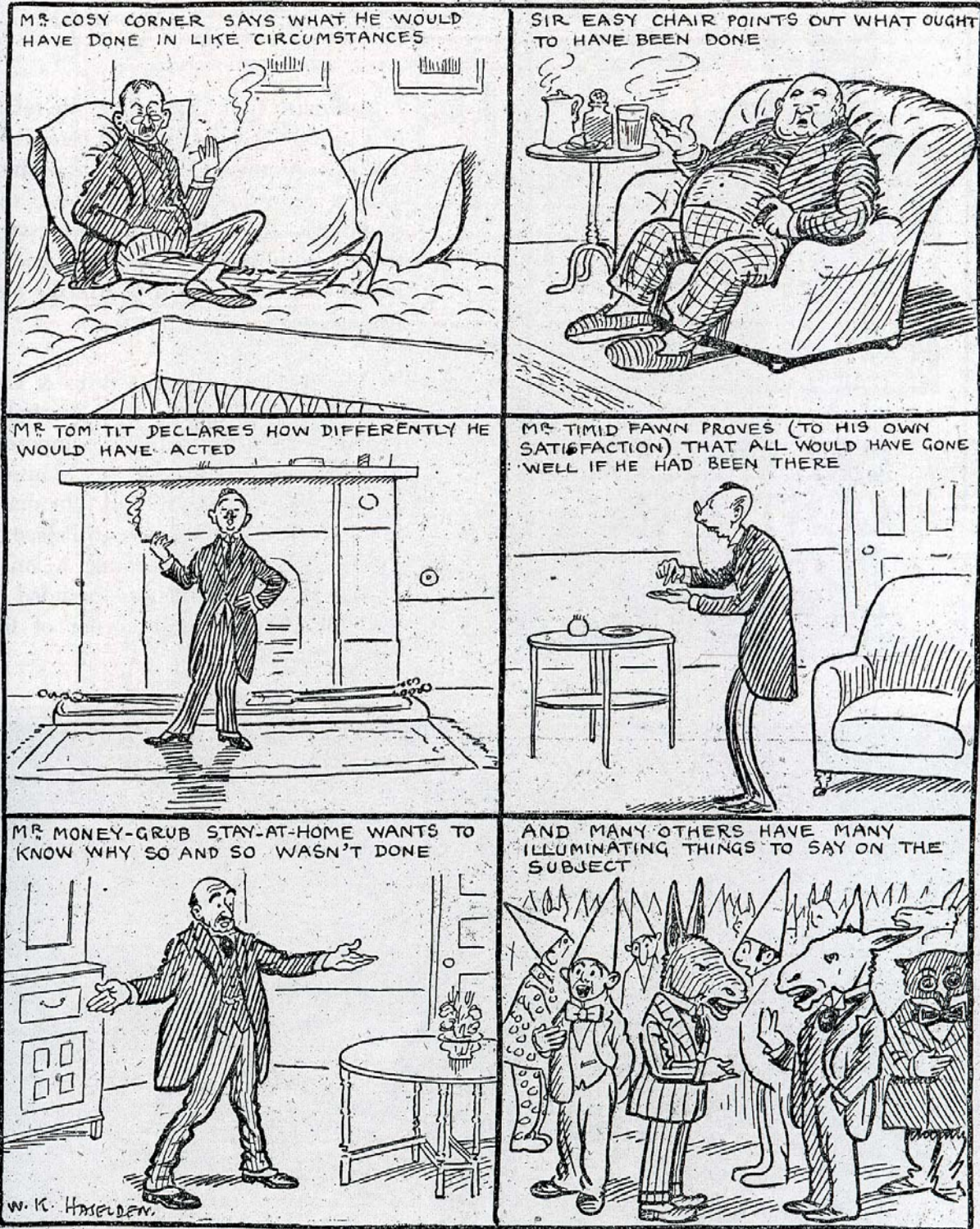


Fig. 3. Satirical depiction of armchair explorers in 1913

Recollected voices

THERE WERE MANY devoted diary-keepers among the thirty-three men in *Terra Nova*'s shore parties—Tryggve Gran, the youngest, kept six (*The Norwegian* 93). The voices of these participants afterwards made a substantial contribution to Scott's story, which I will now consider, together with Roald Amundsen's account. I have already mentioned the need for some caution regarding the reliability of even such eyewitness comment. Since most of the expeditionists' later versions are either based on their Antarctic diaries or, as with the British polar party, remain in diary form, it is necessary to say something about the nature of such texts. My remarks will refer particularly to Scott's diary, and I will also consider the claim that it was heavily edited for publication in order to present the author in a more favourable light.

Diaries

Scholars often employ the terms “diary” and “journal” interchangeably (Mallon; Lynn Bloom), and since the possible distinctions between the two are not important here, I will follow the same practice. In their “theoretical and critical introduction” to a collection of essays on women's diaries, Suzanne Bunkers and Cynthia Huff identify a plethora of issues and approaches in contemporary diary scholarship (1). Most pertinent to the present discussion are the interrelated questions of the purpose for which the diary is kept and “the diarist's sense of an audience other than themselves” (10)—both of which have an indirect bearing on the text's factuality. In his classic review of English diaries, Arthur Ponsonby excluded those of explorers on the grounds that they served a purely practical purpose and were not “personal” enough: “an explorer only uses the daily entry as a convenient means of giving a scientifically exact account of the enterprises on which he is engaged.”⁸⁴ Although Ponsonby allows that there are occasional exceptions to this rule in the journals of James Cook and Charles Darwin, it is strange that he does not notice how many there are in Scott's, although he quotes the last entry (27-28). As well as recording details such as wind,

⁸⁴ Seven years later, Elizabeth D'Oyley did include Scott in her 1930 collection, *English Diaries*.

temperature, surface conditions and the events of the day, Scott regularly expresses moods like hope, joy or anxiety, as well as personal observations and judgements of his staff. His diary, therefore, was considerably more than a merely factual record. Polar explorer Ranulph Fiennes explains that expressing emotions in a diary has a vital therapeutic function, as a way to “let off steam” under “the extreme stresses of enforced togetherness in uncomfortable circumstances.” When Fiennes read his expedition journal later, he could only: “wonder how on earth I could have written such bitter and twisted comments about good people who are now my friends and with whom I can remember having had no open arguments at the time (*Captain Scott* 44-45). Colin Bertram, a ship’s captain during the British Graham Land Expedition 1934-1937, points in addition to the “lonely position” of a leader and states that he too unburdened his feelings in a diary which was “never intended for general scrutiny” (146).

This introduces the important questions of a diary’s privacy and the extent to which the writer may have anticipated it would be read by others. Lynn Bloom’s attempt to enumerate the features that distinguish “truly private” dairies from “private dairies as public documents,” while broadly useful, raises almost as many questions as it answers. This is because there can be no final proof that a particular diary had absolutely no possible audience in view, and Thomas Mallon asserts to the contrary that “no one ever kept a diary just for himself” (xvi). It is only possible, therefore, to indicate approximately where a particular text lies on a spectrum from more to less private. In Scott’s case this changes over time. There is good evidence that at first his diary was intended to be quite private. On 22 February 1911, for example, he writes about the news of the Norwegian presence at the Bay of Whales (the comment was excised from the published version): “That this action is outside one’s own code of honour is not necessarily to condemn it and under no circumstances will I be betrayed into a public expression of opinion” (*Journals* 460). And in a letter to Kinsey, his New Zealand agent and friend, on 28 October he writes:

I am sending a copy of my diary and have told Drake to *deliver it into your hands*. I am sure you will like to have a look through it *and be silent concerning any criticisms it may contain*. But as it is the only copy I possess will you please send it on to my wife as soon as you can. I have told her it will be sent by you after a short delay. (emphasis added)⁸⁵

⁸⁵ While Scott was in Antarctica, his wife explicitly addressed her diary to him, for reading on his return, and wrote inside the cover of the 1911 volume: “... you neednt read all the contents, but if you glance thro’ it you’ll get an idea of my days & of course there are a few rather important things in it.” As we have seen, Scott also expected she would read his, and just before his death wrote at the front of the last

At this point, then, Scott's diary was only for the eyes of a friend who was also vitally important to the ongoing management of the expedition, and for his wife. Moreover, he explicitly asks that the criticisms it contains be kept private. Towards the end, however, when there seemed no chance of returning alive and the diary would be the only record left, Scott's words are certainly intended for an audience. This is most obvious in his "Message to the Public" and in a statement like the following, describing the death of Oates: "Should this be found I want these facts recorded ..." (*Journals* 410). To seek the precise point of demarcation between Scott's earlier personal and later public use of his diary seems futile. What is important is that the essentially private nature of most of the diary is generally overlooked, and it is scrutinized as if it was a finished document intended for publication. Scott is then pilloried for the unflattering comments he made at times about his men (along with a great deal of praise) and the editors of the published version are criticized for omitting some of those comments as part of a cover-up. After his *Discovery* expedition, Scott selected entries from his field diaries for inclusion in the book he published. Clearly he expected to do the same after *Terra Nova* and to have the opportunity to edit out personal comments that could cause offence—just like Bertram, who adds to the comment quoted above: "I have erased therefore comments of a more contemptuous nature...." Having clarified something of the nature and purpose of Scott's original, I will now discuss the editorial changes made prior to its first publication.⁸⁶

As explained in chapter 1, facsimiles of Scott's diaries have been available since 1968 (*Diaries*). Jones lists all alterations which "significantly change the meaning" in an appendix to the most recent edition of the dairies (*Journals* 457). Naturally, the contents of such a list depend on the kind of significance one is looking for. Describing Oates's

notebook: "Send this diary to my widow. R. Scott" (*Diaries* n. pag.). Similarly, Wilson's journal was "intended essentially for family reading" (*Diary of the 'Terra Nova'* xv), and the entire journal the unmarried Bowers began on 1 May 1911 is the continuation of a letter to his mother which begins: "My dearest Mother ... I have much to say ... so much more than I could ever write, & the idea of using a book for it seems the best, seeing that so much time must elapse before you can read it ... Of course I say things about myself & my own feelings which I should never write to anybody else." (*Diaries*). The first page of the section he later sent back with the final support party is marked: "Strictly Confidential. For personal friends & relatives only" (*Sledge Journey*). In a letter of 8 Dec. 1911 to his sister May (included with the same section) Bowers explained that he had asked his mother not to destroy the journals because, according to the strict terms of their agreement, expedition members' journals were "supposed to be available for reference." But he added, "that is merely a form probably."

⁸⁶ Leonard Huxley was the principal editor. Jones gives full details of the text's "Composition and Publication History" (*Journals* xlii-xlviii), but omits to mention Teddy Evans's role, noted in the previous chapter, in editing the magazine version.

deterioration, for example, Scott writes on 10 March: “Poor chap poor chap it is too pathetic to watch him—one cannot but try to cheer him up” (*Diaries*). The initial unpunctuated repetition was replaced with a single “Poor chap!” in the published version. Not surprisingly, the change does not appear in Jones’s list of emendations, and yet it makes Scott’s expression of sympathy slightly less personal and poignant. Similarly, the editorial substitution of a semicolon for the dash brings an extra touch of distance and formality. Nevertheless, Jones’s list is a great service, as the alternative is to pore through the facsimile versions, which, while the last court of appeal, are not always easy to read. And the main point of the list, in any case, is to allow easy scrutiny of the criticisms of Scott and the editors previously referred to. Jones mentions that the substitution of minus for plus signs in some temperatures is so arbitrary that some may have been typographical errors (*Journals* 457-58). To the charge that Scott’s character received a makeover, Jones replies: “the omissions do not fundamentally alter the image of the man projected by the published journals. Indeed, it is striking how many unattractive passages remained, including explicit criticisms ...” (xxxv). “Striking,” no doubt because of the expectation that a private diary *should* be edited before being published. In fact, the “explicit criticism” of Shackleton that Jones cites is not actually a criticism at all, but an expression of chagrin at the “extraordinary difference in fortune” between the surface conditions the two encountered on the Beardmore Glacier: “... at every step S.’s luck becomes more evident” (344). Bowers made similar statements in his private diary.

Certainly, there were criticisms which were edited. Some are trivial, such as Scott’s comment when Bowers broke a thermometer: “I am very much annoyed” (469), or after Wright’s lecture: “He is not a good lecturer though he knows his subject” (467). Others had an evident cause: Scott was highly offended, for example, at the way Shackleton’s expedition had left his old *Discovery* hut and writes, in part:

Everyone was disgusted with the offensive condition in which the hut had been left by its latest occupants. Boxes full of excrement were found near the provisions and filth of a similar description was thick under the veranda & even in the corners of the hut itself.... (459)

It is obvious that such comments would be removed, not necessarily in order to protect Scott’s reputation but because those criticized were still alive. Shackleton, moreover, was famous, and there was the precedent of his angry reaction to the mention in *The Voyage of the ‘Discovery’* that he had once been carried on the sledge when seriously ill. Scott’s implication that Shackleton made errors of position (469)

and exaggerated his journey (468, 470) would be removed for the same reason. There are few remarks about Amundsen. The example I quoted earlier shows Scott, although disapproving of his action, unwilling to condemn it, and another is at least honest: "... it would be hypocritical to pretend one wished very easy circumstances for our rival" (467). Certain excised passages show the leader assessing his men, but there is often light with the shade, as in the case of Evans (463, 465). Some of these cameos are amusing, as when Scott, exasperated by Gran's apparent laziness and malingering, calls him a "big hulking oaf" (461). Later, however, he notes his "great relief" at an improvement in the expedition's youngest member, which "confirms the idea that the first troubles were due to youth. With winter he has found his feet and developed into a thoroughly good boy ready to face hardship with the best" (468)—and this too was cut.

Alterations to Scott's 17 January entry at the South Pole add a dramatic and pathetic touch that is absent in the original, where Scott is remarkably matter-of-fact under the appalling circumstances. First, the "terribly difficult circumstances" in which Bowers is taking sights was changed to the less ordinary sounding "terrible difficult circumstances." Given that the published version is also less grammatical, this may be a slip.⁸⁷ An exclamation mark was added after the first two words of the famous, "Great God this is an awful place ...," and the dash connecting that thought with the next ("well it is something to have got here and the wind may be our friend tomorrow") changed to a full stop. From the entry's final words, "Now for the run home and a desperate struggle to get the news through first. I wonder if we can do it," the editors excised the words "to get the news through first." The second two of these alterations are understandable punctuation emendations. But the last, whatever its motivation—and perhaps it was felt that a race for media priority did not have suitably noble connotations—is unfortunate. It adds a false drama and pathos: at the Pole, Scott did not doubt their ability to return, only their chances of getting back before the ship departed north, and this was a purely financial concern.⁸⁸ But regrettable though this deletion is, it does not reflect on Scott.

⁸⁷ It is possible that the work of transcription was left to clerical staff with no particular knowledge of the expedition. The transcriptions from Bowers's diary in Evans's *South with Scott*, for example, are extraordinarily slipshod and contain several misreadings and dozens of minor changes per page. (On page 233 there is a similar alteration to that referred to above, where the original "A splendidly clear morning" has become "A splendid clear morning.")

⁸⁸ Scott's confidence about their return is clear, for example, on the second day after leaving the Pole: "It is everything now to keep up a good marching pace; I trust we shall be able to do so and catch the ship" (*Journals* 382). He knew that it was possible Amundsen could experience problems on the return

In sum, only sixty-eight words were altered or omitted from the sixty pages of the journal describing the return from the Pole, and Jones points out that “the two most significant passages, the account of Oates’s death and the ‘Message to the Public[,]’ were published exactly as Scott had written them” (*Quest* 124). There is little here to support the claim that the journals were “edited to conform to the imperial myth, what Roland Huntford calls ‘an affair of heroism for heroism’s sake’” (Pegg 559), and much to suggest that the majority of changes were made because the editors recognized that certain comments would be hurtful to people still alive. Moreover, in assessing the diarist himself, it is important to take into account both the essentially private nature of the text and the circumstances under which it was written. In this light, the excised comments, even read together in the condensed form provided in the new edition, are hardly damning.

Survivors’ versions

Amundsen’s book on his journey, *The South Pole*, had been published in English by John Murray in London in 1912, before the fate of the British expedition was known. The following year substantial sections of Scott’s diaries were serialized in magazines and then the whole published by Smith, Elder under the title *Scott’s Last Expedition*. But as Scott regularly pointed out, Antarctic expeditions were team efforts,⁸⁹ and during the next ten years several former members of his team gave their own accounts, delayed in some cases by the authors’ service in the Great War. In 1914 one of the geologists, Raymond Priestley, recounted the exploits of the northern party, including their winter ordeal in a snow cave on Inexpressible Island. Extraordinary though that tale of survival is, it is outside the scope of the present study. The third volume of the expedition’s in-house magazine, *South Polar Times*, also appeared that year.⁹⁰ The following year, the Norwegian ski instructor, Tryggve Gran, published *Hvor Sydhysen*

journey, and if the British could break the story first it would still be a coup, and one that would help the expedition’s troubled finances. Earlier, at Cape Evans, after it had been decided to extend the expedition for another year, Bowers had written that Scott would decide only after getting back from the Pole whether or not to return to England with the ship himself: “I personally hope he will not return & though I don’t think he wants to, should he be successful the financial position of the Expedition may force him to rush off & rake in the needful while the news is fresh” (*Diaries* vol. 2). Amundsen raced back to Hobart for the same reason.

⁸⁹ For an early example of such acknowledgement, see *Discovery* (1: 57). But despite the importance of teamwork, Thomas (Griffith) Taylor later explained how central their leader was: “For, make no mistake, that expedition to the South Pole was the work of one man alone. Scott conceived the idea and put it into practice. The responsibility and organization were all his,” and he goes on to describe Scott’s fundraising tribulations (“How I Survived” 27).

⁹⁰ It is now more readily available as volume 4 of the facsimile edition of Scott’s diaries.

Flammer (Where the Southern Lights Blaze), but this would not be available in English until 1984. In 1916 Taylor, another geologist and a noted wit, gave what D. W. H. Walton in his introduction to a 1997 reprint calls “the most entertaining of all the expedition narratives” (n. pag.).⁹¹ *With Scott: The Silver Lining* contains a wealth of information, including anecdotes, information and drawings on many topics, and details of the *South Polar Times* and the “Universitas Antarctica,” the winter lecture programme at Cape Evans (228).

After the war, in 1921, Herbert Ponting, the photographer, or ‘camera artist’ as he preferred to be styled, produced *The Great White South*. The text is illustrated with his own photographs and has an approving introduction by Lady Scott, consisting largely of laudatory quotations about the photographer from Scott’s diaries. Ponting, in turn, was a devoted admirer of Scott, and as Kathleen Scott writes, the book “teems with appreciation of his leader” (ix). It also emphasizes the expedition’s scientific mission, and a reviewer drew attention to the unusual difficulty of the conditions under which the photographer had worked (“The Scott Expedition”). But there is humour in *The Great White South*, too, as in the descriptions of penguins and skuas. Ponting had returned from Antarctica after the first season and released his documentary footage in several episodes in 1911-12. The first public exhibition of his photographs was held in late 1913, and a silent version of the whole film appeared in 1924 as *The Great White Silence*. In 1933 this was retitled *90° South: With Scott to the Antarctic* and a commentary by Ponting and music added. The film was handicapped by the fact that there was nothing but a few still photographs to illustrate the entire polar journey, a deficit which was partly remedied by the use of earlier characteristic footage and models. Ponting’s films and illustrated lectures were enthusiastically received, and in Jones’s view, together with the magazine serialization and book of Scott’s diaries, made up “the most significant accounts of Scott’s story published before the outbreak of the First World War” (*Quest* 181).

In the same year that Ponting’s book appeared, Teddy Evans published *South with Scott*. And whatever intrigues there may have been behind the scenes, and whatever he

⁹¹ Taylor was “a most valued contributor to the *South Polar Times*,” according to Cherry-Garrard, the editor, “and his prose and poetry both had a bite which was never equalled by any other of our amateur journalists” (*Worst Journey* 317). Apparently, he was also an engaging speaker. In *With Scott*, Taylor mentions a compliment he received from his leader for a lecture on physiography: “Taylor, I dreamt of your lecture last night. How could I live so long in the world and not know something of so fascinating a subject!” (240). Strangely, there is little evidence of these qualities in his diaries, edited in 1978 by Wayne S. Hanley.

felt as he read in Scott's diaries of his commander's mixed feelings about his abilities,⁹² Evans gives little indication of it here or in other public statements. The book's title, like the text in general, defers to Scott and its preface begins: "The object of this book is to keep alive the interest of English-speaking people in the story of Scott and his little band of sailor-adventurers, scientific explorers and companions."⁹³ It is dedicated to William Lashly and Thomas Crean, the companions in the last returning party who had saved the author's life, and as the *Outlook* observes, "no other version [of that episode] has the vivid quality of Evans's own account" (404). Probably the reviewer was thinking of the physical immediacy of images such as the writer feeling Crean's "hot tears" falling on his face when he was thought to be dead (223), his later waking to find "Lashly's kind face looking down" at him, and the arrival of the dogs that were his salvation:

[T]he leader, a beautiful gray [sic] dog named Krisravitsa, seemed to understand the situation, for he came right into the tent and licked my hands and face. I put my poor weak hands up and gripped his furry ears. Perhaps to hide my feelings I kissed his old hairy, Siberian face with the kiss that was meant for Lashly. (225)

In 1913 Evans had also written a panegyric on Lawrence Oates. Liberally illustrated with photographs of its subject, "Captain Oates: My Recollections of a Gallant Comrade" is entirely admiring, and one of the first tributes to a member of the polar party.

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⁹² Scott thought Evans "a queer study": enthusiastic and good-natured but lacking in intelligence. Such comments were excised from the published version of his diaries (see *Journals* 463, 465 and note 81).

⁹³ That Evans was well rewarded for his tact is shown by his subsequent career. He was astute (or good-natured) enough to realize that his fortunes were tied to Scott's reputation. A letter from the Hungarian Geographical Society gives a sense of this: "The recollection of your gallant leader and his four companions[,] who fell on the field of their glory, affect us all with an inevitable sense of sadness ... We ask you kindly to accept the gold medal awarded by the Hungarian Geographical Society as a souvenir of your thrilling address in Budapest ..." (Teleki, Lóczy and Halász 21; inc. trans.). Nevertheless, *South with Scott* does contain some complaints and implied criticisms of the leader. For example, of his own collapse from scurvy on the return north, Evans writes: "I had done too much on the outward journey ... too much had been asked of me." Given that the shorter journey was already too much, it seems incongruous that he then says that bitter disappointment at not being chosen to go on to the Pole contributed to his breakdown (223). But no doubt the disappointment was a factor, just as being second at the Pole probably played its part in the decline of the polar party—although that question, too, has always elicited opposing opinions.

Apsley Cherry-Garrard's *The Worst Journey in the World*, which appeared in 1922, must be discussed at much greater length. It is the best-known and most celebrated account of the expedition apart from, or perhaps even including, Scott's and is routinely referred to as a "classic" (King, *Scott's Last Journey* 106), a "masterpiece" (Theroux, Introduction x) and "the finest account of Antarctic exploration ever written" (D. Campbell 267). It is certainly a remarkable book; but here I am concerned not with its literary qualities but with its role in the interpretation of Scott's story. And since it is also regularly cited as an authoritative source on all matters relating to Scott's last expedition, and the opinions and judgements of the author often accepted without question, it is necessary to review some of the circumstances of the book's composition.

Cherry⁹⁴ was twenty-three and a multi-millionaire in today's values (Wheeler 18) when he embarked jubilantly on the ne plus ultra adventure that would define the rest of his life. He was employed as an "adaptable helper" (qtd. Seaver, Foreword xx), and his notebooks demonstrate that in Antarctica he had to learn the elements of science from scratch.⁹⁵ He was gritty and determined, and a diligent and willing worker. Most notably, he edited the *South Polar Times*, took part in the winter journey to Cape Crozier, was in the second last support party on the push for the Pole, made a final trip to One Ton Depot with the dogs, and was one of the search party that found Scott's tent. The expedition leader was kind to the younger man, nearly twenty years his junior. Cherry noted in his diary, for example, that Scott complimented him about a meal he had anxiously prepared on a sledging trip: "Cherry, you are going far to earn our eternal gratitude," said Scott (even though it had given him indigestion), "I have never had such a dry hoosh [thick meat soup] as far as I can remember" (qtd. Wheeler 94⁹⁶). Scott also regularly expressed the warmest appreciation of Cherry's character and hard work in his diary and in letters to England (Seaver, Foreword). When the two

⁹⁴ This nickname was used during the expedition and is also the title of Sara Wheeler's biography, *Cherry: A Life of Apsley Cherry-Garrard*, which offers the best insight into this very complex, and later very disturbed, character. All parenthetical references to Wheeler in this chapter refer to that biography, and references throughout the thesis to the text of *Worst Journey* are to the 1994 Picador edition, which includes a new introduction by Paul Theroux and a 1965 foreword by George Seaver.

⁹⁵ The first pages of his "Collections register of Antarctic Marine Biological Sp.," for example, comprise schoolboy charts of the animal and plant kingdoms, and "Notes on Antarctic Geological Specimens" begins with basics such as the relationship of the Earth to the other planets and a diagram of geological eras titled "Geological Clock of World's Life copied from Harmsworth's Hist. of the World" (*Scientific Notes*).

⁹⁶ In *Worst Journey*, Cherry makes it a "chocolate hoosh," and Scott thanks him the same evening rather than the next day (342).

parted for the last time, Cherry was clearly still full of gratitude to Scott, and on return to base he drew up a document bequeathing Scott £4,000 (£185,000 in today's terms) in case Cherry himself died later in the expedition (Wheeler 130). Up to this point, with all its demands, it was still a great adventure.

However, when it became clear that the polar party, including his two closest friends, had perished, a profound change occurred in Cherry-Garrard. Bill Wilson had got him a place on the expedition, and he and Birdie Bowers had been Cherry's companions on the gruelling winter journey. Now, in Wheeler's view, "[s]omething inside him had broken. He no longer had Bill's lofty ideals and Birdie's unremitting selflessness to guide him." He began to complain angrily in his journals about work he was asked to do, feeling that he had already done far more than his share, and his feelings of loss and guilt turned into bitterness towards Scott—who in some way he held responsible for the deaths of his friends—and hostility towards surviving members of the expedition (140-41). The guilt arose from the question of whether he could have saved some of the polar party if he and Dmitrii Girev⁹⁷ had gone further south with the dogs instead of waiting for six days at One Ton Depot. The thought that eleven days after he left the depot his friends were dying just eleven miles south of it would gnaw away at him for the remainder of his days. After his death, Nancy Mitford, a friend of Cherry's, wrote to Evelyn Waugh: "If Cherry-Garrard had been more of a chap, he would have rescued them [the polar party] ... Scott or Amundsen would have tried no doubt." Wheeler, who quotes this letter, comments: "it was the accusation he most feared" (269). The adventure of his life, which had started out so magnificently, had turned horribly sour. No doubt this helps to explain the ambivalence of *Worst Journey* towards the expedition and its leader and the faint undertone of resentment. It also contributed to the author's gradual psychological breakdown (280).

Determined to exercise full editorial control over his magnum opus, Cherry had rejected the invitation of the expedition's publishing committee to write the official account. Once the expedition's greenest member, he now saw himself as the 'keeper of the truth' (see Wheeler 170), with unique authority to comment and judge. He was more than happy to oblige, and the final chapter of his book begins:

⁹⁷ I employ the transliteration recommended by Yuzefov, who considers the history of variant spellings of the man's name (253-54).

I shall inevitably be asked for a word of mature judgement of the expedition of a kind that was impossible when we were all close up to it, and when I was a subaltern of 24, not incapable of judging my elders, but too young to have found out whether my judgement was worth anything. (562)

The last question, we can take it, is now quite settled. Certainly, Cherry is capable of judging his elders: “Let me first do full justice to Amundsen ...” (562); “If Scott was going up the Beardmore he was probably right not to take dogs ... (595). At times his tone of authority develops a pontifical, even biblical, quality:

And I tell you, if you have the desire for knowledge and the power to give it physical expression, go out and explore. If you are a brave man you will do nothing; if you are fearful you may do much, for none but cowards have need to prove their bravery. (597)

Throughout *Worst Journey* ‘science’ and ‘knowledge’ are Cherry’s watchwords. “We travelled for Science,” he insists (232. See also xcii, 274, 407, 564, 595). This was how he attempted to legitimize his own part in the expedition and give meaning to his suffering. H. L. Mencken, reviewing the US edition of the book in 1930, was unconvinced:

The thing that takes men on such hazardous trips is really not any thirst for knowledge, but simply a yearning for adventure. But just as an American businessman, having amassed a fortune, always tries to make it appear that he never had any desire for money, but only wanted to set up an orphan asylum or get time to study golf, so a Polar explorer always talks grandly of sacrificing his fingers and toes to science. (qtd. Wheeler 236)

This does seem a more accurate assessment of Cherry’s motives on joining *Terra Nova*. But tragedy, a world war and more than a decade had intervened. A perceptive early reviewer seems to have been able to tell a good deal from its cover about the book Cherry finally produced:

The two volumes of this work look refined enough for the collected edition of a wealthy poet so obscure that he had determined to spend a fortune on printer and bookbinder to get justice done to himself. (H. M. T.)

Certainly, Cherry had refused to allow *Terra Nova*’s official publishing committee to have any oversight of the book’s preparation, had not named it after the famous polar journey but after the winter journey he had made with Wilson and Bowers, and had published and paid for it himself.

The powerful influence playwright George Bernard Shaw had on the book’s production must be also taken into account, since Shaw had very decided views about

the *dramatis personae*, as about most things. Some thirty years older than Cherry, Shaw was a close friend and perhaps, like Scott, a father substitute.⁹⁸ Shaw's biographer, Michael Holroyd, implies this when he writes that Cherry

made Scott a temporary replacement for his father. He had worshipped Scott but ... came to resent his influence. To reconcile these feelings of worship and resentment he simply divided Scott in two.

Shaw's vicarious enjoyment of the Antarctic adventures was one reason for his involvement in the book of which "he almost took command" (3: 104). In addition, for decades Shaw had "relished schoolmastering the English and promoting foreigners over them." He took the view that Amundsen was "an explorer of genius," while Scott was "so unsuited to the job he insisted on undertaking that he ended as the most incompetent failure in the history of exploration," and there was a need to "debunk him frankly" (qtd. 3: 105).⁹⁹ Cherry, on the other hand, Shaw "need[ed] to see ... as a superman" (3: 105). During the preparation of *Worst Journey*, as its author acknowledged privately, Shaw and his wife made editorial suggestions "word by word and chapter by chapter" (qtd. Wheeler 208). However, the playwright strongly discouraged any public statement of his role:

It would be fatal to make any suggestion of collaboration on my part ... You need not be at all uneasy as to the integrity of your authorship. All books that deal with facts and public controversies are modified by consultation, mostly to a much greater extent than this one ... You may be challenged as to your drafts on Scott, though I don't [sic] think you have overstepped the limit; but nobody will question you on any other point of authorship.... (Letter, 26 April 1922)¹⁰⁰

Shaw's singling out of passages referring to Scott as the most likely to raise questions about authorship suggests that his own influence may have been strongest there.

A description by Beatrice Webb in the 1930s gives a sense of Cherry-Garrard's personal decline and isolation. He was, she believed, "a semi-maniac in his hatred of the working-class ...":

⁹⁸ Cherry's father, who was 53 when he was born, died in 1907 (Wheeler 8, 40).

⁹⁹ The editor of Shaw's collected letters offers a rather different perspective. Dan Laurence reports the suggestion that it was Cherry-Garrard who influenced Shaw's opinion of Scott, and not the other way round (818). Shaw's letters to Kathleen Scott, however, do not give this impression.

¹⁰⁰ A document called "Rules of Punctuation by G.B.S. Lamer Dec 28. 1919" which Shaw wrote for Cherry-Garrard contains rules and examples for the use of comma, semicolon, colon, and round and square brackets, and gives an idea of the detail of Shaw's involvement in the production of *Worst Journey*.

He is at war with his neighbours; he has closed footpaths, dismissed tenants, and cannot keep servants. Years ago he was personally attractive, a rather distinguished youth with artistic and intellectual gifts, today he is drab and desolate, looks as if he were drinking and drugging as well as hating. I should not be surprised to hear that a revolver had solved his problem. (qtd. Holroyd 3: 195-96)

In the late 1940s he was still obsessed with his Antarctic experience and the old questions, and added a rambling 27-page “Postscript” to *Worst Journey* which was also privately printed. Once again, it was part self-justification, part elegy and part sermon.¹⁰¹

On 23 March 1923, shortly after the publication of *Worst Journey*, Shaw had written a long letter justifying the book to Kathleen Scott, whom he had known for years. He criticizes Scott and his running of the expedition, eulogizes Amundsen, and makes it plain that he influenced how they were portrayed. He warns her that since readers would be impressed by the “sensational chapter” describing the winter journey and the book’s “general ability and candour,” any objections would appear suspect. Shaw here identifies the aspect which appears to lend the author of *Worst Journey* his greatest authority: his part in the winter (‘worst’) journey, which figures so prominently in the book and its title. The master sums up his view of the text: “there is no doubt in my mind that it is by it that History will judge Scott.” Shaw was largely correct. Cherry’s was the most complete account of the expedition, because he was in a position to interview surviving members, collect documents and construct a narrative of the expedition as a whole, and the book has always been cited as an authoritative source. But it needs to be recognized for what it is: a highly ‘authored’ version of events, and not documentary evidence. For example, on 6 June 1921 Atkinson, who had been reading drafts, wrote to Cherry-Garrard expressing confidence about the arrangement of rations after Scott added an extra man to the polar party:

I am sure that when Bowers was taken on there was the necessary adjustment made in the rations he was entitled to. This would be rapid and would automatically be adjusted from and at the time of his departure with the Polar party. Although there is no mention of it Scott and Bowers would be too careful to miss the amount entailed.

Atkinson’s view was no less well informed than Cherry-Garrard’s own, but in *Worst Journey* the matter is given quite a different complexion: “There were more disadvantages in this five-man party than you might think. There was 5½ weeks’ food

¹⁰¹ Seaver was bemused by this “somewhat tortuous document ... [that] adds little of importance to the story,” and omitted it from the second edition in 1965 (Foreword xxxix).

for four men: five men would eat this in about four weeks” (513).¹⁰² Cherry, however, wrote a remarkable and popular book, while Atkinson wrote almost nothing.¹⁰³ And so, as Shaw warned Kathleen Scott, “History” has judged Scott’s last expedition and its leader through Cherry’s eyes. But Atkinson, and no doubt others too, saw things differently, and we return now to their accounts.

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Without the cachet of being first at the Pole, and also because it constituted a large part of *Terra Nova*’s purpose and activity, it was natural that the British would both publish and emphasize the scientific legacy of their expedition. In 1923 Frank Debenham produced a book on the surveying work, which a reviewer praised for highlighting this “inner [scientific] meaning” of the expedition, which had been obscured by its dramatic and human aspects (“Surveying in the Antarctic” 218). The same year, George Simpson, the expedition’s meteorologist, publicized another of its scientific aspects when he delivered the Halley Lecture under the title “Scott’s Polar Journey and the Weather.”¹⁰⁴ The talk, published three years later, is of particular interest, both because the role of the weather (on which Scott had blamed their deaths) would be much debated in the future, and because the lecturer was an expert and closest in time and place to the events. It is framed by references to Halley himself, leader of the first voyage “sent out for a truly scientific purpose” (5): the same quest in which, Simpson argues, Scott and his four companions gave their lives. A graph of temperatures in mid-November 1911 demonstrates a “startling ... daily variation in the temperature over the Barrier.” Even when daytime temperatures were similar to those at Cape Evans, at night they plunged an additional twenty to thirty degrees Fahrenheit below those recorded at the coast (11-12). (It was for this reason that Scott changed to night marches, so that the ponies would be warmed by their exercise during the coldest

¹⁰² Although, as Atkinson states, there is no record of whether rations for Bowers were taken from the supply of the returning party, Scott was certainly aware of the total amount available and did not consider it a ‘disadvantage’ at the time: “We have 5½ units of food—practically over a month’s allowance for five people—it ought to see us through” (*Journals* 365).

¹⁰³ Immediately after the expedition, as leader of the survivors at Cape Evans, he had contributed a short account of the search party, “The Finding of the Dead” (see *Journals* 453-56), and a description of the final year at Cape Evans (based on Cherry-Garrard’s diaries) to *Scott’s Last Expedition*. After that, he is remembered only for an article on Antarctic parasitic worms (see W. Campbell 9).

