Cold Matters
Cultural Perceptions of Snow, Ice and Cold

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Cultural Perceptions of Snow, Ice and Cold

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ABSTRACT From the Eurocentric or Anglo-American point of view, the Arctic and the Antarctic have often been perceived and presented as the last masculine preserves on earth. Outside constructions of the masculine Arctic obviously also disregard the circumstance that people have lived in the region for very long, but there are also non-indigenous women who have spent time or lived in both areas, to begin with usually as companions to their husbands, but in later years as researchers in their own right. Two early narratives about life in the far North and the far South, respectively, are Josephine Diebitsch-Peary’s *My Arctic Journal: A Year Among Ice-Fields and Eskimos* (1893) and Jennie Darlington’s *My Antarctic Honeymoon: A Year at the Bottom of the World* (1956). Both women describe life in the polar areas in ways compatible with the gender ideologies of their time. In many respects, however, Diebitsch-Peary’s account presents more radical suggestions for how women might live in the masculine polar environment than Darlington whose conclusion is that the Antarctic should remain a men-only continent.

KEYWORDS Josephine Diebitsch-Peary, Jennie Darlington, gender ideology, Arctic, Antarctic, Robert E. Peary, Ronne Antarctic Research Expedition, feminisation
At the end of the first chapter of the ghost-written account of Jennie Darlington's year in Antarctica, *My Antarctic Honeymoon: A Year at the Bottom of the World* (1956), the first-person narrator says: “I was in a man’s world, where I was expected to carry my own duffel bag and follow in my husband’s footsteps” (16). In the book, the polar region is constructed as a masculine space where social codes like politeness to women do not apply. This male-coding of the region is of course not restricted to one particular text. In the 1950s, the Arctic and the Antarctic were among the few geographical areas that were still regarded as male preserves. The idea was widespread at least in European and North American culture, and Sherrill Grace points out that in the Canadian context one of the most common stories of North “is the narrative of courageous men battling a dangerous, hostile, female *terra incognita* to prove their masculinity and the superior force of their technology” (2007: 16). This masculinisation of the polar world has its roots in the nineteenth century when, according to Lisa Bloom, “polar exploration narratives played a prominent part in defining the social construction of masculinity and legitimized the exclusion of women from many public domains of discourse” (1993: 6). Like war epics and business success stories, tales of Arctic and Antarctic expeditions function as repeated re-enactments of the classic hero-myth, where
men overcome dangers and compete for supremacy on a site liberated from the trappings and comforts of western civilisation (David 2000: 63-82). The numbing cold and the stark surroundings mean that the quests for glory and self-discovery stand out even more prominently in the texts. The setting is subordinated to the heroic narrative as only another of the hero's trials.

The structures of the polar narratives are therefore likely to be the heroic quest story, the Bildungsroman or the struggle for supremacy, all of them forms that until very recently have excluded women as main characters. When women narrate Arctic and Antarctic experiences, they consequently need to either adapt their stories and narrative functions to such male-oriented models or create new formats altogether. In line with Jennie Darlington's comment, the double bind of living under men's conditions but without the autonomy that should accompany the situation informs many women's polar stories. On the one hand, women polar travellers challenge the middle class gender order that prescribes a domestic existence and a subordinate role for women by journeying to regions regarded as unsuitable for women. They carry their own duffel bags. On the other hand, they frequently reaffirm conventional femininity by making it clear in their texts that however provocative the act of polar travel may be to the traditionalists at home, they do not really subscribe to any radical ideas concerning women's place in society. They are happy to follow in the footsteps of men, as it were. Women's writing about the polar areas seem to establish a feminine pole, or a female tradition of narrating Arctic and Antarctic experiences that governs both Josephine Diebitsch-Peary's 1893 book *My Arctic Journal: A Year Among Ice-Fields and Eskimos* and continues in Darlington's *My Antarctic Honeymoon* from 1956.

Peary's and Darlington's works need to be read in the context of the gender anxieties at the end of the nineteenth century and the backlash phenomenon of the post-war 1940s and 50s. Although their publication dates are more than sixty years apart, the texts are remarkably similar in how the women at the centre of the first-person narratives are presented. A key element in both narratives is that western women in the Arctic and the Antarctic serve as a reminder of civilisation and sex. Accordingly, Josephine Peary's journal contains a great deal of information about how she creates an American upper-class home in the wilderness and Darlington frequently returns to the idea
of how her presence makes it more difficult for the male expedition members to “forget women” (95). Their roles are presented as relational and sexual, and they go to the poles to accompany their husbands. The works do not describe the realities of being a woman at the North or the South Pole, however, and it is important to distinguish between the lived and the written experience. As opposed to hero narratives centring on men, these women’s encounters with polar conditions and a predominantly masculine culture are subordinated to an overall story of love and true feminine values.

