Illuminations:
Casting Light Upon the Earliest Female Travellers to Antarctica

A novel and exegesis

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Creative Arts
in the Writing and Society Research Centre
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By Jesse Blackadder
Student number 96708633

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Volume One of Two
Dedication

Dedicated to
The women who journeyed to Antarctica in the 1930s on the Christensen fleet:
Ingrid Christensen
Mathilde Wegger
Lillemor (Ingebjørg) Rachlew
Ingebjørg Dedichen
Caroline Mikkelsen
Augusta Sofie (‘Fie’) Christensen
Solveig Widerøe

My mother, Barbara Walsh (1941–1988), whose journey ended too soon.

And my partner, Andi, who came along on this journey from beginning to end.
Acknowledgements

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Thanks to family and friends for support and encouragement, especially and most importantly my partner Andi Davey, who absolutely hates the cold but has nevertheless supported me with steadfast love, extra chores and great coffee for the past four years while my mind has been in the ice.
Statement of Authentication

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

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## Volume Two

*Chasing the Light: A Novel of Antarctica* ......................................................... Separately bound
Abstract

This Doctor of Creative Arts thesis (comprising a novel and an exegesis) illuminates the experiences of the earliest women to visit Antarctica.

Working within the discipline of polar studies, I pose the questions: how have women been represented in, and excluded from, Antarctic narratives of the continent’s early history? Are the experiences of the earliest women to visit the continent – largely overlooked until now – intrinsically worthy of attention? What issues should be considered in using historical fiction to recreate their stories?

In the exegesis I argue that women have been not only physically, but also narratively excluded from Antarctica by the way the ‘grand heroic journey’ functions as a master narrative and foundation myth that privileges the masculine hero struggling for survival. I examine early female memoirs of Antarctica, focusing on those by Dorothy Braxton, Jennie Darlington and Pamela Young, to establish how gender preoccupations influence their narratives. The work of polar scholars, including Lisa Bloom, Tom Griffiths and Gretchen Legler, and literary critics Peter Brooks, Annette Kolodny and Ruth Page form the conceptual framework for this argument.

Focusing on the journeys of Ingrid Christensen and her female companions to Antarctica in the 1930s, this thesis places their experiences in the context of decades of struggle by women to reach the southern continent. Archival information about Christensen’s journeys shows evidence that she was the first woman to land on the Antarctic mainland, rather than Caroline Mikkelsen, as is still widely believed.

In the absence of primary documents, Christensen’s own experience of travelling to Antarctica remains invisible. I argue that historical fiction is an effective tool for recreating the story of Christensen and her companions and that such fiction is not historical recovery, but a form of imaginative historiography. Works of historical fiction by Ursula Le Guin, Francis Spufford and Mojisola Adebayo, which aim to include previously marginalised voices and engage differently with the heroic
narrative of Antarctica, are used to explore the ethics of using real characters and events in historical fiction.

The thesis concludes with the historical novel *Chasing the Light*, a fictional narrative inspired by events from Christensen’s four real life voyages to Antarctica in the 1930s.
Introduction

As I write this introduction, polar adventurers and educators Liv Arnesen and Anne Bancroft are preparing to lead a team of six women from different continents on an expedition to the South Pole with the aim of raising international awareness about water issues. Bancroft and Arnesen are experienced adventurers and educators: in 1993 Bancroft (an American) led the American Women’s Expedition to the South Pole, becoming the first woman to cross the ice to both the north and south poles, and in 1994 Arnesen (a Norwegian) was the first woman to ski solo and unsupported to the South Pole. In February 2001 they were the first two women to sail and ski across Antarctica (Arnesen, Bancroft, & Dahle, 2003).

The reality of female adventurers undertaking a strenuous and dangerous challenge in Antarctica is no longer unusual. However, the lure of achieving a polar ‘first’ remains attractive and such efforts are regularly reported in news outlets and on the web. In early 2012 British adventurer Felicity Aston returned from an Antarctic trip where she became the first woman to ski alone across Antarctica.¹ Simmons, Australian adventurers James Castrission and Justin Jones were coming home after completing ‘the longest unsupported polar expedition of all time’² when they walked from the coast of Antarctica to the South Pole and back. Over the 2012/13 austral summer, Australian adventurer Tim Jarvis re-enacted Shackleton’s desperate voyage from Elephant Island to South Georgia and the crossing of its mountainous interior, outfitted with historically correct clothing and supplies.³ In the early months of 2013 Sir Ranulph Fiennes began leading a team to cross the Antarctic over winter. According to the expedition’s promotional materials: ‘A winter traverse of the Antarctic is widely regarded as the last true remaining polar challenge and the expedition’s success will reassert Britain’s status as the world’s

¹ Felicity Aston’s journey is described on her website http://www.felicityaston.co.uk
² The trek to the pole and back is described on the website http://casandjonesy.com.au
³ Jarvis and his team’s expedition is detailed on the website www.shackletonepic.com
greatest nation of explorers. The tropes that these expeditions draw upon – the perilous voyage, the last great challenge, the world’s greatest nation of explorers, one of earth’s most hostile environments – hark back to the so-called ‘Heroic Era’ of Antarctic exploration. Their use in describing contemporary expeditions shows that they still carry significant narrative power today.

The Antarctic has attracted public interest in recent years, stimulated partly by a number of exploration centenaries that have led to renewed interest in the narratives of these expeditions, and to events such as Jarvis’s re-enactment and public celebrations, particularly in England. However, there are other reasons behind the current public interest in Antarctica. The growth of Antarctic tourism, questions around potential resources in Antarctica and their implications for the Antarctic Treaty, and the spectre of melting icecaps and rapid climate change are all increasing public interest in the southern continent. Historian Tom Griffiths calls this ‘the Antarctic moment’, as the continent has shifted ‘from the geographical periphery of our consciousness to the centre of our scientific and intellectual concerns’ (2009, p. 74.10). Polar scholars concur, with Elena Glasberg identifying the current wave of interest as ‘a new kind of Ice Age’, prompted by climate change and the global environmental crisis, in which Antarctica stands for ‘hope or doom – and usually both at the same time’ (2012, p. xii), and Elizabeth Leane noting that interest in Antarctica has spread to cultural investigations of increasing theoretical sophistication, including books, bibliographies, conferences and academic journals (2012, p. 6). History, geopolitics, climate change and the dramatic growth of polar tourism all ensure that today the Antarctic (together with the Arctic) are powerfully present in the public consciousness, and the stories told of these places – particularly their exploration narratives – remain alive in the public imagination.

My own interest in Antarctica has grown over the past few years, initially prompted by a writer’s residency in Alaska and a week spent on a research vessel in Queensland, observing the humpback whales that migrate between Australia’s east

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4 The project’s promotional materials appear on the website http://www.thecoldestjourney.org/
5 Roald Amundsen and his team reached the South Pole in December 1911, Robert Falcon Scott and his men died on the way back from the South Pole in March 1912, and Douglas Mawson set out on his fateful sledging journey with Ninnis and Mertz in November 2012, making his desperate solo dash for safety in January 1913.
6 In 2011–12 the Scott Polar Research Institute published the text of Scott’s journal entries in the form of a regular blog (and twitter feed), with the dates corresponding to the journal entries 100 years earlier (R. F. Scott, 2012b). Antarctic Tasmania tweeted Mawson’s sledging journey 100 years after the fact (Antarctic Tasmania, 2012). The Scott Polar Research Institute coordinated a series called ‘Scott 100 events’ involving celebrations, exhibitions and talks across the United Kingdom throughout 2012 (Antarctica 100 Group, 2012).
coast and Antarctic waters. Fascinated by whales, female history and the mythology of icy, remote landscapes, I began looking for stories of the first women who travelled to Antarctica. In the Reading Room of the Mitchell Library I opened *Women on the Ice: A History of Women in the Far South* (Chipman, 1986), one of the earliest books on the subject, to find an old black and white photograph of two women sitting on the deck of a ship, bound for Antarctica. One of them, Ingrid Christensen, gazed out at me across continents and decades. Christensen and her companion Mathilde Wegger (the other woman in the photograph) were, in 1931, the first identifiable women known to have seen Antarctica (Chipman, 1986, p. 72), and Christensen made a total of four voyages to Antarctica between 1931 and 1937 on a whaling resupply vessel. In between Christensen’s third and fourth voyages, another woman, Danish-born Caroline (also spelt ‘Karoline’ in some sources) Mikkelsen, became the first woman to land on the Antarctic mainland in 1935. However, little has been written about any of these women, either in English or in Norwegian. Both the ‘Heroic’ (c1897–c1922) and ‘Mechanical’ (approximately post-1922) eras of Antarctic exploration were recounted primarily through the adventures and explorations of men. Christensen and Mikkelsen’s experiences were touched on only briefly in the literature about women’s experiences of Antarctica. Although female writers and academics have now contributed to the modern body of Antarctic literature and polar scholarship, the experiences of these earliest women to visit the continent remain largely absent, even in works that aim to redress the imbalance.

Christensen’s near miss at claiming the first female landing opened up the potential to explore notions of heroism and issues of gender through a creative intervention. My investigations raised questions that formed the basis of my research. I first asked: how have women been represented in – and excluded from – Antarctic narratives, particularly those of the continent’s early history? This question led me to examine scholarship of the canonical male texts of Antarctic exploration, and lesser-known female Antarctic travel memoirs from pre-1970. Uncovering further details of Christensen’s journeys to Antarctica led to my second question: are these

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7 Mikkelsen is reported as the first woman to land on Antarctica in publications including the Norwegian *Main Events in the History of Antarctic Exploration* (Bogen, 1957, p. 85), the Australian *A History of Antarctica* (Martin, 1996, p. 194), the English *Encyclopaedia of Antarctica and the Southern Oceans* (Stonehouse, 2002) and the American *Encyclopaedia of the Antarctic* (Riffenburgh, 2007) as well as on numerous websites.