¹⁰⁴ Simpson’s initial meteorological report had been included in the second volume of *Scott’s Last Expedition* in 1913. He later published full records and analyses in three volumes.

hours.) Simpson adds that simultaneous measurements at Amundsen's base and Cape Evans revealed that

the Barrier blizzard is extremely local and confined to the western [Cape Evans] side of the Barrier ... To all intents and purposes blizzards were not encountered by Amundsen either at his base or during his journey to and from the Pole, while at Cape Evans blizzards occurred during about a third of the total time, and during Scott's journey to and from the Pole he was kept in his tent by blizzards on six occasions, while he marched through many more. (14)

And of the critical, unexpected snowstorm Scott encountered at the height of summer on the approach to the foot of the Beardmore Glacier, he states that although bad weather extended across the Barrier, "from the scanty records available it appears that the worst effect was felt just where Captain Scott's party was encamped," since another group half-way back to base experienced little difficulty. "Scott had good reason," Simpson infers, "to complain of the hard luck which placed him just at this spot at a time when it was having such abnormal and unexpected weather" (19). The conditions the men faced on the polar plateau were, he believes, "as much as the human frame can be called upon to endure" (20). And while, unlike some, Simpson is convinced that being second at the Pole was a terrible blow to the men, he concludes that "[w]hatever other causes there may have been, there can be no doubt that the weather played a predominating role in the disaster and ... was the immediate cause of the final catastrophe" (23-24). In his "Message," Scott had stated that "no one in the world would have expected the temperatures and surfaces which we encountered at this time of the year" (*Journals* 421), and the remainder of the meteorologist's lecture addresses the question of whether the conditions were normal for that area. On the basis of the evidence available to him he concludes that they were not, and that "Scott was the sport of fate" (28). It was a view that meteorologist Susan Solomon would confirm in 2001, at the same time praising Simpson for an estimate of Barrier weather that was "stunning in its accuracy" (164).

Simpson's lecture was reviewed in some detail by another *Terra Nova* man, the geologist, Priestley, who took a sharply different view from his colleague, and one much closer to that of Scott's debunkers half a century later. Priestley, a member of the northern party, writes that low temperatures do not in themselves prevent sledging ("Amundsen with his dogs covered 37 miles in the autumn in low temperatures after a fall of temperature to -45° F., but with a south-east gale intervening to sweep away the rime") and that the real problem is the "*fall of temperature* with its accompanying deposit

of fog crystals” (341). He argues that even if the remnants of the polar party had reached One Ton Depot, they would most likely not have made it back to base. Priestley then offers serious criticism of some of Scott’s decisions. First he states that, while recognizing the

dominant influence of the weather in bringing about the tragedy, ... it is important not to lose sight of the rather numerous predisposing circumstances in which the meteorological conditions played no part. Foremost among these ... must be placed Scott’s disastrous and hurried decision to change his party from four men to five. (341)

Priestley points out (and Bowers’s unpublished diaries confirm) that this placed an extra burden on Bowers, who, unlike the other four, had no skis for this part of the journey. “What Scott’s motives were we can only guess,” he writes (342)—and indeed there has been much guessing about this down the years, as about much else. Priestley’s criticism of the composition of the party appears less well founded than that of its size. He claims that the inclusion of Edgar Evans, as a non-commissioned officer, in the company of four officers may have contributed to his breakdown: presumably because he would have felt uncomfortable. But Evans was used to living at close quarters with officers. He was an old friend of Scott’s, had been with him on *Discovery*, and was one of the two seaman who had shared not only his gruelling plateau journey on that expedition but also his sleeping bag.¹⁰⁵ Edward Wilson’s medically informed opinion was that “Evans’ collapse has much to do with the fact that he has never been sick in his life and is now helpless with his hands frost-bitten [since the Pole]” (243). Priestley rejects the possibility of scurvy among the polar party and “feels inclined to doubt” Simpson’s assertion that their food on the plateau was insufficient.¹⁰⁶ Finally, he addresses the question of the fuel shortages found at the

¹⁰⁵ In *Discovery* Scott had written that some separation of officers and men at the base was “all very right and proper” and good for discipline. But he insisted that the two groups receive exactly the same food and added that “it is an advantage on such an expedition as ours that all should share the same hardships, and, as far as possible, live the same lives ... [W]hen we come to the hard sledging work that is before us ... officers and men must live and work alike in every respect” (1: 222). Of the evenings spent sharing a sleeping bag with Evans and Leading Stoker Lashly, Scott wrote in his diary: “... we have long arguments about naval matters, and generally agree that we could rule the Service a great deal better than any Board of Admiralty. Incidentally I learn a great deal about lower-deck life—more than I could hope to have done under ordinary conditions” (2: 199). He also paid a warm tribute to the seamen and wrote of the officers: “They, as well as I, will be the last to forget how much they owed to the rank and file” (1: 56-57). On returning to England, he saw to it that Evans, Lashly and others were promoted (Yelverton 328).

¹⁰⁶ Scott’s diaries support Simpson’s view. On the return from the pole Scott wrote, for example: 27 January: “We are slowly getting more hungry, and it would be an advantage to have a little more food ...”; 28 January: “We are getting more hungry, there is no doubt.” 29 January: “We are certainly getting

depots by Scott on his return. Noting that “all sorts of explanations have been advanced to account for this, ranging from the formation of an allotrope of tin in the solder of the tins under the influence of low temperatures and consequent leakage, to the shrinkage of the washers of the tins and subsequent evaporation,” he adds: “[w]e shall probably never know the truth.” This reasonable suggestion is then contradicted by two assertions, “Each returning party took, if anything, less than their share. Leakage did take place” (342), both of which absolved his surviving comrades from blame. This review is a further demonstration of the fact that, little more than a decade after the return of the expedition, there were few questions and criticisms that had not already been aired.

Other members’ accounts became available later in various forms, and I will mention some briefly. An anecdotal narrative from 1919 by Scott’s brother-in-law, the naval lieutenant Wilfred Bruce, appeared in three issues of *The Blue Peter* magazine in 1932. Bruce was with the ship throughout and makes no comment on the polar journey. Lashly’s diaries were privately printed in 1939 but were not publicly available until 1969, when they were published as *Under Scott’s Command*. The entries are mostly brief and factual. In 1947, George Levick, the northern party’s medical officer, recounted that group’s adventures in the magazine *Penguin Parade*, and in the early 1960s Taylor (“How I Survived the Scott Ordeal”) and Debenham (“Scott 1912: An Expedition in Harmony”) also gave uncontroversial reminiscences to magazines. Another description of the discovery of the tent containing the bodies of Scott, Wilson and Bowers, a short diary account by Petty Officer Thomas Williamson, became available in 1968. Wilson’s diaries were published with the minimum of editing in 1972 and Taylor’s, Gran’s, Victor Campbell’s, Debenham’s and Charles Wright’s followed in 1978, 1984, 1988, 1992 and 1993 respectively. Even a poem by a seaman on board *Terra Nova* has appeared (McKenzie).¹⁰⁷

The two important lacunae in this encyclopaedia of accounts are those of Oates and Bowers. Oates’s original diary does not survive. As his sister Violet wrote to Reginald Pound, one of Scott’s biographers, in 1965: “My brother’s Antarctic diary has been destroyed as my Mother wished, after her death.”¹⁰⁸ And Bowers’s diligently kept

hungrier every day” (*Journals* 386-87). Naturally, the food supply improved for a time as they reached their depots.

¹⁰⁷ Curiously, one page of *Notes from My Diary or My Voyage to the Antarctic* refers to the expedition as the “British Ontario Antarctic Expedition 1910-1913”! (8).

¹⁰⁸ Violet Oates secretly copied some extracts before destroying the journal at Caroline Oates’s insistence. In the 1960s, long after her mother’s death, she refused to let Pound see them, but showed

and interesting diaries, which are in the archives of Scott Polar Research Institute,¹⁰⁹ have not yet been published—except in extensive quotations by, for example, Cherry-Garrard, Seaver (taken from Cherry-Garrard) and Teddy Evans (carelessly transcribed). These two unpublished accounts are of obvious significance, written as they were by members of the polar party. Oates stopped writing on 24 February (Crane 558), Wilson three days later. After the entry for 29 January, a line in Bowers’s diary reads “From here dates are uncertain I think,” and there are only intermittent, bare notes thereafter, ending on 8 and 9 March,¹¹⁰ both with mentions of “Blizzard—no march....” Scott wrote in detail until 19 March, by which time his right foot was frozen. Then there are brief entries for 21-23, followed by a gap until the final entry dated “Thursday, March 29.”

What can be made of all these various accounts by expedition members? First it needs to be remembered that while the dead did not have the opportunity to edit, change or reinterpret their own diaries, the survivors certainly did. Moreover, only the polar party experienced the crucial final part of the story, and only Wilson and Bowers were with Scott to the very end. Their journals contain little criticism of their leader. Oates’s, which might have, are destroyed. Evans kept no record. Nothing of significance in the journals of Wilson or Bowers is factually at odds with Scott’s own version; and the last is not only the most complete and best written¹¹¹ but is also that

them to one of her brother’s future biographers, the very young Sue Limb (Limb and Cordingley 11-12; Smith 258-59). Limb and Michael Smith (Oates’s most recent biographer) tell us this much but not where the papers are today, and they are not listed in the SPRI manuscript catalogue. The interesting question is: why did Caroline Oates have the diaries destroyed? We can only speculate. But Oates had become a saint, and his mother devoted the rest of her life to hagiolatry. She slept in her son’s bedroom; “every room in the sprawling house was muffled in black crepe,” and she dressed “only in funereal black” (Smith 241). By all accounts an autocratic personality, she blamed Scott for Oates’s death and was also “particularly keen to ensure that she alone controlled the memory of her son. In the 1930s she deliberately blocked the first attempt [by Bernacchi] to write an authoritative book about her son and was not ashamed to resort to lying in an attempt to preserve her authority” (255). In spite of all this, Violet Oates kept her brother’s letters, including those written to his mother during the *Terra Nova* expedition, which are now in the SPRI archives. At times complaining and contradictory, these suggest that in the diaries also there may have been things that were not compatible with a saintly reputation.

¹⁰⁹ In 1990, H. G. R. King prepared *A Catalogue of the Henry Robertson Bowers Papers* in the SPRI archives. The collection comprises many letters (including the poignant last one to his mother) and other documents in addition to the journals. Strangely, the catalogue omits the final two volumes of the polar journey, which, however, are in the SPRI museum.

¹¹⁰ The month is an inference. The task of dating the rudimentary final notes is compounded by the fact that the diary has been broken up and the pages renumbered.

¹¹¹ Scott has always been regarded as a remarkable writer, and it is his words—rather than, for example, Wilson’s—which are constantly quoted. King, the editor of Wilson’s *Terra Nova* journals, acknowledged that Wilson, while an engaging writer, “lacked Scott’s powerful literary genius” (xvi). Even Huntford concedes Scott’s literary skill—but argues that the explorer used it for self-justification and to fabricate

of the leader. For all these reasons we are justified in giving this document first authority among the accounts, and I will make a more detailed study of it in the next chapter. I now proceed to commentary in the decades following the First World War by those who did not take part in the expedition. I will pass cursorily over questions already canvassed and favour instead any new viewpoints or nuances that appear.

Onlookers and echoes

Markham published his history of polar exploration, *The Lands of Silence*, in 1921. Scott is given pride of place in the Antarctic section, and the book ends at his last expedition. “In the whole range of polar history,” the admiring author concludes, “there is no greater name than that of Robert Falcon Scott” (504). Although Markham avoids commenting on most contentious issues, Shackleton’s and Amundsen’s journeys are dealt with much more briefly. He terms the Norwegian expedition “a miracle of forethought and organisation” (485). Two years later, a French physical education journal also found the miraculous in the British expedition, referring to the sheer bodily achievement of the polar journey as “a miracle of energy” (Strohl 19), and to the men’s “superhuman determination” (22).¹¹² But the journal emphasizes that Scott’s passion for action and effort was disinterested and that his essential legacy was one of character. The diaries are seen as uniquely valuable: “Imperishable document: never has the human will left a more moving token, across the centuries, than these few leaves scattered on the white carpet of snow in those infinitely desolate spaces” (“Impérissable document: jamais, la volonté humaine n’a laissé plus émouvante trace, à travers les siècles[,] que les quelques feuillets épars sur le blanc tapis de neige de ces espaces infiniment désolés” [20]).

While the expedition may have been eulogized abroad, this was not always the case at home. The following year a London newspaper, commenting on the possible sale of Ponting’s original *Terra Nova* footage, lamented the fact that “... the British nation does not think it worthwhile to acquire this film as a national possession.” (Swaffer n. pag.). And when it was proposed to erect a plaque after the demolition of Scott’s headquarters in Buckingham Palace Road in 1928, the *Daily Mail* commented: “probably many passers-by would have difficulty in identifying its subject,” and

his own legend. Lisa Bloom, following Huntford, also finds only meretriciousness in Scott’s writing (122-25).

¹¹² French and German translations in this thesis are my own.

reported an anecdote by Scott's brother-in-law, Bruce, on his being introduced to "an important man in the city":

"Scott? Scott? muttered the individual, obviously puzzled. Then after some minutes' deep cogitation, he added brightly: "Oh yes, of course—explorer, wasn't he?"

"Yes," said Captain Bruce briefly.

"North Pole, wasn't it?"

"South," was the grim reply.

"Of course," said the man. "By the way, what's happened to Scott? We never seem to hear of him nowadays." ("Memories are Short")

Even if there has been some embellishment,¹¹³ this delightful vignette, in the style of Wodehouse or Jerome, is used to illustrate the newspaper's own view of Scott's reputation. The same year, H. R. Mill was disdainful of past heroics when commenting in *Nature* on the establishment of SPRI. The Institute, he says, was founded as a repository of knowledge in order that polar research could be conducted "with comparatively little risk and practically no suffering ... It appeared to many of us that the period of polar martyrdom should have been closed long ago, and that a stand should be made against the absurd appraisal of the greatness of explorers by the magnitude of the sufferings they endured" (333). Cold words indeed, in 1928 from the distinguished polar authority and vice-president of the RGS.

Reputation was also a touchy subject for Amundsen at this time. The publication of *My Life as an Explorer* in 1927 gave him the opportunity to look back over his career. He states that he has been honoured by many countries. But in a departure from the suavity of his early press comments and book about the South Pole, he complains about his treatment by the National Geographic Society, which had awarded him a gold medal, and is bitter about the British: "I feel justified in saying that by and large the British are a race of very bad losers" (71). In support of this claim he offers two examples. The first is that he has heard that an English school taught its students that Scott discovered the South Pole. The second is his erroneous assertion that the RGS president had proposed "three cheers for the dogs" at the banquet given for him on his triumphant return—a "thinly veiled insult" (72). In fact, Lord Curzon had introduced the explorer with a long and glowing speech ("The Norwegian South Polar Expedition" 13-15), and after Amundsen's own address Shackleton and the distinguished Antarctic explorer-scientist Dr W. S. Bruce had enthusiastically thanked

¹¹³ Two years after this article appeared, Kathleen Scott recorded in her diary that people sometimes began conversations with her: "I knew your dear husband Shackleton" (*Self-Portrait* 252)—so perhaps her brother's anecdote was simply factual.

and congratulated him, the latter ending with the words: "Great as has been my pleasure in listening to Captain Amundsen to-night, still more am I glad to have been allowed the privilege of seconding the vote of thanks to him." Then Lord Curzon spoke the words which so offended:

I will now put the vote of thanks for one of the most absorbing and, as Sir Ernest Shackleton truly said, one of the most modest lectures to which we have ever listened, and I almost wish that in our tribute of admiration we could include those wonderful, good-tempered, fascinating dogs, the true friends of man, without whom Captain Amundsen would never have got to the Pole. (16)

As we will see, his relationship with his dogs was a sensitive topic for Amundsen, and Curzon's remark hit a nerve. But the praise for his modesty notwithstanding, Amundsen's own speech had included the boastful barb that in the entire Norwegian journey, "[n]ot even a moment had we helped the dogs to pull the sledges" (13). So the president's tentatively expressed desire to recognize the animals seems eminently reasonable: they were the *sine qua non* of Amundsen's success and, as I will show (and Amundsen well knew), they had suffered terribly and died for his fame. In addition, given Curzon's otherwise unstinted praise of the explorer, it is quite possible that this comment was entirely innocent: Debenham later wrote that it was a "spontaneous expression of that wish to bestow honour where it was due" ("Stareek" 19). So Amundsen's second complaint, at least, appears petty, and overlooks the fact that the cream of British exploration society had honoured him with a banquet.¹¹⁴

My Life provides an example of the unreliability of later accounts of events, even by those who took part in them. An instance relating to actual exploration is Amundsen's recollection of the defining moment of his first Antarctic voyage, in the *Belgica* in 1898,

¹¹⁴ When Amundsen's complaints were published, 14 years after the events, the RGS secretary wrote to him, quoted what he had written and the words spoken at the meeting, pointed out the discrepancy and that he had been honoured in several ways, and asked for an apology. A high-handed reply from Amundsen's secretary stated that "the guest of honour ... for always and ever will remember such a gross insult" ("Captain Roald Amundsen" 575). There is more bitterness and self-pity in the book: for example, in Amundsen's claims that he was cheated by a man called Hammer and betrayed by his own brother, who called in a debt of \$25,000 (108-18). The matter with Leon Amundsen went to court, Amundsen was bankrupt, and "the Norwegians, almost to a man, turned upon me with unbelievable ferocity." The explorer's comment on this is unbecoming, in translation if not in sentiment: "They could not take from me the glory of the Northwest Passage, not the discovery of the South Pole—achievements to call which less than illustrious would convict even myself of false modesty if I described them otherwise" (116). The book also reveals that two men died on the *Maud* expedition. These two "boys," had asked permission to leave, which meant "a journey of 500 miles across the snow." Amundsen gave permission in the belief they would get back safely: "Indeed, I was rather glad, for one reason, which was that it would give us all an opportunity to send mail home" (92). This incident can be considered together with the loss of life on Scott's, Shackleton's and other expeditions.

when the ship was beset by ice. He describes how a storm blew them towards the ice to the south. In order to show clearly how this later version of events differs from that given in his diary at the time, I will need to quote at some length. Amundsen writes:

The instinct of any navigator accustomed to the Polar seas would have been to use every effort to get away to the north and into the open sea. This could have been done. But at this juncture my two superior officers saw an opening in the ice field to the south of us and decided to ride before the storm into this opening. They could not have made a greater mistake. I saw and understood fully the great danger they exposed the whole expedition to, but I was not asked for my opinion, and discipline required me to keep silent. The thing I most feared happened. By the time we had ridden out of the storm, we were probably more than a hundred miles within the ice field ... Here we were, fast in the Antarctic ice drifting round in the uncharted southern seas at the beginning of the long Polar winter. (25-26)

In this description, Amundsen sees the danger where his superiors do not, and although seemingly dismayed by their ignorance and foolhardiness must keep quiet. He also paints an alarming picture of their situation, reinforced by his next comment: "Our position was even more perilous than this sounds, because we were not equipped for a winter's stay in Antarctic regions ... It was a truly dreadful prospect" (26-27). The diary offers a very different view. For about a week the ship had been skirting the ice pack, trying to find a way through: continually sailing into it, getting stuck and then freeing itself. On 23 February Amundsen writes: "Unfortunately the scientists are very frightened. They do not want to sail further into in [sic] the ice any longer. Why did we come here then? Wasn't it to discover unknown territory? That cannot be done by staying at the edge of the ice and waiting" (86). He makes no mention at all of the event described in his book or any criticism of the commander's policy, although a diary would be a likely place to write such things. On 6 March, Amundsen simply records: "We are beset ... We may have to spend the winter here and I have no objections to this" (90). On the 11th he writes: "It has suddenly become cold ... The ice lies stationary around the ship. Things are starting to get interesting." And next day he comments on supplies: "We have still more than one hundred ton [sic] of coal in the hold, enough to break out in the spring when the ice is weaker. We also have enough provisions for one year" (91). Later entries express the hope that the ship will drift even further south and also a wild plan, his "greatest desire," to lead a long sledging journey in the spring, with the likelihood of becoming separated from the ship, spending winter on an iceberg and then making his way by kayak to Australia (92-93). I have dwelt on some obvious discrepancies between the diary of the young, unknown

Amundsen and the book of the world-famous explorer thirty years later for several reasons. Amundsen was a principal player in the South Pole drama. Yet, in stark contrast to the multiplicity of British accounts, we have little but Amundsen's own version of events with which to understand the Norwegian expedition.¹¹⁵ Moreover, whereas Scott's words have been scrutinized and often mistrusted, Amundsen's have been taken at face value. The comparison above also illustrates the broader point previously made about the care that needs be used when the later accounts of expedition members are used as evidence.

The complaints in *My Life* notwithstanding, when Amundsen died, a year after the book's publication, he was again publicly lauded on both sides of the Atlantic. The *Bulletin of the Geographical Society of Philadelphia* recalled: "It is no exaggeration to say that Captain Amundsen's lecture tour in the United States in 1913, following his discovery of the South Pole, was nothing less than a triumphal progress" (Bryant 200). It added that "towards the end of his career, he was acclaimed as the greatest of living explorers" (199) and concluded, of the rescue attempt in which he lost his life: "Nowhere in the annals of Arctic exploration, so rich in heroism, will you find a parallel to this supreme act of magnanimity and devotion to a sense of duty" (203). It seems therefore that, in the journal's estimation, he had supplanted even Scott and Oates as a paragon of these qualities. Equally admiring, the *Times* wrote: "There are

¹¹⁵ Amundsen's account of his expedition is still virtually the only Norwegian source available in English beyond the fragments Huntford translates. Helmer Hanssen, one of the Norwegian polar party, published an autobiography in English in 1936. But Michael Rosove has shown that *Voyages of a Modern Viking* is a very unreliable source, terming Hanssen's account of the aborted early start for the Pole "blatantly disingenuous" (185). A biographical essay from 1959 by Harald Sverdrup, a scientist on Amundsen's later *Maud* expedition, is slightly more candid, but adds little to the leader's own statements and deals with the South Pole expedition in two short paragraphs. Ian Hinchliffe published a "Profile" of Hjalmar Johansen (see chapter 3) in 1983. Johansen was older than Amundsen and had been Nansen's companion on the Arctic journey which made the latter famous. His criticism of Amundsen in front of the others for his behaviour during the premature start resulted in Johansen being excluded from the polar party and marginalized thereafter. Hinchliffe's article, to which I refer in chapter 6, draws on and occasionally quotes the explorer's diary, found after his suicide. The diary is not available in English. William Barr quotes a few interesting passages from the diary of a young Russian scientist, Aleksandr Kuchin, the only foreigner on board *Fram*. Kuchin describes Amundsen's startling announcement in Madeira of the change of plans. He also mentions telling the leader he was "amazed that he [Amundsen], who has so strongly condemned polar expeditions which are exclusively sporting in nature, is now undertaking precisely that" and Amundsen's reply about the need to raise money (405). Kuchin, however, did not stay in Antarctica but remained with the ship. A 1995 biography of the explorer by the well-known Norwegian writer and biographer Tor Bomann-Larsen has not yet been translated into English. Bomann-Larsen had access to material belonging to the family of Amundsen's brother as well as to documents that were not released until 1990. According to Per Anthi, the biography highlights Amundsen's "self-centredness, unscrupulous ambition and lack of empathy with others" (1008).

few, if any, parallels in exploration to Captain Amundsen's second and most dazzling achievement"—the discovery of the South Pole ("The South Pole Won"). A few years later, Charles Turvey published a reverential biography, *Roald Amundsen, Explorer*, which begins with the words: "No one in the history of exploration has been more successful than Roald Amundsen. But great as these successes were, the glory of his death magnified and, in a sense, eclipsed them" (1) and ends with an observation which both his brother and Johansen would likely have contradicted: "... no man can ever have been more loyal to his country and his friends. Those who knew him the best loved him the most" (214). But the biography is little more than a synoptic paraphrase of the explorer's own writings, which it also quotes extensively, and some of Turvey's omissions verge on the dishonest. He sidesteps all areas of controversy, to the point of not even mentioning the aborted early start for the Pole and giving the false impression that Amundsen had always intended to divide the expedition (85-86).

The year of Amundsen's death saw the publication of the most sustained criticism of Scott to date. *Antarctica: A Treatise on the Southern Continent* by J. Gordon Hayes is in several ways the prototype for Huntford's book half a century later. The author observes that "English writers, up to the present, do not appear to have given Captain Amundsen all the credit that is due to him; probably because his conduct in forestalling Captain Scott at the South Pole appeared unsportsmanlike." He himself, he continues, once felt that way, but "after full investigation ... found that there was nothing unsporting about it" (174). Hayes's investigation, however, seems to have involved little more than reading Amundsen's own justification in *South Pole*, which he paraphrases almost verbatim, including its assertion that Scott's expedition was principally scientific. When he comes to consider that same expedition, on the other hand, Hayes is strangely at a loss to find a statement of its aims (in spite of the public announcements referred to in my previous chapter) and guesses, wrongly, that reaching the Pole was only the third priority (185). Except for its "uselessness," through not having left even a bare record of the route taken or conducting other geographical exploration (180), Hayes sees Amundsen's expedition as "one of the most perfect exhibitions of man's supremacy over nature" (169) and a "model" for others (180), especially in its use of dogs.

In view of the superabundance today, it is ironic to find the author justifying the relative brevity of his own treatment of Scott's journey on the grounds that, since there are already *seven* published accounts, another would be "inexcusable, if not unnatural" (186). He nevertheless allows space for a fairly comprehensive indictment of a man he

also professes to admire, characterizing this criticism as “a sad and difficult duty” (197). The expedition’s first failing, in Hayes’s view, is that it “lacked originality,” in covering ground that had mostly already been covered. The latter point is undeniable, but the theoretical alternatives proposed overlook some of the practical exigencies the expedition faced. Hayes’s opinion, for example, that the Pole journey could have been dropped reveals a lack of understanding of the reason and need for public support, which he brushes aside with the comment: “*Vox populi* is as often *vox diaboli* as *vox dei*” (203). He mentions how Scott, as a senior naval officer, was constrained by an “often tyrannical” tradition, and lists “the many faults, and some of them serious, in the organization of this expedition” (201). These include Scott’s “burying his head in the sand” and sticking to his original plan instead of racing Amundsen (203)—rather difficult if the South Pole journey had been abandoned—and failing to direct a search party, as Shackleton had, to come out if he had not returned by a certain date.¹¹⁶ Hayes dismisses the claim that the explorer experienced any worse weather than others did, argues that the expedition was poorly equipped and that Scott had, “[i]nstead of the misfortune he pleads ... rather good fortune on the whole outward journey” (283). The sicknesses of Evans and Oates, he stresses, “*were not causes of the disaster, they were parts of it*” (284), and scurvy was a contributing factor. The author’s most severe criticism is that Scott did not rely more on dogs, a fault he finds “positively irritating” (204) and regards as the prime cause of the disaster. British manhauling he dismisses with: “we shall surely hear no more of that absurd method of Polar travel” (179). Hayes concludes this catalogue of errors with the judgement that, “with proper organization, the lives of the Scott, Wilson and Bowers, probably the lives of the others also, could have been saved” (284).

Previously, he had offered a contrasting view: “The writer is perfectly aware that, under the circumstances, the annihilation of the Polar Party was inevitable. There appeared every reason for confidence in Scott’s safe return, and no one is to blame for failing to prevent the tragedy” (205). The word “circumstances,” however, covers a multitude of sins. Hayes had been discussing the much-debated episode where Cherry-Garrard and Girev went out to One Ton Camp with the dogs and then, after waiting there for six days, returned to base rather than continuing south to look for the polar

¹¹⁶ The second criticism, too, seems to be invalidated by Hayes’s own statement: “Scott was not expected back at Hut Point until about 25th March; by which time he was writing the account of his own death” (204).

party. There is little to be gained from rehashing the arguments here.¹¹⁷ Apparently it is the survivors Hayes is exonerating, since he makes it clear that Scott was to blame in many ways, particularly in regard to the dogs. In the early history of Scott's story, especially, it generally proved easier to blame the dead than the living, for the obvious reason that the living, unlike the dead, might well object. Hayes quotes Cherry-Garrard's "trenchant criticism" (201) and Teddy Evans's implied criticisms of Scott with great deference. The former is prefaced with: "although as full of affection for Scott as the rest of us ..."; and Evans "should be able to speak on the subject of this expedition with greater authority than any man now living" (196).

In his introduction, Hayes had made a similar point to my own at the head of the previous chapter about a writer's approach in such a contested field. In contrast to facts and figures, he observes: "Deductions from fact form a different category, more akin to opinions, and these may differ with nearly every individual. One can do no more than strive to be fair and to maintain as level a balance as the facts permit" (viii).¹¹⁸ Hayes's history is certainly highly opinionated, but he does show balance: for example, by raising questions about the options open to Cherry-Garrard at One Ton (205)¹¹⁹ and by suggestive comments like the following: "Whether the organization of Scott's Expedition was less perfect than that of others may be doubted; for much more is known about Scott's, than about any other, Antarctic expedition; and a strong light is cast upon every detail" (202). Nonetheless, after his castigation of Scott's leadership there was little left to add—although here there is none of the vindictiveness that would subsequently enter the debate.

¹¹⁷ Commentators have usually accepted Cherry's justification of his actions. Seaver offers a reconstruction of events and refers to the "near-impossibility" of Cherry-Garrard deciding to act differently (Foreword xlii). Jones calls Cherry-Garrard's action a "wise decision" (*Journals* 408) and Solomon, who deals with the episode in some detail, excuses him on several grounds. Wheeler, Cherry's biographer, blames Scott's orders for the "muddle" (134), while pointing out, somewhat incongruously, that Cherry later stated that he would have continued south if One Ton had been supplied with extra dog food as Scott had ordered. Of course, Scott had no chance to argue his case and the only source of information about the trip to One Ton Depot is Cherry himself. Atkinson and Evans, both of whom, directly or indirectly, had a role in the difficult circumstances that arose, naturally supported the actions of their junior (and living) colleague. There is little information available from Girev's point of view, beyond a report in New Zealand papers that he had wanted to continue south to look for the polar party (Wheeler, *Cherry* 154).

¹¹⁸ He later added that "the greatest impartiality is necessary in dealing with the work of the great Antarctic explorers, particularly at the present time; because the last book that has appeared on this subject [Markham's *Lands of Silence*] has done Shackleton, Mawson and Amundsen a grave injustice [by its summary treatment of their work]" (141).

¹¹⁹ Fiennes also appraises these and mentions additional aspects of this episode (*Captain Scott* 356-62).

The year after Hayes published his history, an important biography of Scott appeared, written by Stephen Gwynn, a friend of the explorer's widow.¹²⁰ To some extent it was a response to the earlier criticisms. But *Captain Scott*, while obviously admiring, is not idolatrous, and it made public for the first time vast quantities of source material, to the degree that Gwynn's own text often does little more than add context and comment. The new material includes Admiralty memoranda and letters the young Scott wrote to his father and mother throughout his naval career; other letters to and about the explorer; additions to the extracts of some of Scott's last letters, originally published in *Scott's Last Expedition*; and, most importantly, numerous letters to his wife during their courtship and marriage and from Antarctica. Not only does all this provide much factual information, it also gives a very intimate portrait of Scott as a man, a lover and a husband. It is hardly surprising that Kathleen Scott, on reading the proofs of the book, wrote in her diary:

I don't know how I am going to bear having that published. I'm told he is not my property, that he is public property, that I have no right to withhold anything that throws light on his character, that I must subject my own susceptibilities to whatever is best to sustain his name at the highest. All that may be so, nay—is so; and yet when I come to see letters that have made me weep and will make me weep every time I think of them till I die, when I come to see these letters laid bare for my chauffeur, my grocer, and small boys at my son's school to read, my skin shrinks round me tight and hard. Shall I be able to bear it when the book actually comes out? ... To think that all these years nobody has seen those letters or known a thing of that amazing love; and now everybody who cares to can talk about it. It's twenty years ago [they had married in 1908], and it seems to me as present as to-day, and shocking to talk of, even to my nearest ... Pooh! despicable self-pity!

The final sentiment is characteristic of the writer. And copious, revealing and intimate though the published letters are, something at least was kept private: "Still the best letters and passages remain for me alone" (*Self-Portrait* 269).

Gwynn makes it clear at the outset that he is not competent to assess the technical aspects of the results and methods of Scott's expeditions and that, in any case, "the essential importance of Scott lies elsewhere than in what can be exactly recounted, or is amenable to criticism" (1). In Gwynn's view, it lies in the vision and moral example Scott indelibly communicated to his fellow countrymen, and it is the nature of this that the biographer sets out to explore. Although he argues that "it was not the deed which

¹²⁰ Previously, the only significant biography had been a brief sympathetic "Biographical Introduction" Scott's friend the writer J. M. Barrie had prepared in 1914 for an abridged edition of Scott's *Discovery* and *Terra Nova* journals (for the text, see *Journals* 446-52).

so moved mankind but the man,” he is nevertheless alive to the power inherent in the events themselves and describes that power eloquently:

Amundsen by an amazing exploit reached the South Pole and came back in triumph. That news would at any time have interested humanity, and made the sensation of weeks or months. But Scott’s arrival on that grim scene a month later gave to the episode a dramatic quality without precedent, which the tragic sequel heightened; yet in that tragedy Scott and not Amundsen dominates. The victor slips away, having vanquished not only the Antarctic barriers but his rival in the attempt; it is left for Scott to make mankind feel and understand and see what the approach to that goal meant. Nothing that Amundsen has written or could have written makes us aware of his achievement as do the pages of Scott’s journal, which tell how, having struggled through those solitudes where no sign of life existed, where no living thing had trodden, where the very air knew no passage of wings, they came on the trampled snow, the bamboo sticks planted, the flags, the written names and the message to be read at that ultimate tryst. (2-3)

Gwynn’s analysis identifies Scott as protagonist and Amundsen as antagonist, as well as the dramatic power of the story’s setting and its great crisis: the arrival of the British at the Pole. And beyond the common use of the words ‘tragic’ and ‘tragedy,’ his claim that Scott’s readers are made to “feel and understand and see” is reminiscent of the empathic involvement of the audience essential to the Aristotelian tragic model, which I discuss in chapter 6. He remarks, in addition, on the literary quality of the journal and tracks both character and writing throughout this book. His comments on Scott’s literary skills will be considered later.

In 1929, US Admiral Richard Byrd flew to the Pole without landing, the first in the area in the nearly twenty years since Scott. After such a long interval, his claims to have seen the cairns Scott (“that great soul”) had left reminded some of Cook’s and Peary’s North Pole claims years earlier (“What Byrd Saw”). London’s *Radio Times* announced a radio drama of the *Terra Nova* expedition in 1935 and included an article by Harold Meredith, who noted that although his contemporaries were “rather shy of the word ‘hero’... [and] adoration of the individual is out of fashion in this country ... Scott is still a hero to us all. His glorious life and death are so unrelated to any particular period that it is likely that his reputation will live far into the future.” However, the transhistorical quality Meredith perceives in Scott’s story has never appealed to everyone, and the wariness of heroism in the traditional sense persists today.

As the twenty-fifth anniversary of the attainment of the South Pole approached, Ponting’s *90° South* was revived. Some hailed it as “one of the finest films ever produced,” proclaiming, “Hollywood Never Beat This!” (Culpin). But it had been shown several times before, and a low-key advertisement in London’s *Daily Film Renter*

suggests its appeal was in fact limited: “Interesting offering for specialised halls ... always a welcome revival....” The silver jubilees of both the Norwegian and British arrivals at the Pole were noted by the British newspapers, which commented on the drama and tragedy of the sensational events twenty-five years earlier, and praised both Amundsen and Scott. To commemorate the day the British reached the Pole, the *Daily Telegraph* published a thoughtful response by Kathleen Scott’s second husband, Lord Kennet,¹²¹ to his own question: “We have many great stories: why is this one chosen for immortality?” He concludes that it is because of “the character of the men, and especially their leader,” as revealed in Scott’s writing (H. Young). I will return to the author’s insightful reading of Scott’s journal narrative in chapter 6. Taking a historical view of Antarctic exploration, the *Glasgow Herald* noted that “Amundsen’s type of expedition [with reaching the Pole as its sole objective] is an exception and Scott’s [with additional important scientific aims and results] the norm.” (“Capture”). To the extent that *Terra Nova* was a scientific expedition and left a legacy for other scientists, it is a remark which continues to be confirmed.

Three fairly conventional retellings of the expedition appeared in the 1930s. Following his earlier magazine reminiscences, Wilfred Bruce published a book dealing briefly and matter-of-factly with both of his brother-in-law’s expeditions. The story from the death of Oates to the end, for instance, is reviewed in one short paragraph (*Captain Scott* 48). Martin Lindsay’s *The Epic of Captain Scott* veers towards hagiography when it expresses pity for “those who say that Scott made mistakes” (170), and the book is mostly remarkable for its regular plagiarism or near-plagiarism of the words of Scott, Teddy Evans, Markham (see note 171) and others. Howard Marshall’s *With Scott to the Pole* is a small book, richly illustrated with high-quality reproductions of Ponting’s photographs, a few of them rarely seen. The style, even at the story’s key moments, is understated and also often paraphrases Scott’s own words. As usual, Oates is treated sympathetically and the remarkable stoicism of his last weeks acknowledged. Unlike most commentators, however, Marshall states plainly the life-and-death implications of his condition for the others: “Oates was holding them back fatally. They all realised that the drag of an unfit man meant the difference between safety and disaster, but not

¹²¹ Kathleen Scott (for simplicity, I refer to her thus throughout this thesis) married Hilton Young, later Lord Kennet, in 1922. Their son, Wayland Hilton Young, was born the following year. He, in turn, later had the title Lord Kennet (then writing under the name Wayland Kennet) and also made important commentaries on Scott’s story, as will be seen.

one of them complained” (43). This is a matter that will be considered in detail at the end of the next chapter.