The gender-coding of the texts is to a large extent a matter of perceived audience, and main justification of the works is that they provide a female perspective on regions that are usually described by men. Especially in the nineteenth century, as Mary Suzanne Schriber points out, women travel writers “capitalized on the ideological construction of gender to advertise their work as different from men’s; thus in a crowded market they distinguished their works for readers” (xxviii). Josephine Peary’s journal can be directly related to a general feminisation of travel literature in the second half of the nineteenth century that coincided with both an increased interest in the woman question and with the heightened emphasis on propriety and family values associated with the Victorian period. This feminisation of the genre frequently manifested itself in a privatising, subjective tone of writing and a particular focus on domestic details and women’s conditions (Foster 1990: 24). It is reasonable to assume that by the mid-1890s, there existed a fairly clear set of expectations of what a woman’s travel book should contain that continues to apply at the time of Jennie Darlington’s 1956 account.

In Josephine Peary’s journal, the author’s wifely role is made explicit even before the beginning of the text proper. The Introductory Note from the publishers begins by describing the expedition of the Philadelphia Academy of Natural Sciences, Robert E. Peary and the other members of the team and the main results of the venture before finally introducing Mrs. Peary as a homemaker on Greenland. Her ethnological observations are mentioned almost as an afterthought (Introductory Note 1894: 1-2). The Note is followed by a Preface by Robert E. Peary emphasising that the book has been written only after considerable persuasion from friends and that Josephine Peary has no wish for publicity and fame (3). Given the fact that she later made
a career of writing about her Arctic experiences in the photo-books *The Snow Baby* (1901) and *The Children of the Arctic* (1903) this declaration needs to be understood as the traditional modesty disclaimer that opens works by women writers from the Early Modern period onwards. The main function of the statement is that it aligns Josephtine Peary with conventional models of femininity. The same is true with the remainder of the preface where Robert Peary states that “a desire to be by [his] side” was Josephine Peary’s main reason for coming to Greenland (3). He expresses a certain pride in her physical fitness and pluck, but undercuts these ideas by highlighting the domestic nature of her part of the experience. Close to the area where explorers like Elisha Kent Kane, Adolphus Greely and Isaac Hayes suffered their Arctic trials,

this tenderly nurtured woman lived for a year in safety and comfort: in the summer-time climbed over the lichen-covered rocks, picking flowers and singing familiar home songs, shot deer, ptarmigan and ducks in the valleys and lakes, and even tried her hand at seal, walrus, and narwhal in the bays; and through the long, dark, winter night, with her nimble fingers and ready woman’s insight, was of inestimable assistance in devising and perfecting the costumes which enabled Astrup and myself to make our journey across the great ice-cap in actual comfort. (Peary 1894b: 5)

One result of this persistent focus on feminine values is that Robert Peary’s foreword gives the impression of protesting too much. The final passage of the preface makes clear that he, too, is responding to a feared or experienced criticism: “That neither Mrs. Peary nor myself regret her Arctic experiences, or consider them ill-advised, may be inferred from the fact that she is once more by my side in my effort to throw more light on the great Arctic mystery” (5). It remains clear that from Robert Peary’s point of view, his wife has no role in the Arctic separate from his project. But Josephine Diebitsch-Peary was no mean photographer and the fact that she published her journal shows that, in spite of the modesty declaration, she had things to say and observations of her own to convey. Nevertheless, it is not only her husband’s account that feminises her, but her own text actively contributes to shaping her feminine image as well.

