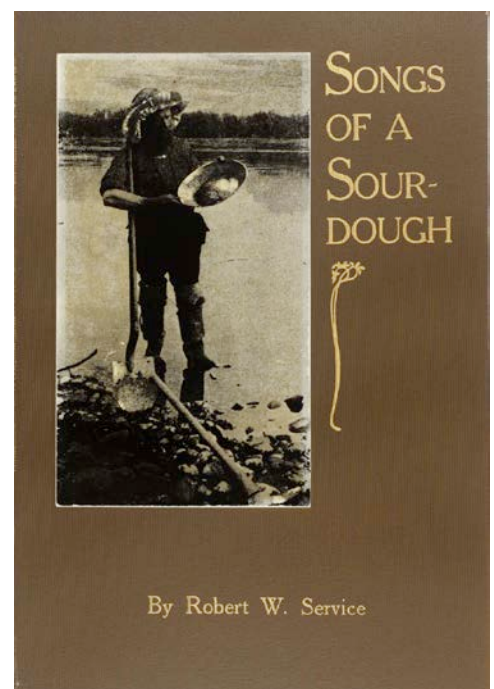


Mawson's Misfits: Laziness, Leisure and Literature in the Australasian Antarctic Expedition

Elizabeth Leane, University of Tasmania
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Send me the best of your breeding, lend me your chosen ones;
Them will I take to my bosom, them will I call my sons;
Them will I gild with my treasure, them will I glut with my meat;
But the others – the misfits, the failures – I trample under my feet.¹

The poetry of Robert Service was well known to the occupants of the Main Base hut of the Australasian Antarctic Expedition (AAE), at Cape Denison. Service – the so-called “Canadian Kipling” – was a favourite author of the expedition leader, Douglas Mawson, and his collections *Songs of a Sourdough* (1907) and *Ballads of a Cheechako* (1909) were included in the expedition library.² One evening in mid-February 1912, not long after the hut had been completed, Mawson read aloud to his companions from both volumes.³ The men may well have heard the lines quoted above from Service's famous poem “The Law of the Yukon”, which opens *Songs of a Sourdough*. The poem asserts that only a particular kind of man – one whose masculinity is premised on physical strength and hardihood – is suited to polar terrain: the Yukon frontier will tolerate “the strong and the sane”, but not the “foolish and feeble”; those who are “grit to the core,” not “weaklings, subtle, suave and mild”. The poems the AAE men heard were similarly “virile, full of strong manly life like Mawson himself”.⁴ The implications of Service's poetry for the expeditioners' own situation were obvious: if the Arctic required such men, what of the more extreme, more isolated Antarctic?



Whereas anyone could try their mettle against the Yukon in an attempt to make good on the Klondike gold rush, travel to the Antarctic in the early twentieth century was

¹ Robert W. Service, “The Law of the Yukon,” in *Songs of a Sourdough* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1907), pp. 5-10.

² Book list, 43AAE, Mawson Collection, South Australian Museum.

³ Frank Stillwell notes that Mawson read from “Songs of the ‘Cheechako’” [sic] on the night of 18 Feb. 1912; see *Still No Mawson: Frank Stillwell's Antarctic Diaries 1911-13*, ed. Bernadette Hince. (Canberra: Australian Academy of Science, 2012), p. 38. Archie McLean mentions Mawson reading “The Cremation of Sam McGee” (from *Songs of a Sourdough*) on the same night; see his *Diaries*, MSS382/1, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney.

⁴ McLean, *Diaries*, (18 Feb. 1912).

more complex. A journey there was only possible via an organized, funded expedition, and an expedition required a particular range of men. The “chosen ones” of the AAE were not, as in Service’s poem, vetted *in situ* by the environment itself but rather selected in advance by the leader Douglas Mawson and his group of advisors. Expedition members were recruited on the basis of their skills and expertise as well the personal characteristics that would (it was hoped) allow them to thrive in a small isolated community in a very harsh environment. Some decisions Mawson came to regret. In early May 1912, a few months into the expedition’s first year, he wrote an assessment in his diary of the men living alongside him:

I will jot down my analysis of the human element which composes the staff of such expeditions as this. They fall into a number of classes. First are the accomplished and painstaking sticklers who are the backbone of things ...

Then there are the mediocre people ... The class of men who require winding up to keep them going happily is but poorly represented on polar expeditions, though there is a tendency that way in winter when the hut temperature rises any considerable degree.