8 There are different views on the start of the ‘Mechanical Era’, but the phrase refers to the use of new transport and communication technologies (such as planes) in exploration. Shackleton’s biographers suggest that Shackleton’s final expedition in 1922 forms a distinct dividing line between the Heroic and Mechanical eras (Fisher & Fisher, 1958, p. 449).
experiences of the earliest women to visit the continent worthy of attention? Did the fact of their gender make them intrinsically worthwhile subjects to research, as a feminist approach might suggest? The question of who was the first woman to land on Antarctica, while not the subject of my thesis, became one of the drivers of my research, as it was a useful avenue through which to examine the reporting of female interaction with Antarctica. The lack of primary texts in relation to Christensen and her companions made them ideal subjects for historical fiction, and led to my third question: what issues should be considered in using historical fiction to recreate their stories?

This research is located in the multidisciplinary space in which gender studies, history, historiography, literary production and literary criticism overlap, within the relatively new humanities discipline known as polar studies that has emerged over the past 10–15 years. Polar studies (and its subset, Antarctic studies) draws researchers from the arts as well as ‘cultural geography, cultural history, sociology, philosophy and gender studies’ and includes ‘any scholarship dealing with sociocultural aspects of humanity’s relationship with the southernmost continent, past and present’ (Leane, 2011, p. 150). As Leane explains, within this community of scholarship members tend to keep one foot in their traditional discipline (in my case, literary production) and the other in their area of polar interest. I locate my work in the area where feminist history and Antarctic studies come together, through recovering lost female history in relation to the Antarctic, and bringing feminist and gender theories to bear on Antarctic history and narratives.

This project began as an act of feminist revision, with its roots in the feminist history movement that has the aim of the ‘recovery of women as subjects and agents in the making of history and the simultaneous decentring of the male subject’ (Morgan, 2009, p. 381). I was initially inspired by the idea of recovering Christensen as a subject and agent in history. In the decades since the 1970s, feminist history has grown from the act of historical ‘recovery’ to incorporate its own self-reflexive historiography. Gender theory in the 1990s helped feminist history ‘avoid the limitations of the arguably compensatory, separatist approach of women’s and feminist history and thus to refigure all history writing’, provoking new research into

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9 The first issue of The Polar Journal, established to discuss polar issues from a social sciences and humanities perspective, was published in 2011.
10 A number of scholars choose to consider the poles together in their work, including Spufford (1996) and Moss (2006), while others prefer to separate the Arctic and Antarctic in their inquiries.
masculinities ‘not as the naturalised understanding of men that had long formed the normative subject of historical scholarship, but as the culturally specific meanings of male roles and behaviour’ (Morgan, 2009, p. 384). My research into female history in Antarctica and the associated theories surrounding it has caused me to question the notion of historical ‘recovery’ and engage with that questioning throughout this work. I come to this project not as a historian but as a historical novelist, concerned with an imaginative intervention in the historical record as a method for recovering historical female subjects. The use of historical fiction to recover lost history is not without controversy, as shown in the public debate between historians Inga Clendinnen (2006) and Mark McKenna (2005), and author Kate Grenville around the latter’s novel *The Secret River* (2005) and her supposed claim that she was writing a form of history. The essays and associated correspondence stimulated ongoing discussion about the relationships between historical ‘truth’ and historical fiction, which remains relevant, given the growing number of female writers producing historical fiction aiming to recover female pasts, for such a motive raises questions about how the fiction is represented to the reader and the ‘paradoxical element of historical fiction, neither “truth” nor story’ (Heilmann & Llewellyn, 2004, p. 144). Griffiths proposes that history and fiction are in ongoing relationship to one another, operating to deepen understanding and imagination, while remaining in tension due to the relationship between ethics and history, which historians must daily observe. He poses the question: ‘When a novelist takes a real historical person or event and re-imagines them freely, what responsibilities do they observe?’ (2009 p. 74.9) and this is a question with which I engaged during the process of writing historical fiction about four real women who travelled to Antarctica during the 1930s.

The historical novel *Chasing the Light* is inspired by events that took place during Christensen’s four trips to Antarctica. Through this imagined recreation, based on detailed historical research, I explore creatively the experiences of Ingrid and her companions, with the aim of bringing these previously marginalised participants into Antarctica history. The primary historical research and the scholarly research for the exegesis overlap and inform each other as I cast light upon, and re-imagine, the experiences of the earliest women to visit Antarctica.

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11 *Chasing the Light* was commissioned by HarperCollins Australia while I was completing my Doctor of Creative Arts. It was published in Australia in February 2013 and will be published in Norwegian in 2014. While the published version of the novel has been through an editorial process with HarperCollins, the version I am submitting as part of this thesis is my own work.
Chapter One: Snow Blindness

Snow blindness: impairment of vision resulting from exposure to snow glare, and causing intense pain (Hince, 2000, p. 325).

The name of the first woman believed to have seen the Antarctic mainland remains unknown. She was shipwrecked on Campbell Island in 1835 and rescued four years later (with her three surviving male companions) by the two ships of John Balleny’s sealing expedition. Both ships sailed further south and sighted what appeared to be the Antarctic mainland. The woman’s name was not written in the log of the Eliza Scott, which carried two of the survivors. The Sabrina, carrying the other two, was lost in wild seas on the way back to England. Chipman, who unearthed this story while compiling evidence of the first women to visit Antarctica, says:

Perhaps it is appropriate that this first woman known to cross the Antarctic Circle and to see the land of the Antarctic continent is anonymous. Without name, nationality, race nor social status she may have been any one of us. (1986, p. 62)

That unnamed woman’s fate is indicative of the earliest female travellers to Antarctica, whose names are unknown, forgotten or overlooked. Where remembered, their travels have often been belittled and mocked, their stories judged as unimportant, and the women themselves classified as domestic companions, without their own legitimate reasons for travelling to Antarctica. Assessments such as these were made not only at the time of their original travel, but also by some later scholars attempting to revise Antarctic history and recognise the participation of women. The ‘snow blindness’ metaphor refers to how the earliest women to visit Antarctica, particularly those from the 1930s who left no primary texts, remain invisible in the landscape.
This chapter explores some of the reasons for this invisibility by addressing how women have been represented in – and excluded from – Antarctic narratives, particularly those of the continent’s early history. I examine how Robert Falcon Scott’s exploration narrative has achieved a quasi-mythic status in polar literature, not only because of the way it foregrounds masculinist heroism, but through the way, paradoxically, it encodes female experience. I argue that women have been not only physically but narratively excluded from Antarctica by the way the grand heroic journey functions as a master narrative and foundation myth that privileges the masculine hero struggling for survival and devalues other stories. Early female travel memoirs of Antarctica by Jennie Darlington, Pamela Young and Dorothy Braxton are examined in relation to the representation of female experience. Before addressing these concerns, a brief overview of the history of female interaction with Antarctica, and corresponding feminist scholarly analysis, is useful to consider.

An Overview of Women in Antarctica

The exclusion of women from Antarctica is well established in both conventional histories of the continent, such as that written by Tim Bowden and Australian National Antarctic Research Expeditions (1997), and feminist histories, including the two major works on the topic, those written by the American Barbara Land (1981) and the Australian Elizabeth Chipman (1986). Although women began applying to Antarctic expeditions as early as 1904, the only women known to have seen and/or landed on the Antarctic mainland before 1947 all travelled south on the resupply vessel Thorshavn as part of the whaling fleet owned by Norwegian businessman Lars Christensen. Land’s history (1981) details a number of the earliest female arrivals in Antarctica. Americans Edith Ronne and Jennie Darlington became the first women to winter-over on Antarctica in 1947, as wives of men of the expedition. Marie V. Klenova, a Russian marine scientist, was probably the first woman to carry out scientific research on the Antarctic continent, in the 1950s.

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12 The earliest known woman to apply to an Antarctic expedition, Dr Stopes, approached Robert Falcon Scott in 1904 (Truswell, 2011).
13 Two women are known to have been close to the Antarctic continent in the early 1900s. Betsy Rasmussen, a Chilean, married Captain Adolfo Andresen, a Chilean national of Norwegian birth, and lived with him on a factory ship moored at Deception Island for unknown periods of time between the summer of 1906–07 and the summer of 1908–09 (Chipman, 1986, p. 70). In the 1908–1909 season Madame Paulsen came south to join her husband Captain Paulsen of the Norwegian whaler Orn in the South Shetland Islands (Chipman, 1986, p. 71). Both women lived amidst commercial whaling activities around Antarctic islands some 100km from the continent. It is not known if either ever saw Antarctica.
American biologist Dr Mary Alice McWhinnie became known as an authority on krill between 1962 and 1972, carrying out her research from a research ship without landing on the continent until 1974 when she became the first female chief scientist at an Antarctic research station. Four Argentine women: Professors Irene Bernasconi, Maria Adela Caria, Elena Martinez Fontes, and Carmen Pujals, carried out hydrographic research along the Antarctic Peninsula in 1968-69, though it is not reported if they made landfall. In the 1969-70 summer a group of female scientists worked on the continent and landed at the South Pole. However, women struggled to be included in Antarctic programs of many countries into the 1980s, with the Australian Antarctic Division excluding women from the continent before 1975 (Collis, 2009, p. 514), and the British Antarctic Survey (BAS) in the 1980s still prohibiting ‘any woman from flying in a BAS aircraft with one man (the pilot) on the grounds that, in an emergency, the pair would have to bivouac without a chaperone’ (Griffiths, 2007, p. 216). The BAS was still debating the inclusion of women in wintering parties as recently as the early 1990s (Cross, 1991, p. 61). The physical exclusion/restriction of women from Antarctica continued for many years after the first arrivals, making Antarctica unique among the continents as a place physically closed to women.