The subtitle of Diebitsch-Peary’s journal is *A Year Among Ice-Fields*
and Eskimos, introducing the idea that the narrative will concern barren, bleak and in western terms uncivilised regions. Yet the first impression conveyed is of Greenland nature as an object of beauty: “Never had I seen so many different wild flowers in bloom at once. [...] Never had I stepped on moss so soft and beautiful” (12). Relating an episode of big game hunting when the expedition members shoot a
polar bear, Josephine Diebitsch-Peary is primarily concerned with the bear’s appearance: “A very, very pretty sight he was, with black snout, black eyes, and black toes” (26). On their camp-site in McCormick Bay, flowers “bloom in abundance” (32) and the first item of clothing she really feels in need of is “an old-fashioned sunbonnet” (40). Through these repeated references to a gentle natural world, the initial section of the narrative actually forms a counter-discourse to the idea of cold barrenness set up in the subtitle. This may to some extent be understood as a means of feminising the Arctic and figuring the region as woman-friendly, but it is also a narratological device that goes back to early accounts of the North and is repeated in most travel books about northern locations.4 By undercuts generally accepted preconceptions, the writers strengthen their own textual authority.

The feminising tendencies can be more clearly seen in Josephine Peary’s descriptions of her role as a representative of refined civilisation and her responsibility for the social life of the expedition. Each member’s birthday is celebrated with a special dinner, and she includes several menus in her text:

- Mock-turtle soup.
- Stew of little auk with green peas.
- Broiled breast of eider-duck.
- Boston baked beans, corn, tomatoes.
- Apricot pie, plum-duff with brandy sauce.
- Sliced peaches.
- Coffee. (38)

This particular meal was accompanied by bottles of Liebfraumilch and Sauternes, and with a few exceptions, could have been served in a well-to-do American home. She relates how she lays on a Thanksgiving (82-83) and a Christmas dinner (95) and how she issues invitation cards to the expedition members for an “At home” on New Year’s Eve 1891 to 1892 (99). Before going on a hunting trip with her husband, she pins a card on the door of their hut “out of regard for ‘social custom’”: “Have gone to Tooltoo Valley for two or three days’ hunt. Visitors will please leave their cards” (54). The idea of sending out invitation cards or leaving visiting cards among a small, confined group of Arctic explorers is of course ludicrous and the descriptions do not carry the suggestion that society rules should apply in the camp. Instead, they sig-
nal the style of life Josephine Diebitsch-Peary was used to and would have felt proper at home. In addition, they indicate that she addresses a female, middle-class audience of fairly conventional tastes. Her frequent descriptions of house-cleaning continue to build up this image of proper femininity and emphasise that although the party live under sometimes very difficult conditions far north, she, at least, does not let her standards of cleanliness and neatness slip (81, 91, 106, 168). In her text, Diebitsch-Peary constructs herself as a lady, implying that her primary task on the expedition is to be a reminder of civilisation and home. The chivalry her presence inspires is illustrated, for instance, through an account of a deer hunt when she has to be carried across a stream (49-50). Her feminine sensibilities are brought to the fore in the description of the end of the hunt when she confesses that she cannot force herself to kill the wounded animal (52). Even though she lives in a man's world, she remains a model of genteel femininity.

The contrasts established in the text contribute to this picture of exemplary womanhood, although they are not drawn up along gender lines but follow ethnic divisions. Like most colonial observers at the time, Diebitsch-Peary's places the indigenous Greenlanders in a lower order of humanity (see Pratt 1992, Grewal 1996, Blunt and Rose 1994, and others). Reporting on the results of a walrus hunt she comments, with no sense of incongruity, that the meat would be used “for dog food and as an occasional treat for our Eskimo family” (46). When she lays on a Christmas meal for the Inuit congregation in McCormick Bay, her purpose seems specifically to be to mock her guests’ manners: “It was amusing to see the queer-looking creatures, dressed entirely in the skins of animals, seated at the table and trying to act like civilized people” (97). The disparaging remarks draw added attention to her own refinement and form an important part of her presentation of herself as a western, civilised woman in uncivilised surroundings.

The list of topics Shirley Foster has identified as particularly common in women's travelogues includes “appearance, costume and manners of women; details of domestic life such as household management and culinary habits; behaviour towards children; marriage customs and female status” (24). In accordance with these selective criteria, Diebitsch-Peary concentrates more on the Inuit women than the men, provides a description of how to make pemmican (59), comments on the custom of wife-exchange (85), relates how a widowed
woman had had to strangle her youngest child to be eligible for a new marriage (87) and describes the procedure of an Inuit divorce (135-36). But her ethnological authority is seriously compromised when she discloses, quite far into the text, that she has never entered “an Eskimo hut” (125). “Hearing about the filth and vermin was quite enough for me,” she explains, and when she is forced to take shelter in an igloo, she is disgusted (125-27). She presents it as particularly problematic to have to watch the Inuit women undress, with no concern for their visitors. But the episode is nevertheless included in the text where it provides both exoticism and erotic titillation, and Diebitsch-Peary’s expressions of embarrassment rather functions to again emphasise her own elegant delicacy. As Kristi Siegel condenses the strategy, to “get an audience, a woman needed to provide material that was reasonably exciting; to keep an audience, she needed to remain a lady” (2).