Finally there are the men who don’t fit in ...⁵

What did it mean to “fit in” to an Antarctic expedition team in the early twentieth century? Who were “the misfits, the failures”, and what personal characteristics led to this classification? Mawson goes on in this diary entry to specify misfits as untalented individuals: those “who can’t consciously say they are good at anything.” But the possibilities were a lot wider than this. Criteria varied with circumstance, team dynamics, the expectations of the expedition leader, or even his moods. In September 1912, Frank Stillwell wrote grumpily about Mawson that it “Seems hard to fit in with a leader who changes his mind three times in a morning”.⁶ Mawson was, however, consistent in condemning one character trait: laziness.

Laziness could be a matter of life or death on a sledging expedition in an environment so hostile to human life as the Antarctic, where survival depended on all parties operating at full strength. My focus here, however, is on everyday existence in the AAE: life in the Main Base hut, in the first winter (1912).⁷ The enclosed, domestic,

⁵ Douglas Mawson, *Mawson’s Antarctic Diaries* (Crow’s Nest, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1988), p. 78 (3 May 1912).

⁶ Stillwell, *Still No Mawson*, p. 149 (25 Sept 1912).

⁷ I have put the second winter to one side here, because the circumstances were so unusual, and many variables other than simply life in an enclosed environment (e.g. the deaths of Ninnis and Mertz, and Mawson’s debilitation) were at play. Sidney Jeffryes, the only newcomer to the hut in the second year, came to be perceived as a ‘misfit’, and was criticised several times for laziness in Mawson’s diary, but his particularly situation (he suffered a psychotic breakdown in the second half of the year) is very specific.

comparatively comfortable space of the hut, especially during dark winter when sledging trips were very limited and activities repetitive, grated against the stereotype of the polar explorer as someone active, energetic and manly. As Mawson's comments above indicate, he worried about his men needing "winding up" – not while they were out in the invigorating cold, but rather when things got too comfortable, comparatively speaking. At these times, leisure became a charged topic, blurring easily (at least in Mawson's mind) into laziness. Leisure activities – including the reading of literature – were the source of considerable anxiety. As leader, Mawson would have been cognisant of the view – one going back at least to William Parry's Arctic expeditions in the early 1800s – that unstructured time and excess leisure in overwintering parties could result in "polar depression." However, in his eagerness to keep all his men at constant work, with little chance to escape into their own private activities or imaginations, he seems to have risked inducing the very disharmony he feared. In the following, I examine the connections between laziness, leisure and literature in the AAE, particularly as these things relate to those men perceived, by Mawson and many other expedition members, as "misfits."

Highly motivated himself, Mawson expected the same levels of energy in his men, and was impatient with what he viewed as laziness. For Mawson, signs of laziness included lack of work ethic, napping, lying about, and doing non-purposeful activity (such as art or reading). His criticisms could be directed at the Main Base members in general, or at a small group. Cecil Madigan writes, for example:

The Doc went fairly crook on everyone today. Stillwell got it worst; Hyde Park Cornerites [Madigan, Ninnis, Mertz, Bickerton] were called lazy —. I was rather mortified.⁸

Hyde Park's name has been rather mud lately; Mawson called it sleepy hollow ...⁹

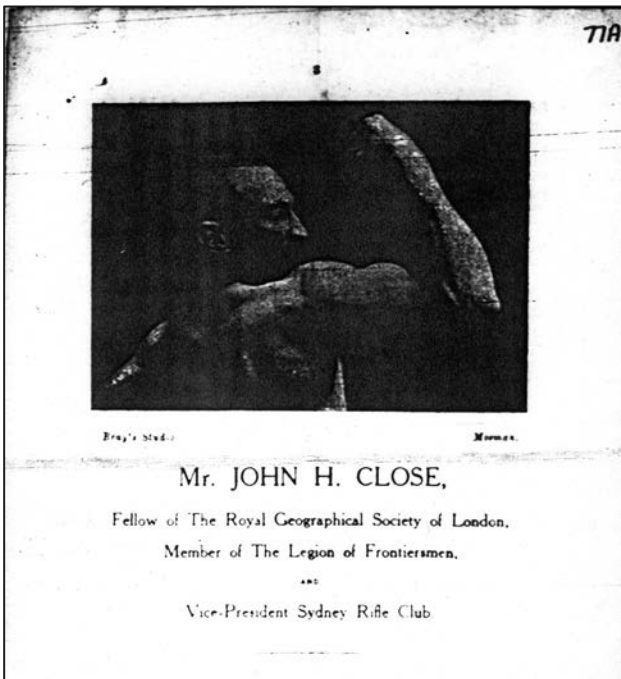
Certain individuals, however, were singled out at times by Mawson – at least in his diary – for laziness: they included Stillwell, Madigan, Herbert Dyce Murphy, John Close and Leslie Whetter. Of these, Close and Whetter – dubbed "Terebus" and "Error" by their hut mates for their efforts at cooking¹⁰ – were considered by popular consensus particularly bad "fits" for expedition life.