In Europe, Scott’s standing apparently remained high. Extracts of his diaries and final letters were published in Germany, with a reverent introduction, as a reader for students of English (Hoschke). In France he was termed “certainly the greatest polar explorer, both on account of his character and of his death” (“certainement le plus grand des explorateurs polaires, et par son caractère, et par sa mort...”). J. Rouch, who made that assessment in *La Revue Maritime* (592), also wrote of Amundsen that, whatever the Norwegian explorer had asserted, his action in suddenly attempting the Pole was not generous (“n’était pas élégant”), because he had announced his plans at a time when it was not possible for Scott to modify his own and had risked changing the discovery of the Pole, which should have been above all a scientific conquest, into a simple sporting competition (604). And in Scott’s home country in 1938, Hugh Robert Mill took a more mellow view of heroic-era exploration than the one he had expressed a decade earlier, and gave sympathetic accounts of the major journeys leading to the discovery of the Pole. Despite Mill’s having personally known all the men he writes about and his many academic credentials, he makes a few surprising errors. For example, he states that on Scott’s last expedition “the dog-teams gave good service in the arduous climb [up the Beardmore Glacier] to the plateau” (“The Discovery” 323), when in fact they were sent back near the very bottom of the glacier (*Journals* 345). Mill also provides some new interpretations, which are important because he is regarded as an authority and his views have often been adopted by later commentators. Much has been made, for instance, of Shackleton’s decision to turn back, 97 miles from the Pole, on the *Nimrod* expedition. The explorer’s own description shows that they had gone to the absolute limit with the available food and that to continue would have been suicidal. Mill writes: “He knew he could have reached it if he had thought the glory worth dying for; but he preferred to come home alive” (321). This is one of Mill’s less well-considered statements, since it encourages the view (still argued) that Shackleton’s turning back was somehow noble—as if he could have chosen instead to persuade his companions to join him in glorious suicide—and in sharp contrast to Scott’s continuing.¹²² Such an interpretation has even led to the conclusion that Scott, against all the evidence of his diaries, ‘preferred’ to die (Moss).

¹²² Riffenburgh provides an extreme example of this position in a recent book on the *Nimrod* expedition. He regards turning back as Shackleton’s “greatest achievement of all ... It was, in fact, one of the most courageous acts ever performed by an explorer” (232). However, as I have explained, the claim the

Two of Mill's other observations which relate directly to the final events of Scott's story are of interest here. The first is his view of the decision to add Bowers to the polar party. "[N]o wiser step could have been taken," he writes, "if the feeblest man of the Polar four had been ordered home. But Scott would not break his word to anyone; so the five went on together ..." (324). This assessment of the decision itself may well be accurate, but the aetiology is not, since Scott had stated publicly that he had promised nobody a place in the final group. Mill's view of how Scott, Wilson and Bowers died is unusual, not to say heretical. Surgeon Atkinson, leader of the search party that found the bodies, wrote in his official report: "I can testify certainly that they all died natural deaths. This I can do on facts" ("Account"),¹²³ and this has generally been accepted. In his diaries Scott tells us that, as the crisis caused by Oates's incapacity mounted, he ordered Wilson to distribute a lethal dose of opiates to each of them; but he later writes that they had decided to die naturally, a scenario corroborated by Atkinson's report. Mill disagrees: "When their tent was found, a year later, the calm, happy faces of Wilson and Bowers suggested that they had found their euthanasia; Scott retained an expression of agonized resolution, showing that he had kept himself conscious to the last ..." (327). Mill's suggestion that Wilson and Bowers suicided did not gain currency; the two men's devout Christianity and the acceptance of divine will expressed in their diaries and letters to the end make it seem improbable.

A late christening and middle years

In 1940, George Seaver, who had already written two books about Wilson (*Edward Wilson of the Antarctic: Naturalist and Friend* and *Edward Wilson: Nature Lover*)¹²⁴ and one about Bowers (*'Birdie' Bowers of the Antarctic*), finally produced a biography of the other

author uses to support this view: that Shackleton "turned with the Pole in his grasp," is simply not accurate, if he was to avoid *inevitable* suicide. (It is also a close paraphrase of Huntford, who has: "Shackleton had stopped with the pole within his grasp, one of the bravest acts in the history of Polar exploration" [245].) Riffenburgh then elaborates his encomium via comparison: "Other explorers had died—or would die—while incautiously pursuing a goal, at the same time dragging their followers to the grave with them. But to Shackleton, the safety and well-being of those who had entrusted their lives to his care was first and foremost" (232). Comparison with Scott is explicit throughout the book and is implied here. But Scott was equally solicitous about his men's safety, and the chance to be in the polar party was a prize many in his expedition coveted. In addition, it is clear from both Riffenburgh's and Shackleton's accounts that *Nimrod's* leader was just as determined to reach the Pole as *Terra Nova's*, and also at times 'incautious.'

¹²³ Interviewed by Seaver in 1929, Cherry-Garrard stated: "When we found them [Scott, Wilson and Bowers] and Atkinson examined them, their skin was clear. There were no dark traces under their eyes as there would have been if they had taken an overdose of opium or morphia" (qtd. Seaver, Foreword xxxv).

¹²⁴ He added a third in 1948: *The Faith of Edward Wilson*.

member of the polar party's final triumvirate. His biography, *Scott of the Antarctic: A Study in Character*, gave Scott's story its enduring name, one that was cemented by its use as the title of the motion picture *Scott of the Antarctic* seven years later. And there is an interesting synchronicity in the fact that Seaver not only gave the story its name but also revealed a new awareness of it as a Story, with a life and evolutionary nature of its own, by prefacing his book with a long passage from Keyserling's *Immortality* (*Unsterblichkeit*). I quote the sections most relevant to the unfolding of "Scott of the Antarctic":

...Year after year imagination and criticism contribute new material to the edifice of [a dead man's] personality, and each successive generation keeps a new and enhanced representation of him. His temporal existence now forms only a part of the man of former days; by far the greater mass is formed by the imaginative faculty of posterity ... Between imagination and memory there is no sharp line of division ... There is no such thing as purely reproductive recollection ... [T]he dead ... are changed from the very moment of their departing ... [and] live ... on only as a myth ... A really accurate transcription of history, objective in the strictest sense of the word, is an impossibility. No historian can test exhaustively the accounts given by his authorities. (2)

These words, although Keyserling had written them in 1907, are a remarkable anticipation of the changes in historiography referred to at the beginning of the previous chapter. They indicate, in a very contemporary way, how a biographical story evolves via an unholy alliance between fact and interpretation. As commentary piles upon commentary over the years, and retelling upon retelling, it becomes increasingly apparent that the attitudes authors take to "Scott of the Antarctic," and what they choose to emphasize or pass over, to praise or condemn, in some ways reveals more about themselves than about the events or people they describe. Seaver, unlike most, appears to be aware of this. The subtitle of his own biography announces that his interest is in the 'inner' meaning of Scott's story, and from the first page he portrays his subject as a "spiritual adventurer" on a life-long journey of self-discovery (3). In sharp contrast to many future commentators, Seaver shares with Scott's other early biographer, Gwynn (whom he quotes [4]), a generous and sympathetic response to his subject. But the complex personality that emerges from the book is far from a cardboard cut-out. Again like the earlier biographer, Seaver is highly sensitive to the qualities of Scott's writing (I will return to his comments when discussing that topic), and to the poetic side of his character (130). Seaver's own perceptive and carefully structured work provides a demonstration of the fact that "Scott of the Antarctic" has attracted some very talented tellers. His personification of Fortune as an active force

throughout the biography (43, 70, 124, for example) highlights a dramatic element of fate in the life of a man he calls “the pivot upon which the history of Antarctic exploration turns” (39).

Two studies published in the United States remarked on the new era in that history which obtained at the end of the Second World War.¹²⁵ Thomas R. Henry, the author of *The White Continent: The Story of Antarctica*, a combination of general introduction and memoir, had been a magazine correspondent with the US Navy expedition ‘High Jump’ (1946-47). That mammoth operation took a fleet of twelve ships with a complement of four thousand—“a larger personnel than all previous expeditions combined” (viii)—to map the perimeter of Antarctica. Henry contrasts their “luxury cruise” with the hardships faced by earlier explorers. This new style of exploration employed up-to-the-minute technologies that were the legacy of the war and, although it had its own challenges and dangers, was clearly a far cry from the heroic era. Moreover, in the Cold War years leading up to the signing of the Antarctic Treaty in 1959, geopolitics, always a factor, would come unmistakably to the fore as the prime motivator of Antarctic exploration. In such a context it is interesting that Henry includes the “sagas of Scott, Amundsen, and Shackleton ... because they seem to give a human soul to this dead land ...” (viii). It seems that, in a bleak post-war world dominated by the large-scale and the mechanical, he is seeking meaning in the small and human. This was a need the stories of the heroic era supplied, as they still do. Henry gives a balanced retelling of the conquest of the South Pole—“one of the epic tragedies of history” (71)—but adds nothing new.

The other US publication, Sara Maynard’s *Scott and His Men*, is a narration of the *Terra Nova* expedition introduced by Teddy Evans (now Admiral Sir Edward R.G.R. Evans, K.C.B., D.S.O., LL. D.). Maynard’s somewhat simplistic¹²⁶ version follows the now-customary pattern of tracing Scott’s last expedition through all its stages, from its preparation to the leader’s death, with a coda describing the finding of the tent and a brief assessment of why the men died. Amundsen and Scott are both regarded as “great explorers” (9), but Amundsen the greater (152). As usual, the Norwegian’s own

¹²⁵ They also reflect increased US involvement in Antarctica in this period. This was dominated by the expeditions of Richard Byrd, which began in 1928 and led to the establishment of the United States Antarctic Service in 1939.

¹²⁶ Although apparently not written for children, the book’s language at times is colloquial and almost childish. Scott, for example, “had to have a good sum of money back of him” (1) for the expedition, which was “one of the brainiest and most colorful exploring parties ever to journey in the polar regions” (8).

breezy account of his journey is read completely uncritically (153), while some attempt is made to interpret Scott's writing (142-43). Like Henry, Maynard is nostalgic about the loss of "romance and adventure" in Antarctic exploration, and contrasts Scott's gruelling trek to the Pole with the nineteen-hour return flight from the Antarctic coast possible at the time of writing. She goes further, however, to locate the loss in the stories and texts themselves. Of *Scott's Last Expedition*, *Worst Journey* and Taylor's *With Scott*, she writes: "There will not again be such books published ..." (158).

Transatlantic commentary continued in a 1952 CBS radio discussion, "Scott's Last Expedition," part of a series on "great books and significant ideas" that was later published. One of the three participants was Arctic explorer Vilhjalmur Stefansson, who had known Shackleton but had never met Scott. The discussion pays most attention to Scott's skill as a writer and to the dramatic qualities of the story. In passing, Stefansson observes neutrally that it is now difficult to appreciate the "yearning for heroes" fundamental to a bygone era (Cohen, Stefansson and Bryson 271), and there is an early trace of the future condescension towards Scott in a comment by Lyman Bryson, another panel member:

In some ways, one is almost tempted to smile at the picture of the perfect English gentleman and hero that Scott presents in himself. It is never vanity, and yet there's always this very clear statement about himself: "we behaved well, we kept our humor, we trusted one another, nobody took advantage of anybody else. We stuck with our sick and dying as long as we could." You smile, and at the same time you realize that this is a great character greatly expressed. (270)

The speaker smiles at what, to him, in a very different world, seems quaint. But he also perceives something important behind the quaintness. Two decades later, as the smile turned into a scowl, that perception would often be lost.

Meanwhile, biographies for younger readers continued to present Scott and his men as exemplars of courage, endurance and selflessness. In L. Edna Walter's *Captain Scott*, the fact that Oates walks out of the final campsite (46) must have puzzled attentive children who already knew the story. Philip Briggs's *Man of Antarctica: The Story of Captain Scott*, the first in a "Courage and Conquest" series, is a far more detailed and substantial work. The pun on the back cover about the "chilling disappointment" of arriving second at the Pole is probably unintentional, and the claim, also made there, that "[t]hough they were defeated, they are the true conquerors of the white south" would have infuriated Amundsen, and Scott's future debunkers, if they had read it. But debunkers, or at least critics, there already were, since the reverential Briggs expresses

pity for those “who have actually criticized [the polar party], and asked what good was all that heroic stuff” (94). There is the occasional ‘Boy’s Own’ line like the following, describing *Terra Nova* in dock before departure. Cleansed of malodorous whale oil and seal blubber from its former work, the ship was “sweet now as fresh hay and as clean as the proverbial pin. On the bridge stood Captain Robert Falcon Scott, handsome and smiling ...” (60). Nevertheless, Briggs avoids what must have been a temptation in a book for a young readership: making Amundsen the villain. The fateful telegram to Scott, for example, is “a simple message from one great leader to another” (61). A shorter, simpler storybook version of the Terra Nova expedition appeared in the Ladybird series in 1963. *Captain Scott: An Adventure From History* (Peach) has striking colour illustrations, most of them based on Ponting’s photographs, facing each page of text. The book is remarkable for its consistently understated, informative tone. Amundsen is introduced before Scott, who is simply “an Englishman” (4), and there is no claim that any of what is recounted is at all exceptional or admirable until the final paragraph.

At the beginning of the 1960s an Italian army officer published a “historical-medical” assessment of Amundsen’s and Scott’s expeditions in the German journal *Polarforschung*. Under the general heading “Der Energieverbrauch” (Energy Consumption) (135), Massimo Cirone considers choices of base and route, transport, the use of personnel, food and psychological factors, and judges the Norwegians superior on all counts. In Russia, K. K. Markov wrote that Amundsen was one of the most fortunate explorers in the history of exploration and Scott one of the unluckiest, but emphasized that both had left important scientific results (“Dva geroicheskikh pokhoda” [Two Heroic Journeys]).¹²⁷ In 1962 the North American journal *Arctic* observed the golden jubilee of the arrival at the South Pole with a commentary called “The South Pole Fifty Years After.” The author, Walter Sullivan, writes that after half a century of “breathless change,” his contemporaries were now separated from the story of the Pole “by two world wars, by the transformation of empires, [and] by technological advances that have revolutionized transport and communications” (175). To help bridge this gap, he draws a comparison with the space race then in train: “the moon will be reached by burning up a succession of rocket stages and casting them off,” which he sees as analogous to Amundsen’s use of dogs: “the weaker animals being sacrificed to feed the other animals and the men themselves” (176). Sullivan lists

¹²⁷ The contents of the Russian articles mentioned in this thesis were kindly interpreted for me by Isabella Warren, Russian Bibliographer, SPRI.

possible causes of the British deaths, and concludes that transport arrangements were probably the decisive factor. He points, however, to their legacy of inspiration and to the fact that “[t]heir tragedy is almost better known than Amundsen’s success. Nothing quite like it has ever recurred ...”—since even astronauts are constantly in touch with and supported by their base (177). Concluding comments note the recent Antarctic Treaty, reserving the continent for peaceful scientific purposes, and the existence of an easily accessible US base with urban comforts at the South Pole. A few years later, Christopher Ralling recorded in the *Observer* that Peter Scott had followed his father’s ten-week trek to that place in a three-hour flight. Only at the Pole itself, writes Ralling, “do you feel the sheer enormity of tackling such a journey on foot” (27). And, in a sign of times, the columnist remarks on the fact that officers and men still had separate quarters at McMurdo base, as in Scott’s day, a custom that had mostly disappeared elsewhere. *Terra Nova* veteran Priestley commented shortly afterwards that making such a division by a mere line in the snow of their ice cave had “contributed enormously to our tranquility” during the northern party’s winter ordeal (“Inexpressible Island” 21).¹²⁸

Two major biographies of Scott appeared within a year of one another in the mid-1960s. Harry Ludlam’s *Captain Scott: The Full Story*, published in 1965, justifies its subtitle not through any sensational disclosures but through its comprehensiveness. For the first time, considerable use is made of press commentary on the various stages of both Scott’s expeditions and their aftermath. There is also judicious quotation from speeches and private letters, which Gwynn and Seaver had also used, and a wealth of interesting detail to be drawn on by later authors. The biographer’s considered treatment of Scott is admiring but in no way hagiographic or partisan. Amundsen’s decision to go south is treated sympathetically (164), he is referred to as “the complete polar traveller” (226), and a generous statement of his on Scott’s death is prefixed to the biography: “I would forego honour—everything—to bring him back to life. My own triumph is marred by the haunting thought of the tragedy”(10). Ludlam simply reports, but does not comment on, the fact that it was Amundsen’s secrecy which caused most resentment (204). Neither is the author antagonistic to Shackleton. He does, however, quote an unflattering retort that explorer made to criticism of his public fundraising on behalf of Mawson’s expedition at a time when *Terra Nova* was

¹²⁸ The former explorer, by this time Sir Raymond Priestley, also gives Amundsen’s conquest of the Pole the dubious but memorable cachet of being “the greatest geographical impertinence ever committed” (19).

still in Antarctica and desperately short of money: “[I]t will surely be a new law to make that no further British expedition shall be supported until the one now in the field returns” (177). It seems that Shackleton, whether by accident or design, had a knack of getting in Scott’s way. Ludlam’s final chapter is a thoughtful summary of the debate to that time about the reasons for the polar party’s failure to return. Noting that most criticism of the leader had focused on his decision to take an extra man, he even-handedly cites different interpretations of that decision (224). And while he accepts Scott’s and Simpson’s assessment that the weather was the principal cause of the men’s deaths, he reviews the explanations advanced by others, including scurvy and the lack of reliance on dog transport.

Ludlam’s quotations from Scott’s diary are from the published version. But in a 1966 biography employing the by then classic title, *Scott of the Antarctic*, Reginald Pound included for the first time material which had been edited out of *Scott’s Last Expedition* (see above).¹²⁹ There was not, however, as Jones implies (Introduction xxxix), any major revelation of Scott’s character in Pound’s inclusions,¹³⁰ since others had already painted the explorer in chiaroscuro. Ludlam, for example, describes the young Scott as, among other things, moody, untidy, indolent, dreamy, reserved, solitary, and with a “quick, explosive temper” (12). Pound’s portrait of him at thirty-three is almost the same, although he omits Scott’s temper from the list and adds that “[d]eviousness was entirely alien to him” (34). On the subject of temper, this biographer later remarks that Scott’s was provoked by the “easy-going response of the Merchant navy men [on *Discovery*],” when he was used to naval discipline. He quotes Scott’s steward commenting that he was not “bad-tempered in the ordinary sense of the term. He was over-sensitive and allowed himself to get worked up if things did not go as planned” (49-50), and physicist Louis Bernacchi, whose “one and only” experience of an “unreasonable side” to Scott’s temper had been an occasion when he offered advice and was rebuffed (67). What such comment does reveal is that every facet of this particular Antarctic hero’s character, like his every action, continued to be minutely scrutinized, and opinions offered. Pound, for example, although he acknowledges that Scott’s preference for manhauling over dog-sledges was based on experience, regards it as sentimental rather than logical (76-77).

¹²⁹ Pound had already written a biography of the expedition’s second-in-command: *Evans of the Broke: A Biography of Admiral Lord Mountevans* (1963).

¹³⁰ These include Scott’s disgust at Amundsen’s secrecy (229), assessments of his own staff (242) and a reference to Shackleton’s having exaggerated his polar journey (277).

The book canvasses all the traditional issues of controversy¹³¹ and, drawing on archival research and on personal papers which had not previously been used (vii), provides a rich fund of source material. A quotation from a letter by Scott to his mother, for example, provides a revealing glimpse of the leader administering tough love to a junior officer with good results (93). New information can also change earlier interpretations. Ludlam had mentioned Scott's suggestion to Armitage that the latter might like to return home after *Discovery's* first season, a suggestion which offended Armitage and which he rejected (75). This can now be viewed quite differently in the light of Pound's information that Scott, put in an awkward position by news received in private letters from England, was in fact trying to help the other man (90). Subsequently, the news has been spelled out as a scandal at home involving Armitage's wife (Crane 238-39). If a person on the same expedition, lacking information, could misinterpret the leader's actions, this is all the more possible for later commentators. The latter, moreover, draw heavily on the recollections and opinions of the former—which in the case of *Terra Nova* are legion. It is reasonable to assume, as some of the earliest interpreters acknowledged, that there are facts which will never be known. Caution should be used, therefore, in speculating about the motives of Scott and others. Like Seaver, Pound employs leitmotifs of fate and impending doom to give his book a tragic trajectory. But Pound was the first, as the story approaches its climax, to interleave the journals of the explorer in Antarctica and his wife in England in a kind of strophe and antistrophe¹³²—one of many skilful touches that make *Scott of the Antarctic* an unusually compelling rendering of the story.

The following year, L. B. Quartermain published an excellent scholarly study: *South to the Pole: The Early History of the Ross Sea Sector, Antarctica*, which includes full referencing of its impressive range of source materials. More than a hundred pages are devoted to Scott's last expedition. "So much has been written about the cause of the Scott tragedy," the author demurs at the end of his account, "that one hesitates to add another assessment." He proceeds to add one, nonetheless, on the grounds that "the

¹³¹ The much-debated question of Shackleton's being invalided home from *Discovery* (83-92) is given particularly detailed treatment. But had it been anyone other than Shackleton, the storm which continues today (e.g. Riffenburgh, *Nimrod*) over whether or not he was briefly carried on the sledge during the southern journey would have remained in its teacup. On the same expedition, Armitage reported of another journey: "Had to camp my party at 8000 feet, owing to their difficulty in breathing at such an altitude, and to the total collapse of one man, who was carried most of the way home" (Pound 89). That incident, quite naturally, was forgotten. And no shame ever attached—on the contrary—to Teddy Evans, *Terra Nova's* second-in-command, for being a "helpless passenger on the sledge," when stricken with scurvy during the return of the last supporting party (Crane 555).

¹³² The technique was later imitated by Preston.

historian is duty bound to attempt a reasoned explanation of why a carefully planned, well equipped expedition by men of the finest calibre met with disaster in a tragedy that shook the world as probably no other incident in the long story of exploration has done” (301). In Quartermain’s opinion “inadequate haulage power and food inadequate in calories and vitamins” were the fundamental causes. On these depended the other factors usually blamed for the disaster, which he considers under the headings: “The Late Start”; “The ‘Abnormal’ Cold of March 1912”; “Frostbite”; “The collapse of P.O. Evans”; “One Ton Depot” [being laid thirty-five miles further north than originally intended]; and “Shortage of Food” (302-03). Finally he gives a long list of other contributing factors, some of which might be laid to Scott’s account and some not (303-05). All in all, Quartermain’s is an exhaustive catalogue.

In 1969 another historian, H. G. R. King, confirmed in a general text that, still, “[t]o most Britishers the word ‘Antarctic’ is synonymous with the name of Robert Falcon Scott” (*The Antarctic* 217). He adds that, as an account of the story, there are “no substitutes for Scott’s own published diary” (221). King, too, refers to the causes of the disaster, and as he was the internationally connected SPRI Librarian and Information Officer (ix), his succinct view is worth quoting:

Much paper and print has been devoted to arguing the reasons for Scott’s failure. Enough to say here that Amundsen achieved his goal by abandoning all pretence at science and skilfully employing his dogs in the attainment of a fixed objective. Scott had no great faith in dogs and preferred to rely on man-power for the last leg of the pole journey. Nor was he inclined to jettison entirely his scientific programme, a positive disadvantage under the circumstances. Unexpectedly bad weather, a late start, shortage of fuel and food leading to premature exhaustion were all factors contributing to the disaster. Yet in a sense Scott’s failure was a victory of another kind; his diary and last letters have proved an inspiration and a lesson to future generations in the art of living and dying. (223-24)

This is a fair assessment. After all the decades of “paper and print” King refers to—including Pound’s and Quartermain’s diligent researches, and the publication by the former of some of the ‘warts’ of Scott’s journal—there was little left to be said about the real-life matrix of the story. All that remained was to rehash previous debates and pass old ‘facts’ through new personal prisms. It is testimony to the intrinsic interest of “Scott of the Antarctic” that this has continued ever since.

In an article in the *New Statesman* which considers Scott’s story, Dan Jacobson gives an impression of the collective prism supplied by the zeitgeist of the early seventies. Recalling the televised moon landing and recently advertised package holidays to the South Pole, he writes:

How antiquated, even implausible, must seem the escapades of these determined, self-assured Edwardian Englishmen, with their amateurish ways, their public school codes of honour, their Wordsworthian love of nature which they sublimated into a fanatical devotion to their own idea of Science.... (24)

Jacobson himself views the story largely through this new prism, and the article is in what Hayden White would call the Ironic Mode. It moves from Scott's shortcomings as a leader, through the "stunning defeat" at the Pole—where he finds Amundsen's letter to King Haakon with "a covering note asking Scott to be good enough to deliver it"—to the announcement: "But the greatest irony of all, of course, is that Scott became a legend, an idol...." The words "of course" indicate that the author knows he is stating the general view. Jacobson finds Cherry-Garrard, with his "grimly sardonic note" (24), more congenial, and the second half of the article is devoted to *Worst Journey*. Jacobson then repeats that in "post-imperial Britain" the antics of this "ill-prepared, bungled expedition" seem "utterly distant," and closes by drawing an unexpected analogy with Che Guevara (25). This was a taste of things to come, and it would only be a few years before Roland Huntford started work on his *Scott and Amundsen*.¹³³

In his introduction to Peter Brent's *Captain Scott and the Antarctic Tragedy* of 1974, Vivian Fuchs tentatively suggests that Scott's story has become "part of the world's heritage" (7). He shows that he is well aware of the dispensation under which he writes these words, but warns that it is inappropriate to judge someone from Scott's era by the very different contemporary standards. Fuchs argues that what should remain in the collective memory is the explorer's example, in extraordinary circumstances, of a "fallible man's mastery of himself and triumph over adversity"(7). He warns, moreover, that it is "all too easy to criticise [the techniques of pioneering explorers] in hindsight and in the light of technical advances beyond their wildest dreams" (8), and that even had the polar party lived, "they still would have deserved recognition for a prodigious feat of endurance ..." (9). As the former leader of the first land crossing of Antarctica (1955-58), Fuchs had a rare understanding of the environment in which Scott worked.

Perhaps following King's cue, Brent uses Scott's own words liberally in telling his story. "Legend," Brent argues, "simplifies its heroes," and, as a consequence of his

¹³³ Three years after Jacobson's article, Huntford published an interview with Trygve Gran in the *Observer Magazine*: "The Man Who Remembers Scott's Last Journey."

national apotheosis, “Scott has dwindled to become little more than his courage, his sense of responsibility ...” (208). In fact, in the author’s view, he was a complex, somewhat mysterious and essentially romantic man (212). One of the book’s many interesting illustrations shows Amundsen, whip in hand leaning on his sledge at the pole (169). In this photograph, which was not included with Amundsen’s own narrative, his face is unrecognizable and shockingly corpse-like. The poor quality of the image notwithstanding, it suggests that the Norwegian explorer’s own journey to the Pole was not quite the romp he subsequently made it seem. Also in 1974, Ann Savours allowed Ponting’s photographs to tell the *Terra Nova* story in her book, *Scott’s Last Voyage: Through the Antarctic Camera of Herbert Ponting*. The connecting text is explanatory rather than interpretative, and draws on the photographer’s and other members’ published versions. The final pages are reserved for Scott’s own words.

Two more Scott biographies appeared in 1977: *Scott’s Men* by David Thomson and *Scott of the Antarctic* by Elspeth Huxley. Thomson had previously written about the cinema and published two novels, and Huxley was a prolific and distinguished biographer. Only brief indications of Thomson’s complex and at times contradictory book can be given here. Although the character of Scott is absolutely central, the author deliberately includes interesting portraits of many others.¹³⁴ At one point he comments on the “mistake” of taking sides (30) and, indeed, he takes an even-handedly jaundiced view of the characters he considers. The book is often ironic and opinionated and is sprinkled with dictums like: “Anyone with more experience of Antarctica would have recognized the danger of making blind promises in advance” (112)—this from someone who states he has not visited the continent (xiii). On the other hand, *Scott’s Men* signals a new novelistic and personal approach to “Scott of the Antarctic,” motivated by the need to make sense of a legend that Thomson affirms is still powerful in a vastly changed, post-imperial era (xiii). The author, who is generally well informed, treats his characters as an omniscient narrator would and moulds the story with some of the freedom and imagination of a novelist. It is an approach that yields fresh insights as well as some simplistic notions. Thomson is one of the few to read Amundsen’s writing critically and finds, for example, the explorer’s justification

¹³⁴ Thomson finally defines the book’s title on page 99. “Scott’s men” is used as a catch-all term which includes, rather perversely, Amundsen, and even “those who lived in England and were moved to pity and wonder by the report of his [Scott’s] fate.”

for going south hypocritical (174-77).¹³⁵ He also proffers the interesting suggestion that Amundsen's plans were not as secret as tradition held (175-76) and has a sophisticated understanding of Scott's attitude to dogs (205, 233). Other suggestions are more fanciful: such as that the Englishman might have joined forces with the Norwegians, or turned back at the foot of the Beardmore Glacier (204, 263). King saw some good in the book, but criticized it for superficiality and cynicism ("Cynical View") and Wayland Kennet launched a full frontal attack, seeing it as a "debased end-product" of the "debunking school of biography ... which was founded with such zestful equanimity by Lytton Strachey (W. Young, "The Truth").¹³⁶ Thus the first shots were fired in a dispute over "Scott of the Antarctic" which would shortly develop the pace and intensity of stichomythia.

Huxley's biography represents something of a calm before the storm. It is noteworthy that her preface, like Thomson's, exhibits a new need to justify a biography of Scott. First the explorer's credentials as a national hero are listed, and then Huxley writes: "Each generation regards its national heroes in a different light, and for this reason, if for no other, his story bears retelling" (xi). But in fact this book, the last for two decades to employ the classic title, *Scott of the Antarctic*, provides an authoritative¹³⁷ and thoughtful compendium of scholarship to date, rather than viewing that information through a new lens. However, Huxley does add material gleaned from her own researches, including details which later accounts would borrow. The Queen's Pekinese, she tells us, fell overboard during a farewell visit to *Discovery* (47), and Scott acquired the lecturer's ploy of "running a hand in mock despair through his hair when a slide failed to come up at the right moment" (143). The book is a sympathetic biography of a "reluctant hero" whose heroism "was the conquest of the self, a feat

¹³⁵ At other times Thomson too "cannot resist" the explorer's prose, and terms the Norwegian's polar journey a "streamlined glide" (258)—words that Spufford, as I showed in chapter 1, would later echo in his "dog-powered glide" (319).

¹³⁶ Thomson replied to these accusations twenty-five years later, in the introduction to a new edition of his book in 2002. (Not surprisingly, the new title, *Scott, Shackleton and Amundsen: Ambition and Tragedy in the Antarctic*, was partly intended to take advantage of the current commercial appeal in the name Shackleton [xi].) Thomson states that he discovered "another Scott" in the unedited journals, but had not at the time realized he was writing a debunking biography (x). He now realizes that "the English were not ready for so complete a re-interpretation of the great hero," but that in any case the dismay his book aroused was minor compared with the furore caused by Huntford's two years afterwards (x).

¹³⁷ Even so diligently researched a book contains a few minor inconsistencies and errors. As a trifling example of the latter, Kathleen Scott's diary does not relate on 19 February 1913 that she discussed "American" (260) politics over lunch after first hearing of her husband's death: "I went down to lunch & discussed Australian politics." Although Huxley states that she has viewed the manuscript (285), she repeats this error from the published version (*Self-Portrait* 120).

perhaps more admirable than the conquest of the Pole” (xi). In her final chapter Huxley, like others before and since, explores some of the “many might-have-beens” of the expedition. She suggests plausibly that Surgeon Atkinson should have been alerted by Teddy Evans’s scurvy-racked condition, on the return of the last supporting group, to the similar danger facing the polar party; and that if a proper relief had then been organized, four at least could have been saved. A private memoir by Thomas Hodgson (the biologist on *Discovery*, but not a member of *Terra Nova*) is adduced in support of this theory (262-63). In view of all the attendant complexities, however, Huxley’s conclusion that “scurvy ultimately killed them” (267) is unsatisfying at this stage in the history of interpretation. So too are the final pages dealing with the men’s motivations for going to Antarctica (267-71). Here the author mixes much speculation with an uncharacteristically didactic tone, as for example in: “Not only are human motives mixed, but one often masquerades as another” (267). A similar tone is evident in Huxley’s preface, and it is symptomatic of an uncomfortable—although in the contemporary intellectual climate understandable—attempt to give a traditional biography postmodern covers.

In 1978 one Russian article still saw Scott, Amundsen and Shackleton as equally worthy of respect (Koryakin), although a second reserved its superlatives for the Norwegian (Kanevskiy). A year later, US author Theodore Mason was a voice in the wilderness in writing favourably of Shackleton’s and Scott’s use of pony transport. Mason argues that this was “a daring experiment” (11) and one justified by previous reports (12-13). He also notes that when Oates first saw the ponies in New Zealand (which he later claimed were in appalling condition) he called them “first-class” (99). All such passing commentary, however, would be forgotten—as well as, for some, all that had been written in the more than three-quarters of a century since Scott first sailed south—when, in 1979, Roland Huntford published *Scott and Amundsen*. In the next chapter we follow the fortunes of Scott’s story from that crisis up to the present.

Critical blizzards

Looking back in anger

HUNTFORD'S BOOK marks a watershed in the history of Scott's story. It has sharply polarized subsequent debate, ushered in a new level of partisanship and rancour, and has often been used as almost the sole source of information and interpretation of the story. The author had previously been the *Observer's* correspondent and sports reporter in Helsinki and Stockholm, where he had gained knowledge of Scandinavian languages (i), and the book contains his own selections and translations from much material pertaining to Amundsen's expedition which is still not available in English. The notes, list of sources and index at the back of *Scott and Amundsen* cover eighty-three pages and leave readers in no doubt that, in many ways, the author knows far more than they do. The impression is powerfully confirmed by the hundreds of individuals and institutions listed in six pages of acknowledgements at the front. Others have challenged Huntford on matters of fact, and some of these writers will be mentioned later. My own concern is more with the part his book has played in the history of "Scott of the Antarctic."

Scott and Amundsen is the work of a skilful writer and storyteller and is part of a new novelistic and journalistic approach to the story that I have already noted. However, since the book also purports to be a scholarly history, my principal objection is to its breathtaking bias. I will give a single example: the severe storm *Terra Nova* encountered shortly after departing on its final leg to Antarctica. Everybody knew the ship was overloaded,¹³⁸ but it was a matter of necessity. Scott himself details the loading process in his diary, and expresses some anxiety about the amount of cargo up on deck—"but everything that can be done by lashing and securing has been done" (*Journals* 11). He comments that the fully loaded ship was a "queer" sight: "Below one knows all space is packed as tight as human skill can devise—and on deck!" (13). Nevertheless, he states that when *Terra Nova* finally sailed south "the load mark was 3 inches above the water" (14). Huntford writes: "Two days out from New Zealand, *Terra Nova* nearly foundered

¹³⁸ Cherry-Garrard wrote to his cousin Winifred on 31 July 1910 from the Southern Ocean: "When we left Dunedin we did not walk on the decks at all but on coal, petrol & motor sledges—& on top of it all the dogs were chained."

in a storm. Scott saw it as undeserved bad luck. 'There were, however, rational explanations for what happened' (330). He goes on to describe how overloaded the ship was, mentions that the Southern Ocean is known to be stormy, and then writes:

Terra Nova had been stowed on the optimistic assumption of fair weather. Scott was hoping to slip through the storms. In those days of imperfect meteorological forecasting, it was rather like stepping blindly off the kerb into the path of heavy traffic and trusting to luck not to be run over. (330)

So writes a man who has not been to Antarctica (Wheeler, *Terra* 59) of the career naval captain who had already twice crossed those waters. But the main point here is how differently Huntford treats Amundsen in matching circumstances, when the explorer is preparing to sail *Gjøa* across Baffin Bay during his North-West Passage expedition:

Gjøa now resembled a waterlogged pantechnicon. A hundred and five packing cases crammed the deck almost to the main spar; atop the mound were perched seventeen raucous Eskimo dogs straining for a fight; and underneath the gunwhale [sic] was at the waterline. This was no state in which to face the swells and storms and meandering icebergs of Baffin Bay.

But, in a notoriously capricious sea, an almost unrelieved calm was vouchsafed Amundsen for his passage. Where others had so often suffered, he slipped across unhindered and untroubled. The contrast was stark. It was almost as if Fortune was already showing whom she proposed to smile on. Amundsen had one more justification for feeling sure of his Fate. (90-91)

Scott, then, is condemned for sailing a rough sea he had previously experienced twice, in a ship heavily loaded but still three inches above the loading mark, while Amundsen is extolled for sailing a rough sea he had not previously experienced, in a ship whose "gunwhale [sic] was at the waterline." The comments about "Fortune" make it clear that it is not "rational explanations" at all (as he claimed in the case of Scott) that Huntford is interested in, but sheer luck. And while Scott is denied the possibility of bad luck, Amundsen's good luck is celebrated. This, I believe, offers some explanation of the author's motivation in writing such a polemical book—additional to the debunking fashion of the times. Amundsen 'won,' and it appears that for some compelling reason Huntford and those who have imitated him need to 'back a winner.' By corollary, Scott becomes the scapegoat of personal frustrations at 'losing.'