Like numerous other early travel writers, Josephine Diebitsch-Peary notes that she at first cannot distinguish the sex of the Inuit
she meets (42, 70). Like the other descriptions of the Inuit in her text, these, too, emphasise her refined status and suggest that upholding the demarcation lines between male and female is an important aspect of what constitutes civilised life. An illuminating counterpoint to her inability to discriminate between Inuit men and women is an episode she does not include in her book, when the Inuit hunter Equ who has come to McCormick Bay specifically to see the “white woman” turns out to be equally unable to discern the sex of the American visitors. Looking closely at both Robert and Josephine Peary he finally asks: “Which one is the woman?” (“T aissumani” 2005). When culturally and socially determined distinctions are absent, sexual categories are difficult to ascertain, regardless of the home culture of the observer. There are no signs of such an awareness of the cultural aspects of gender identity in Diebitsch-Peary’s journal, however.

*My Arctic Journal* is concluded with a text by Robert E. Peary, describing his and his companion Astrup’s journey across the Greenland ice cap. There are some notable differences between his text and that of his wife. For obvious reasons, Robert Peary presents himself as primarily a scientist and only secondarily a family man and he continues to stress Josephine Peary’s role as his helpmeet. The severe cold and Arctic dangers that are so conspicuously absent in Diebitsch-Peary’s text are very much present in his narrative, and although he includes what could be regarded as domestic details in his text, the purpose of the information is primarily scientific, as when he gives advice on how to keep scurvy at bay (Peary 1894a: 240) or provides useful pointers as to suitable clothing and provisions for future expeditions (237-40). The text prepared for the party’s return to the US, where Peary began to present his use of native technology as an important factor for his success, stressing its suitability and reliability. Michael F. Robinson suggests that there were other important reasons behind his advocacy of Inuit equipment, however. Towards the turn of the nineteenth century, there was considerable scepticism as to the blessings of modernity and mass culture, and polar exploration could be constituted as the ultimate rejection of the modern world. In Robinson’s view, Peary tapped into this mood by parading in Inuit clothing at his public talks and promoting native – pre-modern and non-western – expedition gear (120). The threat of over-civilisation was accompanied by a threat of emasculation, but both could be counteracted by encour-
ters with the wilderness and what was understood as a more primitive lifestyle (Robinson 2006: 123). In response to such feelings, Peary presented Arctic exploration “as a test of manhood rather than a test of machines” (Robinson 2006: 126). But Josephine Diebitsch-Peary’s narrative disturbs this back-to-basics polar image to a considerable extent since she continually shows how she does not reject civilisation by going to Greenland but on the contrary, maintains it as far as she is able. There is a jarring discrepancy between the two texts, despite the fact that they were published in the same volume. Robert Peary’s text creates a masculine hero who can show his true mettle only unfettered by urban civilisation whereas Diebitsch-Peary’s journal ventures just a few steps outside the boudoir. It seems an inescapable conclusion that both Robert Peary’s and Josephine Diebitsch-Peary’s projects are closely intertwined with the gender anxieties of the late nineteenth century. Their narratives take the forms they do not because of the writers’ biological sex, but because they write to historically specific understandings of masculinity and femininity in a context where the success of their future expeditions relies on not offending any financial backers.