As women were beginning to make their presence felt in Antarctica in the 1980s, writers and scholars began to chart female interaction with the southern continent, including recovering and revising female history in Antarctica. Although still a minority, in the 1980s women participated in Antarctic life in their own right in winter and summer, as scientists, doctors, radio operators, engineers and tradespeople. By the end of the decade women were stepping up to positions of authority: Diana Patterson became the first female leader of an Antarctic base of any nation when she was appointed station leader of Australia’s Mawson station in 1989. It was during this decade that Land and Chipman mapped their histories of female interaction with Antarctica and noted the difficulties women faced in visiting and working on the continent. Land (1981) focused on twentieth century women who went to the continent, initially accompanying husbands and later as scientists and explorers in their own right, while Chipman (1986) explored and recorded the

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14 Patterson describes her experience of being the first female leader of an Antarctic station in her memoir *The Ice Beneath My Feet* (2010a).
earliest efforts of women to participate in Antarctic life. These two accounts were concerned with recording stories of early female visitors before they were lost, and they have formed the basis of a female history of Antarctica. No further book-length work of female Antarctic history has been produced, though the category of ‘woman’ has been considered, or at least mentioned, in a number of general Antarctic histories.

By the 1990s, as women were firmly established in Antarctica as workers and were starting to make their mark as adventurers, feminist scholars turned their attention to the southern continent and began to examine questions of gender and Antarctica. Lisa Bloom (1993) produced the first book-length work examining polar representations in terms of gender and imperialism, providing a foundation for further analysis of Antarctic (as well as Arctic) narratives in terms that included gender. Some of the scholars who have advanced this line of inquiry in the subsequent two decades include Roald Berg, Linda Bergmann, Christy Collis, Elena Glasberg, Heidi Hansson, Elizabeth Leane, Gretchen Legler, Lisbeth Lewander and Victoria Rosner. Building on that scholarship, in 2008 and 2009 three journals devoted issues to polar themes: Scholar and Feminist Online, which published a ‘Gender on Ice’ issue; Signs, which published a gender and polar studies edition; and Cold Matters: Perceptions of Snow, Ice and Cold, a collection that contained two articles about gender. However, across this body of polar and feminist scholarship there remain gaps, particularly in relation to the earliest work in historical recovery. In addition, few scholars (one exception being Lewander, 2009) have reflected on the impact that female desire for exploration might have on readings of narratives of later female visitors. Although a small number of travel memoirs were written by the women who visited Antarctica between 1947 and 1969, it appears that the women who travelled south before that time left no writing of their own. Without scholarly or creative exploration, their experiences remain invisible. Part of this invisibility relates to the way that Scott’s exploration narrative has become an iconic text of Antarctic history, overshadowing other narratives.

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15 Chipman was herself one of the earliest women to land at Australia’s Casey station in 1976 (1986, p. 5). After leaving the Australian Antarctic Division where she worked from 1954–1977 (Blackadder, 2013b, p. 90), Chipman set out – pre email or Internet – to create a comprehensive list of every woman who had visited Antarctica before 1984 for her book Women on the Ice (1986).

16 ‘Women’ appears as a topic in the indexes of Antarctic histories (including Bowden & Australian National Antarctic Research Expeditions, 1997; Day, 2012; Griffiths, 2007).
The Master-Narrative of the Heroic Era

The use of the appellation ‘Heroic Era’ has become ubiquitous in describing late nineteenth and early twentieth century exploration of Antarctica. The term was first used by the Reverend J. Gordon Hayes in 1932 to refer to expeditions between Scott’s first expedition in 1901 and Shackleton’s death in 1922 (Mills, 2003, p. 299). Antarctic lexicographer Bernadette Hince defines the Heroic Era as:

the period of Antarctic history spanning the end of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, when Antarctic explorations first included long journeys under conditions of extreme hardship. Such journeys are still undertaken in Antarctica, but these early journeys had the cachet of being the first, and are now sufficiently removed from us for our admiration to be often uncomplicated. (2000, p. 167)

Hince’s definition makes clear that the phrase refers as much to a set of beliefs (historical and contemporary) as to a period of time. Griffiths, in identifying the era as the period between 1895 and World War I, characterises the Heroic Era as a period when ‘explorers aimed not so much to secure territory as to establish national pride and personal honour on the world stage’ (2007, p. 11). He goes on to explain that ‘its goal was as abstract as a pole, its central figures were romantic, manly and flawed, its drama was moral (for it mattered not only what was done but how it was done), and its ideal was national honour’ (2007, p. 110). In her analysis of Antarctica in fiction, Leane notes in relation to the Heroic Era that ‘it is common to preface the term with “so-called”, or to place it in scare quotes, to signal distance from its valorization of a specific, subjective view’ (2012, p. 186). Indeed, the designation itself privileges a particular kind of story – the heroic journey narrative in which the masculine hero overcomes the challenges of nature to win a physical or moral victory. In the absence of an indigenous population, Antarctica’s creation myths have become narratives from the Heroic Era. These form the foundation of the continent’s literature, for ‘if Antarctic explorers no longer reside in the forefront of the public imagination, their stories by and large remain the primary narratives about Antarctica inhabiting the collective consciousness’ (Rosner, 1999, p. 6). The persistence of that mythology through to the present day is evident in this description of a contemporary expedition:

Today only one true challenge remains – to be the first to cross the Antarctic in winter […] Sir Ranulph Fiennes will lead an experienced and dedicated team of six explorers in this record-breaking attempt to do the unimaginable. There can be no mistake, attempting to cross the
Antarctic in winter carries very high risks and completing the challenge will require extraordinary endurance, bravery and will power. The ground-breaking venture is one of the largest non-governmental initiatives ever to take place, and it is fitting therefore that it should get underway on the centenary year of Captain Scott’s death in the Antarctic. Achieving their goal will further cement Britain’s reputation as the world’s leading nation of explorers and be a fitting conclusion to an extraordinary period in human history. (“The Coldest Journey,” 2012)

Although the text describes ‘The Coldest Journey’ expedition, which set sail from London in November 2012 under the leadership of Sir Ranulph Fiennes, it draws on tropes and themes from masculinist Heroic Era narratives, including the significance of being ‘first’; competition and struggle; the qualities of courage, endurance and will power; and national significance and patriotism. In one of the earliest gender (as well as post-colonialist) analyses of Antarctic representations, Bloom notes that all-male expeditions are symbolic of a man’s own battle to prove himself and that polar regions provide ‘the ideal mythic site where men could show themselves as heroes, capable of supernatural feats’ (1993, p. 6). Fiennes’ expedition, 100 years after Scott’s death, shows that Antarctica’s appeal as a masculine proving ground is still strong.

Scott’s is not the only Heroic Era narrative to endure, but it has survived17 and been reinvented to a greater degree than other narratives of the time, achieving iconic status within polar literature. While some of the narrative power of Scott’s journal is present in the original text, much of its enduring influence has derived from how the text has been read, received and reinterpreted in the intervening years. Scott’s original journal charts the transformation of his story from an adventurous exploration to a life and death struggle. He famously wrote in his last ‘Message to the Public’: ‘Had we lived I should have had a tale to tell of the hardihood, endurance, and courage of my companions which would have stirred the heart of every Englishman’ (2012a, p. 442). But it is likely Scott was wrong. Had he lived, his tale may simply have been an account of failing to reach the pole first, with the suggestion that Norway did not play fair and England maintained a stiff upper lip in the face of its embarrassment. Scott’s journals attained mythic status at least partly because he did not live, for as Beau Riffenburgh says, ‘the most powerful hero is the dead hero, particularly the martyred hero, since it is through his death for the cause that his heroic status can be most easily created, interpreted and manipulated’ (as

17 Scott’s journal was first published in 1913 and has appeared in numerous editions since that time.)
cited in Leane, 2012, p. 86). The fact that Scott and his men died elevated the journey to a transformative one, in which spiritual success was a greater victory than reaching the South Pole first. According to Stephen Pyne:

>The story of the Polar Party dominates Antarctic literature and history. One reason is that – even as he knew death approached, Scott left a legacy of writings, a diary and letters, that elevated Antarctic exploration above the category of simple adventure, or even of science, and created for it a moral universe. (1986, p. 231)

Scott saved Britain from the shame of losing the South Pole to the Norwegians by making his victory a spiritual one. His journal became an account of a moral struggle to maintain courage, cheer and compassion in the face of adversity.