The extract also provides an example of Huntford's remarkable literary skills. We can sense his pleasure as he describes the plucky ship and its cargo of boisterous dogs. There is the required, but secretly delighted, parental protest at the risk. A new paragraph: the reader pivots briefly on a "but" and a quick reminder of the danger, and

is rhythmically and mellifluously released into the luck “vouchsafed” for the chosen one, who, where others came to grief, “slipped across unhindered and untroubled.” The contrast is indeed “stark.” Amundsen is presented with all the blandishments literary skill can muster; the tone reserved for Scott is cold and unrelenting.

The dual ‘biography’ is in fact hagiography yoked to character assassination. The full extent of the book’s bias would be as tedious to document as it is to read. Fortunately, as Wayland Young (“Debunking” 9) and Ranulph Fiennes (*Captain Scott* 415-16) have also noticed, a snapshot can easily be had from the index, and I quote verbatim from the listings under the “*Characteristics*” of each man, omitting only the page references:

AMUNDSEN:

animals, love of; destiny, sense of; intellect; leadership, capacity for; loyalty; magnetism; modesty; physical fitness; rectitude, sense of; religion; sensitivity; sexual reticence; short sight; singlemindedness; stoicism; vanity. (639)

SCOTT:

absentmindedness; agnosticism; command, unsuitability for, criticism, refused [sic] to accept; depression, bouts of; emotionalism; impatience; improvisation, belief in; inadequacy, sense of; insecurity; insight, lack of; irrationality; isolation; jealousy; judgement, defective; leadership, failure in; literary gifts; panic, readiness to; recklessness; responsibility, instinct to evade; sentimentality; vacillation. (660)

The partiality here would be humorous¹³⁹ if it was not also pursued relentlessly page after page for more than six hundred pages—and if it had been seen by later authors for what it is. Not only does Huntford list almost entirely positive qualities for his hero and almost entirely negative ones for his villain, but there are also considerably more of the latter than the former. As this suggests, debunking is the book’s central, often aggressive, purpose. Even Scott’s much-praised “literary talent” is turned against him. Huntford sees this merely as his “trump” in a campaign of “masterly self-justification” (562).¹⁴⁰

Such a skewed, partisan view is inevitably a misrepresentation. The author concludes, for example, on the basis of his interpretation of the few incidents and comments indicated by the index entry that Scott had an “instinct” to evade responsibility or was, in other words, constitutionally irresponsible. By contrast,

¹³⁹ Wayland Young makes the suggestion: “Perhaps Huntford’s indexer had a sense of humour, because there is no other evidence in the book that Huntford has one himself” (“Debunking” 9).

¹⁴⁰ I would argue that Huntford himself, ironically, employs his literary skills as speciously as he claims Scott does.

commentators such as Le Guin have singled out a sense of responsibility as one of the explorer's most striking qualities. His wife certainly believed it was, writing in her diary after his death: "... I think never was there a man with such [a] sense of responsibility & duty, & the agony of leaving his job undone, losing the other lives & leaving us uncared for must have been unspeakable" (21[?] February 1913). In the light of my discussion so far, it is highly questionable that terms such as "modesty" and "rectitude" apply more to Amundsen than to Scott, and I will return to Amundsen's "love of" animals later. But it can at least be said that the Norwegian is not quite as unremittingly white in this book as the Englishman is black. Amundsen's treatment of Hjalmar Johansen after the latter criticized his behaviour during the aborted early start for the Pole was perhaps one of the least admirable episodes of his life. Amundsen never forgave Johansen and ostracized him when the expedition returned home, thereby possibly contributing to the latter's suicide. Nothing of this was mentioned in the explorer's *South Pole*, and Huntford's is one of the first accounts in English.¹⁴¹ Even here, Huntford's assessment is that provoking the "inevitable breach" with Johansen at this point is evidence rather of "one of Amundsen's greatest strokes of fortune" than of any shortcoming on his part (413). He does, however, include something of Johansen's point of view (415).

Huntford had been given access to many private and archival materials, as the acknowledgements demonstrate. Later editions also state that both Scott's son and the director of SPRI, Gordon Robin, publicly dissociated themselves from the book (vii, xii).¹⁴² The year the book was published, Robin wrote a review which commends the author for his meticulous work at SPRI, for checking references and discovering new and useful material, but states:

Unfortunately the end product is not a careful summing up of evidence that helps us to understand the relative merits and failings of the two men, Scott and Amundsen. It is an

¹⁴¹ In 1974 the Norwegian writer Kåre Holt had included these matters in his literary treatment, *Kappløpet*, which was published in English as *The Race* in 1976, and which I discuss in the next chapter. Hinchliffe gave a similar account of this sad affair in 1983, quoting Johansen's and Amundsen's diaries. He argues that Amundsen saw the "older, equally experienced explorer as a possible threat to his own authority" and resented his advice (593). Hinchliffe regards Amundsen's complaint to the Norwegian Geographical Society, at the height of his own success after the conquest of the Pole, that Johansen had committed "'an act of mutiny'" as "an act of astonishing vindictiveness" (594).

¹⁴² Fiennes claims that Huntford had used SPRI letterhead without authority when requesting access to papers from relatives (*Captain Scott* 426) and had later given the RGS as his address without permission (428). He adds that the biographer had promised Sir Peter Scott the book would not be a debunking exercise. After reading it, and the tribute of thanks for his assistance that suggested his approval, Scott instituted a court action. This he won and Huntford agreed to apologize and pay costs (427-28).

account by an admirer of Amundsen who appears to have a paranoid dislike of Scott and has set out to find all possible evidence in support of his views. (624)

Robin places *Scott and Amundsen* in the debunking tradition “typical of this age,” and believes that the “interpretation becomes more objectionable” at the end of Scott’s life, where, for example, without any evidence that this occurred, he is presented as staring at Oates, expecting him to die (625).¹⁴³ He adds that while Huntford’s referencing is “apparently meticulous,” the author selects only the material most unfavourable to Scott or, in the absence of any, “reads between the lines” and uses his imagination. Robin also notes the use of “journalistic devices” to increase the book’s interest. Others echoed all of these points in reviews the following year. Fuchs, who states that “the full force of his [Huntford’s] vitriolic pen falls upon Scott as though he were pursuing a vendetta” (272), quotes a letter to the press by Tryggve Gran’s daughter, complaining: “My father’s diary ... appears to have been dredged by Huntford for anything that could conceivably be interpreted as derogatory to Scott,” and that Huntford “by textual manipulation, attributed to him [Gran] opinions he did not express” (274). Fuchs also notes a “biased plethora of conditional phraseology and careful choice of adjectives” in Huntford’s text and deplores its effect in particular on less well-informed readers (273). Like Fuchs, Philip Law, director of the Australian Antarctic Division, draws on much personal experience in Antarctica. He finds *Scott and Amundsen*, “essentially a book about leadership” (58), “enthraling reading,” but a “campaign of vilification” (63) rather than history. He analyzes its use of emotive words (60) and identifies “a technique that consists of quoting some fact of evidence and then extending it by a number of unsubstantiated statements to produce an effect far beyond that justified by the original evidence” (59) and is appalled by the “vicious surmise” and “expression of absolute certainty” in certain derogatory statements (60-61). Like Robin and Fuchs, Law attempts to find some good at least in Huntford’s book and to retain a balanced view of its two subjects.

Two American reviews suggest, from opposite points of view, that the attack on Scott caught not only the debunking spirit of the times but also a certain fashionable anti-British feeling. The *Atlantic Monthly* criticizes the book as an “unusually vitriolic volume ... Huntford proceeds to tear down, with an enthusiasm amounting to fanatical zeal, Great Britain, the Royal Navy, and especially Scott” (Adams). In the *New*

¹⁴³ This unpleasant surmise appears to have originated with Bernard Shaw. Limb and Cordingley quote the playwright writing to Kathleen Scott’s second husband, Lord Kennet, in 1948 that Scott “had to give Oates silent hints that he should go out and perish” (169, 171).

York Review of Books, by contrast, Gwyn Jones makes several dismissive comments about the British on his own account. And while he notes Huntford's repetitive criticism of the explorer, he assesses it as fair and feelingly pronounces Scott "convicted" because of "his concept of Britain's imperial destiny, her god-given rightness and righteousness and natural superiority to all other peoples and nations" (34).

The most detailed and well argued response came from Wayland Young, who had given Huntford access to his mother's and stepfather's private papers.¹⁴⁴ Young distinguishes between debunking biographies that are obviously not intended to be judged as part of historiography and those that are. The latter must "meet the normal tests of scholarship" (8). Moreover, if they claim that the praiseworthy acts attributed to their subjects are inventions or that discreditable behaviour has been concealed, the evidence presented must be impeccable. Young points out that a good debunking biography needs an appropriate subject, someone who has already been "drowned in or heaped up with flattering bunk" and that it is pointless to "seek to debunk a subject who was indeed a hero and had been treated as such...." Finally, while such a book may at times be catty or tongue-in-cheek, it also needs "steady good humour" (8). On all of these grounds Young judges Huntford's biography a failure. He regards it as sour, resentful and humourless, having an "intrinsically undebunkable" subject and falling "very much below the general standard" of scholarship (8). Most of the article is devoted to demonstrating the last point, through an analysis of evidence and arguments which Huntford uses to discredit Scott. Young is uniquely able to meet Huntford's allegations with his own detailed quotations from original material, and he points to significant omissions (14, 17) and to interpretations unsupported by evidence (17-18). He quotes a revealing reply Huntford gave to a BBC interviewer who had asked him what evidence he had for suggesting that Scott had forced Oates to walk out of the tent to his death:

As a biographer, one has to use one's intuition, one has to interpret now and then, and knowing from my understanding of Scott's character and from my understanding of the training of the Royal Navy at that time, and from my understanding of Oates's character, I am satisfied that this is the case. (17-18)

¹⁴⁴ Kathleen Scott's son by her second marriage, Young was by this time a member of the House of Lords, former Labour government minister and the author of many books.

As Young points out, being satisfied by one's own understanding and intuition "that a man long dead was a villain and not the hero he had been taken for" is the methodology not of a scholar but of a novelist (18). Young is mostly careful to support his own statements with evidence, but the claim, for example, that "the main purpose of both Scott's expeditions was the scientific study of the Antarctic continent" (15) is clearly an oversimplification in the case of *Terra Nova*.

As with the other reviews I have mentioned, and with my own study, Young's purpose is not to denigrate Amundsen: "The hero-worship of Amundsen, though it cloys from time to time, is no great fault; he was a most remarkable man ..." (9). But neither is it necessary to ignore the explorer's shortcomings, and Young states that Huntford "seems quite unaware of the gravity of the objections which can be, and were, raised to Amundsen's course of action." He also identifies the means by which Huntford exonerates his hero: "The main thing was, he *won*" (9 [Huntford 578]). Young indicates the general reaction to the book after its publication. Some, like him, had found its hostility and the incredible picture it painted of Scott painful; "[a] few, on the other hand, have swallowed it all, hook, line and sinker; that is to say they have accepted both that Scott was a boring and nasty little man, and that Huntford is the first biographer who has taken the trouble to unearth and reveal this truth" (9-10).¹⁴⁵ As my literature review demonstrates, such responses have continued ever since. Young had written for a journal, and his detailed arguments would have little popular appeal. Huntford, on the other hand, had published a book which caught the jaded spirit of the times and which could achieve a very different publicity. That publicity would be dramatically increased when it informed a TV docudrama series, *The Last Place on Earth*, in 1985 and thereby became the popularly accepted truth. "Once such seeds were sown," Solomon observes, "Scott's mistakes grew to assume legendary proportions, radically transforming the figures of all of the men of Scott's fatal expedition from heroism and tragedy to folly and even farce" (*Coldest March* xvi). It is probably for this reason that a critique Young wrote a quarter of a century ago and the arguments and evidence presented there still appear so fresh and energetic.

At the end of his article, Young offers some notable insights about why such a debate over Huntford's book and his methods matters. He begins by stating:

¹⁴⁵ For Huntford's reply to Young, and Young's humbler response, see "Scott and Amundsen: An Exchange Between Roland Huntford and Wayland Young."

The sources for a person's life *are* the truth about him; there is no other truth. In so far as the person's life is important to posterity for its achievement, its nature, or its example, good or bad, they are part of the web of truth and reality which will make posterity what it is. (18)

Although by "sources" Young means documentary sources, later comments about the "creation of people" from them suggest that, in keeping with contemporary ideas about the constructed nature of reality, we could also substitute 'stories' for 'sources.' The author goes on to argue that a biography based on distorted scholarship can thus "harm society as a whole, since it gives people a false impression of a part of reality." This is a minimal claim of harm, and I will argue at the conclusion of this thesis for a broader one, which is a corollary of Young's later remark that "what is good in a society can be fostered by dwelling on what is good in its history" (19).

Huntford, as I have said, cemented the new orthodoxy; he also made an industry out of maligning Scott. A single extraordinary fact demonstrates just how thriving an industry this became. More than twenty years later, in 2001, Huntford was invited to write the introduction to a new edition of Ponting's *Great White South* for Cooper Square Press. Of all Scott's admirers Ponting was one of the most staunchly devoted, and he states in his own foreword that the polar party "bequeath[ed] to their race a priceless heritage in the story of their perfect comradeship, self-sacrifice, and devotion to purpose, ideals, and duty." He goes on to say that Scott, "the Leader," had once said he thought that it would benefit young people to know about "such adventures as polar expeditions," and that "[t]he great explorer's words inspired the writing of this book" (vii). Ponting had asked Scott's widow to write the original introduction and, as previously stated, she was very pleased to find that it "teems with appreciation of his leader" (ix). It therefore seems certain that the author would have been outraged at having his tribute to that leader prefaced by an attack, the terms of which had not changed since *Scott and Amundsen*,¹⁴⁶ and having it subtitled: *Traveling With Robert F. Scott's Doomed South Pole Expedition*. It is hard to imagine that the publishers of the new edition could have been unaware of this, and it testifies to the degree to which Huntford is now regarded as the doyen of polar history, and the final word on Scott.

¹⁴⁶ Huntford claims to find a "subtext" of "telling little incidents" in Ponting's book which "often flatly contradict the writing"—and thus reveal the 'real' Scott (xi). He adds that "for Ponting himself, the Scott expedition seemed nothing but a curse" (xi). But the "seemed" must refer to Huntford and not to Ponting, who was quoted in 1924 as saying (while he watched his film of the expedition, "his eyes full of tears"): "I feel that if I had never done anything ... but produced this film, so that the world could know how great that adventure was, life would have been well worth while" (Swaffer).

The aftermath

In the first chapter I considered academic studies concerned with Scott's story which have appeared since *Scott and Amundsen*. I have now supplied some information about the three-quarters of a century of commentary that preceded it and about Huntford's book itself: in part to provide a context in which both that book and the subsequent scholarship may be viewed. Biographies, non-academic commentary and studies concerned more with the facts than the story have also continued to be produced in the last thirty years. I mentioned in chapter 1 that there is some overlap and exchange between the academic treatments discussed there and the material to which I now refer. The sheer volume of the recent commentary on Scott makes a comprehensive survey beyond the scope of the present study. In addition, I have wanted to present the earlier interpretations in greater detail, both because they have been overlooked in discussion of Scott's story and because some are not easily obtainable. By contrast, the more recent material is more widely available, and so can be drawn on without the need for it to be presented here. Much of it, moreover, merely continues to exemplify the sharp polarization which has characterized the commentary after Huntford. My intention in the remainder of this chapter, therefore, is to provide a synopsis of the story's recent fortunes. At one point I will pause to enter the debate over facts in order to supply information from unpublished primary sources, and at the end of the chapter I analyze two topics that I believe have been neglected to date.

In 1985, in an article called "Hero Caught in an Icy Blast," John Wyver reviewed for the *Times* Central Television's *The Last Place of Earth*—the £7 million, seven-and-a-half-hour series that would prove so powerful in promoting Huntford's views. Quotations from Trevor Griffiths, the screenwriter, make it clear how strong Huntford's influence was. According to Griffiths, "he [Huntford] revealed what British Imperial mythography had suppressed, namely what the Norwegians did and how they achieved their triumph ... Huntford also gives the lie to the official version, the heroized version of Scott's journey." Central Television is quoted as saying that the series is not a documentary but a "fictional account based on fact." This is a distinction, however, that would have escaped most viewers, especially since it was advertised internationally as a "gripping 7-episode film drama series [which] tells the true story of that legendary contest and the men behind the myth" (qtd. Fiennes, *Captain Scott* 433). The series "presents Scott as an arrogant and amateurish leader who

brought death on himself and his team by inadequate planning and by incompetence before and during the expedition” (Wyver).

Many different voices were added to the criticism of Scott’s leadership. In an article titled “The Price of Human Folly” in a popular science magazine, scientist Jared Diamond—well known today for his books, *Guns, Germs, and Steel* and *Collapse* and for television work—used Scott’s expedition as a homily against risk-taking: “This essay has nominally been about the problems arising during scientific expeditions ... [but] these are the problems of everyday life ... If we are careless about risks, we end up scarring our lives by a business failure, an automobile accident, or perhaps a preventable illness ...” (76-77). Repeated references to Huntford make it clear that Diamond has accepted his views as a revelation of truth. A passing comment in an article on leadership in *American Psychologist* in 1994 contrasts Amundsen’s example with “Scott’s incompetence ... the details [of which] were covered up for years” (Hogan, Curphy and Hogan 494). Historian T. H. Baughman argued in *Before the Heroes Came* that heroic-age explorers ignored many of the lessons learned by their forerunners. He criticizes the appointment of Scott as leader of *Discovery*, instead of a scientist such as Bruce or Gregory (116-17), and echoes the words first used by the latter disappointed candidate and subsequently by H. R. Mill (see Holland xviii) when he states that, as a consequence, science in British Antarctic exploration was thereafter subordinated to “adventure” (x). As I showed in chapter 1, during the 1990s in particular, writers from quite unrelated areas of study also offered opinions on these topics. The author of a 1995 book on Australian melodramas, for example, makes this passing remark: “In fact the scientific benefits ... of Scott’s expedition were nugatory. It was also ill-planned and incompetently led” (Pierce 111). The author’s choice of the high-register Latinate term “nugatory” and the summariness of the second sentence also suggest the self-satisfaction with which many sniped at Scott from fields where they were unlikely to be challenged. In the same year, Kathleen Scott’s granddaughter and biographer, Louisa Young, had to reply to a suggestion that Scott’s hut should be removed as junk from Antarctica and ““would make an apter monument to culpable failure”” back in Britain (“Polar Reputations”).

There were writers other than Young who defended Scott, or remained neutral. In an article in the *British Medical Journal*, Mike Stroud reminded readers of an obvious fact of life for the explorers themselves and one which is still often ignored: the inherent dangers and trials of their Antarctic work. As the expedition doctor for a team that had retraced (one way) Scott’s route to the Pole in 1985, Stroud’s comments have

uncommon authority.¹⁴⁷ He refers to the “unfair character assassination” of Scott and, on the basis of his own experience of conditions and pressures that “have to be experienced to be believed,” defends the explorer on several counts (1653). The first part of the title of John Maxtone-Graham’s *Safe Return Doubtful: The Heroic Age of Polar Exploration* contains a similar reminder. The author retells the stories of Amundsen and Scott without partiality, although he identifies certain ironies (328-29), and observes: “In stark, majestic horror, Scott’s death matched the age it ended, as though supreme effort should, perforce, conclude with supreme sacrifice” (335). Paul Simpson-Housley’s 1992 study of “explorers’ perceptions of Antarctica up to the time of the death of Robert Falcon Scott” (xvii) is remarkable as an extremely rare instance of a commentary on these expeditions which makes no judgements about them at all. But Beryl Bainbridge, author of an earlier novelistic version of the *Terra Nova* expedition titled *The Birthday Boys*, still found Scott, Bowers and Wilson “fiery as hell and worth their weight in gold”—like the curry in one of their little food bags which she had coveted at the RGS in 1992 (“Object of Desire”). And a brochure advertising Ponting’s photographs dared to assert in 1996: “Robert Falcon Scott remains one of the giants of Polar exploration.” The brochure quotes words by Cherry-Garrard which recall those by Keats at the front of this thesis: “in these pictures is beauty linked to tragedy—one of the greatest tragedies—and the beauty is inconceivable for it is endless and runs to eternity” (“Brochure” n. pag.). Scott’s story, at least, received a similar endorsement from Michael Rosove in *Let Heroes Speak*, a balanced summary of the main Antarctic expeditions from the time of Cook to the death of Shackleton. Although Rosove blames “tragically flawed leadership” for the outcome of Scott’s last expedition (226), he introduces his narration with the acknowledgement: “Robert Falcon Scott will always be the great, legendary, tragic hero of the Antarctic,” and adds: “the Scott story rivals the greatest of the Shakespearean tragedies” (197). Once again, these comments are part of a general but hitherto unspecified recognition of the genre to which the story belongs.

Tragedy is also announced (but not subsequently explored) in the title of Diana Preston’s *A First Rate Tragedy: Captain Scott’s Antarctic Expeditions* (1997), a book which sits somewhat uneasily between the admiring and critical positions. To call the tragedy “first rate” seems ironic, as if it had been staged for maximum effect—as indeed some

¹⁴⁷ Prior to that expedition, he and Fiennes had attempted to manhaul to the North Pole (1652). For accounts of the South Pole expedition, see Mear and Swan’s book, *In the Footsteps of Scott*, and Swan’s *National Geographic* article of the same name.

have suggested it was (Huntford; Moss).¹⁴⁸ But this is not in fact the tenor of Preston's book, although it appeared the year after Spufford's, discussed in chapter 1. Certainly, there is a rather muddled, *de rigueur*, attempt to place the story in a particular historical context,¹⁴⁹ but the author nevertheless sees it as one that "continues to fascinate and inspire" (7). She argues that the fact that Scott was not perfect "does not detract from his stature," and invites the reader to look beyond legalistic debates over techniques for the story's human value:

It is, of course, possible to pare the story down to clinical discussions of logistics, to a debate about methods of transport, the merits of dogs versus ponies, the quality of rations, the effectiveness of the planning, the routes which were followed, the risks which were run. Yet, while these things have their place, there is the danger of losing sight of the essential humanity of what happened out there in that forlorn and silent world. (7)

That "essential humanity" will be the focus of the third part of this study. Preston, however, concludes her biography with what one reviewer calls "the customary post-mortem investigation" (King 63), and after her sympathetic portrait of Scott to that point this is a strangely punishing catalogue of errors. The book ends with a precarious *détente* between blame and admiration characteristic of a contemporary ambivalence even in those favourably disposed towards Scott (237). A "Pocket Biography" of the explorer, also from 1997, acknowledges Huntford and Huxley as major sources (ix), and the author, Michael De-la-Noy, tries similarly to steer a course between the two. The book's back cover summarizes the result: "In practical terms, the mission [*Terra Nova*] was a hopeless failure, but the men's bravery ensures that they remain a part of exploration history."

All ambivalence was swept aside in 1999, when glaciologist Don Aldridge produced the "simply dreadful book" that provoked Baughman's comment on the

¹⁴⁸ The words "first-rate tragedy" are also Cherry-Garrard's (*Worst Journey* 562).

¹⁴⁹ Preston states, for example, that at the time of Scott's death "[m]oral values and the established social order were under increasing challenge as the certainties of Victoria's golden age faded away" (3). The first part is a truism that could describe the feeling in almost any era—the 1960s, for example, or our own—and Queen Victoria died more than a decade before Scott. The ambivalence of treating the story this way is summed up in the claim that Scott's story, "though so much a part of its own time, continues to fascinate" (237). Preston also nods to the accepted wisdom (see, for example, Scheller 22; De-la-Noy 60) that the British have a lien on 'doing things the hard way,' but the contemporary examples she cites (5) of unsupported treks across Antarctica were actually *inspired* by Scott, and cannot therefore be used to exemplify an abiding characteristic. People of other nationalities have undertaken similar ordeals. Borge Ousland, who in 1966 became the first person to cross Antarctica alone and on foot (Preston 216), and Rolf Bae and Erik Sønneland, who trekked unsupported across the continent in 1999 (Murray and Jabour 313), were in fact *Norwegian*—the counterfactual nationality in the eyes of Huntford and his followers. (The second expedition took place shortly after the publication of Preston's book.)

“tragedy of Antarctic historiography” to which I have referred previously. *The Rescue of Captain Scott* announces its debunking agenda in its introduction: “The purpose of this book is to right a wrong perpetrated far too long—the cover-up of one of the most extraordinary polar feats: the rescue of Scott’s *Discovery*....” It is easy to lose track of all the episodes in Antarctic history which have been referred to as the “most extraordinary” by their narrators; it is less easy to see how the part performed by the two relief ships for the *Discovery* expedition could qualify. The author thanks Huntford for “friendly help in depressing times” (xix). In return, he calls *Scott and Amundsen* “The Big Bang” and “the definitive¹⁵⁰ version, the most objective and best researched account of the two Scott expeditions” (173), and dismisses “the few reckless attempts” to critique it (174). Aldridge devotes a chapter to seeking allies in the literature on Scott (157-78) and another to attacking the explorer’s reputation as a hero (179-87). In these pursuits he co-opts authors such as Spufford and Riffenburgh, who might not object, and Holland and Le Guin, who might: the last not only for Aldridge’s deliberate misreading of her praise of Scott but also for his patronizing comment (referring to her and Preston): “Scott has attracted the maternal instincts of several recent writers, because of his lovely blue eyes, or because of the stories he would have told (had he not taken so many risks with his own and other men’s lives)” (176). In many ways, *The Rescue* is a 200-page footnote to *Scott and Amundsen* and continues its unremitting attack on Scott.¹⁵¹ But in Baughman’s words, it is “a painful read for anyone who has an understanding either of Scott or of ‘Heroic age’ exploration, so flawed are the author’s interpretations” (72).

Aldridge was at least candid about the ‘wrong’ he wished to right; more importantly, it was clear that his book was intended to be history, and so could be assessed as history. By contrast, Adrian Caesar’s *The White*, of the same year, is an insidious mixture of fact and fiction. The English-born Australian academic begins his acknowledgements with the apparent disclaimer: “This is not an ‘official’ biography of Scott and Mawson and the responsibility for the interpretation of their lives in this book is all mine” (n. pag.). This has an air of frankness. But it is hardly possible for a biography written, in Scott’s case, eighty-seven years after his death to be ‘official,’ and

¹⁵⁰ Riffenburgh also uses this term to describe Huntford’s biography of Shackleton (*Nimrod* xx). However, as the discussion of historiography at the beginning of the last chapter—and the long succession of Scott biographies—makes obvious, there can be no such thing as a ‘definitive’ biography.

¹⁵¹ Just as with Huntford’s book, the index entries under Scott provide a snapshot of *The Rescue*’s bias, with a list of unflattering items, including “A dangerous man” (212) and “Admits his orders were stupid” (213).

we are left in doubt whether the book is, nevertheless, a biography: a doubt which is never resolved. A prologue describes visits to the actual historic huts, and accounts of the most dramatic stages of Scott's and Mawson's expeditions are prefaced with short biographical entries, such as might be found in a pocket encyclopaedia. The first ends with: "What follows is an account of Scott's last days" (13) and there is a similar line for Mawson (125). Facts and figures are given and diaries and letters and are quoted extensively and analyzed. The book, therefore, has most of the trappings of a history or biography. But at the same time, Caesar imaginatively recreates scenes and actions and invents dreams, motives and thoughts for Scott. This goes far beyond the novelistic approach adopted by Huntford in enabling the author to present interpretation under the guise of fact. Once again, that interpretation is that the explorer, in his writing, carefully crafted his own myth "as a self-sacrificing hero" (110). Noting the remarkable "lucidity" of that writing, especially near the end, Caesar speculates that the men might have taken "small doses of the opium ... This would provide a short-lived 'rush' ... Perhaps this helped Scott and the others to express themselves with heroic self-delusion" (65). It is difficult to see the point of such hallucinatory imaginings, but it finally becomes clear that in this book Scott is being diminished in order that Mawson, whom the author feels he has unfairly overshadowed (274), can be magnified. Kåre Holt's *The Race*, which I discuss in the next chapter, also blends fact and fiction. But it, by contrast, uses devices which are transparently imaginative, such as an amusing dialogue between Scott and Amundsen, and also offers something new to the story.

After such thorough blurrings of the line between fact and fiction, it is perhaps not surprising that "[v]isitors to the [London] National Maritime Museum's 'South: The Race to the Pole' exhibition in 2000-01 complained that displays were too sympathetic to Scott" (Jones, Introduction xxxix). Nevertheless, the exhibition book, which relates the journeys of Scott, Shackleton and Amundsen, repeats negative views Shackleton is supposed to have had of Scott (35). It also includes the usual¹⁵² inaccurate generalizations about Amundsen being scorned by the "chauvinist" British press because he was "foreign ... an interloper ... a 'professional'... had not 'played the game'" and had depended on dogs (52)—but with no analysis at all of that explorer's actions.

¹⁵² I refer to a fashion in contemporary British historical commentary of dealing with a collective embarrassment about the past by being complacently dismissive of it, on the assumption that this represents a detached or postmodern historical perspective. In the first chapter I argued that Spufford and others take such an attitude towards Scott, and I quoted Le Guin also noting the British mood "that now makes it so chic to sneer at him" (171).

And at the conclusion, the authors of *South* find it necessary to offer this strange ostensible defence of Scott:

Historical perspective of course makes it easy to criticize Scott. It does him greater justice to recognize that, far more than Amundsen or Shackleton, he was a conventional product of his background—English, Naval, Victorian,—and, to a degree, a casualty of its limitations as well as of any personal factors. (129)

Here, the view of Spufford and others that Scott was a product of his times is taken for granted. But if it was as simple as that and if, as Spufford and Huntford believe, Scott was merely a masterly self-promoter who filled a national need at a specific time, how do we explain all the continuing bother over him—and why the need for an exhibition? This was also the period of the Shackleton exhibition in New York, referred to in my introduction, and Caroline Alexander's widely read book that contrasted Scott unflatteringly with that explorer. Richard Morrison's article "Pray for a Shackleton" in the *Times* in 2001 typifies the general view. This eulogy to the "cult figure" (3)¹⁵³ of Shackleton asks: "Who would not wish that he might steer our destiny today?" (2). There follows the inevitable comparison: "Yet for decades Shackleton was eclipsed by his bitter rival, Robert Falcon Scott, the man who met his ghastly death by being everything that Shackleton wasn't"—and the Huntford-derived denunciation continues. Scott, Morrison writes, was "devoured by his own lust for glory," his death was the result of his own "bullheaded obstinacy" and, "[t]o modern eyes, his leadership seems appalling" (3). Even Roger Scruton, while lamenting the English impulse to repudiate the past, is as dismissive, in Scott's case, as those he criticizes: "Scott's expedition had no motive other than the competitiveness of schoolboys; it was the ultimate futile gesture ... [of] self-imposed and functionless heroism" (227-28). To put it mildly, it was time for some more balance.

§

In the most recent phase of scholarship a few authors have sought to redress some of the damage done to the explorer's reputation and story in the last three decades. An article in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science* in 1999 by US meteorologists Susan Solomon and Charles R. Stearns was an important first step in rescuing the

¹⁵³ Morrison states that there are "30-odd Shackleton books now in print," including an American one using the explorer's example as a template for modern business management and motivational techniques (3).

commentary from the realm of private, novelistic speculation where it had been languishing, and introducing new empirical evidence. The authors showed that fifteen years of data from automated weather stations vindicated Scott's claim that the weather conditions which confronted the polar party were exceptional. Solomon and Stearns noted that statements by the expedition leader and his meteorologist about these extraordinarily low temperatures in March 1912 had been "largely ignored" or "explicitly dismissed" (13012), but attested that "Scott was correct rather than petulant when in his final message to the public he wrote, '... no one in the world would have expected the temperatures ... which we encountered at this time of the year'" (13015).

Solomon followed up the article with a book-length study, *The Coldest March*, in 2001. Here she interweaves the story of Scott's expeditions with personal experience of Antarctica and the evidence of modern Antarctic science to critique Huntford's depiction of "Scott and his men not as stoic pioneers but as inept bumbler" (xv). As Solomon examined data from "reliable automated weather stations" that "furnish the first detailed insight in seventy years into the weather conditions along Scott's via dolorosa," and compared them with the diaries of the expeditionists, she found to her surprise that "Scott and his team had analyzed the meteorology in exquisite detail, in a manner that can only inspire the greatest admiration by scientist and nonscientist alike" (xvii). Furthermore, she argues that "more than one myth of Scott as a bungler crumbles" in the light of the knowledge supplied by the modern disciplines of "sea ice dynamics, nutrition, snow physics, materials science and human physiology." Her thesis, in short, is that "Scott and his men did everything right regarding the weather but were exceedingly unlucky" (xvii). In *Coldest March* Scott is once again regarded as an admirable figure. The single aspect of his record Solomon disputes is the final blizzard which prevented Wilson and Bowers from making the 11-mile trip to One Ton Depot. She argues that a blizzard of such duration could not have occurred in that location (309-27), a point which was overlooked by reviewers, who mostly welcomed the book (Walton; Wheeler; Chang). The blizzard appears from Scott's diary to have lasted for ten days. His entry for "March 21st" (this date is written over another) states: "had to lay up all yesterday in severe blizzard"; the next, for "22nd & and 23rd": "Blizzard bad as ever"; and the last entry: "March 29th Since the 21st we have had a continuous gale ..." (*Diaries*).

Without entering the meteorological debate,¹⁵⁴ I will point to two factors which may help to explain the discrepancy, since it is one which potentially reflects on Scott's honesty. Firstly, and most obviously, the accuracy of the date of his last diary entry must be regarded as doubtful. Already at the time of Oates's death he states, "lost track of dates" (*Journals* 410); his penultimate entry has two dates, and then there is a six-day gap. A week before the date of Scott's final entry, the meticulous Bowers, was also unsure of the date and prefaced his last letter to his mother thus: "Date uncertain about March 22nd. 1912 Blizzard Camp 11' S. of 1 'Ton Dépôt." Wilson dated his farewell letter to his friend Reginald Smith "March 21 or 22," and confirmed the first days of the blizzard: "... not able to move now for 3 days on account of the blizzard" (qtd. Seaver, *Naturalist* 293). Defeated by the weather, starving and half-frozen, confined to a tent with dying or dead companions for days on end and little to distinguish day from night, it would be miraculous if Scott *had* known the date at the end.¹⁵⁵ So, in the first place, there may be no need to find an explanation for a blizzard lasting ten days. The other point is the meaning of the term 'blizzard' itself, which Scott uses for the first two entries but not the last. An elucidation Bowers wrote in the diary he kept for his mother—a year before, when they were all fit and healthy—shows how the word was used on the expedition:

Our residence at Corner Camp [a depot on the Barrier, only 35 miles from the Hut Point base] was destined to be more protracted than we imagined[. A]t midnight it was drifting heavily & the long expected blizzard had come at last. We therefore had perforce to turn into our bags again & sleep all the 5th. of Feb. [1911. O]n 6th. and 7th. conditions were just the same *though the wind was not always of very great force, it was impossible to march.* A Blizzard I am afraid is rather an elastic term & certainly any of these would [not] be called such in a temperate clime—They are of such varying intensity here however that a *moderate gale* or even a strong breeze can produce the drift to make *the conditions of a "Bliz"* as we call it. *Temperature & force of wind are not essential factors*—it is the drift snow that causes the peculiar storm we all know so well. It is quite unlike ordinary snow as instead of being smooth & flaky—it is fine & generally powdery & hard like sand. I[t] whirls along the

¹⁵⁴ It appears that the topography of the region of the final camp would not permit such a long blizzard to occur—whereas, on his first expedition, for example, Scott and his men had been held tent-bound for seven days and nights by fierce winds near the top of the Ferrar Glacier (*Discovery* 2:183). Solomon also states that in 15 years of automated records there had not been a wind of "more than four days' duration at a strength above 6 on the Beaufort scale" in that area (314), and it is therefore highly unlikely that there was one in 1912. (Force 6 denotes a wind speed of 40-50 km/hr [138].) Furthermore, she argues that such a blizzard did not occur, by extrapolating from conditions observed at the same time by Atkinson and Keohane further north on the Barrier (316-17). However, as she states, the idea of an exceptionally long blizzard is based solely on Scott's final diary entry: in particular, its date. But that entry, written in extremis, is itself open to interpretation, as I will show.

¹⁵⁵ During the expedition, the young Trygve Gran even lost track of how old he was! (*The Norwegian* 233). (It is puzzling that Scott does not write here that he is unsure.)

surface & where it rises over one's head so that it is impossible to see about it becomes a blizzard as far as we are concerned. (vol. 1. n. pag.; emphasis added.)

If a not-very-strong wind can produce conditions under which it is “impossible to march” for men in perfect health and close to base—and could still be called a blizzard, because that is what it looks like—how would similar conditions appear to men in the extremity of the three survivors of the polar party?