* 

Gender anxieties were a prominent feature also of the cultural climate of 1950s America when men struggled to recapture their positions after the Second World War. During the war years, women had done what had previously been considered men’s jobs and a return to the housewife role was certainly not universally welcomed. Women who nevertheless opted for a domestic life had to come to terms with the fact that this was no longer the automatic choice. For both men and women, the 1950s were a period of readjustment and insecurity as it became more and more obvious that it would not be possible to re-establish pre-war conditions. Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) was one of the first attempts to diagnose the problem as a matter of gender trouble, but the issue informs fiction, journalism, TV and film throughout the late 1940s and the 1950s. It is therefore quite logical – although disappointing – that Jennie Darlington’s conclusion in *My Antarctic Honeymoon* (1956) is that Antarctica is no place for women (205).
Darlington’s narrative was ghost-written by Jane McIlvaine and begins in 1946 when Jennie Darlington first meets her husband-to-be Harry. It is a “strange, unsettled time” (17) and Harry is described as clearly out of place at the party where they meet (19). Throughout the text, he is depicted as forceful, uncompromising and uncomfortable in small spaces, and these characteristics are obviously seen as what makes him a successful explorer:

His was a search for simplicity. Because of his directness, his blunt, sometimes hurting honesty, his lack of guile, and his individualistic approach to life, he seemed complex. And, just as he found himself unable to sit comfortably in average-sized chairs, he found it difficult to fit into contemporary civilization. (27)

For Harry, an Antarctic expedition is a way to return to the security of soldiering where everybody knows his place and authority is unquestioned. Antarctica is the peacetime equivalent to war: the “challenge without the killing” (47). It is also a place where his masculine virtues are more important than his lack of formal education. Jennie Darlington, on the other hand, is presented as a cultured, civilised being who understands “tall buildings, gray pavements, and the gaiety of multicoloured hats in display windows” (11). These civilised qualities underscore an image of helpless femininity, and Jennie’s relation to Harry is shown as subordinate. The couple’s hierarchical positions are made clear from the start:

Then I remember how he went to the door, opened it and, without waiting for me to precede him, went on out and down the steps. It was the first of a series of doors Harry was to open and through which I, caught in a kind of whirling helplessness, was to follow him. (21)

Since going to the Antarctic is nothing that Jennie Darlington herself can take credit for, and as a result, it cannot be presented as liberating in feminist terms. On the contrary, Darlington emerges as even more conventionally feminine when set against the stark natural environment and the overwhelmingly masculine atmosphere in the Antarctic camp. Her role is primarily to function as a contrast, and the narrative is equally concerned with definitions of masculinity as femininity.
The rationale of the narrative is the incongruous combination of the inhospitable, uncivilised life in the south polar region and the utterly civilised custom of honeymooning and the text is organised as series of binary contrasts which correspond to traditional notions of masculinity and femininity. It is only Jennie’s honeymoon, however, not Harry’s, and when they are to take possession of their new quarters she reflects: “I had a last, lingering, bridal thought. I wondered if it would occur to Harry to carry me over the threshold. It was a silly, feminine thought, as out of place in this man’s world as I felt” (147). The view that Antarctica is “the one spot left in the world where a woman can’t go” (38) is continually juxtaposed with the idea that it can offer “that inner peace men find only in an all-male atmosphere in primitive surroundings” (38). The polar area is used as an argument in the gender debate in order to show that despite all the examples of the war period, there really are parts of the world that only belong to men. As in the case of Robert E. Peary, an expedition to the Pole is presented as a means of reinforcing the importance of physical prowess and counteracting threats of feminisation. In gender terms, the Antarctic is a safe place.

RARE, the Ronne Antarctic Research Expedition 1946-48, set off in January 1947, led by the Norwegian-American Commander Finn Rønne and with rather shaky finances. Since Edith “Jackie” Rønne was to accompany her husband on the first part of the journey, Jennie Darlington was allowed to come too, and only a short time before the women were to go back to the US, they were offered the opportunity to stay on for the duration. For Harry Darlington, “taking a woman down there was unthinkable, as unthinkable as a woman co-pilot in his navy bomber” (92), and he immediately refuses to allow his wife to go. Seven other expedition members sign a paper stating that the presence of women would jeopardise their “physical condition and mental balance” in the Antarctic and declare that they will leave the ship in Valparaiso if the women are allowed to stay on (93). No rational arguments are presented, and the question is treated as almost entirely a matter of gender propriety: “It’s just that there are some things women don’t do. They don’t become Pope or President or go down to the Antarctic!” (94) Harry says. The episode gives rise to Jennie’s only expression of feminist awareness in the text:
The way he had laughed in the elevator, his abrupt “no” angered me. Inside me something hardened. That moment it was as though his words had sparked a determination to prove myself. I did not know how or where, or what would happen. Nor did I consider the possibility of going to the Antarctic beyond this immediate, instinctive reaction. (91)