⁸ Cecil Madigan, *Madigan's Account: The Mawson Expedition: The Diaries of C.T. Madigan 1911-1914*, Ed. Julia W. Butler (N.p.: Wellington Bridge Press, 2012), p. 201 (24 June 1912).

⁹ Cecil Madigan, *Madigan's Account*, p. 215 (17 July 1912).

¹⁰ After the volcanoes on Ross Island, Mt Erebus and Mt Terror.

John Henry Collinson Close, the oldest Main Base expeditioner (he was forty) and the only married man in the hut, was arguably the biggest Main Base misfit. An veteran of the Boer War, Close had put himself forward to Mawson as a “good energetic man” who, while lacking scientific expertise, could contribute to the expedition by training its members in “physical culture exercises”.¹¹ “Physical Culture” was a health and fitness movement that was influential across Europe, the UK and the US from the mid-nineteenth century to the end of the second world war.¹² It arose partly as a reaction to the perceived enervation of working-class men as life became more urbanized, but also had moral dimensions, instilling (it was claimed) wholesomeness and self-respect in its practitioners.¹³ Close was the founder and director of the British Australian School of Physical Training, and wrote to Mawson under its letterhead, including a pamphlet advertising himself as a product and promoter of “Scientific Physical Culture”.¹⁴



Mawson’s decision to accept Close’s offer, after initial concern that the he was a “fanatic”,¹⁵ may have been influenced by the relationship already established between the AAE and the Physical Culture movement. One of the movement’s best-known proponents was the German celebrity “strongman” Eugen Sandow, who established a series of Physical Culture institutes as well as a serial publication, *Sandow’s Magazine of Physical Culture*. Wealthy as a result of his worldwide fame,

Sandow sponsored Ernest Shackleton’s *Nimrod* expedition (1908-10) to the tune of

¹¹ John H. Close, Letter to Douglas Mawson, 20 Aug. 1911, MSS171/14-15/C29, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney.

¹² Vike Martina Plock, “A Feat of Strength in ‘Ithaca’: Eugen Sandow and Physical Culture in Joyce’s *Ulysses*,” *Journal of Modern Literature* 30.1 (2006), p.129.

¹³ Plock, “A Feat of Strength,” 130-131.

¹⁴ ML MSS171/14-15/C31, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales,

¹⁵ Qtd in Beau Riffenburgh, *Aurora: Douglas Mawson and the Australasian Antarctic Expedition 1911-14* (Eccles, Norwich: Erskine Press, 2011), p.90.

one thousand pounds – a substantial sum for the day.¹⁶ Mawson was a member of *Nimrod*, and Shackleton threw his weight behind the Australian's efforts to fundraise for the AAE in 1911. Among the supporters was again Sandow, this time donating slightly more: a thousand guineas.¹⁷ (Mawson later reciprocated by naming an Antarctic nunatak after the bodybuilder.) Sandow was endorsing not only the activity of polar exploration and the AAE but also a man. According to Mawson's biographer Philip Ayres, Sandow considered the geologist an "ideal type", taking him to the theatre, where they sat in a box close to the British royals and the German Kaiser.¹⁸ Close's promise to teach his companions Physical Culture, coming a few months after Mawson's socialising with the magnanimous Sandow, was thus particularly well timed.