At a textual level, Scott’s journal fits the genre of an exploration narrative, already well established by Arctic explorations. Exploration journals, while written in the field, were intended as public documents and usually formed the basis of the later published narratives. More than personal accounts, they were official records, often used in fundraising efforts. The form itself tended to incorporate masculinist elements relating to the conquest of nature, the claiming of new territory and the development of the heroic male subject. Bergmann, in looking at polar narratives, characterises an exploration text as one that places the subject into a certain relationship with nature, emphasising the effort to:

>conquer natural hazards and to overcome natural barriers, activities depicted through metaphors of athletics, sport and war [...] nature is represented as the provider of challenges and dangers to be endured and conquered. In overcoming these natural obstacles, the explorers bond together as men and identify themselves as heroes, often the best of their national kind, the embodiments of national virtues. (1993, p. 57)

In narrative terms, an expedition journal is an example of literary critic Peter Brooks’ ‘ambition plot’ in which ambition is a ‘force that drives the protagonist forward, assuring no incident or action is final or closed in itself until such a moment as the ends of ambition have been clarified through success or renunciation’ (1992, p. 39). An expedition has a clear goal and progresses in a linear movement towards it, with the first person diary form linking the reader intimately to the narrator subject.

While the seeds of the mythic component of the journals are present in Scott’s writing, it is important to distinguish between his journals as a text in their own right, and their status as a mythology. In the first instance, virtually every reader of Scott’s journal (beginning with Edward Atkinson who was leading the party that found the
bodies and the original diary) comes to the text knowing the end of the story – that Scott and his men have perished. This casts the text as a tragedy from the first word. As Francis Spufford comments, ‘while at the same time as you feel the approaching deaths to be inevitable, the perpetual present tense in which the story happens every time keeps hope helplessly alive’ (1996, p. 4). While the reader is drawn through the narrative by this progression towards a known and tragic outcome, for the author the shift from official expedition record to tragic moral tale does not occur until the final chapters, when Scott realises that he and his men will not survive. He takes up the moral issues of his tale explicitly in the letters he leaves to be read after his death, the very place where the mythmaking begins, according to Bloom:

Scott’s particular sense of masculinity is encoded in the […] letters that Scott wrote before his death in March 1912. These documents became the founding text that accounted for the rise of the Scott myth. (1993, p. 122)

While his final letters consisted of Scott’s efforts to make a moral victory out of the circumstances of failure and death, this was only the first step in the creation of the Scott mythology, which was taken up after his death by others.

Scott’s journal was edited prior to its original publication in 1914 in a manner clearly calculated to elevate the heroic elements and remove material that detracted from it. The fact of the editing was not widely known until Reginald Pound’s (1966) biography was published, noting the omission and alteration of entries. A 2006 version of the journals edited by Max Jones provided a complete list of changes made to the original journals when they were published, focusing on those that could have changed the meaning of the original text (R. F. Scott & Jones, 2006, p. 457). Reading the sections removed in the process of transforming a partly private narrative into a public one is instructive. Material that was cut included supposed errors made by Scott’s rival Shackleton (2006, p. 469), and concerns about Amundsen beating him to the pole (2006, p. 460). Temperatures not considered low enough to suit the public’s expectations of Antarctica were altered by the simple expedient of changing plus signs to minus signs (2006, p. 457). Passages about the shortcomings of his men, some of them lengthy and detailed, were also cut (2006, p. 460). While the editing was relatively light in nature – and Scott would have certainly edited his own journal prior to publication had he survived – the choice of one editor is instructive. Scott’s close friend, J.M. Barrie, playwright and author of
the play (and later novel) *Peter Pan* (Barrie, 1904), was the person to whom his
widow Kathleen passed the journal for editing prior to publication. Roland Huntford,
whose biography was one of the earliest works that attacked Scott’s incompetence
(1979), provides an example of a significant excision made by a committee chaired
by Kathleen Scott:

> It began with Kathleen Scott who, at her husband’s request, was dealing
> with the papers. ‘He was the last to go,’ she wrote to Admiral Egerton,
> sending Scott’s farewell letter to him – which happened to indicate
> otherwise. It was one of the letters found loose in the tent. On the back
> was a note in Bowers’ hand, suggesting that Bowers might have been the
> last survivor, or at least casting doubts on Scott’s claim … In any case it
> was inconvenient evidence. It was suppressed, and, instead, there was
> issued an official reconstruction of the closing scene in the text, contrived
> at the request of Kathleen Scott, by the playwright Sir J. M. Barrie. (as
cited in Bloom, 1993, p. 114)

Bloom comments that in the construction of the death scene ‘Barrie’s staged drama
perpetuates an ideal of British male heroism in which the captain, unafraid, thrusts
his manly chest out in the face of adversity and awaits death alone’ (1993, p. 114).
Barrie’s work to make a hero of his friend is evident not only in his editing. In his
introduction to the journals, his personal opinion of his friend also emphasises the
heroic:

> Courageous, indomitable, of an iron self-control, yet gentle, a man who
set himself an almost superhuman standard of energy and efficiency, and
was overwhelmed with self-contempt if he thought he fell a jot from it –
these were perhaps the chief qualities, with his blessed sense of fun, that
made him great and helped to make his comrades great when their hour
struck. (R. F. Scott, 2012a, p. xxxv)

While most Scott scholars believe that Barrie used the material he was given in good
faith, the fact that he had a playwright’s sensibility means his intervention was as a
dramatist; and moreover, one concerned with how his friend would be remembered.
Barrie’s involvement ensured that the tropes that would come to dominate Antarctic
literature – masculinity, nationhood, conquest and struggle – were present within
Scott’s narrative of tragic self-sacrifice, and provided fuel for the growth of the Scott
mythology.

Some polar scholars have put forward more nuanced theories to explain the
endurance of the Scott mythology, suggesting that it goes beyond masculinist
heroism and incorporates other moral and emotional experiences including –
paradoxically – those more traditionally ascribed to women. Spufford, in his
exploration of Britain’s relationship to the ice through the ‘intangible history of assumptions, responses to landscape, cultural fascinations, aesthetic attraction to the cold regions’ (1996, p. 6), proposes that Scott’s narrative encompasses an experience of feminised suffering as well as masculinist heroism, one reason it originally held such strong appeal to his contemporary female readership and why its appeal endures. While female experience of polar travel during the Edwardian era was indirect and at a distance, polar narratives like Scott’s provided an opportunity for a powerful, albeit ‘shadow’ experience. The masculinity expressed by the heroic narratives (as opposed to that related to war or business) held a particular appeal for women because it incorporated virtues that were traditionally female: endurance, perseverance and resignation, the very qualities that women were supposed to draw upon to face their lot. This allowed them an imaginative identification with the effort of exploration:

> It means that Arctic heroism, strangely, was relevant heroism, with the natural environment of the poles compelling men to wait, suffer, and be patient, in the same way as the human environment compelled women. (Spufford, 1996, p. 103)

Through narratives like Scott’s, women could experience a sympathetic identification with male explorers, making imaginative journeys that were, in a sense, parallel, following the progress of explorers on maps. This may have secured a female readership and fascination with polar travel, according to Spufford, but it also functioned to maintain strict gender relations:

> Moral homage like this never disturbed the primacy of the male voyage, of which the female voyage was the echo, or the primacy of the male decision to travel, of which female endurance was the consequence. Indeed it confirmed the different destinies of men and women, which could unite on the ground of mutual sympathy. (1996, p. 106)

Through emotional identification with the masculinity of exploration (particularly that masculinity implicated in physical failure such as Scott’s), Edwardian women had a place and an involvement in the mythology of exploration; but this participation did not challenge the strict gender division between the male who explored and the female who waited at home.

The story of Scott has persisted in one form or another for a century, and shows little sign of losing its power. It has evolved into a kind of foundation myth of Antarctica, a narrative against which other stories are read, and with which they
engage. Leane claims it has taken on a ‘quasi religious’ meaning over its evolution, and attributes this partly to Antarctica’s lack of human history and habitation:

> These are the origin stories of a continent bereft of indigenous inhabitants and corresponding creation myths. Like all origin stories they are re-told and re-interpreted by each generation, mocked and venerated alike, but never lose their grip on the popular imagination. (2012, p. 84)

In narrative terms, the life and death stakes and the way Scott achieved a moral and spiritual victory in the face of material defeat have helped his story achieve the status of legend. In looking at its role in the imaginative history of the poles, Spufford proposes that the narrative structure of Scott’s story is part of its enduring appeal:

> That world – at least as we experience it through print – is at times even structured like the world of myth, of legend, of moral tales [...] Scott’s story in particular survives. (1996, p. 4)

It has a timeless quality, an ability to adapt so that it appeals to successive eras. ‘Like any successful myth, it provides a skeleton ready to be dressed over and over in the different flesh decades feel to be appropriate’ (1996, p. 104). Leane points out that these narratives have been reworked by writers and filmmakers for a century, and that literary responses, particularly fiction, ‘can show the faults and failures, blind-spots and prejudices of early Antarctic narratives while still acknowledging their continuing ability to inspire in unpredictable ways’ (2012, p. 96). The influence of the Scott story is evident throughout polar literature right through to the present, both in texts that address it directly (for example novels by Arthur, 1995; Bainbridge, 1991) and those that have a referential relationship (for example the short story ‘Sur’ by Le Guin, 1982). The persistent narrative of Scott, in its various forms, revolves around the transformative journey in which the male participants uphold their moral and spiritual values and find redemption even in failure. It set the scene for an Antarctic narrative tradition, and in doing so, privileged certain types of stories.