This question is also directly connected to that of why, with Scott almost unable to walk, Wilson and Bowers did not attempt the 11-mile journey to the depot for fuel and food, as apparently intended—a question Solomon also raises (319). Huntford, in one of his meanest interpretations, guesses that returning defeated was something Scott “could not face. It would be better to seek immolation in the tent ... Wilson and Bowers were persuaded to lie down with him and wait for the end, where the instinct of other men in like predicament was to keep going and fall in their tracks” (542). In his final letter Bowers told his mother: “Each depot has been a harder struggle to reach but I am still strong & hope to reach this one with Dr Wilson & get the food & fuel necessary for our lives. God alone knows what will be the outcome of the 23 miles march we have to make....” While this suggests that he intends to make the journey and still has some hope that it will be possible, later in the letter he writes:

It is splendid to pass however with such companions as I have & as all 5 of us have mothers & wives you will not be alone. There will be no shame however & you will know that I struggled till the end. Much & dearest love to your dear self & May & Edie.—Oh how I do feel for you when you hear all. You will know that for me the end was peaceful as it is only sleep in the cold.

Leaving aside the words’ great poignancy, they indicate that Bowers was already sure on about 22 March that the end had come, and that the idea of reaching the depot was, as Scott himself put it the day before, a “forlorn hope.” Each sentence of Bowers’s short letter is closely linked by reference words and sequence to the previous one, and it therefore appears unlikely that the excerpts I have quoted were written at different times. In the letter to Smith already mentioned, Wilson writes: “We shall make a forlorn-hope effort to reach the next depot to-morrow, but it means 22 miles, and we are none of us fit to face it.” Writing to his wife, apparently at the same time, Wilson makes it clear that it was he and Bowers who would make the attempt while Scott remained in the tent (Seaver *Naturalist* 293). Scott’s third last entry (21 March) includes: “Today forlorn hope—Wilson & Bowers go to dépôt for fuel.” The complete text of the next entry (22 and 23 March) is:

Blizzard bad as ever—Wilson & Bowers unable to start—tomorrow last chance—no fuel & only one or two of food left—must be near the end—Have decided it shall be natural—we shall march for the dépôt with or without our effects & die in our tracks[.] (*Diaries*)¹⁵⁶

It is quite possible that Scott added these fragments at different times as the days passed, before eventually adding the longer final entry, in a last summoning of strength. They suggest the gradual ending of any hope that Wilson and Bowers might attempt the return trip to the depot—or possibly even start at all. Given the way the polar party had treated their injured to that point, as well as the closeness of the bonds between the surviving three, it is unthinkable that Wilson and Bowers would have left Scott if there had been no chance of returning to find him alive. The last option seems to have been all three walking on until they fell—or were saved at the last minute by the arrival of the dog teams. But that too may have become impossible or, since death was now inevitable, they may have chosen instead to remain in the tent.

Another explanation for the mixture of references to an attempt to reach the depot with statements indicating the inevitability of death may be that in their terrible circumstances the men, as usual, tried to appear cheerful and optimistic in their writing and to each other, even while believing that all hope had gone. In his farewell letter to his friend Sir James Barrie, Scott wrote:

We are in desperate state feet frozen etc, no fuel and a long way from food but it would do your heart good to be in our tent, to hear our songs and the cheery conversation as to what we will do when we get to Hut Point. *Later* We are very near the end but have not and will not lose our good cheer we have had four days of storm in our tent and now have no food or fuel[.] We did intend to finish ourselves when things proved like this but we have decided to die naturally in the track[.] (qtd. Dunbar 254)

¹⁵⁶ The date given in the published version of Scott's last letter to Sir Edgar Speyer, the treasurer of the expedition, is 16 March. The letter clearly anticipates their death in phrases like: "... some time after we are found next year" (*Journals* 417). Yet 16 March was the time of Oates's death, and nearly two weeks before the date of Scott's final entry. While Scott might not quite, as Jones suggests (*Journals* 502), have given up hope at that time, clearly there was little hope left. Even before Oates's death Scott had written to Kathleen: "I have doubts of pulling through – In our short lunch hours I take advantage of a very small measure of warmth to write letters preparatory to a possible end." There is an error in the published version of the position Scott adds to Speyer's letter: "Lat. 79.5°." In Scott's customary notation this means 79 degrees and 5 minutes (he never uses decimals for latitudes). But that position is impossible, since it is 24 geographical miles *north* of One Ton Depot, which was at 79 degrees and 29 minutes South (126). (Moreover, Scott never usually added the degree symbol, which he used instead for the temperature readings, unless he gave degrees, minutes *and* seconds of latitude, as for example on 12 Jan. 1912 [373]). Unfortunately, Scott's final letters are not included in the facsimile edition of his diaries, and I have not been able to locate the manuscript of this particular letter to check the possibility that this is an error of transcription.

Exactly what happened in those last days will never be known and, as Solomon wisely concludes, must remain a matter “for the human heart” (327). But while this “human story contains great tragedy,” she found that “it also contains a richness and beauty that rivals that of the continent itself” (xix). That richness and beauty most of Scott’s debunkers appear not to see.

In 2003 distinguished British polar explorer and author Ranulph Fiennes published the first sustained refutation of those debunkers. He frankly targeted Huntford and dedicated *Captain Scott*: “To the families of the defamed dead.” I have already mentioned the admiration of Scott expressed by commentators with personal experience of major expeditions in Antarctica: men such as Fuchs, Law, Stroud, Mear and Swan. And the back cover of *Captain Scott* points out that, as “the first man to reach both poles (by surface travel) and the first to cross the Antarctic Continent unsupported,” Fiennes brings to his account of Scott’s expeditions unrivalled understanding of “the deprivations, the stress and the sheer physical pain that Scott lived through.” He also comments from first-hand experience on the burdens of Scott’s role as leader. Fiennes, therefore, unlike most who have passed judgement on Scott, is the antithesis of an armchair explorer.¹⁵⁷ And the importance of these credentials in assessing the decisions and practicalities of such expeditions needs to be stressed. We might, for example, expect a biographer of the pioneer of heart transplants, Christiaan Barnard, to tell us interesting details about the surgeon’s life and perhaps comment on the wider implications of his achievement; but for a convincing evaluation of his work itself, someone who is also a heart surgeon is obviously required. Fiennes’s final chapter is a thought-provoking overview of the history of the debunking of Scott. It includes a lengthy critique of Huntford and contains interesting

¹⁵⁷ Paul Theroux, for one, provides a striking contrast to Fiennes. Although Theroux eagerly endorses Huntford’s views on Scott in a 1999 introduction to the retitled *The Last Place on Earth*, his own claims to being even a ‘traveller’ (rather than a celebrity tourist) are dubious. At a certain point in his Mediterranean tour, for example, he considers staying in a \$600-a-night hotel, but “thought better of it” (*Pillars of Hercules* 225). Later, he has a suite on a \$1000-a-day cruise ship—sampling fare such as “sun-dried blueberry and champagne soup” (316)—as the guest of the shipping company and protests: “There was no disgrace in that” (300). And an awkward moment when he is questioned by officials, and it “hurt ... to have to admit” he was a tourist, transforms when one of them recognizes him (380). Perhaps a nagging awareness of how pampered some of his own globetrotting was contributed to Theroux’s judgements on Scott. (Five years earlier he had been somewhat less certain, when he stated in an introduction to *Worst Journey* that it was “the compassion in the apparent paradox” of Cherry-Garrard’s portrait of his leader’s strengths and weaknesses that he found most intriguing about that book [xiv].)

background information about that author and his methods that is not found elsewhere.

It is not necessary to be an explorer or a scientist to critique some of the arguments of Scott's detractors; but increasingly, as Solomon demonstrates, sciences like meteorology and physiology have brought a better understanding of the actual conditions Scott faced, thus removing certain topics from the realm of mere speculation. This was demonstrated by a 2003 episode in the Granada Television series *Into the Danger Zone* called *Scott: Hero or Fool?* and directed by Emma Hawley. Glaciologist Liz Morris, for example, reminds viewers that: "When you're working in polar regions sometimes things go wrong: people get killed; shit happens." (Scott spoke plainly about the inherent risks of his work, but it is a fact that has often been glossed over by commentators.) Meteorologist John Turner explains that fierce storms on the Ross Ice Shelf are more common in the west, where Scott was, and that "Amundsen [in the east] was particularly fortunate because he had no blizzards at all and he missed the worst of the strong downslope winds." Antarctic expeditionists were also interviewed. Fiennes describes the nature of the polar party's work: "Anyone who wants to get a rough idea without going down to Antarctica can get any old bath tub without legs on it, put two very fat six-foot men into it and then tow them for sixteen hundred miles over sand dunes." Stroud adds that on his own polar treks, even with a calorific intake far higher than Scott's, they still lost weight; and Howard Oakley, a cold injuries specialist, explains that a lower food intake increases the risk of frostbite, which in turn brings mental strain and loss of sleep. Other topics covered include how the exceptional cold in the southern summer of 1911-12 affected the friction under the sledges and the fuel containers. Scott's already exhausted team experienced temperatures in the minus 40s, when, according to Fiennes, "it's like a sort of foetal feeling ... You want to roll yourself up into a ball." He concludes with the comment: "The miracle of it is that human beings against that sort of circumstance could survive so long," and Preston concurs: "The point to me about Scott has been not that he failed but that he so very nearly succeeded in the worst conditions on earth." Admiration such as this has scarcely been heard for more than two decades. The fact that it is grounded in specialist knowledge and experience lends it additional authority.

Scott's story continues to be told. The extent of the reappraisal that is currently taking place is suggested by the back cover of the latest *Scott of the Antarctic*, by David Crane in

2005, which refers to him “a superlative leader of men”—the very antithesis of Huntford’s view. But in fact, this long, diligently researched and sympathetic biography, which reconsiders all the old debates, is more nuanced than the quotation suggests. At one point, for example, it contradicts its cover in stating that Scott’s “deeply felt sense of responsibility and compassion ... disabled [him]... from taking the hard decisions that were required ... in command” (467). And along with the new assessments, denigration of Scott also continues in certain quarters, as I have shown in chapter 1. In 2004 the journal of the Scott Polar Research Institute itself still published an article on “organisational structure” (Savitt 153) that includes the facile pronouncement: “Scott did not appear to appreciate the central role of sledging in exploration and the need to gain as much experience as possible in preparations for the expedition”—and in contradiction, a mere two sentences later: “Scott recognised the importance of sledging and actively sought advice ...” (159). I would like to conclude this survey of the story’s long and often troubled history of interpretation with an analysis of two topics which I believe have been neglected.

The legend of Lawrence Oates

As I have shown, most early commentators regarded Oates as a soldierly hero who had made the supreme sacrifice to give his friends a chance of survival. For some, his ‘sacrifice’ eclipsed that of the three who survived him by perhaps a further ten days. As early as 1913, Teddy Evans had written his fulsome tribute to this “splendid British soldier ... a most glorious example to us all” in the *Strand Magazine* (626). It is not surprising, therefore, that his example was used to inspire British troops during the First World War.¹⁵⁸ What is surprising is that while every detail of Scott’s last expedition has been critiqued for nearly a century, the value of Oates’s famous exit and his reputation for bravery and self-sacrifice have remained virtually unchallenged. Scott’s generous epithet, “a very gallant gentleman,” has echoed down the years. It was first repeated on the memorial to him left by the search party in 1913. The following year it was the title of a famous painting by J. C. Dollman of Oates hunched over and staggering away from the tent into the snow; and it was further cemented in 1933 as the title of the first biography of Oates, by Louis Bernacchi: *A Very Gallant Gentleman*. The biographer wrote: “does history contain a finer picture than of this young officer

¹⁵⁸ He was also one of the subjects of *Three Heroes* suite which Sir Henry Wood composed towards the end of the war. This was first presented at the 1918 Proms concert and again several times immediately after the Armistice.

walking out of the tent into the whirling snowstorm to give up his life for his friends?” (18-19).¹⁵⁹ Even Huntford and his followers approved of Oates, because Oates had grumbled about Scott, and because his mother (paradoxically, as I will argue) blamed Scott for her son’s death and campaigned bitterly against his good reputation. Oates’s next biographers, Limb and Cordingley (an officer in the regiment Oates had belonged to), object to Huntford’s claims about Scott’s role in their subject’s death. But while they reveal much about Oates and his role in the expedition, to his biographers he remains a hero (175).

Only a few commentators have taken a different view. Seaver notes that Scott, Wilson and Bowers sacrificed their lives for Oates (but still allows Oates to reciprocate) (*Scott* 173). Marshall also mentions that the incapacity of Oates was a fatal delay for the others, and Thomson found him “unconvincing”:

Oates’s reputation hangs on the sacrifice of his death, and he is widely regarded as an exceptional devotee of duty. However, his early life shows a very different, dissatisfied man for whom the south may have been all the more appealing as a thorough alternative to wasting and apathy. (163)

Michael Smith lends considerable support to such a view of Oates’s character in the most recent biography: *I Am Just Going Outside: Captain Oates—Antarctic Tragedy*. Smith portrays a listless aristocrat with a long and painful history of educational failure, who “yearned for adventure and a sense of purpose to his life” (74). And while on the one hand Oates had a strong sense of duty and was generally professional in his army work, on the other he had spent most of his adult life fox hunting and racing horses and objected when army duties interfered with those interests (74-75).¹⁶⁰ He was generally popular with his fellows and those under him, but had less easy relations with his superiors: “Oates was a man who held strong views, which he never failed to express. He readily criticised the officers who were leading the regiment’s raw recruits into battle for the first time, despite his own obvious lack of fighting experience”

¹⁵⁹ These words, incidentally, are plagiarized from the *Geographical Journal* of March 1913, which had: “Does history contain a finer picture than this young fellow ... walking out of the tent into the shrieking snowstorm to give up his life for his friends?” (“The Antarctic Disaster” 211-12).

¹⁶⁰ Smith’s biography offers much insight into Oates’s upbringing. He was his mother’s pampered favourite and, like the rest of the family, was dominated by her throughout his life (41). Caroline Oates was used to having her own way, and her son appears to have inherited this quality. A list of instructions she drew up for visitors to the family home, for example, was no doubt less amusing to her visitors than to a modern reader. It included, in Smith’s words, “such frosty directives as: ‘Don’t stay an awful time, ie. more than a week ... Don’t shiver ... Don’t ask what time the next meal is ... Don’t say ‘What fish’ when offered fish for breakfast” (31).

(54).¹⁶¹ Smith also reports various criticisms he made of his captain and colonel (54-55).

It was a strange mixture of a man, then, who went south with Scott: a tough army officer who was also a pampered member of the landed gentry; someone who had been subject to the will of others all his life and, not surprisingly, resented it. This information provides new context for the criticisms of Scott in certain of Oates's letters to his mother. Much of his ill will seems to have been fuelled by his anxiety over the performance of the ponies, so important to the expedition's success. As Oates himself wrote in one of those letters, "when a man is having a hard time, he says hard things about other people which he would regret afterwards" (qtd. Smith 171). Scott, in any case, was quite unaware of Oates's resentment, clearly liked and respected him, and praised him warmly in a letter to Caroline Oates (170).

So new light has been cast on the complex character of the 'Soldier' or 'Titus,' as he was nicknamed. But his famous final act of walking out of the tent, described by Scott, has somehow remained largely unexamined. First of all, it was well known at Cape Evans that Oates had more than once raised the question of the proper action for an injured member of the polar party. Smith quotes Meares, a close friend of Oates's:

Before there was any thought of his going with the Polar Party, he repeatedly brought up the question, "What should a member of the Polar Party do if he felt that, through illness, he was a hindrance of [sic] the party?" And he always said that he should sacrifice himself for the good of the others. (178)

Ponting recalls a similar conversation in *Great White South* (288), and to judge from a reply Wilson gave to a reporter who had raised this question after the return of *Discovery*, the practice was a kind of unwritten rule:

There is a code of honour among Arctic (*sic*) explorers. A man who is very ill knows perfectly well that he may cause grave risks to all his comrades and if the immediate risk[s] of delay are indeed grave and he feels very feeble he walks out. (qtd. Smith 180).¹⁶²

But while a man might take this action on his own account, it was obviously not something that could be asked of others.

¹⁶¹ Oates himself was bizarrely foolhardy in an incident where he was shot in the leg, an outcome he seems almost to have provoked (58-59).

¹⁶² And Cherry-Garrard afterwards wrote: "There is no chance of a 'cushy' wound [in polar exploration]: if you break your leg on the Beardmore you must consider the most expedient way of committing suicide, both for your own sake and that of your companions" (*Worst Journey* 596).

This was the horrible dilemma which presented itself to Scott and the other two relatively fit men struggling against the odds to return across the Barrier in early March 1912. In such extreme conditions, a sick or injured man was obviously a threat to the lives of all. The polar party had already been delayed by the sickness and collapse of Evans, and on 17 February Scott had written about that death:

It is a terrible thing to lose a companion in this way, but calm reflection shows that there could not have been a better ending to the terrible anxieties of the past week. Discussion of the situation at lunch yesterday shows us what a desperate pass we were in with a sick man on our hands at such a distance from home. (*Journals* 398)

Scott wrote this a full month before Oates walked out of the tent. His words make the reality of their situation crystal clear, and Oates, as part of the “discussion,” knew this as well as any of the others. After this crisis had passed, and despite the persistently “terrible surface” they were labouring across (399, 400), Scott’s diary is immediately more optimistic. He also notes, factually, that the death of Evans has left them with more food but that they may have progressed faster if he had been alive and able to pull the sledge too. Two weeks later the first sign of a far greater threat to the survival of the polar party appeared. I quote all references to Oates from Scott’s diary (the only source from this date) as the leader charts his decline (*Journals* 404-10):

2 March: Titus Oates disclosed his feet, the toes showing very bad indeed, evidently bitten by the late temperatures.

4 March: [expresses concern about the direness of their situation, and anticipates colder conditions] I fear that Oates at least will weather such an event very poorly.

5 March: Regret to say going from bad to worse ... The result is telling on all, but mainly on Oates, whose feet are in a wretched condition. One swelled up tremendously last night and he is very lame this morning ... Our fuel dreadfully low and *the poor Soldier nearly done. It is pathetic enough because we can do nothing for him; more hot food might do a little, but only a little, I fear ... Wilson is feeling* [the low temperatures] *most; mainly, I fear, from his self-sacrificing devotion in doctoring to Oates’ feet. We cannot help each other, each has enough to do to take care of himself.* [emphasis added]

6 March: Poor Oates is unable to pull, sits on the sledge when we are track-searching—he is wonderfully plucky, as his feet must be giving him great pain. He makes no complaint, but his spirits only come up in spurts now, and he grows more silent in the tent ... If we were all fit I should have hopes of getting through, but the poor Soldier has become a terrible hindrance, though he does his utmost and suffers much I fear.

7 March: A little worse I fear. One of Oates’ feet *very* bad this morning; he is wonderfully brave. We still talk of what we will do together at home ... One feels that for poor Oates the crisis is near...

8 March: Worse and worse in morning; poor Oates' left foot can never last out, and time over foot gear something awful. Have to wait in night foot gear for nearly an hour before I start changing, and then am generally first to be ready. Wilson's feet giving trouble now, but this mainly because he gives so much help to others.

[*9 March:* no entry]

10 March: Things steadily downhill. Oates' foot worse. He has rare pluck and *must know that he can never get through*. He asked Wilson if he had a chance this morning, and of course Bill had to say he didn't know. *In point of fact he has none* ... of course poor Titus is the greatest handicap. He keeps us waiting in the morning until we have partly lost the warming effect of our good breakfast, when the only wise policy is to be up and away at once; again at lunch. Poor chap! it is too pathetic to watch him; one cannot but try to cheer him up. [emphasis added]

11 March: Titus Oates is very near the end, one feels. What we or he will do, God only knows. We discussed the matter at breakfast; he is a fine brave fellow and *understands the situation*, but he practically asked for advice. Nothing could be said but to urge him to march as long as he could. One satisfactory result to the discussion; I practically ordered Wilson to hand over the means of ending our troubles to us, so that any one of us may know how to do so ... We have 30 opium tablets apiece ... So far the tragical side of our story. [emphasis added]

12 March: Things are left much the same, Oates not pulling much, and now with hands as well as feet pretty well useless.

[*13 March:* no entry]

14 March: Poor Wilson horribly cold, could not get off ski for some time. Bowers and I practically made camp, and when we got into the tent at last we were all deadly cold. Then temp. now midday down -43° and the wind strong. We *must* go on, but now the making of every camp must be more difficult ... Poor Oates got it again in the foot. I shudder to think what it will be like to-morrow.

[*15 March:* no entry]

16 or 17 March: Lost track of dates ... At lunch, the day before yesterday, poor Titus Oates said he couldn't go on; he proposed we should leave him in his sleeping-bag. That we could not do, and induced him to come on ... In spite of its awful nature for him he struggled on and we made a few miles. At night he was worse and we knew the end had come.

Should this be found I want these facts recorded. Oates' last thoughts were of his Mother, but immediately before he took pride in thinking that his regiment would be pleased with the bold way in which he met his death. We can testify to his bravery. He has borne intense suffering for weeks without complaint, and *to the very last was able and willing to discuss outside subjects*. He did not—would not—give up hope to the very end. He was a brave soul. This was the end. He slept through the night before last, hoping not to wake; but he woke in the morning—yesterday. It was blowing a blizzard. He said, "I am just

going outside and may be some time.” He went out into the blizzard and we have not seen him since.

I take this opportunity of saying that we have stuck to our sick companions to the last. In [the] case of Edgar Evans, ... the safety of the remainder seemed to demand his abandonment, but Providence mercifully removed him at this critical moment ... We knew that poor Oates was walking to his death, but though we tried to dissuade him, we knew it was the act of a brave man and an English gentleman. We all hope to meet the end with a similar spirit, and assuredly the end is not far. [emphasis added; they reached their final camp on the evening of 19 March.]

These excerpts from two weeks of Scott’s diary, which read like the Stages of the Cross, detail the gradual physical disintegration of Oates and, consequently, of them all. Factually, it seems the direct and honest record of a good naval captain. Scott does not mince words about such matters as the benefit of extra food after the death of Evans, or the fact that they knew Oates was walking to his death. He spells out how the continued presence of Oates hampered them all terribly, and he was under no illusion at all that it was bringing certain death to him, Wilson and Bowers. As early as 5 March Scott indicates that he believes Oates cannot survive (see my italics). The situation deteriorates predictably until he states outright on 10 March that Oates has no chance at all (see my italics). But despite Oates’s assertions at Cape Evans, and his understanding the situation (see my italics, 11 March), he does not act, asks for advice, and continues to put the others in an impossible situation.

In view of the bizarre interpretations that have been made of these events by Huntford and others, it is necessary to state the obvious: the situation was blindingly clear to Scott. But short of abandoning the dying man, all he could finally do was to “practically order” Wilson to give them all opium tablets in the hope that Oates, who was clearly incapable of acting, might at least manage it by this method. Oates did not. It was still an excruciating nine or ten days before he finally left, and by that time he had doomed them all to death. In other words, he did not sacrifice his life to save his friends at all: they sacrificed their lives for him. And yet we read that Oates, as well as understanding the situation, remained mentally clear to the end (see my italics, 16-17 March). It seems he was simply psychologically incapable of acting on his own initiative when it most counted. How he finally managed to leave must remain uncertain, but there is absolutely no indication that it was at Scott’s prompting. And if it is argued that Scott and the other two, against all the evidence, were willing in some way to force the issue, then an explanation is needed of why they waited for so many desperate days, and until it was too late to make any difference. On the other hand, if Oates had left when the others knew he had no chance, perhaps ten days earlier, they

would have needed to cover only an extra mile a day to reach One Ton. Given what Scott reveals about the burden he was and the delay he caused, that may well have been possible. So I suggest that the obvious and immediate cause of the polar party's destruction was the critical failure of Oates in the end to live up to the standard he had advocated so strenuously back at the base. None of this is to deny the extraordinary stoicism he displayed in his agonizing last weeks.

Scott's record also reveals something astonishing: despite his clear awareness of the situation, he never blames Oates. On the contrary, and demonstrating his quality as a leader, there is compassion in every reference to the other man. And finally Scott summons all of that compassion to write a tribute that would secure the reputation of someone who had finally brought destruction on them all, and he thoughtfully begins it with references to those to whom it would mean the most. We can assume that Wilson and Bowers behaved in the same way.¹⁶³ It is sadly ironic that Scott's very generosity of spirit towards Oates was later interpreted as a weapon against him by the latter's mother and others.

Huntford's attack was still some years in the future when, in 1972, Oates's former school issued a booklet honouring its "most famous pupil" (*A Very Gallant Gentleman: Laurence Edward Grace Oates*). The publication includes a poem, "Some thoughts on the Scott tragedy," by A. Burnett, apparently a student at the school:

Brave men went, brave men came back.
But not all, some like Scott and Oates perished,
They perished yes, because they went unprepared for the hardship that followed.
They took ponies, tractors, dogs.
The ponies all had to be shot.
The tractors, the engines fell out,
Well the dogs were good, but were sent back.
Roald Amundsen went, but he came back,
He got back because he was prepared.
He took dogs only, dogs are better than ponies or tractors....

The words of this early debunker, inserted among the encomiums of Oates, introduce the second of the two unexplored topics I would like to examine: the suffering of Amundsen's dog teams in Antarctica.

¹⁶³ In his farewell letter to his mother, Bowers wrote simply: "We have had a terrible journey back—Seaman Evans died on the glacier & Oates left us the other day—we have had terribly low temperatures on the Barrier & that & our sick companions have delayed us till too late in the season which has made us very short of fuel & we are now out of food as well."

Amundsen's dogs

From the beginning, Amundsen was praised for his use of dogs and Scott, in hindsight, blamed for not depending on them entirely. I would now like to consider this question from the point of view of the dogs. In doing so, I will draw on the evidence of Amundsen himself, as given in *The South Pole*. First, however, it is necessary to quote from Scott's *Voyage of Discovery* to confute three old chestnuts of the anti-Scott canon (see, for example, Huntford; Katz and Kirby; Rosove): that Scott did not appreciate what dogs could do; that, as an Englishman, he was prejudiced against using them for transport; and that he chose manhauling instead because it was nobler and more virile.

The following quotation from Scott's book is regularly given to justify these views:¹⁶⁴

In my mind no journey ever made with dogs can approach the height of that fine conception which is realised when a party of men go forth to face hardships, dangers, and difficulties with their own unaided efforts, and by days and weeks of hard physical labour succeed in solving some problem of the great unknown. Surely in this case the conquest is more nobly and splendidly won. (1: 343)

Certainly, these lines appear to offer good evidence for the last of the three claims. They are not, however, from his Antarctic journal: Scott wrote them back in England, and while preparing his book he was lunching daily at the house of his patron, Markham, who was known to advocate this view.¹⁶⁵ In part, it became Scott's own attitude too, in reaction to his experience during *Discovery's* southern journey, when the men had to thrash sick or exhausted dogs to get them to move, something Wilson had described as "soul sickening" (*Diary of the Discovery* 220). But, as is often the case, Scott's perspective was far more complex than a single quotation suggests—especially one which excludes essential context.

The excerpt is from a disquisition on dogs as a means of polar transport that runs for more than seven pages (all written after *Discovery's* return), and it provides a good example of how misleading quotation can be (1: 340-47). I will give a precis of what preceded the fragment usually cited in order to show that Scott very clearly understood the advantages of dog travel, and that it was not 'prejudice' that later prevented him

¹⁶⁴ Rosove even quotes this passage ("this hidebound view") to support his claims that Scott was "too sentimental to make serious beasts of burden" of dogs and was "disdainful of their role" *before* the southern journey on his first expedition (91-92)—when in fact it was written as a *result* of the experience on that journey. As a consequence, when Rosove starts to describe the journey itself (where Scott expresses enthusiastic confidence in his dog team) he has to write that Scott "*now*" seemed more enthusiastic about dog transport" (94; emphasis added).

¹⁶⁵ Much later, in *Lands of Silence*, Markham referred to this as "one of the noblest passages in Scott's great work" (472). But he is careful to explain the context of the quotation and to include the preceding sentences—all of which, as I will show, is vital.

from relying on them to the degree that Amundsen did. All of this was written long before the *Terra Nova* expedition and at a time when there was no other Antarctic explorer Scott needed to compare himself with in this regard:

Broadly speaking, there are two ways in which dogs may be used—they may be taken with the idea of bringing them all back safe and sound, or they may be treated as pawns in the game, from which the best value is to be got regardless of their lives. (1: 340)

If the first method is chosen, Scott calculates, a dog can pull a heavy load about twenty-five percent further than a man consuming an equivalent amount of food, and a light load fifty percent further:

To this may be added that the dog requires no sleeping-bag, tent or cooking-apparatus, nor, indeed, any of those articles which figured so largely as the permanent weights of a sledge party ... So far, then, it would appear that a dog is a more efficient machine than a man; but, on the other hand ... dogs cannot travel without man, and they have therefore, in addition to their own food, to carry the food and *impedimenta* of their drivers. (1: 341)

Scott notes that the best performances of dogs have been “little short of marvellous,” but that these were “on short journeys, over beaten tracks, and with a light load” and that for some reason (he admits “the subject is complicated”) no dogs have ever returned alive from a long and completely isolated Arctic journey. He states that if, and only if, the comparison is made with a dog-sledge journey which aims to preserve the dogs’ lives, “I am inclined to state my belief that in the polar regions properly organized parties of men will perform as extended journeys as teams of dogs.” If the lives of the dogs are to be sacrificed, on the other hand, then “the dog-team is invested with a capacity for work which is beyond the emulation of men. To appreciate this is matter of simple arithmetic” (1: 341)—and Scott then performs the arithmetic. Efficiency notwithstanding, he expresses “reluctance” to use dogs in this way:

One cannot calmly contemplate the murder of animals which possess such intelligence and individuality, which have frequently such endearing qualities, and which very possibly one has learnt to regard as friends and companions. *On the other hand, it may be pointed out with good reason that to forego the great objects which may be achieved by the sacrifice of dog-life is carrying sentiment to undue length. It is a case, if ever there was one, where the end justifies the means. There is no reason why the life of a dog should be considered more than that of a sheep, and no one would pause to consider the cruelty of driving a diminishing flock of sheep to supply the wants and aid of the movements of travellers in more temperate climates.* (1: 342; emphasis added)

Far from being the victim of ‘English’ dog-doting sentimentality that his debunkers portray, Scott shows that he has thoughtfully considered both sides of this question. He argues for a compromise: “the avoidance of unnecessary pain” (1: 342). At the

same time he is forthright in acknowledging that their own experience on the southern journey was

probably ... an exceptionally sad one in this respect, but it left in each one of our small party an unconquerable aversion to the employment of dogs in this ruthless fashion. We knew well that they had served their end, that they had carried us much farther than we could have got by our own exertions....

Scott explains that he has tried to give a “just view” of the use of dogs, and summarizes:

To say that they do not greatly increase the radius of action is absurd; to pretend that they can be worked to this end without pain, suffering, and death is equally futile. The question is whether the latter can be justified by the gain, and I think that logically it may be; but the introduction of such sordid necessity must and does rob sledge-travelling of much of its glory. (1: 343)

The passage usually quoted, with which I began, follows immediately. After such a balanced argument with its emphasis on pragmatism and logic, Scott’s use of terms like “glory,” “nobly” and “splendidly” for his peroration is probably unfortunate. But this does not excuse their quotation in isolation and the false impression thereby created.

In contrast to Scott, Amundsen took an entirely utilitarian approach to dogs, with consequences that I will now examine. Scott had stated that it was futile to pretend that dogs could be employed in the way they were later employed on the Norwegian expedition without concomitant “pain, suffering, and death”—and in fact Amundsen’s report of the experience of his dogs is replete with examples of all three. I will present the facts as Amundsen himself describes them.

The expedition left Norway with 97 dogs (1: 169). Additional females were apparently not needed and two puppies of that sex were the first animals to be killed, at Madeira (1: 122). The dogs continued to breed and on arrival at the Barrier there were 116 (1: 169). More puppies were dispatched later—six females were shot, for example, at Framheim at the end of winter (1: 346)—and three whose sex is not stated were shot when they followed the expedition during the abortive early start for the Pole (1: 382). Adult dogs were killed or died of exhaustion throughout the expedition. On a depot-laying journey, for example, one called Thor was killed with an axe. Another, Lurven, reduced to “skin and bones,” “fell down on the march and died on the spot. He was one of those dogs who had to work their hardest the whole time; he never thought of shirking for a moment; he pulled and pulled until he died” (1: 242).

Even at this early point Amundsen states: “All sentimental feeling had vanished long ago.... ”

The South Pole journey took the heaviest toll of deaths. During the first stages, dogs were killed because they were too old (2: 22), too thin (2: 27), pregnant (2: 28) or simply superfluous (2: 29). “The more we could get rid of,” Amundsen writes at a certain point, “and the sooner we could begin to do so, the better” (2: 28). Not long afterwards, the mathematics of his plan demanded a mass slaughter, with a further six deaths held in abeyance:

We now had forty-two dogs. Our plan was to take all the forty-two up to the plateau; there twenty-four of them were to be slaughtered, and the journey continued with three sledges and eighteen dogs. Of these last eighteen, it would be necessary, in our opinion, to slaughter six in order to bring the other twelve back to this point. (2: 35)

At the point when the first of these killings takes place, Amundsen makes the candid and revealing comment: “We had agreed to shrink from nothing in order to reach our goal” (2: 62). Apart from the dogs that were killed, some that could not keep up were let go (1: 388, 2: 4) or ran away (2: 30) and were never seen again. More fell dead in their tracks (1: 243, 388). As devoted, hard-working animals outlived their usefulness, they were summarily dispatched. Helge, for example, “an uncommonly useful and good-natured dog [who] without making any fuss ... had pulled from morning to night, and had been a shining example to the team,” was “only a shadow of old Helge” on arrival at the Pole: “He was only a drag on the others and did absolutely no work. One blow on the skull, and Helge ceased to live” (2: 123). There is often an incongruous satisfaction in the perfunctoriness with which Amundsen describes the killing of dogs whose loyal service he has just remarked on. Lasse, Amundsen’s “own favourite dog,” was the first to be killed on the return journey: “He had worn himself out completely, and was no longer worth anything. He was divided into fifteen portions ...” (2: 137). The incongruity is also evident in the relish with which the men ate the dogs: the thought of “fresh dog cutlets,” Amundsen writes, “made our mouths water” (2: 57). He is especially enthusiastic, and graphic, at the “Butcher’s Shop,” where the mass slaughter took place: “Great masses of beautiful fresh, red meat, with quantities of the most tempting fat, lay spread over the snow.” And as “Rex, a beautiful little animal,” is being cut up, the explorer is clearly salivating: “I could not take my eyes off [the] work; the delicate little cutlets had an absolutely hypnotizing effect as they were spread out one by one over the snow” (2: 65).

When the expedition finally departed from Antarctica, there were thirty-nine dogs left, about half of which had been with the expedition from the outset (2: 181). Approximately eighty of the original ninety-seven dogs, therefore, had either died or been killed, along with many others born during the expedition. Even on departure, when there was no particular need for it, Amundsen had planned to kill twenty-one of the remaining thirty-nine dogs as superfluous to his breeding requirements—but spared them after *Fram* brought news that Douglas Mawson had requested them for his expedition (2: 181).

From the death toll, I turn now to the dogs' suffering. Essentially this was of two kinds: it was either inflicted by the men to force the dogs to obey them or was the result of the nature and conditions of the work the animals performed. Early in *South Pole* Amundsen makes it clear that he enforced absolute submission: "the dog must understand that he has to obey in everything" (1: 58). Generally, this was achieved by whipping,¹⁶⁶ of which there are many descriptions, particularly during the first sledge trips (1: 180, 182, 188, 190). Amundsen writes: "We had some work indeed, those first days, to get the dogs to obey us ... More than once it cost us a wet shirt to convince them we were really the masters. It was strenuous work, but it succeeded in the end. Poor dogs! They got plenty of thrashing in those days" (1: 182). The expression of pity and the wry references to the *men's* work and discomfort (wet shirts) divert attention from the harsh reality of the repeated flogging of the dogs. This early cowing of the animals and the traditional view of Amundsen as a complete master of dog driving notwithstanding, he too experienced runaway dog-teams (1: 380, 383). And later in the expedition his dogs still "had to be flogged home" (1: 377) and physically punished (2: 16, 21).