Close's (and perhaps Mawson's) vision of gymnastic exercises on the ice was not, however, to be fulfilled. With no scientific skills, the self-professed muscle-man became the expedition garbage-collector and snow-shoveller.¹⁹ It was soon evident – to the other men at least – that Close did not fit in. Significantly older than the most of the other men, he was more anxious about dangers (such as the possibility of the acetylene generator exploding); and, as a married man, he was homesick for his wife, to whom he wrote heartfelt letters expressing his love and concern for her well-being.²⁰ In retrospect, it is easy to sympathize with his situation and understand his responses. From the perspective of his companions, however, Close embodied the "feeble and foolish" that Service considered so ill-suited to polar environments. "He is certainly the least popular member of the expedition", wrote John Hunter in a brief character summary in his diary, "... the weakest of us is stronger & more active than he is".²¹

Anxious, helpless and bumbling in the execution of everyday tasks, yet eager to please his leader, Close was seen as an amusing (and sometimes annoying) parody of the ideal man he purported to embody. "Close ... has been in the habit of taking a short nap during the latter part of the dinner", observed Hunter in April 1912: "Poor old John Close – the friend of Nansen and all great explorers ..." ²² "He always seems

¹⁶ David Waller, *The Perfect Man: The Muscular Life and Times of Eugen Sandow, Victorian Strongman* (Brighton: Victorian Secrets, 2011), p.214.

¹⁷ Philip Ayres, *Mawson: A Life* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne UP, 1999), p. 51

¹⁸ Ayres, *Mawson*, p.51.

¹⁹ Riffenburgh, *Aurora*, p.155.

²⁰ These letters are held by the National Museum of Australian as part of the John Collinson Close collection, and can be read online via the Museum's website. An item from the John Collinson Close collection featured under the theme of "loneliness" in an exhibition on emotions held by the Museum; see <http://www.nma.gov.au/exhibitions/eternity/loneliness>. I'm grateful to Stephanie Pfennigwerth for pointing me to these resources.

²¹ John Hunter, *Rise & Shine: Diary of John George Hunter, Australasian Antarctic Expedition 1911-1913*, ed. Jenny M. Hunter (Hunter House, 2011), p.96 (9 June 1912).

²² Hunter, *Rise & Shine*, p.68 (19 April 1912). In his letter to Mawson (20 Aug. 1911), Close had mentioned that Nansen and another veteran Arctic explorer to whom he wrote, Francis M'Clintock, had both responded positively to his idea of

to be asleep”, wrote Walter Hannam flatly in mid-July.²³ Mawson complained in his diary around the same time that Close “gets tired before the day is out and has a nap at intervals. After 4pm he is prone to read a book ...”²⁴ As befitted an instructor in Physical Culture, Close’s favourite book (according to Charles Laseron²⁵) was Theodore Roosevelt’s *The Strenuous Life* (1900). The American statesman was famous for his own love of vigorous sports, and in the essay that opens the book (based on an 1899 speech), he exhorted his compatriots to embrace hardship and effort: “A life of slothful ease, a life of that peace which springs merely from lack either of desire or of power to strive after great things, is as little worthy of a nation as of an individual ... teach your sons that though they may have leisure, it is not to be spent in idleness ...”²⁶ The book seems to have had a counterproductive impact on Close, however. On a particularly busy day during a sledging trip with Laseron and Frank Hurley, Close “stayed in camp reading ‘This Strenuous Life’”.²⁷ On one notable occasion, Laseron recalls, the exercise instructor was found asleep with Roosevelt’s book “open on his chest”.²⁸ The irony of occasions such as this was not lost on AAE men, who in turn could not resist playing pranks on Close that parodied his self-image and highlighted his shortcomings.

Whether Close’s frequent naps were indicative of “slothful ease” or perhaps indicative of nighttime insomnia and incipient depression brought on by loneliness is, one hundred years later, impossible to determine.²⁹ Certainly Close remained positive about his experiences after the event, writing in glowing terms about Mawson and Hurley (the primary prankster) in a series of articles later in life. Despite his issues fitting into hut life, Close could claim his own heroic AAE moment: on a sledging trip in late 1912, holed up in “Aladdin’s Cave” (a shelter and food depot dug into the ice), he saved himself and his companions from death by carbon monoxide poisoning by unblocking the iced-up entrance. Close’s eagerness to publicly reinforce his links with his famous expedition-mates suggests that his identity as a polar explorer remained important to him, however difficult he found it, in practice, to perform that role.

While Leslie Hatton Whetter competed with Close (in the eyes of their peers) for the title of laziest expedition member, Whetter’s laziness was far more purposeful. It was

physical culture exercises on ice. Even by Close’s report, however, Nansen seems to have been underwhelmed, replying to that “the idea merits consideration.”