**Early Female Travel Memoirs of Antarctica**

Previous scholarship examining female representation within, and creation of, Antarctic literature has developed useful classifications for examining the subject. Leane categorises the historical evolution of female representation in Antarctic literature into three stages:

> A pre-twentieth century mythological stage in which Antarctica was a symbol rather than a reality and was itself implicitly constructed as
feminine; a post-1900 stage in which heroic era narratives dominated literary responses to the Antarctic, including those told from a female perspective; and a recent stage, covering the last few decades, in which Antarctic literature by and about women has flourished and broadened, informed by women’s burgeoning opportunities to experience the continent. (2009, p. 510)

Polar scholar Gretchen Legler’s taxonomy extends Leane’s categories of female representation, examining works of Antarctic literature written by women. She identifies three ‘generations’ in Antarctic narratives by female authors: pre-feminist, feminist and post-masculinist, with the pre-feminist generation showing the following characteristics:

Women writers occupy male-dominated space and adapt to it; they are self-consciously female; in many ways they participate in their own oppression by cooperating with stereotypes about women and women’s roles that were accepted and popular at the time; their narratives in large part concern themselves with the recording of domestic details and include little reflection or descriptive flourishes. In these early narratives woman’s role in the Antarctic is defined primarily as that of male helpmate, civilizer, friend, confidant. The general stance taken in relation to gender in these narratives is that woman is the ‘weaker’ sex and that she is unfit, in body and spirit, for life in the Antarctic. (2011, p. 210)

There are commonalities and differences in these two taxonomies, but I am working in the overlapping area of Legler’s pre-feminist ‘generation’ and Leane’s ‘post-1900 heroic era narratives told from a female perspective’, into which early female travel memoirs of Antarctic fall, to explore the influence of gender on narrative strategies used by the authors.

Although by the Heroic Era a handful of women had made forays into northern polar areas, no exploration or travel narratives of Antarctica were written by women at that time, as none had managed to reach there. Legler comments: ‘This may seem evident, but it is worth thinking for a moment about how impossible a personal narrative of place is if one is not allowed to enter that particular space’ (2011, p. 210). Antarctic travel narratives by women did not start appearing until after 1948, when several women did find ways physically to enter Antarctic space. These narratives developed a different form to the heroic journey narrative; one in which the gender of the writers looms large. Legler proposes that Antarctic literature has seen the development of narratives that operate to ‘unmake the heroic self’:

Each generation of narratives has been progressive, leading us step by step toward a new, feminist-inspired anti-heroic literature that calls
boldly into question the narrative tropes upon which the story of Antarctica has been built – tropes of masculinity, objectivity and empiricism, nationhood, progress, conquest and race. (2011, p. 208)

The progression towards this unmaking of the heroic self in Antarctic literature is evident in recent works that examine connections between landscape and self, where ‘gender is not the primary issue and the focus, instead, is on defining a multi-gendered human self in relation to the non-human landscape’ (Legler, 2011, p. 211). My own interest in early female travellers to Antarctica has gender as a central concern, placing my work within Legler’s ‘feminist’ generation rather than the ‘post masculinist’ period, though my concern is also with how the heroic self may be unmade and the creation of a narrative not based on triumphal achievement.

The attraction of the ‘heroic’ and the desire to create matching heroines lurks within some works that revise female history. In the course of researching *Chasing the Light* I found myself poring over the fragments of Lillemor Rachlew’s diaries reproduced by Lars Christensen in his memoir of Antarctic travel (Christensen, 1935). He quoted at length from Rachlew’s writing when he needed more lively descriptions than his own rather staid prose could provide.¹⁸ These fascinating scraps – a page here, two pages there – provide snippets of Rachlew’s experiences on the first of her two voyages to Antarctica with the Christensens. In the absence of her original diaries, these excerpts provide hints of insight into the experiences of this group of early female travellers; they are the only surviving words from the first group of female visitors to the Antarctic mainland. However, I became aware I was reading Rachlew’s diary extracts looking for signs of heroism. There is a certain tone in work that applies gender analysis to female narratives of polar travel prior to the 1970s, a hint of chiding of our foremothers for not being better feminists. We long for these female pioneers of the polar regions to be ambitious and radical, to challenge the gender relations and stereotypes of their times. It is not enough that they venture outside of the normal places where women of their times live and travel – we want them to venture outside the hidebound thinking of their times. Annette Kolodny, in her examination of female experiences and writing in the American frontiers, confesses to initially wanting to recover a female Daniel Boone (1984, p.

¹⁸ Christensen quoted from Rachlew’s diary five times, including a two-page description of the huskies on board (1935, p. 54), a two-page description of meeting the first whale factory (1935, p. 62), a description of the expedition to Proclamation Island (1935, p. 70), her description of a storm (1935, p. 80) and her ‘striking account of the smash,’ after huge seas shattered the port side of the enclosed bridge (1935, p. 90).
Heidi Hansson, in her comparative analysis of female memoirs of the Arctic and Antarctic, finds it ‘disappointing’ that Darlington concludes Antarctica is no place for women (2009, p. 115). It appears that researchers like myself, attempting to recover female history, delight when these women appear to be ‘heroic’ by overtly challenging female stereotypes of their time; by being, in fact, more like us. My own desire to find polar ‘heroines’ was a driving force during the early stages of my research, and it was important I maintained a self-critical awareness of this urge to avoid simply recasting my subjects into a heroic mythology.

Being mindful both of the position of the reading self, and the historical context in which the work was originally produced is important in examining these texts, to avoid, or at least be aware of, the imposition of 21st century values and assessments. Kolodny suggests an approach that is useful in analysing historical narratives written by women, which is, in essence, cultivating a historical imagination:

If we judge these women and their writings by the ideological predispositions of late twentieth century feminism, their aspirations seem tame, their fantasies paltry and constricted. But when analysed as part of the worlds in which the women actually lived, those same fantasies emerge as saving and even liberating. I ask the reader, therefore, to consider the social and historical contexts in which these women dreamed their dreams [...], and with that, to appreciate the psychological fortitude required to evade the power and cultural pervasiveness of male fantasy structures. (1984, p. xiii)

In analysing female Antarctic narratives written between 1947 and 1969 from an early twenty-first century gender theory perspective (rather than the specifically female-centred approach of feminist history), I aim to approach these texts with an awareness of my own historical position, and a respect for the journeys and lives of the writers in the contexts in which they lived, while tracing the influence of gender on the construction of these polar narratives.

Although women did not manage independently to access Antarctica prior to 1968, a number travelled to the Antarctic and sub-Antarctic before that time, almost all as companions of men, and several of these travellers wrote accounts of their experiences. Female travel memoirs of the sub-Antarctic and Antarctic between 1947 and 1970 include: A Naturalist’s Wife in the Sub-Antarctic by the Englishwoman Grace Murphy (1948) who spent time at South Georgia; Women in Antarctica: The Human Side of a Scientific Expedition by American Edith Ronne (1950) covering her...
1947 overwintering season on the Antarctic mainland; *My Antarctic Honeymoon* by the American Jennie Darlington (Darlington & McIlvaine, 1956) who was on the same 1947 expedition as Ronne; *Antarctic Housewife* by Nan Brown (1971), an Australian who spent two and a half years at Grytviken on South Georgia in the mid-1950s as the wife of the government radio officer; *The Abominable Snow-women* by New Zealand journalist Dorothy Braxton (1969) who travelled south on the second tourist voyage to Antarctica in 1968; and *Penguin Summer – or, A Rare Bird in Antarctica*, by Pamela Young (1971), who was, in 1969, the first New Zealand woman to work in Antarctica, as a field assistant to her biologist husband. Five of these six texts are written by women who travelled with their husbands, and who were not professional writers. Braxton, the author of the sixth, was a journalist who travelled independently and her memoir is the first to show characteristics of Legler’s ‘feminist generation’ category. The texts follow narrative conventions common to the travel memoir: first person linear accounts, reflecting on the events leading to the travel (in most of these accounts, a relationship), and placing the narrator in an unknown and sometimes dangerous landscape. All of the women in those accounts, with the exception of Braxton, lived in Antarctica for a period, meaning their stories can also be considered as pioneering narratives. I examine three of these memoirs – those by Darlington, Braxton and Young – to explore some of the differences between male and female narratives of polar travel, and areas of commonality and difference between the female narratives themselves.

In applying a gender analysis to these memoirs, it is useful to briefly review how notions of gendered narrative structures arose and have since been largely discredited, except in certain circumstances such as those posed by early Antarctic literature. Early work in feminist analysis, arising from French feminism in the 1980s, claimed that certain narrative structures and interests were inherently male and female, and that these reflected biological differences. The approach of identifying a female ‘lyric’ plot and a masculine ‘narrative’ plot was consistent with discussions of the meaning of ‘woman’ and the notion of an essentialist female identity. Honor McKitrick Wallace, in her critique of feminist narrative theory, describes it thus:

*Narrative is the formal expression of linear teleological movement that is at the very least metaphorically linked, if not driven by, masculine desire, while lyric is the attempt to subvert narrative’s linearity by positing a timelessness linked to feminine desire.* (2000, p. 177)
This concept of gendered plot structures arose from consideration of how female bodies and their biological rhythms relate to language. Peter Brooks identifies what he calls a ‘female plot’ that stands in opposition to the traditional masculine plot and involves ‘the formation of an inner drive towards the assertion of selfhood in resistance to the overt and violating male plots of ambition’ (1992, p. 39). In Brooks’ formulation the typical female plot is one of endurance, waiting and suffering. However, notions of gendered narrative constructions have been challenged on a number of levels, both for lack of empirical evidence and for the reductive nature of these categories. As Ruth Page points out, language and gender research has failed to clearly correlate linguistic forms with gender, and furthermore, claiming a certain narrative form to be essentially female disregards the plethora of both experimental writing by men, and conventional narratives written by women (2003, p. 51). Wallace also challenges the notion, claiming that relying on the lyric casts women as dependent and denies them the agency of a narrative plot:

For the female protagonist, trapped between the stasis of lyric feminine desire and the masculine trajectory of traditional narrative, narrative desire may simply be a desire for agency. Thus a certain kind of female desire is consciously created (not born) and a new narrative force arises from the conjunction of the desiring female character and the traditional plot. (McKittrick Wallace, 2000, p. 185)

While an essentialist separation of narrative styles between a fluid and non-linear female style and a goal-driven male style has been challenged and largely discredited, a form of the idea persists in relation to gender analysis within polar studies, justified by gender relations particular to Antarctica.