Although Harry has to give in on this occasion, it is clear that the two women’s loyalties in every other respect belong to their husband. The expedition team gradually splits into two opposing factions, with Rønne as the leader of one group and Harry the other. The conflict is carefully avoided in Rønne’s account of the expedition but given considerable prominence in Darlington’s text. Unlike Rønne, Jennie Darlington was not bound by any expedition decorum, and could therefore publicise the episode freely (Roscoe 1958: 421). As Darlington reports the matter, it becomes another argument against allowing women or at least wives in the Antarctic, and as a result of the frictions is that any friendship between Jackie Rønne and Jennie Darlington has to be ruled out since it might be construed as disloyalty to their husbands (202). Their husbands’ needs and wishes have automatic primacy.

To fit in during her time in the Antarctic, Jennie Darlington attempts to conceal any hint of a feminine attitude and become invisible:

My job was to be as inconspicuous within the group as possible. I felt that all feminine instincts should be sublimated. I believed I should ask for no favors nor expect any, not even from my husband. Whereas woman’s natural instincts are to play up to men, I felt it imperative to play down. [...] Any drawing of attention to myself as female, any gesture or indication that I expected certain courtesies, any show of bossiness or pretense would have been resented. (203)

She consequently chooses the opposite strategy to Josephine Diebitsch-Peary. Whereas Diebitsch-Peary’s project is to maintain a civilised, feminine-coded culture in their Greenland camp, Darlington tries to be one of the men. Their accounts represent two fundamentally different attitudes to women’s participation in polar exploration. Diebitsch-Peary’s journal illustrates that it is perfectly possible
for women to go to the Arctic without sacrificing their femininity while Darlington arrives at the conclusion that women’s constitutions render them unfit for the Antarctic and place unreasonable demands on the male expedition members:

Taking everything into consideration, I do not think women belong in the Antarctic or on a similar expedition. The polar regions belong to those who know and respect them and can survive. Any weak link damages the whole. Man’s best instincts are protective. He should not be put in the position of endangering his own safety for another, lesser physical human. (205)

The circumstance that she becomes pregnant during their stay is used as one of the strongest arguments against women going to the poles. Diebitsch-Peary, in contrast, makes considerable capital out of the fact that their daughter Marie is the only white child born so close to the North Pole through her photo-books about the “Snow Baby” and her Arctic friends.

Although Darlington sees no place for women in the Antarctic, she nevertheless acknowledges the importance of what she regards as feminine touches. In her text, this domestic femininity is represented by the members of the nearby British expedition. After a visit to the British camp, one of the members of the American team paints a scene of domestic bliss, describing how the British scientists gather around their tea-table to darn their socks and mend their gear:

But the most striking thing about those Britishers was a sense of unity as well as that British quality of inward certainty and assurance that made them unashamed of doing feminine chores with detailed domestic precision.

They were restrained but hospitable, and the hut was warm and cozy. There was a boxful of purple pansies with yellow centers, and there were lettuce, mustard and cress for the table. They told us Mrs. Bingham had furnished the gay scarlet-checked curtains for the windows. There were cheerful lamp-shades on which the men had painted topical sketches. Water was boiling for tea and cake, and hot scones sent wonderful odors from the Esse stove in the small kitchen off the main room. (116)

In the absence of women, the men can take on what would otherwise be regarded as feminine duties without their masculinity being
compromised. At first, the British group seem to form a stereotypical contrast to the Americans as posh and effeminate with a hint of degeneration, but gradually they come to represent true civilisation and a welcome relief from the petty quarrels in the American camp. Even so, there is no sense in the text that the Americans could have followed the British example, and the emphasis on frontier-style masculinity remains throughout.

It is a well-documented tradition in exploration writing that the land is depicted as feminine, either silently awaiting the male explorer's penetration or violently resisting it, but in both cases, tamed and controlled in the end (Rose, McDowell). Mapping and naming are the most obvious symbols of this attitude, and in Robert E. Peary's text, for instance, the map-maker's right to name and thus imaginatively control various land features is mentioned on several occasions (Peary 1894a: 227, 229). Jennie Darlington attaches to the tradition of imagining nature as a woman, but somewhat surprisingly, she selects exclusively negative signs of femininity:

Antarctica, to me, is female. Fickle, changeable, unpredictable, her baseness disguised by a white make-up of pristine purity. Suddenly she strips off her gloves, rolls up her sleeves and, with the ferocity of a wolf, springs at your throat. The deceptive white mask becomes a shrieking, demoniacal darkness, a savage reiterations of her sheathed power, lest man let down his guard and forget.