The animals, moreover, were suffering from their work. At times they were shivering constantly and so cold that they had to be lifted up and put into harness (1: 384). And despite the careful mathematics by which the dogs were fed to each other and to the men, they were also ravenously hungry. En route to the Pole, they would eat "whips, ski-bindings, lashings, etc.", and Amundsen adds: "With some of them this voracity went so far that we had to chain them" (2: 40). At the Pole, "these ravenous animals ... devoured everything they came across, even to the ebonite points of our ski-sticks ..." (2: 110-11). They were required to perform gruelling work nevertheless. On

¹⁶⁶ In addition, Amundsen explains that his "Eskimo" dogs had a deeper fear of him than domestic dogs, since it was linked to their stronger "instinct of self-preservation" and they depended on him for food (1: 196-97).

an early depot-laying trip, for example, Amundsen pushed on with dogs that were “very thin, and apparently worn out; but in any case we had to reach 82° S ...” (1: 234). Closer to that latitude, the dogs were “terribly emaciated” (1: 236), and when they finally arrived at the goal Amundsen acknowledged he had “asked more of them than they were capable of doing ...The whip had long ago lost its terrors. When I tried to use it, they only crowded together, and got their heads as much out of the way as they could; the body did not matter so much” (1: 237). One dog which died had been

uttering his plaintive howls on the march, a thing one never hears a dog do while working. I did not understand what it meant—would not understand, perhaps. On he had to go—on till he dropped. When we cut him open we found that his whole chest was one large abscess. (1: 238)

Others were in a similar state. On the return from the Pole, when “Fritjof” was cut open, it was discovered that his “lungs were quite shrivelled up” (2: 160). Nevertheless, at the beginning of his book Amundsen writes: “the dogs were always in splendid condition” (1: 56). He has been taken at his word.

The point of enumerating all this suffering and death, therefore, is that very few commentators have either noticed it or found anything to object to in it.¹⁶⁷ On the contrary, Scott has been widely criticized from the beginning for not employing the same means. But even if one accepts, as Amundsen did, that the end justified any means, there is cognitive dissonance at least and perhaps also hypocrisy in his attempts in *South Pole* to appear as an animal lover despite the evidence of his actions. To my knowledge, this has not previously been pointed out. Amundsen had read Scott’s *Voyage of the ‘Discovery’* and a comment early in *South Pole* suggests that he was uneasily aware that the treatment of animals was a topic of some sensitivity: “I still cannot help smiling when I think of the compassionate voices that were raised here and there—and even made their way into print—about the ‘cruelty to animals’ on board the *Fram*” (1: 60). He prefaces his statement about the need for absolute domination over dogs with some heavy irony regarding their use by the English: “Can it be that the dog has not understood his master? Or is it the master who has not understood his dog?” (1: 58). On the other hand, throughout *South Pole* he is at pains to demonstrate his own sensitivity to the special qualities of dogs. “There can hardly be an animal,” he writes,

¹⁶⁷ Turvey, for example, tells us that Amundsen “loved his dogs” (80). A very rare dissenting view is implied in “Dogs,” published by New Zealand poet Bill Manhire in the *London Review of Books* in 2005 (see my comments in the next chapter).

that is capable of expressing its feelings to the same extent as the dog. Joy, sorrow, gratitude, scruples of conscience, are all reflected as plainly as could be desired in his behaviour, and above all in his eyes. We human beings are apt to cherish the conviction that we have a monopoly of [sic] what is called a living soul; the eyes, it is said, are the mirror of this soul. That is all right enough; but now take a look at a dog's eyes, study them attentively. How often do we see something "human" in their expression, the same variations that we meet with in human eyes. This, at all events, is something that strikingly resembles 'soul.' (1: 110)¹⁶⁸

The hint of didacticism in the imperatives ("now take a look ... study them") suggests that Amundsen may be trying to persuade himself of his empathy, because it is very difficult to square such a statement with the actual treatment of the dogs on the *Fram* expedition. Likewise, it is when the suffering inflicted first becomes obvious—when dogs drop dead from exhaustion on a depot-laying journey and "the whip had long ago lost its terrors"—that Amundsen first feels the need to justify his actions:

How hard and unfeeling one gets under such conditions; how one's whole nature may be changed! I am naturally fond of all animals, and try to avoid hurting them. There is none of the "sportsman's" instinct in me; it would never occur to me to kill an animal—rats and flies excepted—unless it was to support life. (1: 238)

This seemingly reasonable statement bears further examination. The reference to the "sportsman's instinct" may well be a deft swipe at the English hunting tradition, and there is deftness, too, in the wry exception made for "rats and flies," with agreement guaranteed from most readers. It is at least questionable whether such an animal lover as Amundsen here portrays himself could treat animals the way he did. (Scott could not.)

But there are two claims which can be challenged on the author's own evidence. The first is Amundsen's assertion that he takes no pleasure in the hunting of animals. He describes, for example, at considerable length "an exciting seal-hunt" which took place shortly after the Norwegians arrived in the Bay of Whales, and which he obviously finds side-splittingly funny. At first he "chuckle[s] and laugh[s]" as he watches two men stalking the seals:

¹⁶⁸ At least two of the men of *Terra Nova* would have agreed. Wilson, for example, took a particular liking to an older dog called Stareek ('Old Man' in Russian), whom he thought: "quite the nicest, quietest, cleverest old dog gentleman I have ever come across. He looks in face as though he knew all the wickedness of all the world and all its cares and as though he was bored to death by both of them" (*Terra Nova* 100). Debenham wrote a moving article about this unique animal: "Stareek: The Story of a Sledge Dog." (Stareek's 18-day, 200-mile journey across the Barrier later in the expedition, alone and without a morsel of food, is more extraordinary than any of the human tales of endurance.)

Then there is a report. Two of the sleeping seals give a little spasm, and do not move again. It is otherwise with the third. With snakelike movements it wriggles away through the loose snow with surprising speed. It is no longer target practice, but hunting real game, and the result is in keeping with it. Bang! bang! and bang again. One of the hunters uses up all his cartridges and has to go back, but the other sets off in pursuit of the game. Oh, how I laughed! Decorum was no longer possible; I simply shook with laughter. (1: 177-78)

Amundsen's hilarious enjoyment of seals being used for "target practice" and then shot at indiscriminately cannot easily be reconciled with the statements such as: "There is none of the 'sportsman's' instinct in me" and "I am naturally fond of all animals, and try to avoid hurting them." Furthermore, the claim that he would only kill an animal "to support life" is belied by the previously mentioned fact that before he was told of Mawson's request he was intending to kill twenty-one of his remaining dogs on leaving the continent.

It seems that, after the event, Amundsen felt some pangs of conscience about his pitiless treatment of his dogs and in his book attempts to justify it in retrospect. Some of the statements he makes in doing so are inaccurate. In places, however, he is more honest in his remorse and admits that he was brutalized by his monomania with being first at the Pole. Of the time he drove the dogs to death on the depot-laying journey to 82° S, he writes: "the daily hard work and the object I would not give up had made me brutal, for brutal I was when I forced those five skeletons to haul that excessive load" (1: 238). And this, in my view, points to a crucial broad distinction between the stories of Amundsen and Scott: a distinction of character. Amundsen, by his own admission, was ruthless in the pursuit of his goal, and he used that end to justify questionable behaviour of various kinds. Subsequently, as Scott had foreseen, his attainment of that goal also justified the means he had employed in the eyes of many. "In victory, there are no questions asked," Huntford admitted for a different reason in an article he co-authored shortly before *Scott and Amundsen* appeared: "After Roald Amundsen won the race for the South Pole ... very few cared how he did it, least of all himself" (Drewry and Huntford 329). (The final point, as we have seen, is not quite accurate.)

When considered solely as an example of the single-mindedly determined carrying out of an immense and arduous plan, the legacy of Amundsen's South Pole expedition is unsurpassed, and it is one from which I have also drawn inspiration. But his conduct had serious consequences for others, and I have described some of those for his animals, for Johansen and for Scott's expedition. At the same time, Amundsen's triumph did not take place without a certain brutalizing of character. Norwegian psychoanalyst Per Anthi, who had access to Norwegian sources, published a

psychological profile of the explorer in 1999. Anthi, who identifies certain general sado-masochistic traits linked to “*belligerent rivalry*” (998), argues that Amundsen in fact experienced acute guilt at his South Pole victory but, lacking insight into his inner conflicts, afterwards lapsed into paranoia. The study contains much information of psychological interest from all periods of the explorer’s life. Anthi cites Amundsen’s humiliation of Johansen among the examples of rivalry, and his ongoing fury at Lord Curzon’s previously mentioned praise of the dogs, which led to a “bitter campaign against the British” (1003), among those of paranoia. The Norwegian ambassador in London came to regard Amundsen as “mentally deranged” and Anthi quotes Nansen writing that “there were several unmistakable signs of insanity” (1003). The memory of Scott’s death never left Amundsen, and Anthi considers that his dogged determination to fly out over the Arctic in search of the Italian Umberto Nobile, “one of his worst rivals”—a flight during which he met his death—was both the fulfilment of an underlying wish “to turn his destructive aggression against himself” and “an effort to expiate his deeply rooted guilt over the death of Scott and his men, and for Johansen’s suicide” (1004). Anthi’s study makes sad reading. I have given a few details here because, although Amundsen is an essential factor in Scott’s story and its interpretation, these matters are little known to readers of English.

§

This part of the thesis has considered more than a century of commentary on Scott and his story, both during his career and after his death. On the basis of the written evidence at least, it can now be seen that even in 1987 Beck’s claim that “the epic, heroic, and patriotic dimension of the Scott expedition caught and held the imagination of the British people both at the time and ever since” (32) was a serious oversimplification. Today it is inapplicable. More time may be needed to test the same author’s optimistic prediction that Huntford’s book would ultimately encourage a better-informed assessment of the explorer. To date, it appears only to have fatally polarized the discussion, and the distortions it introduced continue to be perpetuated in a kind of Chinese whispers. On the other hand, there is no arguing with Beck’s statement that “revisionism has always been the fate of great men, and Scott should constitute no exception” (33-34). But revisionism is one thing, and the simplistic partisanship, character assassination and misuse of evidence encountered in this survey, particularly during the last three decades, is another. We have seen that many

have not hesitated to sit in judgement on Scott from the start and that some, more recently, have combined these judgements with blanket criticism of Edwardian institutions. Scott has been censured principally on account of the deaths of the polar party; but factors such as the inherent risks of the work and conditions, gaps in contemporary scientific knowledge and plain bad luck have been ignored or brushed aside. A recent article in the psychology journal *Memory*, “Hindsight Bias: How Knowledge and Heuristics Affect our Reconstruction of the Past,” provides a useful insight into and caution against such retrospective criticism. “Once people know the outcome of an event,” the authors write, “they tend to overestimate what could have been anticipated in foresight” (Hertwig, Fenselow and Hoffrage 357). This phenomenon is abundantly clear in critiques of Scott, and indeed the article cites his case and the views that Huntford and Theroux expressed “with the benefit of hindsight.” The authors offer a further relevant warning: “the more experienced the person is with the task under consideration, the smaller the effect of hindsight bias” (358). We have seen that men like Fiennes, Fuchs, Swan or Stroud, with experience closest to Scott’s, are full of admiration, whereas some of the explorer’s sternest critics have not visited Antarctica.

Discussion of Scott’s story must take Amundsen’s expedition into consideration. But assessment of the latter has been based on a single highly edited account—Amundsen’s own—and even this has been read uncritically. By contrast, Scott’s personal journals and letters have been picked over, and the evaluation of his story draws on the private and public comments of many of his colleagues and countless commentators and biographers. Among other things, this disparity has resulted in a simplistic view of how the *Fram* expedition actually proceeded, and of the conduct and personality of its leader. But pilloried or applauded, Robert Scott remains the central figure in the heroic era of Antarctic exploration. I hope that the foregoing discussion may once again allow at least the possibility to be contemplated that Markham was not deluded when he wrote that Scott “died as he had lived, one of the most beautiful characters of our generation” (*Lands of Silence* 502). I also hope that in the process of making this suggestion I have shown that hagiography is not the only alternative to demonization. In the final part of the thesis I direct my attention to Scott’s writing and to the nature of his story.

PART THREE

Literary “Scott”

It takes a great deal of history to produce a little literature ...

— *Hawthorne*, Henry James

Writing a tragedy

TODAY SCOTT IS remembered not because of his achievements as an explorer but because “he composed the most haunting journal in the history of exploration.”¹⁶⁹ Those pencilled words not only tell an extraordinary story but also tell it astonishingly well. The reader follows the little band of men on their great quest, struggling with them across the forbidding wasteland towards the goal, where bitter disappointment, long foreshadowed, awaits them. Then, in the interval between ‘failure’ and death, we watch, hoping and fearing, as their difficulties multiply. But it is Scott’s words that draw us into this drama, and we see through his eyes and feel with him, as a quest narrative transforms ineluctably into a tragedy and an exemplum on how to face death—no less great a human theme than the quest. I begin this chapter with an assessment of Scott’s qualities as a writer, paying particular attention to the last journal itself, “the active instrument that has made the adventure so famous and the characters of the adventurers so familiar” (H. Young). Following that, I investigate certain qualities of “Scott of the Antarctic” as a story, and the remainder of the chapter considers some of the imaginative inflections the story has received.

Scott’s narrative of his last expedition, unlike that of the first, remains in the form of a diary or journal. What Piggott calls “the enduring question of motives and audiences” (3) in regard to such documents has already been discussed and also some of the editorial changes made to the manuscript prior to publication. Full details of the text’s preparation and publication history can be found in the recent scholarly reprint of Smith, Elder’s 1913 first edition, *Scott’s Last Expedition, Vol. I, Being the Journals of Captain R. F. Scott, R.N., C.V.O.* (Jones, Introduction xlii–xlvi). (The second volume contained preliminary scientific reports and accounts by others of *Terra Nova*’s subsidiary expeditions.) Scott’s published words comprise: the journal describing events from the preparations for departure from New Zealand until his death; substantial or complete versions of eight letters and short quotations from two others;

¹⁶⁹ Jones makes this comment in the introduction to his edition of Scott’s journals (xvii), the version referred to in this chapter unless otherwise stated.

and his “Message to [the] Public,” giving the reasons as he saw them for the destruction of the polar party. By way of prefacing my analysis of Scott’s writing, I begin with some of the earliest, and most personal, responses it evoked.

One of the first and most poignant was that of his wife. Kathleen Scott received news of her husband’s death while she was travelling by sea to meet the expedition on its return to New Zealand. As she read first the fragments which had been made public and later the complete journal, it was Scott’s example of character and courage that most inspired her. Of his “Message’s” dying appeal on behalf of the bereaved relatives, she writes in her diary while still at sea: “That was a glorious courageous note & a great inspiration to me—If he in his weak agony-racked condition could face it with such sublime fortitude, how dare I possibly whine—I will not ...” (25 Feb. 1913). And after receiving the journal on arrival in New Zealand and spending the entire night reading it: “Any more magnificent invigorating document I never read, & one would be a poor creature indeed if one could not face one’s world with such words to inspire one” (27-28 Feb. 1913). In the same entry she mentions the “fine stirring words of self forgetfulness” in her husband’s last letter to her.¹⁷⁰ Kathleen Scott’s presence at home and the love between her and Scott are important elements of “Scott of the Antarctic.” As I have mentioned, some versions of the story interleave her daily activities in England with Scott’s on the Antarctic plateau; others conclude as she receives news of her husband’s death. It needs to be remembered, however, that she was by no means the type of the conventional grieving widow.

Sir Clements Markham, although no doubt less important to the explorer than his wife, had an equally great impact on his life. The two men were closely associated professionally for more than a decade and it was Markham who had appointed Scott leader of *Discovery*, thus launching him on his Antarctic career. Markham also responded to the legacy of courage and selflessness transmitted through the journals, themes that were echoed, in turn, by contemporary reviewers of *Scott’s Last Expedition* (Greely; Brown). Markham writes in the book’s preface:

¹⁷⁰ Twenty years after the events, a French commentator wrote romantically of this letter that it “brings tears, certainly, but makes one wish all the same, as one woman said, to be so loved by such a man” (“qui arrachent des larmes, certes, mais qui font envier tout de même, disait une femme, celle qui fut aimée à ce point par un tel homme”) (Rouch 608-09). A curious inversion of this sentiment appears in contemporary American writer Evan Connell’s “The White Lantern,” an essay which seems to owe much to Huntford. Connell regards the words Scott’s wife wrote about him in her diary as *his* only redeeming quality and concedes: “To arouse such transcendent feelings in a woman, he must have been extraordinary” (154).

... the vast number of readers of his journal will be deeply impressed with the beauty of his character. The chief traits which shone forth through his life were conspicuous in the hour of death. There are few events in history to be compared, for grandeur and pathos, with the last closing scene in that silent wilderness of snow. The great leader, with the bodies of his dearest friends beside him, wrote and wrote until the pencil dropped from his dying grasp. There was no thought of himself, only the earnest desire to give comfort and consolation to others in sorrow. (4)¹⁷¹

Like Kathleen Scott, Markham highlights the journal's revelation of its writer's character, a character he recognizes. But the references to historical perspective and to "grandeur and pathos," along with the description of the setting and the use of the term "closing scene," also point to certain dramatic qualities inherent in the story itself. I will explore the nature and structure of the story later, through a comparison with Greek tragedy; but first to Scott the writer.

Scott as a writer

Commentators have always praised the explorer's literary gifts. His first biographer dubbed him "a born writer" (Gwynn 35) and the most recent observes: "Of all the great explorers of the Heroic Age Scott was the only one ... who had the literary talent to make sense of his life ..." (Crane 38). Even Huntford, as we have seen, conceded Scott's ability in this regard, although he turned that too into a fault by arguing that the explorer employed it in "masterly self-justification" (*Scott and Amundsen* 562). The principal texts I consider here are *The Voyage of the Discovery* and *Scott's Last Expedition*, and a distinction should be made between texts the author edited and those he did not. As I stated in the prologue to this thesis, if Scott had survived he would have polished and added to his *Terra Nova* manuscripts to prepare them for publication, just as after his previous expedition. Whether the result would have been an improvement, however, is open to question. One of the first reviewers of *Scott's Last Expedition* thought not:

The reader undoubtedly gains in having the story told through these diaries written on the spot. It is only necessary to compare this account with that of Captain Scott's previous expedition ... excellent as that was, to realise this. The colour and the glamour of the life are reflected from every page, with all its vicissitudes and changes of mood. Had Captain Scott been able to rewrite these diaries for publication we feel sure that some of the

¹⁷¹ Twenty years later, Martin Lindsay plagiarized Markham in the preface to his biography of Scott: "There are few events in history to be compared with the final tragedy enacted in that silent desert of snow—the dying leader, with the dead bodies of his dearest friends beside him, writing, writing until the pen slipped from his fingers, with never a thought for himself, seeking only to give consolation to others" (17-18).

simplicity and directness would have been lost, trifling episodes, momentary reflections, might have been removed, and other incidents expanded. But now we have it all exactly as it seemed at the time.... (Brown 14)

Of course, by its nature, a story with such an ending could not have been revised by its author, but the diaries were edited to some degree by others. Sledging and base diaries were combined to give a continuous daily narrative, and material from letters to Kathleen Scott was incorporated in certain places (Jones, Introduction xlv).¹⁷² As discussed in chapter 4, some critical comments were removed and minor changes were made to punctuation, spelling and grammar. Nevertheless, Scott's original remained essentially intact. And while a distinction can certainly be drawn between daily records kept in the field and accounts composed after the events (R. Davis), by the time Scott pencilled his *Terra Nova* diaries he had already written *The Voyage of the 'Discovery'* and they are therefore, even in their manuscript form, the work of an experienced writer. In this regard they contrast with the writings of many of the early explorers of Canada, for example, which Northrop Frye once wittily called "as innocent of literary intention as a mating loon" ("Conclusion" 214).

Scott's literary talent had several aspects. It must first be admitted that he had unusually good material to work with. Lamenting the fact that the genre of the "explorer's diary" now appears to be "defunct," Thomas Mallon writes: "There are no uncharted worlds left into which prairie schooners can roll and ships sail—unless you count outer space; but even if you do, you have to face the fact that most astronauts cultivate a diction as gray as moondust and aren't very promising diarists" (49). By contrast, Scott had at his disposal the fabled last uncharted part of the world to explore, with Markham's "silent wilderness of snow" as its heart. But then, so did Shackleton, Amundsen and, for that matter, Wilson. And since there is general agreement (see, e.g., notes 111 and 173) that their books are of considerably lower quality than his, the distinction must lie, in combination with the nature of his story, in Scott's writing itself.

In the first place, the explorer possessed an unusual sensibility for such a man of action and this supplied him with, among other things, a greater range of things to write about than most. Leonard Huxley, who edited both *Discovery* and *Scott's Last Expedition*, declared admiringly that Scott's mind was "like wax to receive an

¹⁷² What Jones means by the statement "the editors departed from chronology to craft the dramatic conclusion to the volume" (xlv) is not clear, since every entry of the return journey—from the departure from the Pole to the final entry—simply reproduces Scott's manuscript. There can be no question of 'crafting' here: the conclusion was innately dramatic.

impression and like marble to retain it” (qtd. Huxley 144). The diaries are full of Scott’s responses to animals, people, events, and the physical features and conditions around him. At times, he simply jotted down impressions, and the first part of one such list, from 2 February 1911, shows all his senses alert:

The seductive fold of the sleeping-bag.
The hiss of the primus and the fragrant steam of the cooker issuing from the tent ventilator.
The small green tent and the great white road.
The whine of a dog and the neigh of our steeds.
The driving cloud of powdered snow.
The crunch of footsteps which break the surface crust.
The wind-blown furrows.
The blue arch beneath the smoky cloud.
The crisp ring of the ponies’ hoofs and the swish of the following sledge.
The droning conversation of the march as the driver encourages or chides his horse.
The patter of dog pads.
The gentle flutter of our canvas shelter. Its deep booming sound under the full force of a blizzard.
The drift snow like finest flour penetrating every hole and corner—flickering up beneath one’s head covering, pricking sharply as a sand blast ... (*Journals* 112-13).

These are the responses of a poet,¹⁷³ and represent Scott’s writing in its germinal stages. As he gathers his materials, he is also beginning to process them. In the first item, for example, a reaction to the fold of the sleeping bag which is initially somatic is then made literary by the use of the word “seductive,” a personification that suggests the effect of the object on the observer. Similarly with the antithesis in the third item. And a flair for onomatopoeia is revealed in elements such as the “crisp ring” of hoofs, “swish of the following sledge,” “patter of dog pads” and drift snow “flickering up.” On the other hand, the choice of the term “steeds” instead of horses or ponies is an example of a more forced and conventional literariness, of which there is further evidence later in the list in items like: “The blizzard, Nature’s protest—the crevasse, Nature’s pitfall ...” (113). The unmannered style of *The Voyage of the ‘Discovery,’* however, and also Scott’s keen awareness of cliché and literary affectation (which I will demonstrate at the end of this section) suggest that if he had been able to prepare his *Terra Nova* diaries for publication, phrases like the last would not have made the final

¹⁷³ These “Impressions” have often been noticed by commentators, and are the only non-fiction that poet Bill Manhire includes in his anthology of Antarctic writing, *The Wide White Page*. He believes Scott uses language here “with more sense of its lyrical possibilities than either of his poetry-writing contemporaries, Wilson and Shackleton” (17). Similarly, Connell states that the vignettes are “what you might expect from a mystic poet, not an explorer” (148).

cut. More authentic and effective is Scott's lyrical jotting on 23 April in the afterglow of the sun that had departed for the winter: "The long mild twilight which like a silver clasp unites to-day with yesterday; when morning and evening sit together hand in hand beneath the starless sky of midnight" (176).

Some of the "Impressions" took a more discursive or philosophical form, as in this excerpt from a passage about dogs:

A dog must be either eating, asleep, or *interested*. His eagerness to snatch at interest, to chain his attention to something, is almost pathetic. The monotony of marching kills him.

This is the fearfulest difficulty for the dog driver on a snow plain without leading marks or objects in sight. The dog is almost human in its demand for living interest, yet fatally less than human in its inability to foresee.

The dog lives for the day, the hour, even the moment. The human being can live and support discomfort for a future. (*Journals* 117)

The philosophizing here also has a characteristically practical point: how to get the best work from the animals. (Amundsen, incidentally, overcame the problem of the featureless horizon by having a man on skis go ahead of the dogs.)

A passage from *The Voyage of the 'Discovery'* offers an excellent illustration of Scott's command of still more extended discourse, as he combines sensual response and philosophical reflection into a memorable whole. The extract also provides an example of a text that he at least had the opportunity to revise, although quotation marks indicate that it is sourced from his diary. Scott is describing his feelings at the point when he, Lashly and Evans turn back at the limit of their plateau journey. Having just said, "I am not an imaginative person ...," he looks out over the snow still untrodden and writes:

But, after all, it is not what we see that inspires awe, but the knowledge of what lies beyond our view. We see only a few miles of ruffled snow bounded by a vague wavy horizon, but we know that beyond that horizon are hundreds and even thousands of miles which can offer no change to the weary eye, while on the vast expanse that one's mind conceives one knows there is neither tree nor shrub, nor any living thing, nor even inanimate rock—nothing but this terrible limitless expanse of snow. It has been so for countless years, and it will be so for countless more. And we, little human insects, have started to crawl over this awful desert, and are now bent on crawling back again. Could anything be more terrible than this silent, wind-swept immensity when one thinks such thoughts? (2: 195-96)¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁴ Shackleton appears to have borrowed from this passage, the image of crawling insects in particular, in *The Heart of the Antarctic*. Also at the point of turning back from his furthest south, he writes: "it falls to the lot of few men to view land not previously seen by human eyes ... we were but tiny black specks crawling slowly and painfully across the white plain, and bending our puny strength to the task ..." (1: 297).

(Immediately afterwards, Scott lightens the mood and finishes the chapter with homely details of their camp-life.) It would be hard to disagree with Gwynn, who regards the larger section from which I have quoted as one of Scott's finest (74). With great economy and sharp, well-chosen imagery (ruffled snow, wavy horizon, crawling insects) the author gives the reader a remarkable spatial perspective: foreground, horizon and 'aerial view.' The rhythms are sure: as, for example, in the weary endlessness conveyed by the long second sentence, and the immutable fact underscored by the short balanced phrases and repetition in the next. The passage reveals a breadth of vision and, pace Scott's disclaimer, imagination. Pointing out that some of the explorer's best writing is unrelated to adventure, Gwynn cites a description of the construction of the ship, *Discovery*. "There is not a sentimental touch in the writing," he says, "yet the whole glows with emotion" (38). This astute remark applies equally to the passage I have quoted, even though it describes one of the high points of adventure on Scott's first expedition. It is charged with feeling but not with sentiment, is grand but never grandiose.

Such qualities in the writing, it seems, both have their source in and reveal the personality of the author—a point emphasized by those such as his wife, Markham and Barrie, who knew him well. Kathleen Scott's second husband also argues that text and character are one: "The style is the man; Scott's books are like their writer, simple and direct in expression, but pliant to the passing mood, and sensitive to all impressions" (H. Young). And Seaver's entire biography is posited on that same unity. To illustrate the point, I quote a single example from *Discovery*, which conveys Scott's concern for the men he led. It refers to "one of our blackest days in the Antarctic," when a seaman named Vince disappeared over an ice cliff during a blizzard (1: 173). Scott had not been on the sledging trip and according to Armitage was "terribly agitated" when he received the news (qtd. Pound 64). After searching by land and sea for two days he wrote: "We had now finally and sadly to resign ourselves to the loss of a shipmate, and the thought was grievous to all ... Life was a bright thing to him, and it is something to think that death must have come quickly in the grip of that icy sea" (1: 187). Like the longer passage quoted above, this is an example of Scott's "elegiac note" (Pound 64). And the few simple words, "life was a bright thing to him," speak volumes about the young seaman and Scott's affection for him.

Finally, there is an important purposive side to Scott's writing, one which has a determining effect on its structure. As a naval captain, Scott needed to develop the ability to describe complex operations in a clear and orderly way and to stamp his own

interpretation on them (Gwynn 3, 36). He also wanted to impart useful knowledge to those who would follow him, as the closing words of his first book illustrate: "... the time will come when others will follow in our footsteps and pass beyond them, [and] I have written these pages for the future as well as for the present (2: 322). This combination of training and intention explains, for example, the "*topographical accuracy*" in the writing and the clarity of structure which Crane describes well:

[The text has] an organisation so limpid and undemonstrative that it almost goes unnoticed ... No one can marshal detail on the page like Scott. Nobody can make the logistical complexities of a journey read so straightforwardly. Nobody can make so lucid and explicable an experience of being lost. Nobody fix a physical feature and make it so palpably real. (320)

Following this review of the elements of Scott's literary talent, I would now like to focus attention on his record of his last expedition. And I begin with the document that is the best possible witness to the qualities of clarity and organization: his own final testament. In this famous "Message," Scott addresses the Public who had supported the expedition, sets out his reasons for its fatal end and makes his appeal on behalf of the bereaved families. It is one of the last things he wrote, and was penned under appalling circumstances. Even on his previous expedition he had written of the "great nuisance" of keeping a diary, especially on dark nights, with tent shaking in the wind and lantern flickering. As the writer

pores over his task his breath forms a film of ice over the paper, on which the pencil frequently skids, and sometimes after writing a few lines he will turn the page to the light and find half of it illegible, so that he has to go painfully over each word afresh. Now and again his bare fingers will refuse duty, and he must wait awhile until they are nursed back into life. This sort of thing does not help one's ideas to flow.... (1: 353)

The circumstances under which the "Message" was composed were incomparably worse, and Wilson had stopped keeping his diary a month before. Scott's script has lost some of its usual precision, and the "Message" continues on the reverse side of the diary in blocks of text at right angles to one another, connected by a wandering pencilled line (Figures 4 and 5). But despite all this, it is a crystalline piece of writing, both at the sentence level and as a whole. I refer to the text as printed in *Scott's Last Expedition* (421-22). It was not edited, because it requires no editing.

"The causes of the disaster," Scott begins, "are not due to faulty organisation, but to misfortune in all risks which had to be undertaken." He then goes on to expand this

topic sentence chronologically by explaining misfortunes encountered during the various stages of the journey to the pole and back. He justifies his initial claim about organisation by writing that on the long and critical plateau stages “food supplies, clothing and depôts ... worked out to perfection.” Except for the breakdown of Evans, the polar party would have returned to the top of the Beardmore Glacier “in fine form and with surplus of food.” The argument proceeds with clear logic:

The Beardmore Glacier is not difficult in fine weather, but on our return we did not get a single completely fine day; this with a sick companion enormously increased our anxieties.

As I have said elsewhere we got into frightfully rough ice and Edgar Evans received a concussion of the brain—he died a natural death, but left us a shaken party and the season unduly advanced.

A statement about the glacier under benign conditions is countered by evidence of the different conditions actually experienced. Linked to the previous comment about Evans, this produces a result: the understated “increased ... anxieties.” Next, for concision and to avoid labouring their difficulties, Scott simply refers readers to earlier descriptions of the gruelling descent of the glacier. The glacier leads in turn to Evans’s concussion, to his death and to the double implication for the others. Once more, the last point is made clearly but with restraint: “a shaken party and the season unduly advanced.” Scott then gathers up all of the foregoing, “all the facts above enumerated,” reiterates his claim about proper planning, and proceeds to central explanation of the disaster: the weather conditions which “no one in the world would have expected.” A few supporting facts are mentioned, and the argument is firmly summed up: “... our wreck is certainly due to this sudden advent of severe weather, which does not seem to have any satisfactory cause.” There follows one of the simple statements that give the “Message” so much of its power: “I do not think human beings ever came through such a month as we have come through ...,” but the argument flows on uninterrupted to include Oates’s breakdown, the unexplained fuel shortage and the storm at their last camp. Scott then reminds the reader once more of his opening claim, at the same time as he points up that final piece of bad luck, the protracted blizzard: “Surely misfortune could scarcely have exceeded this last blow”—when they had got *so* close. The explanation is complete. Now he moves into the present, into the tent with “the gale howling about us.”

“We are weak, writing is difficult”—with this apotheosis of English understatement begins the remarkable final section—“but for my own sake I do not regret this journey”—and Scott accepts his fate. An allusion to a national tradition of

fortitude is consistent with statements he made before the expedition set out and also prepares for the appeal on behalf of the relatives who would survive them to the British public, who funded the enterprise and to whom the “Message” is addressed. The words about the “tale” he would have told if he had lived I discussed in my prologue, and what remains is this:

We took risks, we knew we took them; things have come out against us, and therefore we have no cause for complaint, but bow to the will of Providence, determined still to do our best to the last.

Ursula Le Guin, an acclaimed writer herself, “seriously tried to find those words false and silly” but could not (174). Instead, she finds in them, as I do, perhaps the essence of what is admirable about Scott. “Their beauty is no accident,” Le Guin writes: while the phrase “things have come out against us” sounds at first “like a projection of fault,” it “lacks any note of accusation or blame; the underlying image is that of gambling, trusting to luck.” And although Providence seems to have “a will opposed to Scott’s will[,] ... something you call by the name of Providence is not something you perceive as an opponent or enemy—indeed the connotations are maternal: nurturing, sheltering, providing.” Scott, she concludes, “takes responsibility for the risks taken, and beyond hope finds duty unalterable” (173-74).¹⁷⁵ Once again, in other words, the beauty of the language reflects a beauty of character.

How did Scott produce such a powerful and coherent piece of writing in the face of certain death from cold and starvation? Was there a draft version? There is no evidence of one and it seems unlikely. Scott’s extended account of the death of Oates, where revision was impossible, is of similar quality.¹⁷⁶ The first two pages of the “Message” (before the notebook was reversed and the last section squeezed in) look little different from other pages in the diary. And here, as throughout, there are only

¹⁷⁵ Le Guin draws a sharp contrast between Scott’s words here and Shackleton’s when he was forced to turn back 100 miles from the Pole: “Man can only do his best. The strongest forces of nature are arrayed against us.” “What is false is the military image,” she writes, “what is foolish is the egoism; what is pernicious is the identification of ‘Nature’ as enemy ... Nobody, nothing, ‘arrayed’ any ‘forces’ against Shackleton except Shackleton himself. He created an obstacle to conquer or an enemy to attack; attacked; and was defeated—by what? By himself, having himself created the situation in which his defeat could occur.” Had Shackleton reached the Pole, he would have claimed that he had conquered “in perfectly self-justified triumph. But, forced to retreat, he does not say ‘I am defeated’; he blames it on that which is not himself, Nature ... [and] refuses the responsibility for a situation for which he was responsible from beginning to end” (173).

¹⁷⁶ As mentioned in chapter 3, it was the source of Oates’s subsequent reputation. It also contains the most famous understatement of all: “I am just going outside and may be some time.” But it should be remembered that these are actually Scott’s words, and whether he is quoting Oates verbatim cannot be known.

rare edits: a caret has been used to insert the fourth word, a definite article (and one is still missing from the title, “Message to public”); a dash has been added in the margin to indicate a paragraph break; and one word has been crossed out. By any standards Scott’s “Message” is writing of surpassing skill—produced under conditions such as can only be imagined, it is preternatural.

The final sections of the journal and the farewell letters are similarly remarkable. As Hilton Young notes, from the start of the polar journey Scott’s narrative “begins to soar”:

It moves forward with certainty, swiftness, and concentration. There is hardly anything but direct statement of events; there is little or no introspection; and yet it expresses every mood of the party. There is no ornament, no elaboration, no effort at effect; and yet it is beautiful and powerful, with the pre-eminent beauty and power of sincerity.

These qualities are present in microcosm in the famous entry with which the diary ends:

Every day we have been ready to start for our dépôt *11 miles* away, but outside the door of the tent it remains a scene of whirling drift. I do not think we can hope for any better things now. We shall stick it out to the end, but we are getting weaker, of course, and the end cannot be far.

It seems a pity, but I do not think I can write more. (412)

The complete simplicity of the diction here mirrors the situation of the writer: tentbound in a frozen wilderness, awaiting death. Even under these circumstances, Scott creates in a few words a clear image of the men inside, the tent, and the “whirling drift” outside. As in the “Message,” apart from the underlining of the tantalizingly short distance to the depot, there is a remarkable composure. Only ordinary words are used, including the colloquialism “stick it out,” and none of more than two syllables. And the sigh, “it seems a pity,” appears to pass beyond his inability to keep writing and to encapsulate the whole tragedy.

not to wake - but he wakes
in the morning - yesterday
It was blowing a blizzard
he said I am just going
outside and may be sometime
He went out into the blizzard
and we have not seen
him since
I take this opportunity of
saying that we have stuck
to our ^{sick} companions to the last
In case of Edgar Evans
who absolutely lost of food
and he lay insensible. The
safety of the remainder
seemed to demand his
abandonment - but Providence
mercifully removed him at
this critical moment - He
died a natural death

Fig. 4. Scott's diary: 16 or 17 March 1912, describing the death of Oates and how they had not abandoned the sick.

A clear intention in Scott's letters to family and friends was to give comfort. To Wilson's wife he begins simply: "My dear Mrs. Wilson, If this letter reaches you Bill and I will have gone out together." He praises Wilson warmly, takes responsibility for his friend's death by adding that there was "never a word of blame to me for leading him into this mess," says Wilson is at peace in his faith, and concludes: "My whole heart goes out to you in pity." There was a similar letter for Bowers's mother. Scott's friend, the famous writer J. M. Barrie, stated that the farewell letter he received "is, I suppose, my most precious possession."¹⁷⁷ Non-recipients have also found these letters moving and a French commentator wrote evocatively in 1934 that the Antarctic wastes are forever "imbued with these calls of tenderness which Scott, wounded to the death and brought down by fate, launched through space" ("imprégnées de ces appels de tendresse que Scott, blessé à mort et terrassé par le destin, lançait à travers l'espace") (Rouch 610).