Feminists analysing narrative structure note that in certain circumstances, it can still be appropriate to consider masculine and feminine characteristics of narratives, namely when gender is a clearly identifiable influence in the creation of the narrative in the first place. According to Page:

At a somewhat simplistic level, it would seem more convincing to argue that if narrative form has anything to do with gender, then this is more prominent when the performance of that story is closely related to gender issues. (2003, p. 52)

Sex was a precondition of access to Antarctica for much of the twentieth century, with men constructing and maintaining the continent as an almost sacred masculine
There were no realistic opportunities for independent travel for women until the first tourist voyages went south in the late 1960s, as women did not manage to raise the funds and resources required for their own voyages of exploration (if indeed any tried), were unable to gain admission to official expeditions, and were excluded from government-run scientific programs on the continent. The few women who did find a way around the ‘ice curtain’ and journey south as travellers before 1968 showed conscious preoccupations with gender in their writing – as evidenced by the titles of the six memoirs, which all reference gender. It is appropriate to apply a gender analysis to the constructions of their narratives given that it was a precondition of access. However, Page cautions:

Research that attempts to consider the relationship between language and gender needs to be locally grounded and avoid abstraction […] any investigation of narrative form needs to bear in mind the potential influence of contextual factors that include not only beliefs and practices to do with gender, but also ethnicity, class, historical period and numerous interconnected others. (2003, p. 52)

Page recommends a similar approach to that suggested by Kolodny, one that attends to historical context and other relevant factors, and I use this approach in my analysis. In building a context for the reading of these memoirs I consider three main things: the reality of female exclusion from Antarctica, the existence of the genre of female travel writing, and the state of gender relations at the time these memoirs were written. I am cognisant of the significant influence of ethnicity and class in this instance (given that all three memoirists were white and middle or upper class), but it is beyond the scope of this short examination to explore ethnicity and class in depth.

From the late nineteenth through to the early twentieth century, female travel became a distinct phenomenon in which white, bourgeois western women began to assert their relative freedom and independence by moving through different landscapes, and as a result female travel writing became a distinct genre (Smith, 2001, p. x). Travel was a way in which these women – while lacking access, in relative terms, to education and professional opportunity – could educate themselves. The rise of the eccentric or spinster traveller became a known phenomenon. Although some of these narratives presented quite radical challenges to the

\[^{19}\text{Griffiths describes it thus: ‘There was something spiritual about male comradeship, something pure about distant yearning and asexual love, and something incontrovertibly masculine about frontiering. The ice was their own inviolable space. In Antarctica the presence of women could diminish a man. In their absence, one might prove oneself worthy’ (2007, p. 214).}^{\text{^19}}\]
construction of women as equating to fixity and ‘home’, what they had in common was placing their female subjects in the realm of masculine mobility, as ‘femininity trespassing upon the domain of the constitutively masculine’ (Smith, 2001, p. 17). Female travel narratives were one way in which this gender problematic was negotiated, as a way in which women made meaning of their travels and explained their position outside the usual female realm.

Gender is reflected in early female travel narratives through the methods used to establish the self. Smith proposes that female travel writers minimised the threat of becoming ambiguously gendered subjects through narrative strategies such as playing down the narrative ‘I’ to ‘avoid the impropriety of self-preoccupation and self-promotion that were so much a part of travel narratives’, blaming friends and relatives for pressing them to write their stories, assuming the role of dutiful wives or daughters within their narratives, and giving obeisance to male writers within the field (2001, p. 18). Plots of romantic attachment to exotic ‘others’, common in masculine travel narratives, risked female narrators being seen as improper, and were generally avoided in favour of domestic situations, manners and customs. Hansson, in her examination of female Arctic and Antarctic narratives (including Darlington’s), points out that the gender-coding of texts also derives from a commercial imperative:

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 distinguish their works for readers’ […] 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. (2009, p. 108)

Female narratives of polar travel, while having much in common with the broader genre of female travel memoirs, contain some notable differences. For female visitors to Antarctica the most significant challenge of their journey (and thus their source of narrative conflict) is their gender. Unlike the accounts of middle and upper class white women travelling as individuals that characterise European female travel writing of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, these travel narratives are centrally concerned with the relationships that make travel possible and they reflect the specific ways in which women interacted with the almost exclusively masculine space of the southern continent. Their femaleness – and how they come to be in the
polar environment in spite of it – is the first issue that they must address, and they do so through their relationships to the men who have enabled them to travel, and by establishing themselves as traditionally female subjects. Hansson calls this the ‘feminine pole’, a female tradition of narration arising from these travellers ‘living under men’s conditions but without the autonomy that should accompany the situation’ (2009, p. 107). She describes the double bind faced by these women:

On 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. 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. (2009, p. 107)

Such female writers justify their existence in the polar terrain, usually by subordinating their own encounters with polar landscapes and focusing on narratives of relationship rather than on those of discovering new lands.

**Jenny Darlington: My Antarctic Honeymoon**

Probably the best known of these Antarctic memoirs is Jennie Darlington’s, and it demonstrates a central preoccupation with relationship and gender. Published in the 1950s in an atmosphere of post-war anxiety around the radically changing roles of men and women, it opens with a description of the author’s preparation for landing on Antarctica. As well as describing her first impression of the continent – ‘a vast, empty expanse with the dead, distant look of a lost planet’ (1956, p. 9) – the author reveals she is on her honeymoon, placing herself in relationship to her husband from the outset. After setting the scene, Darlington flashes back to her meeting with Harry Darlington using the phrase ‘it had all begun’ (1956, p. 12) to introduce their rushed courtship and wedding, the events that lead her to travelling south. She casts herself as a young woman living in New York, concerned with clothes and perfume, and her Antarctic journey begins with meeting Harry, not with her own desire for adventure. While she provides little information about herself, Darlington covers her husband’s background in some detail. The memoir’s opening

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suggests that the encounter with Harry (along with his husky dog Chinook) is Darlington’s primary adventure and signals that it is her desire for him that will form the backbone of the narrative. Harry follows her silently, in a doglike matter: ‘the intensity in his eyes was so much like that in the dog’s gaze I was disconcerted’ (1956, p. 10). With his ‘untamed quality’, he is her access to raw nature and in response she feels ‘small, feminine and safe […] caught in a kind of whirling helplessness’ (1956, p. 13). Harry Darlington’s masculinity represents freedom, agency, wildness, danger and even ‘dreams’ – he not only gives her the means of reaching the physical landscape and adventure of Antarctica, but the possibility of experiencing the emotional experiences of wildness and danger through her marriage to him. Her memoir is a narrative of relationship, with the narrator’s primary desire being a satisfying and complete union with her husband.

The fact of Darlington’s sex is established as the challenge she faces throughout her travel, and a source of conflict throughout the narrative. The qualities she admires in Harry – his individualism and his difficulty in fitting in to contemporary civilization – do not extend to his attitudes towards women, which are conservative.21 Once married (in a secret registry office service by a Justice of the Peace as Harry Darlington wishes, rather than in a church with family and friends as Darlington wants), she accompanies him south on his way to Antarctica, planning to disembark at Balboa with Edith Ronne, the wife of the expedition leader, who is also on board. Following the announcement that Ronne is staying with the expedition through to Antarctica to help her husband with writing press materials – and Darlington is invited too – Harry abruptly refuses to consider allowing her to remain on the ship. Having previously bent to his will in all matters, Darlington now must oppose her husband if she wants to continue her adventure (and stay with him):

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. (1956, p. 65)

Darlington’s own inability (at that stage) to even imagine continuing on to Antarctica is indicative of the rigid attitude she is confronting: Harry’s basic belief that ‘women simply did not go down there’ (1956, p. 67). Seeing no way to confront or change his

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21 Harry Darlington is shocked even by the gender roles of Adelie penguins, disparaging the males for taking turns at sitting on the nest, an activity he insists is ‘woman’s work’ (Darlington & McIlvaine, 1956, p. 253).
belief, Darlington remains silent and stops herself from trying to force him. As the protagonist of the narrative she can only move towards her (barely articulated) desire by refraining from taking action. When Harry changes his mind overnight, Jennie reports this significant turning point in her narrative simply as: ‘The decision had been made. I was to go to the Antarctic’. As the protagonist, she moves the narrative forward through passivity rather than agency.

