

book, by an astonishing record of dedication, sacrifice, and concern for society. This is a story of long hours and low pay, of cramped facilities and lack of funding—indeed, without the help of the Carnegie Foundation, the College might well have ceased to operate. MacLeod has done an admirable job, especially given that he has developed his account not only from archival records but from personal reports of many former students of Memorial. Here is an example of oral history at its best. There was never any danger, I suspect, that this book would have joined the ranks of the aridly statistical—it is altogether human and anecdotal; yet the facts—the numbers and the dates and the lists—are all there, embedded in the text, in the tables, and in the appendices. This is indeed part of our country's story—what Memorial was, is, to a point, behind what we are today, and we would do well to take some lessons from the vision and dedication of some of our forebears when we come to contemplate the challenges of the present day.

Polar Attractions

Dean Beeby

In a Crystal Land: Canadian Explorers in Antarctica. U Toronto P \$29.95

Lisa Bloom

Gender on Ice: American Ideologies of Arctic Explorations. U Minnesota P \$34.95/\$14.95

Reviewed by Sherrill E. Grace

In a Crystal Land is an account of the lives of Canadian men—scientists, doctors, aviators—who participated in some of the most important twentieth century British and American “assaults” on the south pole. These men, and the roles they played, have been obscured by time and historiography (in one case by a deliberately edited British account) and marginalized. Their accomplishments have been ignored. Beeby's purpose, then,

is to reinstate them to their rightful place in antarctic and Canadian history by telling their stories. *Gender on Ice*, as its title suggests, is a highly critical reappraisal of American explorers in the high arctic and of the deliberate construction of these white, male adventurers as invincible American heroes. Again, others were marginalized in the process—the Inuit, all women, and a black American, not to mention the country whose territory would be crossed, penetrated, and claimed for the greater glory of the United States of America. Both books tell a tale of violent reconstructions of reality in the pursuit of imperialist agendas. And both aim to reinsert forgotten, suppressed voices into the polar discourse.

In the nine main chapters of his book, Beeby recounts the stories of fifteen intrepid men, often weaving their own accounts into more general descriptions of the expeditions on which they served. He begins each chapter with a brief *in medias res* narration of a dramatic moment and moves back from that moment to the wider context. His intention is to catch our interest and to draw upon the time-honoured traditions of oral story-telling and tall tales. Often this strategy succeeds; however, the cumulative effect is somewhat stultifying, and it makes the material itself seem predictable. But that is a small failing because there are many interesting moments recounted in a *Crystal Land*. The one that held my attention most forcibly was the story of Charles Wright, a young physicist from Toronto, who was part of the search team sent to find out what had happened to Captain Robert Scott. It was Wright who, on 12 November 1912, spotted the tent that covered the frozen bodies of Scott and his two companions, as well as their diaries and letters.

Beeby, a journalist, has done a lot of primary research for this book, from the Scott Polar Institute and Canadian government

archives to personal diaries, letters, and interviews with the few men still alive. An especially interesting product of this research is the set of photographs and maps chosen to illustrate the text. With one or two exceptions, these black and white pictures are unromantic snaps of men at work in a bleak, hostile landscape. For example, the image of Charles Wright chosen for the dust jacket shows a very young man, bundled up and seated on a loaded sledge, smiling forlornly, even wistfully, past the camera; he is surrounded by a blur of white. Beeby insists that his book is about “young men burning for adventure,” and he repeatedly describes their endurance, skill, and courage—all qualities he claims are characteristic of the “Canadian character,” which is moulded by our northern experience. Paradoxically, to my eye, the photographs tell a different story, none more so than the haunting image of Wright. In the last analysis (and in spite of Beeby’s rhetoric at times) Canada’s antarctic explorers were not larger than life heroes but real human beings. They were not setting an agenda (whether imperialist or personal); they were serving. And when Captain Andrew Taylor did take charge of the secret Operation Tabarin in 1943-44, the British refused to acknowledge him because their sovereignty in the antarctic was at stake.

Beeby provides little critical reflection or commentary on the activity of polar exploration itself or on the ideology supporting it, but Lisa Bloom picks up where the storytelling of *In a Crystal Land* stops. *Gender on Ice* is a disturbing and probing examination of the American discursive formation of heroism as it was constructed by Robert Peary and the *National Geographic* magazine. Bloom argues—and I find her arguments convincing—that Peary represented masculinist and nationalist ideologies that were exploited and validated by the *National Geographic* at a crucial point in its development and that once the investment

in Peary was made it could not be abandoned or discredited without diminishing the scientific credibility, mythological power, and economic success of the magazine. According to Bloom, “expeditions to the North Pole . . . were icons of the whole enterprise of colonialism,” and Robert Peary was (and is) the symbolic hero of this American story.