²³ Walter Henry Hannam, *Diaries*, 11 July 1912. ML MSS 384/1 at the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney.

²⁴ *Mawson’s Antarctic Diaries*, p.101 (20 July 1912).

²⁵ Charles Francis Laseron, *South with Mawson: Reminiscences of the Australasian Antarctic Expedition, 1911-1914* (Sydney and London: Australasian Publishing, 1947), p. 79.

²⁶ Theodore Roosevelt, *The Strenuous Life: Essays and Addresses* (New York: Century, 1902 [1900]), p. 1-2.

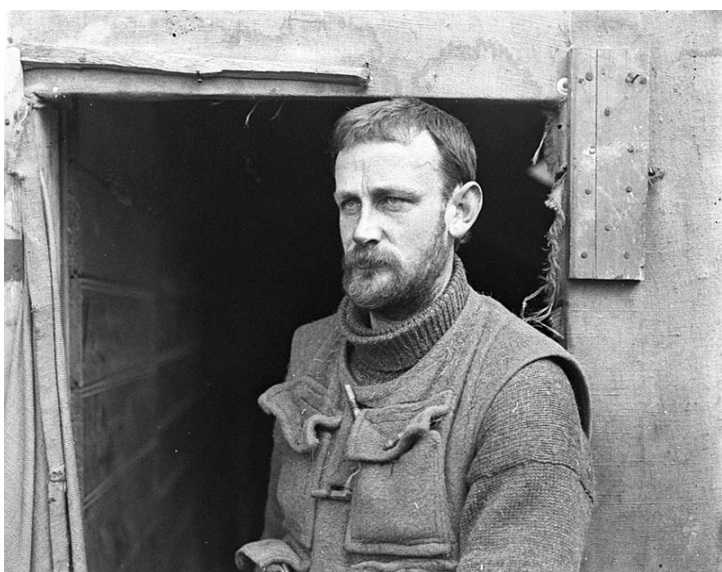
²⁷ Laseron, *Diary*, 17 Dec 1912, MSS 385/1, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney.

²⁸ Laseron, *South with Mawson*, p. 79.

²⁹ Mawson noted in his diary that Close would read a book when “he is not asleep until after midnight.” *Mawson’s Antarctic Diaries*, p.101 (20 July 1912).

a form of active resistance – of protest – as well as a lifestyle choice. A surgeon from New Zealand, Whetter was originally intended to provide medical care for the third proposed continental base of the AAE. As this third base did not eventuate, the Main Base ended up with two medical officers: McLean, who became the base’s senior officer, and Whetter. Whetter’s usefulness was thus inadvertently devalued from the outset, and (like Close) he was assigned a “‘rotten’ job”³⁰ – chipping ice with a pick-axe to melt for water. Finding himself doing very different work from the medical duties he had anticipated, Whetter made little attempt to hide his dislike of physical labour: “He told the Doctor he had come down here as medical man ... & not to do hard work”.³¹

By the start of winter, Mawson was expressing frustration with Whetter’s work ethic. Noting that the New Zealander had questioned him about when a lighter “winter



routine” would be instigated, Mawson wrote that “he has never had more [work] than 2 hours a day”. A couple of weeks later, finding Whetter reading at 6pm with a set task (chipping frozen penguin carcasses out to the ice) undone, Mawson declared him “entirely unfit for an expedition”.³² References to Whetter resting instead of working continue in Mawson’s diary over the next two months, backed up by others’ observations: “Whetter is a

conundrum”, wrote Hunter in another of his character summaries: “he is a big fairly strong fellow yet lazy; chronically so I think & there is no one the Doctor dislikes more”.³³ Madigan (who was assigned to lead a sledging party consisting of himself, Close and Whetter), concurred that Whetter was “incurably lazy”.³⁴ The clash between Mawson and the recalcitrant surgeon came to a head in early October, when Whetter entered the hut at 4pm, “intend[ing] to read a book”, having failed to dig out the front of the hangar as instructed (in addition to fetching the ice as usual). In response to his leader’s fury, Whetter insisted that Mawson was creating work where none was necessary, with the result that the men would “draw out” their tasks to avoid being assigned further jobs. Despite his angry response, Mawson must have recognized some truth in Whetter’s argument, as – following the latter’s suggestion –

³⁰ Hunter, *Rise & Shine*, p. 99 (15 June 1912).