Darlington constructs her character as a woman of deep and abiding femininity, and her narrative challenge becomes one of maintaining that femininity in spite of her situation. Having built the narrative around falling in love with the wildness and adventure that Harry initially represents, when advised that she will be proceeding to Antarctica, Darlington’s concerns are with her appearance. ‘For the first time in my life I forgot about clothes’ (1956, p. 59) she reports, before immediately contradicting the statement by describing how she is issued with underwear that makes her shudder, and how she impulsively purchased a black chiffon nightgown at their last port (1956, p. 69). For Darlington feels her femininity is threatened. She is ‘disguised’ by her Antarctic issue clothing (designed for men) and her permanent wave has disappeared. ‘Outwardly we were indistinguishable from each other […] Briefly we seemed to have lost our identity, to have become blurred like the horizon’ (1956, p. 24). She panics about her identity, asking herself ‘Who am I? […] What am I doing here?’ (1956, p. 25) and tries to erase external signs of her femininity while struggling to maintain it secretly. Legler posits that women like Darlington use such invisibility to try to adapt to their circumstances:

After receiving permission to enter all-male space, the women remain hyper-conscious of their outlier status and adapt to the male-dominated space rather than try to change it to meet their needs; in some cases this adaptation consists of virtually erasing themselves. (2011, p. 212)

Having achieved her first desire – to stay with her husband – Darlington faces the challenge of secretly retaining her female self in the face of an utterly masculine world. She tries to hold on to the last whiff of Chanel No. 5 as the final remnant of her known self, but that real smell is overwhelmed by the imagined stench of boiling blubber as she drags her heavy duffel bag over the rocks, following her husband who, concerned about drawing any attention to her femaleness in front of the expedition members, leaves her to carry her own luggage (1956, p. 27).
Although hers is primarily a memoir of female adventure through the medium of relationship, Darlington is affected by her experiences of the Antarctic landscape. At the memoir’s beginning she describes the view confronting her as she waits to disembark from the ship and land on Antarctica for the first time:

In contrast to this huge glittering expanse, the figures working around the camp at its foot seemed interlopers, pygmy-like, unprepossessing against the age and extent of that astonishing, pristine wilderness that is Antarctica [...] this vast, empty expanse with the dead, distant look of another planet. I shuddered, appalled at the silence, the vastness, the whiteness. (1956, p. 9)

Her description evokes the elements of the sublime: the mixture of beauty and terror, the contrast between the size of the observer and the grandeur of the object observed, even her ‘shudder’ in response. Arriving on the continent, she still believes the landscape is linked symbolically to her husband. Harry and Chinook represent – and stand in for – the Antarctic wilderness:

In Chinook, as in his master, was an instinctive understanding of the wild. Whereas I was a fragment from a safer civilization, they were rooted in the pattern of cold and danger and dreams. (1956, p. 10)

Though Legler characterises this generation of memoirs as including little in the way of reflection or ‘descriptive flourishes’, Darlington does in fact devote parts of her narrative to trying to represent Antarctica. However, the issue of gender, and her problematic situation, take precedence.

Antarctica shifts in its gender symbolism over the course of Darlington’s narrative, carrying intimations of her ambivalence about her female role and what she has learned about the feminine. As she achieves the union she seeks with her husband – ‘the Antarctic had equalised our relationship’ (1956, p. 244) – Darlington metaphorically separates him from Antarctica. The pair is isolated from the rest of the party (and from Ronne, the only other woman present) by a personal conflict between Darlington’s husband and the expedition leader. Hiding her secret pregnancy, Darlington and Harry are each other’s only support, and their relationship becomes central to both of them, a haven of safety in a physically and emotionally dangerous world. When caught in a blizzard on the way back from a field hut, Darlington rails against Antarctica as having destructive female agency:

Antarctica, to me, is female. Fickle, unchangeable, 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 reiteration of her sheathed power, lest
man let down his guard and forget. All day she had been a lady,
disguising her true nature in windless silence, burying her treachery
beneath layers of snow garments. Now when we emerged from the shack,
she was stripping off her gloves. (1956, p. 235)

Antarctica, as the monstrous female, has come to stand in for the vitriolic forces
arrayed against Darlington. In Darlington’s narrative, Antarctica initially symbolises
a pure experience of masculine animal wildness, but by the end the author reverts to
showing the continent in the more conventional symbolism of an ‘ice maiden’ of the
fairytale type, a ‘fierce opponent against whom only expeditions – groups of men
held together by male bonding and national traditions – could prevail’ (Bergmann,
1993, p. 55). This outburst can be understood as an expression of Darlington’s anger
against Ronne, who chooses to stand by her own husband and isolate the
Darlingtons. It can also be read as Darlington’s projection of her rage about hiding
her own female nature; a belief that the repressed feminine is capable of violent
retribution. Darlington represents herself as an obedient wife who would never feel
or act in such a way, and instead Antarctica becomes the recipient of her projections.
A fear of the repressed feminine may well be why Darlington throws her support
behind the traditionally masculinist view of Antarctica by asserting that women do
not belong there after all (1956, p. 205).

The conclusion of Darlington’s narrative is not, in fact, the ‘equalising’ of her
relationship as this term would be understood today, but its return to the conventional
gender relations of marriage in that era. Darlington’s character development over the
course of the narrative sees her grow from an ignorant and nervous young woman to
one possessing ‘a new and adult clarity’ and realising that life’s meaning can come
from helping others (1956, p. 245). Darlington has succeeded in winning her husband
back from Antarctica through the power of her own hidden femininity – symbolised
by her secret pregnancy. As Darlington leaves, she thinks of Antarctica: ‘It could be
tamed […] but never conquered’ (1956, p. 255). Her husband has been tamed by her
femininity, and Antarctica is left to hold all that is negative about femaleness. The
narrative ends with Harry Darlington waiting at the door for her to precede him
outside to begin their journey home. Normal relations, as symbolised by his chivalry,

22 ‘The Ice Maiden’, a Hans Christian Anderson fairy tale published in the United States in 1863, is the
story of the queen of the glaciers, who steals away the male character, Rudy, through her kiss.
have been established at last, and Darlington has succeeded in winning him back from Antarctica’s icy grip. Her memoir concludes with her evidence of her feminine victory, taking the reader full circle to its romantic beginning.

Pamela Young: *Penguin Summer – or, A Rare Bird in Antarctica*

Some twenty-two years after Darlington and Ronne became the first women to winter on the continent, many of the same gender-related themes arise in another female travel memoir that includes the story of the first women to reach the South Pole. In 1969, New Zealander Pamela Young went to the continent as a field assistant to her biologist husband and she begins her memoir in a manner reminiscent of Darlington’s, with a brief description of a new, strange landscape. After a paragraph describing a howling wind shaking a bird hide, she introduces her husband, who has spent six summers in Antarctica, and traces the genesis of her Antarctic narrative to the same source as Darlington: ‘It had all begun eleven years before when we were first married’ (1971, p. 11). In this construction she sets the scene for a narrative of relationship. Like Darlington, Young initially has no independent desire to visit Antarctica. Her wish to accompany her husband arises after being left behind in New Zealand for five summers in ‘my usual rut of chauffeuring children to kindergarten, housework and general monotony,’ (1971, p. 15). Written and set in the early days of feminism, Young’s memoir shows few signs of this social change, with the exception being her use of dry humour to show that her tasks as a housewife are boring (rather than a natural female function):

I resigned myself to a wasted summer trying to keep an unformed garden and a year-old son under reasonable control. The garden was a jungle and the son a delinquent when Euan arrived home. (1971, p. 13)

Her open disdain for domestic tasks may be indicative of changing times, but not of a changing narrative structure. Young’s marriage is a central preoccupation of the story and the narrative drive is for union with her husband.

When Young decides she has had enough of being left at home with the children and puts her foot down, demanding to be taken on the sixth season, her obstacle and the memoir’s source of narrative conflict is her gender. Conflict comes not from her husband, who is keen on the idea, but from the official policy of the Antarctic Division in New Zealand not to allow women to travel to Antarctica.
However, Young undermines this source of narrative tension by allowing this significant obstacle – a key part of the narrative construction – to be demolished within a few pages when official New Zealand policy changes because Americans have decided finally to allow five female scientists to spend a season working in Antarctica. Although she has actively demanded to come south, Young finds out that she is ‘allowed’ to travel: her husband phones and tells her ‘you’re going to the Antarctic’ (1971, p. 16). As a protagonist, her driving desire is to escape the boredom of being left at home with children and to join her husband. The method of doing so – working in Antarctica for a season in a support role to her husband – is almost irrelevant.

Young establishes her narrator-self as a practical, though feminine, woman with a wry sense of humour, a construction that provides little challenge to traditional gender relations. Contrary to the suggestion of unusualness in the book’s subtitle, A Rare Bird in Antarctica, she claims to be an ordinary woman who dreams of ‘future summers filled with pleasantly normal family activities’ (1971, p. 13), not a female pioneer with a desire for adventure. The fact of her female presence is what makes her a ‘rare bird’ in the landscape, not an unusually adventurous personality. Like Darlington she focuses on the problem of clothing as a source of conflict, reporting her disappointment when the Antarctic clothing issue arrives and turns out to be a motley collection due to, she believes, the low status of biologists in the program:

Being a normal sort of female I’d had visions of looking dashingly efficient in colourful, fur-trimmed garments – but with this collection of leftovers from Antarctic Division’s last jumble sale I could see I’d look more like Orphan Annie. There was not going to be much glamour spreading around the ice from my direction. (1971, p. 19)

A sense of anticlimax, rather than narrative tension, builds as Young’s flight lands ‘with a slight bump’ in Antarctica and she disembarks to find that ‘funnily enough, it was not cold, or at least not the piercing cold I expected. It felt very like a winter’s day in Central Otago’ (1971, p. 32). The highlight of her first evening at Scott Base is the film screening and the supply of chocolate (1971, p. 34). By this stage in the narrative Young has barely mentioned the Antarctic landscape or her feelings in response to it, choosing instead to describe the vehicle that conveys them to the base and the base itself as she and her companions are taken inside, and limiting her emotional response to ‘it was a fabulous feeling’ (1971, p. 32). There is no sense of
the sublime in the memoir; there is barely even a description of beauty. Young’s inexperience as a writer is evident in her failure to create narrative tension, her lack of sensibility, and her inability to infuse her work with wider significance or meaning. While Young’s memoir may well be contributing to Legler’s ‘unmaking of the heroic self’ by undermining the notion of Antarctica as a space of danger and heroism, she does not find a narrative replacement for this desire and action.