In order to support her central argument, Bloom scrutinizes the records of Robert Peary’s claim to have discovered the North Pole in 1909. He asserted this claim in the face of Britain’s failure to do so after four centuries of arctic exploration, against his American competition, the hapless Dr Frederick Cook, and despite the increasing evidence (scientific and other) that he had missed his goal and had fudged his results. Bloom, however, gives full weight to various counter-claims, commissioned investigations, and other narratives.

The two most fascinating of these other narratives are the stories of Cook and of Peary’s black American co-explorer Matthew Henson, who was excised from the story both by Peary and by others in subsequent accounts. The reasons for excluding Henson may seem transparent. First, a racist construction of the “negro” did not include the possibility that Henson could be anything more than a servant, like the local “Eskimos” whom Peary described as “cogs” in his expeditionary “machine”; second, the construction of the supreme, white American male could not permit his reliance, in any way, upon a black man. Even the publication, in 1912, of Henson’s book *A Negro Explorer at the North Pole*, did not lead to his inscription within the polar story. Indeed, to this day, Henson’s role is presented in racist terms, when it is mentioned at all.

The reception given to Frederick Cook, who claimed to have discovered the North Pole in 1908 (a full year before Peary) is harder to summarize. For various reasons,

his records were lost, his assertions discredited, and his life after his return was plagued by poverty, rejection, and imprisonment. Bloom examines Cook's treatment in some detail, but she highlights two possible, related explanations for his fate. One is simply that he was not backed by President Roosevelt and the *National Geographic* (as was Peary), and the other was that he did not conform to a pre-conceived and useful idea of the American explorer-hero. Of course, he could not have the former without the latter. Through a comparison of Peary's and Cook's comments about the pole, Bloom suggests that Cook presented himself as a human being who could reflect upon the folly of his ambition and the hollowness of his achievement, whereas Peary presented himself as the sole conqueror and individual victor. What was worse, Cook openly praised his Inuit guides and fully acknowledged his dependence upon them and their skill.

The role played in the dissemination of what I am tempted to call the "Peary Polar myth" by *National Geographic* is examined by Bloom in her second chapter, and it is a story of obfuscation and self-interest. She also examines the central roles played by science and technology, especially the advancing technology of the camera, in the *Geographic's* manipulation of the facts and the story told around the facts. Her discussion amounts to nothing short of an exposure of the magazine's vested interest in an ideology and discourse of exploration that posited white American masculinity as the supreme force dominating the world. Also of importance in this study are Bloom's discussions of gender representation and construction in the pages of the *National Geographic* and in Peary's treatment of his Inuit lover. In her final chapter, Bloom compares British and American narratives of polar exploration—Scott's in the antarctic, Peary's in the arctic—and suggests that

the British and American models for heroism, like the means they used to dramatize and validate these models, differ sharply. Where the British place their faith in individual male nobility within a narrative of potentially tragic self-sacrifice, the Americans rely on scientific methods and rhetoric to disseminate, through photographs, film, and video, an image of world domination. The arguments and evidence in support of these two discursive formations are too complex to consider here, and Bloom needs to develop them more fully and critically to my mind, but on the whole she is persuasive in her demonstration of how these two positions underlie current policy and behaviour—Britain's in the Falklands and the United States' during the Gulf War.

In the light of Bloom's critique of the ideological agendas fuelling polar expeditions, I am tempted to re-read Beeby's *Crystal Land* as a naive representation of story that leaves largely unquestioned the masculinist and nationalist biases inscribed in the stories of his young Canadians. However, the re-reading works both ways. Nowhere does Lisa Bloom mention the role of Canada and of Canadians in the north that Robert Peary so determinedly crossed and so ferociously claimed as his prize. Interestingly, it is Frederick Cook whom I find the most sympathetic personality in either Bloom or Beeby. Cook *lived* in the arctic *with* his Canadian Inuit guides and companions; he attempted to speak for them, as well as for himself, and he testified to the ultimate supremacy of a formidable natural world that no one could claim as "his" own.