Crane observes how poor the "paraphrases, summaries and plagiarisms" of Scott are by comparison (320). Nevertheless, their number is further testimony to the quality of the original. I have mentioned a borrowing by Shackleton (note 174), and Markham, Pound and many others have paraphrased sentences from the journals in their own accounts. Kathleen Scott must have read the "surely, surely" of Scott's plea for the bereaved many times as her ship approached New Zealand, and perhaps it was echoing in her mind as she wrote in her own diary: "It is good I do not believe firmly in life after death, or surely surely I would have gone overboard today ... But I'm afraid my Con has gone altogether except in the great stirring influence he must have left on everyone who had knowledge of him. I think he's made me twice the man I was" (21 Feb.). The moving simplicity of her words reflects that of Scott's own. Indeed, Scott has had a "great stirring influence" on many, and in large part this is through the legacy of his writing. As Kathleen Scott wrote, "one would be a poor creature indeed if one could not face one's world with such words to inspire one."

It is likely that Scott would have been pleased that something in his example and that of his men had proved useful. I have alluded to the practical side to his writing and the wish to pass on helpful information, and he once remarked to Ponting that knowledge

¹⁷⁷ A faithful transcription of the full text of that letter, of which an abridged version was printed in *Scott's Last Expedition*, can be found in Dunbar (253-54). The original is in the British Library (Add. MS. 46272).

of “adventures such as Polar expeditions” might be salutary for the young (vii).¹⁷⁸ But it is unlikely that he would have wanted to be remembered only by the grand tragic ending of his life and his response to it, since there was an unpretentiousness about his character and a self-deprecating humour which are often overlooked. His wife, of course, knew this and refused to allow a film to be made of him in the 1930s on the grounds that: “I have a feeling that Captain Scott’s journey might be over-dramatised, and I would not want that” (“Widow Bans Film”). Neither, it seems certain, would Scott. Under the pseudonym “Juxta,” he had contributed a spoof called “In Futuro” on just this topic to the fifth volume of *The South Polar Times* in August 1902. The setting is a room in Buckingham Palace “graciously set aside by His Majesty for the use of the National heroes lately returned from the Antarctic.” One of the heroes languishes on a luxurious couch, “a trifle hoarse from constant repetition of ‘well chosen words’ delivered to rapt post prandial audiences.” He graciously admits a fawning reporter, and immediately launches into his speech:

“I am the son of poor but honest parents ...”

“Startling novelty” murmurs the youthful journalist hastily scribbling in his note book.

Scott is satirizing the clichés of biographical and hagiographical writing,¹⁷⁹ and next are the ‘portents of greatness’ in the hero’s childhood:

“I was a precocious youth; at an early age I discarded dolls as uninteresting—even tin soldiers soon failed to afford me amusement; on the other hand, a well executed model of “*Lobodon carcinophagus*” or the “*Glossopteris flora*” gave me immense delight and I would pore for hours over drawings of table topped icebergs, tracing in my infant mind the history of their wondrous stratification ... I do not assume any merit for this ... It was born in me ... I displayed an early desire for the society of great minds; for this reason I was always glad when the nursemaid stopped my perambulator at the corner of our court to talk to the policeman, on these occasions I was pleased with the unrestrained social intercourse and ceased for a time to slobber over my bib.”

The persiflage continues in the wry equation of a street-corner conversation between a nursemaid and a policeman with “the society of great minds” and the images of the scientifically minded but slobbering child prodigy. Typically, a famous explorer visits the family, notices the boy and predicts a great future. There are delightful snippets of

¹⁷⁸ Scott’s journal and letters were in fact used in school readers: for example, in Britain (Worlock 41-45), Germany (Hoschke) and Australia (The Education Department, Tasmania 9-14; *Victorian Readers* 124-27).

¹⁷⁹ Compare, for example, the beginning of the Baker’s tale in *The Hunting of the Snark* (1876): “My father and mother were honest, though poor—.” “Skip all that!” the Bellman quickly interrupts, recognizing the formula (Carroll 764).

dialogue: “We all has our crosses to bear master George,” a Methodist nurse admonishes; the child replies, “Then mine shall be the Southern Cross,” and she calls him a “puffick terror” (36-37). As the celebrity drones on and repeats himself, the journalist politely mutters, “Amazing.” But after a long passage of high-flown, hackneyed description (“Picture to yourself our first meeting with the ice ... spectral sentinels of the south glide by, feathered minions of the sky are falling around; soon the van of the defending army is sighted; with superb dignity our vessel sweeps on to victory or death ...” [37]), he hastily exits without the hero noticing. Scott is adroitly poking fun at the stock-in-trade of hagiography—and at heroes crafting their own myths. It is likely, therefore, that he would have been amused at the irony of the accusation, seventy years after his own death, that he had done the same.

“Scott of the Antarctic” and Greek tragedy

This skilful writer, as I have said, also had remarkable material to work with, especially that of the determinative last expedition. My aim in this section is to show that much of the enduring power of “Scott of the Antarctic” derives from its quality as a tragedy, and I will do this by exploring the story’s affinities with the genre of Greek tragedy. In doing so, of course I am not implying that this tragedy was deliberately ‘composed,’ as the Greek plays were, but rather that the series of events falls into a pattern that has certain similarities with the one Aristotle famously described—a pattern that has been confirmed by repeated tellings. As mentioned at the beginning of chapter 3, the relationship between actual events and their narration is a thorny topic and one which has long engaged the attention of philosophers, historiographers and literary theorists. But in the present discussion we have mostly moved away from questions of interpretation and authenticity to consideration of the bare bones of Scott’s story. By this I mean the basic facts related in chapter 2 that are not disputed: such as that Amundsen attempted to beat Scott to the Pole (rather than the rights and wrongs of that action), and that all of the British polar party died (rather than the reasons for their deaths). Today it is relatively common for factual and scientific narratives to be analyzed from a literary point of view. Theoretical justifications for doing so can be found, for example, in the work of the distinguished French philosopher Paul Ricoeur, who produced what Hayden White calls “the most important synthesis of literary and historical theory in [the twentieth] century” (“The Metaphysics of Narrativity” 141).¹⁸⁰

¹⁸⁰ See, for example, Ricoeur’s major work *Time and Narrative* and essays such as “Narrative Time” and those collected in *From Text to Action*. Ricoeur’s essay “On Interpretation” provides an overview of his

Thus we can avoid the problematic issue of the relative ‘truth claims’ of fictional and non-fictional discourse and proceed to an examination of “Scott of the Antarctic” as a story.

It is necessary at this point to clarify my use of the term ‘story’ and to distinguish it from the way the term is sometimes employed by narrative theorists. In their time-honoured glossary, Abrams and Harpham summarize the general narratological sense as “a mere sequence of events in time.” They also note a basic differentiation made by narratologists between “story” and “plot.” In simple terms, the latter refers to the “organized and meaningful structure” of those events which produces a literary work (181). This is similar to narratologist Gérard Genette’s distinction, mentioned in chapter 2, between the order in which events ‘actually’ occur and the order in which they are related: categories which, in turn, are equivalent to the standard Russian Formalist distinction between *fabula* (story) and *syuzhet* (plot) (Eagleton, *Literary Theory* 91). On the other hand, in a well-known introduction to narrative theory, Mieke Bal uses a different term for the basic chronological series of events, and “story” to denote events “presented in a certain manner” (5).

Partly in view of such terminological questions, I do not attempt to fit my analysis into a narratological framework, although I will return to the notion of plot when discussing Aristotle, from whom it derives. For the present, I adapt to my purposes the broad distinction between the basic factual material of the story (as presented in chapter 2) and the different versions of the story (historical: as in chapters 3 to 5; and imaginative: to be discussed at the end of the present chapter). I turn now to story itself, by which I mean something larger and more amorphous than the narratological senses of the term: something known as “Scott of the Antarctic.” Although I hope this meaning will become clearer later, my intention is not to capture it in a definition—which would be an instance of the “failure to distinguish criticism as a body of knowledge from the direct experience of literature” (Frye, *Anatomy* 29)—but rather to indicate aspects of its genre and power.

§

At the end of the first chapter I referred to the constant association of the terms ‘tragedy’ and ‘tragic’ with Scott’s story, and to the fact that there has been almost no

entire oeuvre, and John Thompson summarizes the main arguments for analyzing real actions as text in his study of the philosopher (63-64).

discussion of the story in the formal, literary sense of those terms. In 1913 the *Daily Graphic* pronounced *Scott's Last Expedition* “a great book, perhaps the greatest ever written, because of the grandeur of its tragedy” (qtd. Jones, Introduction xxxvii). In the “Postscript” to *Worst Journey*, Cherry-Garrard writes: “Their story ... has in it the elements of great tragedy, where each step follows the step before, probably, if not inevitably, with Fate not far away ...” (603). Pound, too, hints at a fatal, tragic structure in comments like: “The gods, at their old business of discouraging *hubris* ...” (78) or, with a musical twist, when Scott is forced to turn back prematurely on his first southern journey: “The undertone of disappointment [in his diary] is like the first intimation of a symphonic theme committed to a sombre, far-off climax” (82). The passing comments of many others lend support to the suggestion that Scott’s story is “a tragedy of classical Greek dimensions” (Simpson-Housley 30), and it is this aspect of “Scott of the Antarctic” that I would now like to explore.

In the first chapter I also mentioned Dave Burnham’s paraphrasing of Joseph Campbell to read Scott’s story as a “perfect retelling of the age old myth of the questing hero” (21). Campbell himself regards ‘the hero’s journey,’ as outlined in the fourth chapter of his influential *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, as the central mythic structure, or ‘monomyth.’¹⁸¹ Burnham argues, in addition, that it is in its quest aspect that the enduring appeal of Scott’s story lies. This is certainly a plausible interpretation. But since Amundsen’s or Shackleton’s or other explorers’ tales can also be read in this way, I will instead seek the special power of “Scott of the Antarctic” in its tragic aspect. Some encouragement for this approach is offered by the remarkable echoes of contemporary attitudes towards Scott’s story in Terry Eagleton’s opening remarks on the genre in his recent disquisition, *Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic*:

Tragedy is an unfashionable subject these days ... It smacks of ... cosmic fatality and stoical acquiescence. There is an ontological depth and high seriousness about the genre which grates on the postmodern sensibility, with its unbearable lightness of being. As an aristocrat among art forms, its tone is too solemn and portentous for a streetwise, sceptical culture ... tragic art is far too enamoured of sacrifice, false heroics and a very male nobility of spirit, a kind of high-brow version of ripping yarns for boys. (ix)

¹⁸¹ This view parallels the approach of theorists like Russian Formalist Vladimir Propp and French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, who described universal structures in folk tales and myths. Campbell’s work has been popularized by screenwriting teacher Christopher Vogler and others.

These comments (which do not apply to a quest narrative such as the movie *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, for example¹⁸²) neatly encapsulate many of the aspects of the disdain for what Scott is perceived to represent which were expressed by some commentators I reviewed in chapter 1: especially the final sentence of the quote, which Eagleton ascribes to particular feminist viewpoint.

The connotative rather than denotative nature of Eagleton's subtitle is noteworthy. Half a century ago, Frye complained that "the critical theory of genres [was] stuck precisely where Aristotle left it" (*Anatomy* 13), and attempted to rectify that situation. There has been a vast, ongoing academic literature on the subject of tragedy, but questions about the genre's corpus and definition remain unresolved. In the general introduction to a 1996 collection of essays, *Tragedy and the Tragic: Greek Theatre and Beyond*, M. S. Silk acknowledges that "there is no current consensus on how, precisely, tragedy should best be defined or understood, or indeed on how, precisely, *Greek* tragedy should be defined or understood" (3). This notwithstanding,

any definition or general understanding of tragedy as a whole depends first and foremost on an understanding of Greek tragedy in particular. Indeed, for theorists of tragedy, from Aristotle to our own century, Greek tragedy has been one of the few constants. (2-3)

This is partly, Silk explains, because the Greeks, at least, had no trouble recognizing a tragedy, and because Aristotle defined the form and its variations in his *Poetics*.¹⁸³ Therefore, since my own aim is not to enter the theoretical debates about the nature of tragedy but to elucidate some of the tragic qualities of "Scott of the Antarctic," my approach will be to describe certain similarities between this story and Greek tragedy in particular, although naturally without implying any equivalence between the two. The vastly influential *Poetics* itself is the obvious starting point.

Introducing his translation (the one referred to here) of Aristotle's famous work, Richard Janko emphasizes not only the influence of the *Poetics* on European

¹⁸² They might apply better to the winter journey to collect emperor penguin eggs at Cape Crozier. But the sacrificial seriousness of that quest narrative derives from its being an episode in a tragedy. Two participants in the quest, moreover, later perished in that tragedy: the closest friends of the winter journey's principal narrator, Cherry-Garrard.

¹⁸³ Eagleton calls the first chapter of *Sweet Violence* "A Theory in Ruins," and gives an extensive, entertaining and characteristically mordant and political review of attitudes to tragedy. His discussion encompasses literature from the Greeks to the present day and the common as well as literary senses of the term 'tragedy.' Perhaps this range explains the rather bald assertion: "The truth is that no definition of tragedy more elaborate than 'very sad' has ever worked" (3). And while Eagleton criticizes "full-blooded essentialists such as Paul Ricoeur" for believing that Greek tragedy holds the key to understanding the entire form (3), he too nods to Aristotle throughout his book.

scholarship, since its rediscovery and publication around the beginning of the sixteenth century, but also its contemporary relevance. This relevance extends to forms and media unknown to the Greeks, such as the detective novel or cinema and television (ix).¹⁸⁴ Janko explains that the *Poetics*, which survives only in dubious and incomplete versions of what were probably originally lecture notes, was Aristotle's response to objections raised about poetry in general, including comedy and tragedy, by his teacher, Plato. To the charge that poetry is composed through inspiration, Aristotle replies by formulating principles of composition that could be learned (xiv). He addresses the objection that poetry is deceptive in its imitation of reality by stressing the sense of 'representation' rather than 'imitation' in the Greek word *mimesis*, and also what can be learned from such representations—thus the importance for him of the clear structuring or plot of the action represented. Finally, he uses the notion of catharsis to argue that the arousal of the audience's emotions, which Plato had decried, can be beneficial (xv). This benefit Aristotle states as “accomplishing by means of pity and terror the catharsis of such emotions” (7). Janko translates catharsis as “purgation” or “purification,” but points to a missing explanation of the concept in the *Poetics* and surveys some attempts to reconstruct or interpret Aristotle's meaning (xvi- xx).

In considering what light Aristotle's various comments on tragedy might throw on Scott's story, it is important to bear in mind Oliver Taplin's contention that the “rules of the game” of Greek tragedy itself were flexible rather than rigid (2) and Stephen Halliwell's complaint about “merely terminological alignment” that ignores the possibility that certain of Aristotle's views were radically different from modern ones (139). The comparisons I will draw, therefore, are intended to be only tentative and suggestive.

First, Aristotle makes a general distinction between history and what he calls poetry, but which Janko explains includes “the whole range of what we call fiction” (xv). History “relates things that have happened,” fiction “things that may happen.” The former deals exhaustively (ergo the epigraph to this part of the thesis) with particulars, the latter with universals—and is thereby the “more philosophical and more serious” of the two (33, 12). It follows that in a case like “Scott of the Antarctic,” where history partakes of the qualities of fiction in becoming a story, it also assumes something of the philosophical and universal. This is a possibility that Aristotle himself appears to contemplate when he says, “there is nothing to prevent some of the things

¹⁸⁴ As an example of the considerable influence of the *Poetics* on cinema, see *Story: Substance, Structure, Style, and the Principles of Screenwriting* by leading American screenwriting teacher Robert McKee.

that have happened from being the sort of things that may happen ..." (13). He also suggests that tragedy has closer links with fact than other forms (12), and that the best tragedians cannot choose their material randomly but are "obliged to concern themselves with those households in which such sufferings [appropriate to the form] have happened" (19). In part, this is because there must be "nothing improbable in the incidents" depicted in a tragedy (20). As a story based in fact, "Scott of the Antarctic" has clear advantages on these grounds.

But what does Aristotle mean by a story? According to Janko, he employs terminology here flexibly and, for example, uses the same term, *muthos*, to refer both to a historical story, such as the Trojan War, and to the "construction of incidents put into the poem by the poet" (217). It is this second sense that Ricoeur regards as the quality which makes a text a narrative, and this notion of 'emplotment' forms the basis for his entire investigation, referred to above, of the function of narratives, both historiographical and literary ("On Interpretation" 3-4). Perhaps even more interesting, however, is a passing comment of Aristotle's: "*The potential of tragedy exists even without a performance ...*" (10; emphasis added). Translated into my own terms, I take this to indicate that a story like "Scott of the Antarctic" has some existence that is independent of any particular rendition of it—a biography such as Pound's, for instance, or one not yet written. One might even contemplate the possibility that its tragic essence exists in potential in human life without the need for a Scott, specifically, to live it. It is this 'incorporeal' quality of the story that I am also pursuing, in addition to its basic material and the ways it is presented in different versions—whatever these are termed.

Aristotle has much to say about what makes for a good tragedy. I will focus on comments that apply more generally to story rather than to the construction of a particular version. First he insists on the importance of action, because

tragedy is a representation not of human beings but of action and life. Happiness and unhappiness lie in action, and the end [of life] is a sort of action, not a quality; people are of a certain sort according to their characters, but happy or the opposite according to their actions. (8-9)

Implied here and afterwards stated explicitly is that character is secondary to plot. This makes obvious sense in the context of the theatrical performances Aristotle was discussing, and Susanne Langer glosses Aristotle's statement with the comment that, ultimately, "the action is the play [or story] itself" (352). Writing from a novelist's point

of view more than two millennia later, Henry James sees the two as inextricable: “What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character?” (392). Nevertheless, Aristotle’s dictum illuminates something critical in Scott’s story: it is Scott’s death which gives it its essential quality. An account of the illustrious career of a remarkable character that he might otherwise have had would be a story of an entirely different kind, and certainly not a tragedy. I acknowledge that there are some who believe the explorer’s death was indeed, to paraphrase James, a product and illustration of his character; but for such readers the whole of the present discussion is irrelevant and “Scott of the Antarctic” merely a cautionary tale. In Aristotle’s view, however, death is “a sort of action.”¹⁸⁵ And, one might add, a sort of action crucial to tragedy. It could be objected that Scott was “happy or the opposite” depending not only on his own actions but also on those of others, such as Amundsen or Oates. Importantly, however, by finally accepting complete responsibility for his life, he makes his death his own. In that sense, he unites character with action and confirms James’s point as well.

In imitation of Aristotle’s own pithy plot synopses,¹⁸⁶ I offer the following possible statement of the essential action of Scott’s story:

A man tries for a second time to discover a place at the end of the earth. He undergoes many trials, and a secret competitor beats him to the goal. He and his companions struggle back, but die just before reaching safety.

The point of such a bare statement is to reveal “what is universal” in a plot (23). Along with such obvious universal elements as the dangerous quest, competition and death, I am suggesting that the fact that Scott returns after a previous failure might be included, and possibly the narrowness of the final defeat—although this also relates closely to the audience’s reaction to the story, which I discuss later. On the other hand, the fact Scott’s nation supported him and wanted him to arrive first, although significant, is not in Aristotle’s terms a universal element. These fundamental elements in the tragedy, Aristotle explains, are then augmented by episodes, which, however, are not intrinsic to the main action. The winter journey to Cape Crozier is a good example of such an

¹⁸⁵ In his edition of the *Poetics* Leon Golden notes that the text is corrupt at this point. But on the basis of an accepted emendation he translates it similarly: “the end of life is some action, not some quality” (12).

¹⁸⁶ The fact that Aristotle presents and analyzes such synopses suggests that he may not have entirely agreed with Taplin’s claim that “the mere *story*, such as may be excerpted in a collection of ‘Greek Myths,’ has no significant bearing on the quality of the play” (5).

episode. Although it was given much prominence in Cherry-Garrard's book and is thereby well known, Scott's tragedy could exist without it.

My synopsis reveals other conditions of an Aristotelian tragic plot that "Scott of the Antarctic" meets. The quest for the Pole fulfils the requirement that a plot should portray a "serious" action (7) and one "which has a beginning, a middle and a conclusion," all logically connected (10). The preparations, the journey to the Pole, and the fatal return supply this tripartite structure. This plot is also of an appropriate "magnitude" because it is "easily seen as a whole ... [and] easily memorable." We can see at a glance and recall the essentials of the story as listed above—it is not, in Aristotle's witty phrase, like "an animal a thousand miles long"! The sequence of events in a tragedy which allows the change from good fortune to misfortune must also occur "in accordance with probability or necessity" (11). In this factual story, naturally, we can watch this logical unfolding as, for example, the start of the polar journey is delayed; the motor sledges fail; a four-day storm hits; they are disappointed at the Pole; winter approaches; and Evan and Oates are incapacitated. Many have in fact been obsessed with this logic in "Scott of the Antarctic," and the delineation or denial of it is at the very heart of the long debate about what caused the men's deaths and what could have saved them.

Aristotle's explanation of how the tragic hero's change in fortune occurs in the preferred "complex" plot offers considerable insight into the power of Scott's story. The change must involve what he terms a "reversal" or a "recognition" (14). Examples of the former, where the characters' expectations are reversed, are the vital discoveries that Amundsen had sailed south instead of north, or that Evans, the strongest man in the polar party, was the first to collapse. Reversal is closely related to recognition, which Aristotle terms "a change from ignorance to knowledge, and so to either friendship or enmity." The two are most effective when they occur together, and can even occur via the agency of "inanimate objects" (14). This is certainly the case in Scott's story and, in addition, the central reversal is teased out over the entire course of the action in three painful stages. Amundsen's fateful telegram to Scott was the first, partial, recognition; the sighting of the Norwegian ship in the Bay of Whales was the next; and their black flag, spotted by Bowers on the approach to the Pole (together with ski and dog tracks), was the culmination. Suffering, the final essential of a tragic plot and characterized by Aristotle as "a destructive or painful action, e.g. deaths in full view, agonies, woundings etc." (15) is only too evident in Scott's story.

Although subordinate to action, character is a vital part of it and reveals the decisions made by the protagonist (Aristotle 9). It follows by corollary that “the more individual and powerful the personality is, the more extraordinary and overwhelming will be the action” (Langer 352). There is evidence that Scott possessed such a personality. Cherry-Garrard called him “certainly the most dominating character in our not uninteresting community ... there is no doubt that he would carry weight in any gathering of human beings” (205). And Teddy Evans wrote: “Certainly no living man could have taken Scott’s place ... there was none other like him. He was the Heart, Brain, and Master” (*South* 230). An effective tragic character, in Aristotle’s view, needs to be more than powerful. He must also be a “serious” person (7) and “better” than most (3). (This explains what Frye calls the form’s “high style of decorum” [*Anatomy* 22].) While, as we have seen, Scott certainly had a sense of humour, his essential seriousness of character is apparent throughout his diaries, in the writings of others and in his close friendship with the deeply religious Wilson. In this thesis there is also considerable evidence of superior qualities he possessed to an unusual degree. As mentioned in chapter 1, Cherry-Garrard, not easily impressed, underscores Scott’s “character, sheer good grain” (466). Seaver devotes his biography to this subject, and Fiennes ends his with quoted testimonies to Scott’s good qualities and to the affection in which he was held by those close to him. It needs to be said, however, that while I believe that Scott did possess such qualities as integrity, compassion and a sense of responsibility to an unusual degree, those who regard the explorer quite differently will not, for that reason, see his story as a tragedy. This is not to say that the tragic hero need be a complete paragon. In fact, Aristotle states that less desirable qualities should also be included to make the character believable (20). There is evidence of these, too, in Scott’s moodiness and habitual anxiety.

Mention must be made here of the much-debated concept of *hamartia* or “error” which Aristotle at one point introduces into his analysis of tragic character (16). As I have shown, some have found little beside ‘error’ in Scott; and he is commonly portrayed as an Edwardian naval clone, overambitious and territorial, prejudiced against foreigners and their methods, deaf to all advice, unscrupulous, dishonest and manipulative. But Janko explains in a long note that the error or mistake is not, as traditionally held, a “tragic flaw” of character, but instead “the result of actions performed in the best intentions,” and in his *Ethics* Aristotle adds the explanation that since the protagonist acts “in ignorance, not of principle but of facts,” we can “pity and forgive the doer” (101-02). So whether one finds such negatives in the explorer’s

character or not, it appears that this is not what Aristotle means by *hamartia*. Scott's long ignorance of Amundsen's real intentions, for example, and thus of the fact that, like it or not, he was engaged in a race, might offer a closer parallel.

The assertion in *Poetics* that the cause of the previously discussed reversal of fortune cannot be of external origin raises even larger questions. Paraphrasing Aristotle, Janko explains that an "accident ... would break the chain of causes in the plot, and produce the wrong emotions in the audience" (102). But a serious blizzard, for example, like the one Scott met on approaching the Beardmore Glacier or the one that held him in his last camp, would still be a cause of misfortune, just a cause of a different type—what might be called bad luck. Perhaps the distinction is one of world view, a possibility Halliwell alerted us to: in this case, whether one sees a moral element in luck or not.¹⁸⁷ In fact, it is just this ambivalence which is a major watershed in the interpretation of Scott's story, and which seems to fuel the passion of many of the responses. Did Scott experience the extraordinarily bad luck he and others believed he did? Pound quotes Bowers writing to Kathleen Scott about an "almost unparalleled succession of initial reverses," even before the final push for the Pole, and adding, "Capt. Scott has endured the trials of Job again" (*Scott* 260). And along with many other commentators, Pound himself makes frequent reference to external fortune, culminating in this comment at the time Cherry-Garrard left One Ton Depot with the dog teams and returned to base: "That day, Fortune irrevocably turned her back on Scott" (289). For Huntford, by contrast, Scott was a "bungler" who deserved what he got (*Scott and Amundsen* 563). Amundsen is inconsistent on the subject of luck. He prefaces the first chapter of *The South Pole* with the epigram: "Life is a ball/ In the hands of chance" (1: 1) and refers to his good luck in the text. But later he writes: "Victory awaits him who has everything in order—luck, people call it. Defeat is certain for him who has neglected to take the necessary precautions in time; this is called bad luck" (1: 370). He is saying, in other words, and it must be remembered after the events, that 'you make your own luck.' This is a sentiment with which Huntford, Connell and others clearly concur,¹⁸⁸ and Nansen endorses it in his glowing introduction to *The South Pole*: "Let no one come and prate about luck and chance.

¹⁸⁷ Eagleton discusses this question of chance and what he calls "the downgrading of accident" by certain commentators on pages 124-25 of *Sweet Violence*.

¹⁸⁸ Connell, however, is also inconsistent. While on the one hand he is sceptical of Scott's claims about persistent bad luck (146-49), on the other he lists a series of exogenous misfortunes, including the storm at sea, the heavy pack ice and so on, and comments: "as one reads about the expedition, a feeling of doom soars overhead like an albatross" (149).

Amundsen's luck is that of the strong man who looks ahead" (xxxi). In his "Message to the Public" Scott himself attributes the causes of the disaster not to "faulty organisation, but to misfortune in all risks which had to be undertaken," the unusual weather in particular (*Journals* 421). As I mentioned, the question of whether Scott was right or not in his assessment has stirred considerable passion. There are possible parallels here with the idea of *hamartia*, in his ignorance of the fact that weather conditions in Antarctica in 1912 would be exceptional and of the injuries Oates and Evans concealed when they were selected for the final group. It is a potent question, one with profound existential implications, and probably one of those which will ultimately be decided in "the human heart" (Solomon 327). Albin Lesky believes that this ambiguous nexus of freedom and compulsion, one that cannot be logically analyzed, lies at the heart of tragedy's power.

This brings me to the final aspect of Aristotle's theory I would like to consider: the crucial question of the audience's response. Aristotle touches briefly on the personal quality of that response by observing that people are attracted to comedy or to tragedy "according to their own particular natures" (5). It may therefore be the case, as I suggested in the previous chapter, that a certain type of commentator is simply repelled by the innate tragedy, and concomitant seriousness and suffering, of "Scott of the Antarctic." But Aristotle is more concerned with the general effect of a tragedy on its audience, an effect that hinges on the idea of catharsis previously mentioned, and which Eagleton neatly terms "homeopathic" (*Sweet Violence* 155). The audience of a tragedy, Aristotle says, should feel "the pleasure [arising] from pity and terror" (18) and the purging of those emotions. At first this might sound like masochism, or even Schadenfreude, since the "pleasure" arises out of the suffering of others. But in an essay on audience responses to Greek tragedy, Taplin argues that the emotions experienced are in fact "generous," because they are compassionate (10). In contrast to the random, ugly or meaningless quality of everyday 'tragedies,' formal tragedy places emotions such as "pity, horror, fascination, indignation" in a meaningful structure and moral context, and thereby brings understanding of "life in its tragic aspects. We have the sense that we can better sympathize with and cope with suffering, misfortune and waste"(11-12). Such a view of tragic catharsis recalls Le Guin's comment that Scott's "testimony turns mere waste and misery into that useful thing, tragedy" (175), and helps to explain the inspiration Scott's wife and others have found in his painful story. While Taplin dismisses the traditional "dogma" that Greek audiences already knew the stories they were watching and emphasizes the variation and uncertainty that were

possible (4), he overlooks the larger point that the audience knew that disaster would come, even if they did not know quite how. Such knowledge has surely been an important part of the response to Scott's story. How many must have read or reread it, watching the "visibly growing future, this destiny to which the persons ... are committed" (Langer 326), but hoping, like the biographer Spufford mentions, "that *this time* things might turn out differently, *this time* they might make it home" (27).

Other elements could no doubt be found in Scott's story that have connections with actual Greek tragedies. The latter, for example, were written, performed and watched almost exclusively by males (Goldhill 344): the first two points apply equally to "Scott of the Antarctic." And Aristotle's mention of "deaths in full view" notwithstanding, only four of the surviving Athenian plays show deaths on stage (Easterling 154): as in Scott's case, such things were usually enacted at a remove from the audience's world, thereby enhancing their ritual power (Goldhill 333). Similarly, confrontations on the Greek stage were usually formal and verbal rather than physical (Burian 199): Scott and Amundsen never actually met—except, as we will see, in the imaginations of story-tellers—and Amundsen threw down the gauntlet in a telegram, however cryptic, and announced his victory at the Pole in a letter to Scott and another to the Norwegian king. Parallels could perhaps be drawn between the report of the search party which found the bodies of the polar party—often used to end the story—and the tragic chorus, which offers "possible models for the onlookers' emotional responses" (Easterling 163). More could be said about tragedy's preference for well-known, factual stories, and the effect of that on audiences. Beyond these indications, however, I will confine myself to some remarks about the actual reception of Scott's tragedy.

Peter Burian argues that the full realization of a Greek tragedy depended, in combination with the text itself, on the response of the audience, and he lists some common story patterns within which meaning was negotiated. We saw in chapter 3 how a sacrificial interpretation was commonly placed on "Scott of the Antarctic" by contemporary commentators: the "*sacrifice* pattern," Burian writes, "entails conflict between the needs and desires of the individual and those of a community in crisis, resolved in favour of the community through the willing participation of the sacrificial victim" (188). I have described how Scott, Wilson and Bowers, willingly sacrificed themselves for the injured members of the party and how Oates 'sacrificed' himself for them: in this way they affirmed the priority of collective over selfish values. In the context of the present discussion, however, the polar party was not the only or the

most important “community in crisis,” but rather an emblem of contemporary society, which they also in some sense redeemed by their actions. I mentioned in chapter 3 a view in Edwardian society that it was decadent, and quoted the president of the RGS farewelling *Terra Nova* with the assertion that “Captain Scott and his expedition were going to prove that the manhood of the nation is not extinct, and that the natural characteristics to which the existence of this Empire was due still flourish ... amongst us.” This was an interpretation of the story that Scott confirmed. At the death of Oates, he wrote: “I take this opportunity of saying that we have stuck to our sick companions to the last,” adding that this had been at the expense of their own safety. And in his “Message” he wrote that their journey had “shown that Englishmen can endure hardships, help one another, and meet death with as great a fortitude as ever in the past” (*Journals* 410, 422). Thus the events on the Antarctic stage dramatized the tension between the needs and desires of the self, on the one hand, and responsibility to the group on the other. And the men’s behaviour reaffirmed “civic virtue” (Burian 206) in what was perceived as a degenerate community.

However, it can no more be said that such concerns are restricted to the era of the story’s setting than that the old plays have nothing to say today. In an eloquent evocation of the spirit of Greek tragedy, Charles Segal writes:

These are complex meditations on mortality, on the inevitability of our confrontation with death, suffering, and the unpredictable in human life, on the force of the passions and the irrational behind our actions ... on the question of what larger power, if any, is responsible for the shape that our world and our lives take. (9)

There is considerable resonance in these words with my discussion of the tragic qualities of “Scott of the Antarctic.” Segal suggests that the genre may reflect “the anxieties rather than the confident verities of its audience” (23). In Max Jones’s opinion it is exactly this in Scott’s story which connects it with a contemporary audience:

Scott’s anxious odyssey unfolds in a succession of dramatic incidents, as he struggles against weather, terrain, animals, competitors, comrades, and his own fears of inadequacy. And it is the persistent beat of anxiety ... which draws in the modern reader... (Introduction xvii)

Such a list, however, does not capture the moral and existential power of the story. Of course, as mentioned earlier, this depends on your view of the protagonist, and I would argue that these are, in the main, “the undeserved agonies of a great-souled

man,” as Segal comments of a Greek tragic hero (29). Certainly, Scott also finds his “strength turned to weakness, his prosperity to misery” (38). As my analysis of his last words suggests, he is finally brought to what T. S. Eliot at the close of *Four Quartets* calls “a condition of complete simplicity/ (Costing not less than everything)” (198). Contrary to Moss’s view, Scott did not seek this self-immolation: “Tragedy was not our business,” as Cherry-Garrard put it (*Worst Journey* 562). Neither did the explorer see himself as a tragic hero. Although he is aware of how the story is unfolding and might be seen retrospectively, he refuses the role of a grand tragic character. After describing the impossible situation with Oates and the handing out of the opium tablets, he comments wryly in his diary: “So far the tragical side of our story” (*Journals* 409), and at the end of it all writes to his wife: “you must not imagine a great tragedy” (qtd. Gwynn 221). All the same, I suggest that Scott, like Charles Segal’s Greek protagonist, provides an example of “man’s capacity for spiritual strength, compassion, friendship, and loyalty in the midst of ... destruction” (46). In this way, the universal and inescapable fact of what Langer terms the “deathward advance” of an individual life is given meaning (351).

Imaginative responses

The accounts of “Scott of the Antarctic” I have considered in previous chapters have attempted to engage with the historical side of Scott’s last expedition. But there have been many imaginative responses too, and these allow the story to be approached in interesting ways which are not available to historical treatments. There is no expectation, for example, that a work of ‘fiction’ remain faithful to the chronology, setting or even characters of the original. Accordingly, while some of the texts¹⁸⁹ I will now discuss do follow the facts (as summarized in chapter 2) closely, others depart from them almost completely. Still others blend fact and fantasy. All approaches have yielded results of varying quality, and to indicate something of that range I will begin this section with samplings from the poetry, drama and prose respectively. Following that, I have chosen two works to consider in more detail: Ted Tally’s play, *Terra Nova*, and Kåre Holt’s book-length prose treatment, *The Race*. These are two of the most substantial, complex and, in my view, interesting imaginative responses to Scott’s story.

¹⁸⁹ There have been, of course, other creative responses to the story—in dance, the visual arts and film, for example—but analysis of the impact and reception of these is a different project. And while I touch on documentary and film to the extent that they present a narrative, what I am interested in here is written text.

Tally gives free rein to invention while Holt stays close to the facts, but both demonstrate the special advantages of a non-historical approach. These include new possibilities for humour, for opposing points of view to be given simultaneously and for dramatic reinventions, such as bringing Scott and Amundsen, who never met, together.

The early poetry relating to “Scott of the Antarctic” was often commemorative or eulogistic. It generally retold the story as received, and much of it reads like sentimental doggerel today. In chapter 3 I mentioned “England’s Debt,” which was used to raise funds for the families of the survivors immediately after the disaster. *Scott’s Last Expedition in Verse* is an undated but apparently later example from New Zealand—“This other England,” where “Tis summer, and the pregnant land/ Burgeoning ’neath the sun/ Displays its wealth with lavish hand/ And chaunts a benison” (Gordon 6). The poem begins unpromisingly: “Come ye with me to the frozen South” (5) and spares no punctuation when the British reach the Pole: “Oh! Bitterness! Forestalled!!!” (17).