All that day she had been a lady, disguising her true nature in windless silence, burying her treachery beneath layers of snow garments. (262)

The female Antarctic, as Darlington imagines it, is immoral and violent, a demon who treacherously disguises herself as a lady. Corresponding to Margaret Atwood's description of the Canadian North, the far South is thought of “as a frigid but sparkling fin de siècle femme fatale, who entices and hypnotises male protagonists and leads them to their doom” (3, original italics). Darlington compares Antarctica with mythological man-eaters like Lorelei and the sirens (110), and it seems the only reasonable conclusion that the one who will be able to conquer the continent is a heroic de-sexualised man who is not tempted by such feminine guiles as deceptive but dangerous beauty and siren songs. Such a hero cannot be compromised by the presence of women
who threaten his masculinity by suggesting the possibility of a softer life.

Although Jennie Darlington receives attention as one of the first two women to over-winter in the Antarctic, she does not use this circumstance to further women’s equality with men. On the contrary, she expresses stereotypical ideas about women and supports a traditional distribution of gender roles. Rather than expressing any dissatisfaction with the return to a more circumscribed existence for women in post-war America, her story contributes to a 1950s backlash against feminism. Josephine Diebitsch-Peary’s *My Arctic Journal* and Jennie Darlington’s *My Antarctic Honeymoon* can be viewed as direct responses to the gender anxieties of their respective times. In both cases, the works promote conventional gender roles but the effects of the philosophy differ in fundamental ways. For Diebitsch-Peary, the solution is to make the polar region itself woman-friendly by introducing civilised customs and polite social codes. For Darlington, the polar area remains a man’s world and the only possible option for a woman is to avoid going there. Despite its earlier date and more conventional social context, Josephine Diebitsch-Peary’s narrative advocates the more radical alternative.

NOTES


3 Establishing a tradition is obviously a matter of the critic’s choice of works, and there are several other traditions that could be created based on a different selection of works. Adventure and survival stories such as Liv Arnesen and Ann Bancroft with Cheryl Dahle, *No Horizon is So Far: Two Women and Their Extraordinary Journey Across Antarctica* (Oxford: Perseus, c. 2003) or Jerri Nielsen with Maryanne Vollers, *Ice Bound: One Woman’s Incredible Battle For Survival at the South Pole* (London: Ebury, 2001), could be included in a tradition where women’s strength and stamina under harsh conditions are foregrounded. Jenny Diski’s reflective and personal *Skating to Antarctica* (London: Granta, 1997) belongs in a completely different subgenre where the Antarctic experience is used as the counterpart to a journey of self-discovery. All the books are based on the writers’ experiences of the poles, however, and in various ways, they take part in
the cultural debates on gender of their times.


5 This (western) inability to distinguish the sex of indigenous people can be found in accounts of travel from almost every part of the world. Examples include the comment that under the Chinese umbrellas, “it was excessively difficult to tell the men from the women” (14), Albert Richard Smith, *To China and Back: Being a Diary Kept, Out and Home* (London: Egyptian Hall, 1859, published for the author); “The Arab women, it is said, do not appear; and, except in the case of Moorish females, it is rather difficult at first to distinguish the men from the women” (195), David Thomas Anstead, *Scenery, Science and Art: Being Extracts from the Note-Book of a Geologist and Mining Engineer* (London: John van Voorst, 1856); “From the similarity in point of dress, it was often extremely difficult to distinguish the men from the women” (138), William Rae Wilson, *Travels in Russia &c, &c* (London: n. p., 1828)

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Cold matters on a number of different levels. It has become a political instrument that helps to establish common ground for the cold regions of the globe. As a metaphor, it suggests an impassioned and controlled outlook on life. Physically, cold produces environments where people can freeze and starve to death. Psychologically, it may serve as the route to self-discovery, since it has the capacity to strip away everything except the most essential aspects of the self. Historically, cold has usually been surrounded by negative associations but more recently, it has become a theme to explore in words and pictures and exploit in marketing strategies. At the beginning of the twenty-first century there are signs that indicate that cold is becoming increasingly “cool.” At such a juncture, it is vital to assess the cultural meaning of snow, ice and cold since conventional ideological and metaphorical connotations of the concepts are destabilised.

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