³¹ Hunter, *Rise & Shine*, p. 99 (15 June 1912).

³² Mawson, *Mawson’s Antarctic Diaries*, p. 88 (4 June 1912), and p. 92 (18 June 1912).

³³ Hunter, *Rise & Shine*, p. 99 (15 June 1912).

³⁴ Madigan, *Madigan’s Account*, p. 253 (7 Sept. 1912).

he announced at dinner that everyone would henceforth “knock off at 4pm”, having done a “fair day’s work”.³⁵

While Whetter’s laziness earned the men’s contempt, some outwardly or secretly agreed with the surgeon’s view that Mawson created work when none was necessary. “D.M. ... determined to prevent the cook sitting down for any time at all” wrote Stillwell in mid-September; a few days later, having come in at 4pm, he was assigned to grinding biscuits: “There were already three at this and it can only keep two going. This is the usual state of things ...” When the clash with Whetter erupted, Stillwell described it as “D.M.’s behaviour” – not Whetter’s – coming to “a crisis”.³⁶ Madigan, not widely known as a shirker, remarked on the lack of leisure time a number of times: “I wish I could get some more time; we are at continuous work” (30 Jan 1912); “Tonight I have done absolutely d. a. for once; talked and smoked. I feel a slacker” (24 July 1912). He was relieved when Whetter’s stubbornness forced Mawson into a compromise: “Right till now we have never had a minute to call our own, and a half hour’s reading has been a painful conscience-racking process ... [now] I will feel justified in making a little spare time for myself, my diary etc., without knowing that the Old Man is worrying round and hinting that I should be doing something else, as he usually does”.³⁷

Books and reading were an important component of the flare-up of early October: it was Whetter’s desire to read a book that set off the confrontation, and Madigan’s comments confirm the angst that surrounded “a half hour’s reading” in the Main Base hut. Books, which offered imaginative escape from claustrophobic hut life, were thus a guilty pleasure. However, they could also be used as a tool for reinforcing the work ethic, particularly when read aloud in a group. Whether deliberately or simply from personal inclination, Mawson chose texts for this purpose that reinforced the importance of physical work and hardihood. Not long after his battle with Whetter, Mawson used the occasion of the Sunday service to read aloud Lord Avebury’s essay “Ambition” from his collection *The Pleasures of Life* (1887).³⁸ In this case the choice of text seems too pointed to have been coincidental: “To give ourselves a reasonable prospect of success,” writes Avebury, “we must realise what we hope to achieve; and then make the most of our opportunities. Of these, the use of time is one of the most important. What have we to do with time, asks Oliver Wendell Holmes, but to fill it up with labour”.³⁹

³⁵Mawson, *Mawson’s Antarctic Diaries*, p. 155-6 (3 Oct 1912).

³⁶ Stillwell, *Still No Mawson*, p. 145 (18 Sept. 1912); p. 147 (24 Sept. 1912); p. 154 (3 Oct. 1912).

³⁷ Madigan, *Madigan’s Account*, p. 100 (13 Feb. 1912); p. 219 (24 July 1912); p. 262 (3 Oct. 1912).

³⁸ Mawson, *Mawson’s Antarctic Diaries*, p. 122 (13 Oct. 1912)

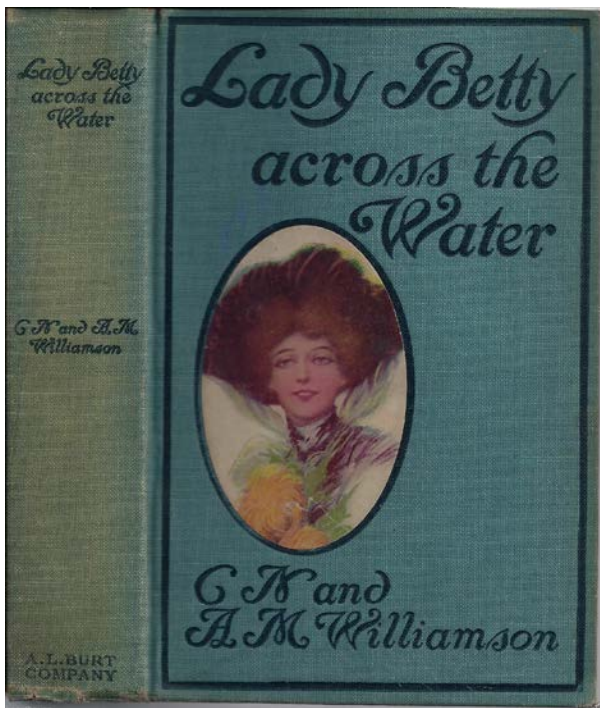
³⁹ Avebury, Lord. *The Pleasures of Life* (London and New York: Macmillan, 1903 [1887]), part 2, pp. 4-5.