The responses of present-day poets are naturally quite different, something that is starkly demonstrated by Chris Orsman’s 1996 description of the same scene in “The Pole.” Apparently referring to the most famous photograph, where Scott stands in the middle rear of the group, pained and eyes closed,¹⁹⁰ Orsman reveals the feeling of that moment in this way: “He wore his whole body/ like a prosthetic/ reaching out to this abstraction” (76). In a soliloquy called “Satori,” on the other hand, J. A. Wainright has the explorer finally experiencing a kind of a spiritual awakening: “here/ in the land where/ you are not/ finding You” (131). This scene occurs towards the end of a sympathetic “Narrative” (7), *Flight of the Falcon*: a combination of poetry, paraphrases of Scott’s journal, and photographs and paintings from the expedition, sprinkled through pages which have often been left mostly blank. Snowdon Barnett’s seven-canto “Romance,” *Last Entry*, is also largely spoken by Scott. Barnett reflects on “the quest for Antarctica” and “those qualities of courage and loyalty which run through the human story” (xiii) and finds, like the refrain of the title poem from Derek Mahon’s *Antarctica* (on Oates’s exit from the tent), “[a]t the heart of the ridiculous, the sublime”

¹⁹⁰ This classic photograph, with Bowers sitting at front left holding the string to trigger the camera and looking cross, and Oates standing at rear left somewhat askew (P 48/281/12 in the SPRI archives), was not the only one taken at the Pole. The men posed in a variety of different configurations, but Scott was at the centre rear in all except one where the men are standing in a single row (P 48/ 281/11).

(33). In “Ice House,” Canadian poet Anne Michaels also suggests a deeper significance in Scott’s journey: “You reached furthest south,/ then you went further.”¹⁹¹ The following lines of the poem, which is spoken by Kathleen Scott, recall the human bond of affection and care her husband maintained even in extremis (inner and outer) with those at home: “In neither of those forsaken places/ did you forsake us” (169). Michaels implies that the story is protected by the integrity of Scott’s own text:

Newspapers, politicians
Scavenged your journals.

But your words
Never lost their way.

Together with the poem’s title, Kathleen Scott’s final lines, “Still I dream/ of your arrival,” capture the story’s eternally present quality: the sense that the characters are frozen in time, and the hope that things might still turn out differently for them.

These early and modern poems demonstrate a characteristically serious poetic approach to the story, which in various ways seeks meaning in the historical events. A delightful exception is the aptly surnamed Les Barker’s “Spot of the Antarctic,” where “a small patch of yellow snow” (22) proves that one of Amundsen’s dogs at the front of the sledge beat him to the Pole. But even this witty poem, with its jaunty rhythm and rhymes that have “Roald ... trudg[ing] through the coald,” hints at more serious things. One such is the treatment of the dogs: “How can the man on the back of the sledge/ Beat the dog he has tied on the front?/ But spot was not a happy dog ...” (22). The double meaning of the word “beat” is not accidental, coming as it does with the mention of the unhappiness. There is also an amusing but pointed reference to the way Amundsen converted dogs to protein when he shouts, “Here, Spot!” and gets out his knife and fork (24). Barker demonstrates much skill in never allowing the comment to obscure the poem’s humour. Complete seriousness returns in a 2005 poem on the same subject by Bill Manhire. “Dogs” is prefaced by a line from *The South Pole*, where Amundsen says he “tried to work up a little poetry ... but it was no good.” Manhire’s catalogue of the dogs’ suffering, like my own in the previous chapter, often quotes Amundsen’s own words, and implies one very ‘unpoetic’ reason for the explorer’s failure. The incongruity between the harsh reality for the animals and the standard

¹⁹¹ This is also reminiscent of SPRI’s Latin motto, *Quaesivit arcana poli videt dei*, which could be translated: “You quested after the secrets of the Pole and found those of God.”

image of the expedition as a 'walk in the park' is expressed in a couplet like: "13 dogs each, hence we could sit on the sledges/ and flourish our whips with a jaunty air." And towards the end of the poem Amundsen says: "sometimes/ I feel quite alone. It is hard almost to speak ... [let alone write poetry]/ My best friends bark in my stomach...."

I will include a single film, the 1948 *Scott of the Antarctic*, in my overview of dramatic versions of Scott's story. Although largely documentary, this film was an important and widely known rendering of the story and the approach taken is of interest here. As previously stated, Kathleen Scott had refused to give permission for a film, fearing that Scott's story would be over-dramatized. So I will first mention a play which partly confirmed her fears and then discuss the movie she finally allowed. In 1930 she attended a performance of Reinhard Goering's three-act drama, *Die Südpolexpedition des Kapitäns Scott (Captain Scott's South Pole Expedition)*, in Berlin and although "her reaction was better than she had feared it would be," she objected to a "long, unhistoric and intensely melodramatic scene of the failing of Oates, where they all howl and shriek like demented Latins—a sorry affair" (L. Young 237-38). One contemporary review of the play, which has not been translated into English, stressed its connections with Greek tragedy: in particular with the sense of inevitability and "the dignity and hopelessness of man's fight against Destiny." A chorus, sympathetic to the British, comments on the action and at one point wails, "O Bitter Amundsen!" ("Scott's Last Journey"). Another reviewer wrote that although the German play was a compliment to "the epic tragedy of our race," it was a harrowing experience for an English viewer. The last act in the tent

is terrible. It is relentless. It freezes the soul ... I have never seen anything so grim or so nobly impossible. They have staged it with dignity. They have used the latest inventions. They have gone back to the Greeks for their form ... [but] Lady Scott is right. Her husband's memory belongs to the world. But her sorrows must remain her own. (*Sunday Express*)

Serious and sympathetic though the play was, it lacked the restraint Scott's widow required.

Kathleen Scott finally gave her permission for *Scott of the Antarctic* after being assured of the "factual and non-melodramatic approach" to be taken (D. James 36). The film was directed by Charles Frend, with music by Vaughan Williams, and John Mills in the title role. By the time it appeared Kathleen Scott was no longer alive, and

in the view of her granddaughter this was perhaps fortunate: she “would have loved the scenery,” but probably not “John Mills’s matinee heroism and Diana Churchill’s rather smug little wife in a clean overall” (L. Young 238). Nevertheless, the production was inspired by a touchingly earnest desire to do justice to the story, leading to almost obsessive attempts at verisimilitude. David James’s book about the making of *Scott of the Antarctic* contains several pairs of ‘spot-the-difference’ photographs that juxtapose Ponting’s originals with remarkably similar stills from the movie. “We have tried and really tried,” writes Mills, “to do justice to one of the great stories of the world ... [we were] all desperately anxious for the result to be worthy of the subject” (12). That wish is partly explained by the story’s inspirational value for a post-war audience.¹⁹² As I mentioned previously, the winter journey to Cape Crozier is an entr’acte rather than a central element of the story, and no doubt for that reason is omitted in the film. To present-day eyes *Scott of the Antarctic* may seem dated and the story somewhat diminished by the stagy cinematic mould of the period. Scott is like an energetic terrier, the men speak in cut-glass accents and “Good-ohs,” the humour is corny, and this Boy’s Own tale of British derring-do is just too nice.

Seven years previously, Douglas Stewart had offered a far less documentary but equally devout version of the story in his 1941 verse radio play, *The Fire on the Snow*. The play begins like the Gospel of John as the announcer intones:

In the beginning was the Word,
Before the Word was silence.
Man was born of a word
And he dies back to silence.
It is quiet in the white South.
...
These men of their own accord
Move away into silence,
Their skis soft on the snow. (10-11)

Here Stewart is linking the meaning of the men’s struggle to the eternal, ultrahuman quality of Antarctica itself. The reduction they undergo, which I have previously discussed, is shown in Scott’s words: “We’re down to the bones of life, harder and colder,/ More nakedly ruthless than anyone ever dreamed” (25). In all this cold, there is still the warm life of the men, however, the “fire” in the play’s title, and afterwards

¹⁹² In an analysis of the social and geopolitical context of *Scott of the Antarctic*, Klaus Dodds argues that the film can also be seen as evidence of a desire to “regenerate popular memories of imperial heroics and British pluckiness,” as well as “an enduring imperial determination to maintain a British polar empire” during a period of intense territorial rivalry in the Antarctic (9, 2).

also the timeless ‘flame’ of their spirit. Appropriately, it is given to the deeply spiritual Wilson to finally articulate this spiritual essence of their story:

Triumph is nothing; defeat is nothing; life is
Endurance; and afterwards, death. And whatever death is,
The endurance remains like a fire, a sculpture, a mountain
To hearten our children. I tell you,
Such a struggle as ours is living; it lives after death
Purely, like a flame, a thing burning and perfect.

The biblical tone returns here, as Stewart proclaims the men’s fortitude as the lasting meaning of the story.

Such reverent treatments as these probably played a part in the backlash that was to come, and it was partly *Scott of the Antarctic*’s image of the explorer that was later mocked by Tom Stoppard in *Jumpers* and in a Monty Python sketch about the making of a film called “Scott of the Sahara.” But while Wheeler (*Terra* 57) and Jones (Introduction xxxix) both state that the Python sketch lampoons Scott, most of the satire is actually aimed at film-makers and movie stars, American ones in particular. The setting is arbitrarily changed from Antarctica to Africa and the film’s title altered accordingly because the star insists on fighting a lion (see the epigram to part one of the thesis). It is the blasé fakeness that is being caricatured here: sand painted to represent snow, icing sugar on noses and eyebrows, a black man playing Bowers and a starlet in a short pink fur coat in the role of Evans. One could even argue that, by satirizing a production that is its antithesis, the sketch pays the 1948 film a compliment.¹⁹³ Nevertheless, by 1992 Pamela Davis and another student at Scott Polar Research Institute felt that things had got so bad that, “driven by the need to redress this contemporary opprobrium” (1), they compiled “*These Rough Notes*”: *Scott’s Last Expedition* to tell the story anew. The narrative begins with a verbatim reading of Kathleen Scott’s poignant diary entry on receiving the news of her husband’s death. Readings from the letters and diaries of Scott, Wilson and Bowers then take the story from the optimism of early January 1912 via disappointment at the Pole to death. Finally, in a biblical gesture reminiscent of Stewart’s radio play half a century earlier, Cherry-Garrard reads the “Corinthians Burial Service.” And here too, the concluding words indicate the story’s legacy: “... and we shall be changed” (11).

¹⁹³ For the script, which dates from 1970, see Manhire, *The Wide White Page* 173-80. It is not Scott, as Wheeler writes (*Terra* 57), but Oates who fights the electric penguin: Scott fights a lion.

An interesting addition to the plays already mentioned is *The Last South* by G. M. Calhoun, which was first performed in 1999. Mostly quoting from their book and journal respectively, Amundsen and Scott tell their stories in strict alternation, but without being aware of each other's presence. Amundsen is given the first word and Scott the last. This technique dramatizes the men's parallel—but quite different and physically separate—journeys to the Pole. It also demonstrates how indissolubly their stories are linked (at least from Scott's point of view), and has the advantage of allowing Calhoun to bring the two parties to the Pole at the same time (although he has the English see the signs which tell them they are second just before the Norwegians to arrive). Amundsen's "A cigar at the Pole! What do you say to that?" can then be immediately followed by Scott's very different cry, "Great God! This is an awful place ..." (31). *Kathleen's Antarctic*, a 2002 multi-media dance production, is an example of another type of performance work dealing with the story: in this case by recounting the love affair between Scott and his wife, also through extensive use of diaries and letters.

Except for *The Race*, which I discuss later, I will mention prose treatments of Scott's story only briefly, since I have found few which offer it anything new. Perhaps this is because they have had limited options beyond repeating the history-writing or repeating Scott's own words. Some do little more than retell the story and, like Nancy Mitford's "A Bad Time," are essentially essays. Others have only a nominal connection with the facts—as, for example, Yolen and Harris's unpleasant 2002 story "Requiem Antarctica," where Scott is arbitrarily represented as a vampire. With better justification, Peter Tinniswood's mildly amusing story, "Polar Games," locates the cause of the whole controversy over the Pole and Scott's death in that quintessentially English game, a cricket match, purported to have been played between the Norwegians and the British in Antarctica. Beryl Bainbridge's *The Birthday Boys*, first published in 1991, is the length of a short novel, with a different member of the polar party as narrator in each of its five sections. These begin with Evans's account of the expedition's departure from Cardiff and conclude with Oates's dreamlike description of walking out of the tent. The last is perhaps the work's most effective scene, and Bainbridge's attempt to have Scott speak like his diary meets with only mixed success. The title seems to have no significance beyond the mention of one or more of the men's birthdays in each section and Oates's dying near the time of his. Although the

book has been carefully researched, it offers the story little that is new—apart from an implausibly acid relationship between Scott and Wilson.

I now consider the first of the two works I have selected for more detailed discussion. Ted Tally's 1977 play *Terra Nova* is still regularly performed.¹⁹⁴ As well as being, in the words of its author, a "chestnut of American theatre" ("An Interview"), it was adapted for BBC television in 1984 and has been translated into several languages. In my view, it is the most skilful, imaginative and complex theatrical treatment of the story in English, and also at times one of the most amusing. Tally, who more recently wrote the screenplay for the film *The Silence of the Lambs*, employs a remarkable blend of fact and fantasy to dramatize the English journey. While attention centres on the five members of the polar party, Amundsen's and Kathleen's presences are vital to the play and they move in and out of the action in strikingly effective ways. It commences with Amundsen as a suave, upbeat chairman introducing Scott to fellow members of the RGS, whom he is to address about his forthcoming expedition. But the Scott he introduces is in fact near death at the end of that expedition. Embarrassed, Amundsen talks to Scott in stage whispers, at the same time reassuring the waiting members, before Kathleen enters, concerned. Perhaps comforted by her announcement that she is pregnant, although he continues to speak from the point of death, Scott finally returns and begins his address. During these first minutes of the play, along with different layers and changes in time reference, the scene has dissolved imperceptibly from the RGS hall in London to the final camp on the Barrier to the Scotts' house and back. Such temporal and spatial osmosis permeates the play. On one occasion Amundsen appears in what is explicitly a dream (11); at other times he simply manifests or vanishes suddenly and startlingly (28) or is present but not noticed (56). The dramatic potential of each is exploited, as in an example of the last, when he is an unseen burden on the back of the sledge the English are painfully hauling: the visible physical equivalent of the weight he was on their minds.

Amundsen also fulfils a variety of roles. At the beginning of the second act he is the waiter at a restaurant in France, where the five men are meeting for one of their regular reunions, years after arriving second at the Pole but returning safely. This inspired scene provides much delightful humour in banter between the English and in their stereotyped attitudes to foreigners, as well as in hilarious ordering from the

¹⁹⁴ There was a brief note on the play and its early production history in *Polar Record* in 1980 (Anon).

French menu. During preliminary toasts, Scott is finally able to break through years of reserve to tell the others, “We’ve come through a lot together ... I love you each as if you were my own sons” (48). Then Amundsen returns and announces simply: “There is no food.” Disappointed, the others filter away, but Scott remains as Amundsen removes the tablecloth to reveal the sledge underneath—and we are back in Antarctica. At some points Amundsen encourages or helps Scott; at others, like the Evil Angel in Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus*, he urges him to ignore his conscience. Towards the end, he seems to take possession of the men, murmuring the words they will say just before they say them (58-59), and finally to become death itself (68-69). There is nothing simplistic about these encounters, some of which are very challenging. As with Kathleen’s entries, while they sometimes bring relief and variety, they also allow opposing points of view to be aired. Nevertheless the difference between the two men emerges clearly, as for example in an exchange in which Amundsen is pressing Scott to abandon the injured Evans and Scott finally bursts out:

SCOTT: Should I just shoot him then, like one of your dogs? Damn it, perhaps we could eat him as well—just to be absolutely logical! It’s my fault he’s here. Can’t you see I’m responsible for his life?

AMUNDSEN: (*furiously*) For many lives! There’s one way to live here, one only! Everything is a *tool*—a boot, a sled, a dog—and a hand, an arm, even a man! If it breaks down you throw it away and you march *on!* It’s brutal, yes! And it’s ugly. But anything else is sentiment and it will kill you!¹⁹⁵

SCOTT: There’s a wall. I can see myself approaching from a great distance—and at last I come to it. On this side I’m something like myself. On the other side I’m lost, I have no name. (*Pause*) Can’t you understand? Where is the point at which the entire thing becomes worthless? After one man dies? After two? (31)

Scott’s question “Where is the point at which the entire thing becomes worthless?” is the question every tragic hero—if they are to be a tragic hero—has to solve on approaching their own particular wall. If there is no meaning in the suffering, it is reduced to the random sordidness of everyday ‘tragedy’ that I referred to previously. Although Tally occasionally inserts phrases from the original texts into his dialogue, he does so with discrimination and avoids the risk which Bainbridge takes of attempting to imitate Scott’s diary style. The dialogue’s great economy is demonstrated by this

¹⁹⁵ This ruthless element in Amundsen and the consequences for his character are highlighted in a 1999 Norwegian documentary based on Bomann-Larsen’s biography and with the suggestive title: *Frosset Hjerte* (“Frozen Heart”), which metaphorically links the explorer’s emotional makeup with the frosty South Pole.

later restatement of the question Scott put above. Amundsen asks: “How do you like your game now, English? Where will you find the rules?”:

SCOTT: In myself.

AMUNDSEN: That’s a large enough space to explore.

SCOTT: It’s all you’ve left me. (49).

At the crux of that inner exploration, when Scott, in extremis, considers taking the opium tablets and ending his life, it is finally Amundsen who grasps his hand and tells him: “Not the Pole, but here ... The single moment you were born to live ... the moment you were born for is here ... Live it well” (76-77), and then withdraws, allowing Scott to write and speak the final words from his journal, “Message” and letters. Perhaps this is a recognition that Amundsen, in a sense, ‘gave’ Scott the opportunity to find his greatness. Following the text of the play is a quotation from J. B. Priestley’s *The Edwardians*, arguing that the story’s principal appeal for the English is its “poetic quality, that haunts the mind like a myth.” Tally, an American, has captured that haunting, mythical quality and, with much humour and dramatic interest, added something distinctive and fresh to the story’s corpus.

Finally, I come to the second of the two works proposed for more detailed consideration: *The Race* by Kåre Holt. The book was originally published in Norwegian in 1974 as *Kappløpet* and the English translation appeared two years later. There are several reasons for giving this “documentary novel,” as it is called on its dust cover, special attention. Firstly, it is one of the most interesting literary versions of the story. It also helps to address the serious shortage of translated Norwegian sources on the *Fram* expedition. Although *The Race* is not a history it contains much factual information. As mentioned in the previous chapter, it was the first work to bring to light the true nature and consequences of the false start for the Pole, which Amundsen glosses over in a sentence or two—and of which more later. Secondly, *The Race* was published before Huntford’s attack on Scott and has the reputation (undeserved, in my view) of treating Amundsen in the same way the later work treats Scott (Robin 625; Wheeler *Terra* 58-59). Finally, copies of *The Race* itself are not easy to obtain and as a consequence it is not widely known. This is a further reason for presenting some of its special contribution to Scott’s story here.

As the title indicates, Holt chooses to focus on the story's competitive aspect. The mostly chronological narrative pits the two men against each other in alternating chapters, seven of which are numbered and titled "Amundsen" and seven "Scott." (As we have seen, Calhoun later used a similar technique.) The one exception is a chapter called "Conversation," after the fifth alternation. In a masterstroke (and despite elsewhere stating, "They never did meet, those two" [49]) here Holt exploits the dramatic potential of bringing the two men together for a tête-à-tête just before they start out for the Pole in the southern spring of 1911. This delightfully formal, yet frank, colloquy introduces a rare element of humour: as for example when Amundsen explains that he left Norway in secrecy because otherwise he might have been stopped:

"I realize I am now revealing my small-mindedness, Mr Amundsen, but I wish your authorities *had* stopped you" ...
"I quite understand that, Herr Scott. If we are talking about wishes, then perhaps I may be granted one of my own. For instance, those motor sledges ... I wish them in hell."
"I often share your wish on that particular point. The first one is already there—it went through the ice to the bottom." (160)

And when, a little later, Amundsen comments, "You're a bit of a pessimist by nature, aren't you, Herr Scott?," Scott's reply is an exquisite blend of pointedness and politesse: "Yes. Strictly speaking, I think it comes from my having a more active mind than yours—forgive my bluntness, but we did promise not to keep anything back" (161). Towards the end of the encounter, Amundsen "can't help liking [Scott] better and better," while Scott "unfortunately ... can't pretend to feel the same" (165).

The men's final exchanges exemplify several of the book's themes and techniques. "I think you're going to die, Herr Scott," observes Amundsen, and Scott agrees but thinks he will die honest and proud (165). There had been similar leitmotifs of impending death and tragedy throughout. Holt comments of Wilson and Scott, for example, that "[t]he two of them were to die together" (35), and that in Shackleton's choice of ponies "lay hidden something of Scott's later tragedy" (40). Further on, like the chorus in a Greek tragedy, he remarks during the storm at sea shortly after their departure south: "... here was Scott, on his way to the Pole and his death" (70). To Scott's comment about dying 'well,' Amundsen replies that he

would prefer to live as the victor. As the loser, I'd rather die. I think that if I get to the Pole and find your flag there, then I'll play my last card—it will be difficult, leading my men on the way back, keeping a journal that will tell posterity what a great man I was ... and then finding a crevasse in the ice one night when everyone is asleep. (165)

Shortly afterwards, the meeting ends with a mutual confirmation that it will be kept secret. This exchange is one example of the many fascinating alternate story lines Holt explores: here, the possibility of Amundsen arriving second and consequently choosing to die. (And, of course, Amundsen's statement about the journal for posterity conceals the barbed suggestion that this was what Scott did.) Further examples are Amundsen's (highly unlikely) proposal, when Campbell discovers him at the Bay of Whales, that they join forces and "go hand in hand just for the sake of science—and conquer ... the Pole together" (94) and the (more plausible) suggestion that Scott's men were unhappy with his refusal to race and that Evans tried to persuade him to do so (146-55). These are all interesting topics to speculate about. Finally, the conversation reveals the two men's contrasting characters, and psychological revelation is one of the book's central preoccupations. In this regard too, as with the possible scenarios explored, Holt pulls no punches. At one point, for example, he considers the possibility that Amundsen was homosexual (19). And his rendering of the explorer's reactions on being discovered by the British in the Bay of Whales cuts close to the bone:

His stomach churned, all the unpleasantness of the last few weeks coming to the surface ... He had stood there at home in Oppegård and not picked up the telephone when Scott had rung, hadn't he? He had lied to everyone ... And here was Scott's ship. They had found him. (81)

There are interesting insights into the psychology of the British too, as when Holt suggests that Wilson possessed a reticence "which made his friendship invaluable to the only man he really gave it to: Scott" (35).

This brings me to the previously mentioned accusation of Holt's bias against Amundsen and the comparison with Huntford. Certainly, Amundsen is often portrayed in a bad light. Probably what most angered his admirers were descriptions such as that of him (and Frederick Cook) during the *Belgica* expedition, vampire-like, sucking blood from living animals (10) or prowling his base during *Fram*: "He moved noiselessly, and they didn't hear him until he was upon them ... watching them. His eyes were deep-set, black and full of superficial smiles which concealed an inner suspicion" (129). But there is also often some qualification of the negatives. At the start of the book, for example, we read: "He was both genius and a snarling tiger ..." (13) and "The demand for submission should not be dismissed as arrogance: Amundsen knew that an expedition of this kind, composed of a small group of men who admired their strong leader, would have the greatest chance of succeeding ... Unfortunately, this desire to dominate other people got out of control" (14). And in

contrast to Huntford, Holt uses this kind of chiaroscuro in his portraits of both men. Scott, for example, is conditioned by naval discipline not to tell his men the truth (27) and lacks “that brutality you need to save lives when everything is at stake—or at least to save your own life, if not that of others” (33-34). He is also a conventional figure, who may sometimes have asked himself, “Why am I so boring?” (61). Ultimately there is no doubt that Holt decides in favour of Scott. He finds much to admire in Amundsen, nevertheless, as in the following comment on the explorer’s sudden decision to go south:

This plan reveals the breadth and character of Amundsen’s genius. The boldest feat in his life was not that he reached the Pole, but that he had the imagination and courage secretly to reverse all his plans from north to south. It wasn’t a question of morality. It was a question of willpower and the ability to accomplish his will. He won because he had the courage to take an imaginative decision. (46)

Far from mirroring Huntford’s attack on Scott, this assessment of Amundsen as an explorer is as favourable as Huntford’s own.

Especially in the early biographical sections, Holt gives *The Race* a documentary air through phrases such as: “Though there is no evidence, we can imagine how ...” (24) and “There was nothing to indicate, either then or later, that ...” (32). Indeed, the book does have a strong factual basis, although there are a few slips—or examples of poetic licence. These include portraying the agnostic Scott as a believer (30, 90), the claim that he sent the men out on the winter journey, and that he did so to establish (if they survived the cold) whether he could leave earlier than anticipated for the Pole (156). (In fact, Scott was reluctantly persuaded by Wilson to agree to the winter journey, and the start for the Pole had in any case to be delayed on account of the ponies.) Importantly, as mentioned earlier, *The Race* gave the first account of Amundsen’s own aborted early start. Holt introduces the episode with the words:

Then the incident occurred which he [Amundsen] later tried to cover, and which did not become known until many years afterwards. *Hjalmar Johansen’s journals were found half a generation later in a hotel cellar in Kristiania. Then the truth about the leader’s desertion came to light. Olav Bjaaland also wrote curt, hard words in his notebook. They revealed the same truth.* (177; emphasis added)

The words I have italicized suggest that what is about to be reported is historical fact. Detailed comparison with Ian Hinchliffe’s profile of Johansen demonstrates that it is. Johansen criticized Amundsen in front of the other expedition members for starting too early and for abandoning injured men on the dash back to base. Furious,

Amundsen then divided the group and excluded Johansen from the polar party. I will quote some of the parallel phrases in Holt's account (179-87) and Hinchliffe's (594). They are taken from the incident's denouement:

Holt: At first [Johansen] wanted to believe that the men in front hadn't been able to stop the dogs ...

Hinchliffe: Johansen's diary for 17 September records the experience: "We were certain that those in front would soon stop ..."

Holt: They found Framheim and staggered inside. Lindstrøm was brewing hot coffee: "Ssh," he said. The leader is asleep.

Hinchliffe: They arrived to find Amundsen and the others long returned, and fast asleep in their bunks.

Holt: [At breakfast] ... Amundsen slammed down his cup and said: "What do you think you were doing last night, dawdling like that?"

Hinchliffe: The following day Amundsen tried to trivialize the matter ...

Holt: [Johansen] "It was unworthy behaviour of a leader."

Hinchliffe: [Johansen] "A leader does not desert his men."

Holt: Dinner ... [Amundsen said] "I've changed my plans for the trip to the Pole. Eight men will be too many. Five will be sufficient ..."

Hinchliffe: At noon Amundsen announced new plans. Five men only would go to the Pole.

This sample demonstrates how closely Holt's narrative is based on Johansen's actual diary account. At other times, fact and interpretation are inextricably blended. Of the letter Amundsen left at the Pole for Scott to deliver to the King of Norway, Holt writes:

This was a diabolical triumph, a brilliant way of celebrating his victory ... This was the victor's wily greeting to the man who was now doomed to failure, exquisitely formulated, irreproachable in that it involved the King, the surprising little twist in the moment of victory which would find its place in all subsequent accounts of the journey. (232)

At the end of *The Race* Holt shows Scott, Wilson and Bowers rising above all doubt and weakness. Then, in a gesture similar to that of Amundsen in Tally's play, Wilson and Bowers "tactfully retreated into sympathetic silence for a few hours to allow their great leader to stand alone on the stage in the glare of history. Scott wrote ... making no excuses, the naked facts laid bare." His last letters "contained a warmth seldom matched by the literature of the world" (254). Here again Holt appears to write like a biographer, and the sense that the book may have been motivated in part by the need

to right a wrong is supported by the inclusion of an “epilogue” referring to a cable Amundsen sent from Hobart to the Norwegian Geographical Society: “Johansen mutinied. Therefore had to be excluded from the Pole party. His arrival home must take place quietly.” Holt adds: “Johansen took his own life the year after” (255).

§

There is widespread agreement that much of the impact of “Scott of the Antarctic” derives from Scott’s founding text and also that the story is a tragic one. But little critical attention has previously been given to Scott’s qualities as a writer or to the story’s links with the tragic form: as previous chapters illustrate, the focus instead has been on historical interpretation. In this final chapter I have attempted to remedy some of that deficit. By examining a selection of imaginative renderings, I have also indicated some of the ways in which the story’s potential has been exploited outside the historical debates.

CONCLUSION

The conservation of a story

We have taken from the defeated
What they had to leave us—a symbol:
A symbol perfected in death.

— *Little Gidding*, T. S. Eliot

AS YOU ENTER the John Ritblat Gallery of manuscripts in the British Library today, around the walls nearby are sections marked “Literature” and “Music.” But it is not clear what category a group of display cases in the middle belongs to. One is marked “Shakespeare and Contemporaries,” another holds a journal of Captain Cook, and another Sir Thomas Moore’s last letter to King Henry VIII. Among this group is a crowded cabinet containing a miscellany of six items, including an application by Lenin (under the name of Jacob Richter) for a reader’s ticket at the British Museum, General Haig’s order of the day for 11 April 1918, an apparently inconsequential letter by John Maynard Keynes and some post-war German stamps. Also there is the magazine produced by Scott’s expeditions in Antarctica, the *South Polar Times*, and it casts a shadow over the sixth item, a small “Black & White” brand sketchbook, eight inches by five inches. This is Scott’s final sledging diary, found with his body, now lying open at the famous last entry: “For Gods sake look after our people.” On a late September day in 2005 it seemed that some of the lights in this particular cabinet were not working. Others nearby held fewer items and were clearly lit. Half in shadow and squeezed in among its strange bedfellows, the little notebook could easily have been missed, with its pencilled message from the tent on the Great Ice Barrier ninety-three and a half years before.

As I have shown in this thesis, for several decades Scott’s story has been in decline. The casual display of its founding text, including the “Message,” “one of the most remarkable documents in British history” (Jones, *Quest* 100), is a sign of the times. Although, as we have seen, Scott has always attracted criticism as well as praise, his reputation was high at the time of his death and remained so for many decades. He was increasingly less likely to attract the hagiographical treatments he had sometimes

received in the early years, but was still regarded as the pre-eminent Antarctic explorer: a pioneer who, with his companions, had left a heroic example of courage and endurance, as well as a riveting story. In time, however, two devastating world wars brought far-reaching changes in world-views, and earlier notions of heroism, together with much else, came to be seen as compromised and highly suspect. In chapter 3 I described parallel developments in historiography and biography, and in the same chapter and the following one I charted changes in the attitude to Scott. But the major watershed in the history of interpretation of “Scott of Antarctic” did not occur until the late 1970s. By then Kåre Holt had recently debunked Amundsen, Norway’s polar hero, and biographers in general were “giving their subjects the full x-ray treatment”:

[T]he scene was set for Scott’s long overdue assassination by a fellow Englishman. He was about the only high-calibre hero still perched on his pedestal. Others, shot down almost monthly by the mid-seventies, included Albert Schweitzer, Winston Churchill and V. I. Lenin. (Fiennes, *Captain Scott* 413-14)

With the publication of Thomson’s and especially Huntford’s scathing books, Scott was added to the casualty list. As I demonstrated in chapter 1, despite a few recent reappraisals, similar attacks have continued to the present. Often they co-opt Scott’s story to make an ideological point or to instance an argument in their own field. Many ignore the story’s original sources and any commentary prior to Huntford and exhibit scant knowledge of the facts and dubious reasoning. I have suggested that some writers may have identified with Amundsen because he was a ‘winner,’ and therefore read his accounts uncritically and overlooked his shortcomings. The corresponding wish to downplay or deny the tragic aspects of life would make Scott’s story unappealing, and perhaps that wish has provided some of the fuel for the endless debates over how tragedy could have been avoided in his case. At times, therefore, Scott may have been made a scapegoat of others’ insecurities or frustrations at not succeeding. As my analysis indicated, all of this has had unfortunate consequences both for scholarship and for Scott’s story.

§

Scott’s diary is in a safe, if shadowed, place and will be physically protected for the foreseeable future. The same can be said for his hut at Cape Evans. Like the tent out on the Barrier, the hut was found in a very tidy state. Two years after the departure of

Terra Nova, the Cape Evans base was used by the Ross Sea support group for Shackleton's projected continental crossing. Their commander, Aeneas Mackintosh, wrote: "On arrival our first impressions were the very decided state of neatness ..." (qtd. Harrowfield 43). The hut was next visited much later, in 1947, by Americans during "Operation High Jump," and in the following decade by those taking part in the International Geophysical Year and the Commonwealth Trans-Antarctic Expedition. Conservation of the building began in 1960 with the removal of ice, and since 1987 it has been restored and maintained by a New Zealand charitable organization, the Antarctic Heritage Trust. Despite its use by Mackintosh's group, an archaeologist involved in the restoration work stated: "The hut to me was still Scott's, and while the presence of the Ross Sea Party was clear, when you looked closely, it did not overshadow the stronger presence of Scott" (qtd. Harrowfield 49). By contrast, Amundsen's expedition left no physical legacy, and Harrowfield writes: "Amundsen's station 'Framheim' has not been seen since his expedition and is presumed to have drifted out to sea on an ice berg" (70).

Scott's Cape Evans hut is one of seven, including his *Discovery* hut at Hut Point, that still survive from the heroic age. There are also four ruins and ten sites where buildings once existed (Headland). The historic huts that remain do so because they are cared for. But they themselves, as I pointed out in my introduction, are only of interest because of the stories attached to them; and although the hut and diary are being conserved, I have argued in this thesis that the story itself is in a less satisfactory state. Like the building, it has had to weather an adverse climate (in biography, history and literary criticism) as well as mistreatment by some who have used it carelessly, brutally or for inappropriate purposes. I have shown evidence of considerable distortion and of neglect of the original materials, and argued that a story of great power and meaning has thereby been reduced to a mere cautionary tale. Yet "Scott of the Antarctic" still survives, and although it may have lost its 'roof' like some of the ruins, it is by no means yet an empty site. The Antarctic Heritage Trust's statement of "Conservation Philosophy" for Scott's hut contains a comment which is remarkably relevant to the 'conservation' of the story that I am suggesting:

One would wish, of course, to guard against unwarranted reconstruction where the evidence is thin and conjecture takes over. There are, however, elements that should be reproduced for the overall performance and safety of the structure. (161-62)

I have given numerous examples of thin evidence and conjecture in the ‘reconstructions’ discussed in this thesis, and my intention in chapters 3, 4 and 5 has been, in part, to furnish materials which could provide a basis for better ones. While I too would like to avoid any “unwarranted” interpretation of “Scott of the Antarctic,” I will conclude by highlighting what in my view we are justified in conserving, as vital for its “overall performance and safety” or, in other words, its transhistorical significance and legacy.

In 1923 a nostalgic Cherry-Garrard found comfort in recalling the old days. In contrast to the present, when “it is seldom that any one does anything well for the sake of doing it well ... [and] men are out to hurt and not to help,” in Antarctica they had wanted to do their best and had lived “a life of co-operation in the face of hardships and dangers ... which has seldom been surpassed” (Preface v). Despite the rose tint of retrospect there is considerable evidence that the men of *Terra Nova* did live in that way. Cherry is referring essentially to qualities of character, tested under extraordinary conditions, and to an outstanding example of unselfish service and cooperation. And while Bowers, Wilson and other members of the expedition could also be mentioned in this regard, in this thesis I have focused on the leader and principal storyteller as the central example. “Human action transcends the social conditions of its production,” writes John Thompson. “For the importance of an action may exceed its relevance to the immediate circumstances in which it occurs ...” (64). Of course, the importance today of Scott’s story is symbolic: no one can go back and take part in past events themselves. And in that sense it can be argued that the precise details of those events, their “social conditions” and “immediate circumstances,” while obviously matters of life and death for the participants, should be of less significance for us than the story’s symbolic value. Even the best possible judicial treatment of “Scott of the Antarctic” will not capture that; and it was for that reason that my consideration of its forensic history was followed by an attempt to suggest something of its power as a story.

I argued that its symbolism was “perfected in death,” to borrow T. S. Eliot’s phrase quoted above. In other words, an important aspect of the legacy of “Scott of the Antarctic” is the legacy of tragedy. Thompson’s comment about an action’s transcendent meaning applies here too. There is nothing “Edwardian” or “English” or “British” about suffering and bitter disappointment; about the choice in a difficult situation between saving one’s own skin and helping others at one’s own cost; or between self-interest and caring about the effects of one’s behaviour on others. And there is certainly nothing place- or time-specific about the fact of death. These are

universal human situations and choices. Amundsen, as I have shown, let nothing stand in the way of personal achievement, and today is praised for efficiency and professionalism. Almost all maps show his route to the Pole in ruler-straight lines, next to a more wandering one for Scott. Although this difference is actually the consequence of the scanty data Amundsen left, it also emblemizes the commonly held view of him as the efficient professional. However, as Gabriel Marcel, philosopher and teacher of Paul Ricoeur, observes in *Tragic Wisdom and Beyond*: “Life in a world centred on function is liable to despair because in reality the world is *empty*, it rings hollow” (13). In countering such dehumanization, Marcel suggests that personal views of what it is to be human need to be calibrated against “exemplary witnesses recorded in history” (30). Values must not remain theoretical but must be confirmed by actual responses to life’s “tragic and even agonizing” challenges (115). In meeting suffering and death as he did in the stark setting of Antarctica, Scott became both an exemplary witness and the hero of a universal tragic drama. He demonstrated the surprising fact that success and the fulfilment of desires can be cut away and a life still have meaning. And while the value of that demonstration is recognized, the confidence his wife expressed in her diary will continue to be justified: “I *know* out of it all great good will come.”

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