Imaginative literature too could have moral overtones. In addition to Service's poetry, with its ideal of masculine strength and simplicity, the men listened to his novel *The Trail of Ninety-Eight* (1910). This "Northland Romance" – a tale of the Klondike gold rush – was read aloud as the dark winter was commencing, to mixed reactions. "We are all enjoying it immensely", wrote Stillwell, noting that part of the hut had been dubbed the "waggon corner";⁴⁰ he also received his nickname – "Stillwater Willie" – from a minor character (a flamboyant gambler) in Service's novel. But there were times when the tale grated: "[O]n the whole it has been somewhat gruesome" complained Hunter; "Trail of '98 drags on its miserable course ... it got on my nerves tonight," wrote Madigan.⁴¹ The men found its vacillating male protagonist frustrating, at one point beating up a pillow that served for his "effigy".⁴² More consistently popular was Owen Wister's *The Virginian*



The Rescue.

(1902), now commonly considered the first Western novel. Dedicated to Roosevelt, it featured the kind of hero – physically powerful, experienced in outdoor living, willing to play pranks but serious when it comes to duty – who would have appealed both to Mawson and to most of his men. There was a "rush" on this novel,⁴³ which was a favourite for sledging parties, who often read it aloud. At one point Hurley and Whetter, arguing over the latter's ability to read sufficiently loudly, tore the novel in half so that they could read parts of it simultaneously.⁴⁴



While literature could be useful for reinforcing ideals of energetic manliness, its effects were unpredictable. Neither Service's account of gruelling life in the Klondike gold rush, nor Wister's more romantic tale of Wyoming cowboys, in the end impressed the AAE men as much as a

⁴⁰ Stillwell, *Still No Mawson*, p. 91 (1 June 1912)

⁴¹ Hunter, *Rise & Shine*, p. 95 (8 June 1912); Madigan, *Madigan's Account*, p. 189 (5 June 1912, 6 June 1912).

⁴² Madigan, *Madigan's Account*, p. 189 (5 June 1912).

⁴³ Madigan, *Madigan's Account*, p. 282 (27 Oct. 1912).

⁴⁴ Francis H. Bickerton, "A Log of the Western Journey", 8 Dec. 1912, Mawson Collection, South Australian Museum. Copy of typescript lodged in the Scott Polar Research Institute, Cambridge.

novel of manners, *Lady Betty Across the Water* (1906). The third “Lady Betty” tale by husband and wife team C.N. and A.M. Williamson, this novel centres on a young aristocratic British woman’s encounters with American high society. *Lady Betty* was, Madigan confirms, the “most popular book” of the expedition. The sessions when it was read aloud in May 1912 were joyous occasions: “After dinner Hurley said – ‘Who wants ‘Lady Betty’? and a yell of ‘We all do’ settled the question”.⁴⁵

Mawson acknowledged the novel’s popularity in the official expedition narrative, *The Home of the Blizzard*, confirming that “There was not a dissenting voice to the charm of *Lady Betty across the Water* ... Lady Betty ... had a host of devoted admirers. Her influence spread beyond the Hut to the plateau itself.”⁴⁶ In one sense, the men were getting much the same version of masculinity in this novel as that presented by Wister and Service. Betty rejects the proposal of a fashionable urban man – the type who might be classified in “The Law of the Yukon” as “subtle, suave and mild” – and accepts the hero, Jim Brett, who is explicitly likened to the “splendid” hero of *The Virginian*. Betty notes approvingly that “he has led an open-air, adventurous sort of life”.⁴⁷ Unlike *The Virginian* or *The Trail of ’98*, however, *Lady Betty Across the Water* is told from a female point of view and presumably aimed primarily at female readers. The previous two *Lady Betty* novels were both published in the *Ladies Home Journal*. Narrated by the playful heroine of the title, *Lady Betty Across the Water* is full of descriptions of social events, clothes, and shopping. The AAE men thus found themselves in the Antarctic reading aloud chapters entitled “About Shopping and Men” or “About Bathing, a Dress, and an Earl”, featuring lines such as “The petticoats and stockings and belts and lace things and parasols, and especially blouses, were so perfectly thrilling that my heart began to beat quite fast at sight of them”.⁴⁸ While such descriptions may have had a special appeal to Murphy, who had cross-dressed for several years while working for British intelligence services, they were evidently enjoyed by all the company: “Tonight Madigan finished off ‘Lady Betty’ ... we were all so affected that we all hugged one another!”⁴⁹

There is a lovely (and probably self-conscious) irony in the expeditioners’ wholehearted embrace of this light, girlish novel. Here, for once, was a leisure activity that was primarily for pleasure, not instruction or character-building. The men’s outward delight in this novel represented, perhaps, a kind of resistance to the expectations around work and masculinity that were constantly placed upon them.

⁴⁵ Madigan, *Madigan’s Account*, p. 269 (11 Oct. 1912); p. 179 (23 May 1912).

⁴⁶ Douglas Mawson, *The Home of the Blizzard: Being the Story of the Australasian Antarctic Expedition, 1911-1914*, (London: Heinemann, 1915), vol. 1, p. 147. The “plateau” here refers to the shelter and food depot that the men dubbed “Aladdin’s Cave”, in honour of a setting from *Lady Betty*: a room decked out for a party in an “Aladdin’s Cave” theme, in the cellar of a mansion on Rhode Island.

⁴⁷ C.N. and A.M. Williamson, *Lady Betty across the Water* (New York: McClure, Phillips), 1906, p. 129.

⁴⁸ Williamson, *Lady Betty across the Water*, p.91.

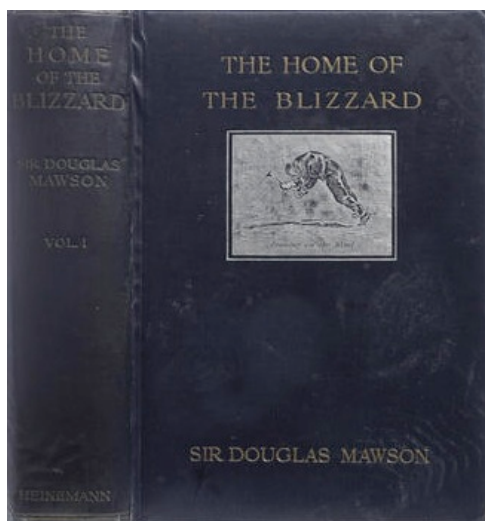
⁴⁹ Hunter, *Rise & Shine*

Another irony came later, in the form of an image. Hurley’s photograph of two men collecting ice in the face of a blizzard, with the Main Base hut in the background, has become perhaps the most iconic shot of the AAE. While this image, manipulated by Hurley to



product particular effects, appears in a number of slightly different

versions, the two men in the foreground are never named in its captions.⁵⁰ You can see why: anonymous figures produce a more mythic effect, in which the image is, as Robyn Mundy writes, “not a simple record of a specific event,” but rather an impression of “every man’s – the expedition’s – daily struggle with the blizzard”.⁵¹ Perhaps, too, the AAE men might have winced if these figures of stoicism had been publicly identified as Leslie Whetter and John Close. Yet these two “lazy men” of the expedition



have together become the unacknowledged emblem of the AAE, from the front cover of the first edition of *The Home of the Blizzard* onwards. In an unexpected turn of events, the misfits of the expedition are now its heroic icons.

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Figure 4. Leslie Whetter. Photographer: Frank Hurley. Source: State Library of NSW.

Figure 5. Illustration by Arthur I. Keller, from 1902 edition of *The Virginian* (New York: Macmillan).

⁵⁰ Robyn Mundy, “Writing with Light: A Photographer’s Vision: Frank Hurley and the 1911-1914 Australasian Antarctic Expedition”, *The Polar Journal* 4.1 (June 2014), pp. 127-149, at p. 140.

⁵¹ Mundy, “Writing with Light”, 140-141.

Figure 6. Front cover of *Lady Betty Across the Water* (New York: McClure, Phillips, 1906).

Figure 7. “Out in the blizzard at Cape Denison, adjacent to Winter Quarters.”
Photographer: Frank Hurley. Source: State Library of NSW.

Figure 8. Front cover of first edition of *The Home of the Blizzard*.