When Young discovers that she is unexpectedly going to the South Pole her narrative shows its starkest differences to masculinist accounts. In late 1969 there were seven women working in Antarctica. The arrival of six of them at the pole has been cited as an example of female collaboration:

So anxious were they that no one woman would become known as ‘the first woman at the Pole’ that they planned in advance to walk down the exit ramp arm in arm, feet hitting the ice at the same moment. In none of the accounts of this venture that I have read were any of these women’s names cited [...] Women took their place at the pole anonymously, collaboratively, and transported by men. (Rosner, 1999, p. 11)

The seven ‘anonymous’ women present on the continent in the 1969–70 summer were: Pamela Young (from New Zealand); journalist Jean Pearson (from America); scientists Christine Muller-Schwarze, Lois Jones, Terry Lee Tickhill, Eileen McSaveney (from America); and scientist Kay Lindsay (from Australia) (Land, 1981, p. 37). The reality of their landing, it transpires from Young’s memoir, was rather more constructed than Rosner’s description suggests – women were not just transported by men, but stage-managed by them. During some free time at McMurdo, Jones requested to join a supply flight to the pole so she could have an aerial view of the geology of the area where the team would be working (Land, 1981, p. 49). In response the US Navy invited all seven women on the continent to join the flight ‘to be the first at the Pole’ (Land, 1981, p. 50). When six of the women agreed (Muller-Schwarze declined the invitation because she did not want to interrupt her research), they were flown to the Amundsen-Scott base. It was not the women themselves who decided to disembark together, but the Navy, which had organised the trip:

It was slowly beginning to dawn on me that the Americans regarded the flight as a historic occasion – the first visit of women to the Pole Station was evidently a landmark and as such it was to be suitably recorded and

23 Kay Lindsay is often assumed to be an American (such as in Land, 1981, p. 23) as she was part of an American research team, but she was Australian (Lindsay, 2013 personal communication).
publicised […] When it [the paper] finally reached me I discovered it was a list of instructions for the visit – particularly for the disembarkation from the Hercules […] The Admiral was determined that we would all arrive together. (Young, 1971, pp. 39–40)

The landing of the first women in the Antarctic was closely controlled by the Navy, with photographers waiting to cover the event. Young was rather bemused by joint disembarkation for the cameras, and found herself unable to reconcile her experience with the heroic tales of the South Pole:

Protruding proudly from the middle of this differentiated area was the incongruously striped pole, so exactly like a pedestrian crossing marker that I simply couldn’t think of the spot as that solemn goal to which Scott and Amundsen had toiled. Indeed, it seemed just the sort of Pole that Pooh and Piglet might have set out to find and it fitted perfectly into the circus-like atmosphere of our own visit. We lined up with linked arms and smiled sweetly for the photographers, marched solemnly with the Admiral around the world, admired the enormous mileage marker with its innumerable names of American towns, and generally performed for the cameras. (1971, p. 40)

It is a hard to imagine any greater remove than that between the first men to reach the South Pole, and the first women – a remove at least partly created by the US Navy’s stage management of the event, which removed any suggestion of competition, de-emphasised the identities of the women present, and ensured that any comparison with heroic endeavours of the past would be impossible. While Young’s sense of bemusement may mean she ‘pops the heroic bubble’ as Legler describes (2011, p. 215), undermining the notion that Antarctica is a place of extreme physical hardship where only men can survive, her failure to find either an alternative solemnity of her own, or relate her sense of incongruity to the wider issue of the artificiality of first arrivals, means that her report of the landing tends to reinforce the gender stereotypes of her time.

Young’s narrative is ultimately unsatisfying in terms of character development, as at the end of the journey she claims to feel no different to the beginning of her adventure. Her apparent desire – to travel to Antarctica in an era before women were officially permitted – comes to pass with relative ease due to an issue of timing in relation to policy. Unlike Darlington, Young has no need to enter into the adventure of marriage – she is already there – and she posits the ‘boredom’ of being left at home as her reason for wanting to travel with her husband – an unexciting motivation. As narrator she lacks the narrative ambition that both ‘drives the
protagonist forward’ and ‘carries us forward, onward through the text’ (P. Brooks, 1992, p. 37). Young’s narrative failure can be read in her final lines:

I felt as if I were meeting Euan as I usually did at the end of the season. There was no sense of arriving home myself. Nothing seemed to be out of the ordinary, there was not any great shock at seeing grass again, or trees or traffic swirling past. I felt as if I’d never been away. (1971, p. 164)

The employment of a narrator with a negative desire and little sense of her own agency, who travels to her destination and returns unchanged, mean that Young’s work functions as a fairly bland travelogue of Antarctica, providing insight into the continent’s literature by what it does not attempt, as much as by what it does. Straddling the period between women going to Antarctica only as companions for men, and women going in their own right, her memoir has much in common with that of Darlington 20 years earlier. In both narratives, traditional views of femininity are emphasised and reinforced.

**Dorothy Braxton: The Abominable Snow-women**

The first example of the newer generation of female Antarctic memoir, in which the subject’s independence and agency comes to the fore, was published earlier than Young’s, though in gender terms it is part of a later generation of work. Journalist Dorothy Braxton, another New Zealander, travelled to Antarctica in 1968 on the country’s second tourist voyage, more than a year earlier than Young’s trip. The start of her memoir follows the same construction as Darlington’s and Young’s – a short description of a dangerous, uncomfortable, unfamiliar environment (in this case Enderby Island in the sub-Antarctic) – leading to a ‘how did I get here?’ flashback. Although Braxton must, like Darlington and Young, immediately establish her gender and its bearing on the situation, by the end of the second page she has signalled that her narrator is active and ‘ambitious’, with her own desire and the ability to pursue it:

I hugged myself tight, unable to believe that after twenty years of trying to beat the petticoat ban imposed on women who wanted to reach these regions, I had at long last achieved my ambition. (1969, p. 17)

Unlike Darlington and Young who both identify their marriage as the beginning of the plot of their memoirs, Braxton identifies ‘many beginnings’ to her story, all of which trace back to a powerful childhood desire:
From the time I was old enough to realise that there was such a place as the Antarctic I had wanted to go there. I was not very old when I found that *Anne of Green Gables* and *Pollyanna* and her adventures were not half as exciting as the stories I could read in my father’s library […] books such as Apsley Cherry-Garrard’s *Worst Journey in the World* and others about the epic explorations of Scott and Wilson […] and of Shackleton and Ross. (1969, p. 17)

Braxton presents her desire for adventure as an intrinsic aspect of her character, present since childhood. The model of femininity represented by Anne and Pollyanna, is dull, while adventure, represented by male polar heroes, is exciting and desirable. She explicitly characterises her desires as feminist, saying she always wanted to write and travel, choosing her career in the ‘male stronghold’ of journalism and breaking her first ‘petticoat ban’ by becoming a cadet reporter, a role she achieved through her own agency (1969, p. 17). She clearly fits into Legler’s ‘feminist phase’ of Antarctic writing, openly opposing the overt sexism of Antarctic culture and challenging gender stereotypes two decades earlier than the examples that Legler analyses. Although pre-dating Young, there is nothing passive about Braxton, who is determined to achieve her ambition.

The clear articulation of an ambition that is grand in its scope gives this narrative a different orientation, though it still has gender as a central focus. In contrast to Darlington and Young’s relationship stories, Braxton’s is a narrative of personal determination to achieve her goal of a journey south. Her ambition is grand when pitted against the obstacles she has to overcome – an official determination that women are not allowed to visit Antarctica in any capacity.24 The background to Braxton’s story is twenty years of determined effort to travel to Antarctica.25 While Braxton came close several times, she missed out in every case because of her gender. Her chance eventually comes through a male sympathiser, Lars-Eric Lindblad, who is planning to run the first Antarctic tourist voyages from New Zealand to the Ross Sea Sector. Braxton offers to work in any capacity whatsoever on his cruise and he eventually invites her to join the second voyage. Her relatively liberated state is evidenced by her comment that although men going south do not have to worry about maintaining home and family in their absence, her own family is

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24 In the book’s foreword, the head of the Antarctic Division of New Zealand compares women’s determination to get to Antarctica as reminiscent of the men of the Antarctic’s Heroic Era and characterises Braxton as one who has fought hardest (Braxton, 1969, p. ii).

25 Braxton’s efforts to reach Antarctica included attempts to travel to sub-Antarctic islands to report on news stories, to join groups of scientists travelling to sub-Antarctic islands, to gain journalist’s visiting privileges with the US Navy and to travel south with New Zealand’s Antarctic Division as a journalist.
accustomed to her travelling for work and her teenaged children are delighted for her (1969, p. 32).

However, once her trip is secure, Braxton turns from her overtly feminist outlook to a more traditional view of gender typical of the late 1960s. She begins to wonder ‘what the well-dressed woman wears in the Antarctic’ and expresses the same challenge of maintaining her femininity that Darlington did some twenty years earlier:

With a feminine streak uppermost, I opened a drawer and took out the prettiest, fluffiest piece of pink nylon and lace I could find, a negligee I had bought in a moment of fleeting affluence and feminine indulgence from Saks on Fifth Avenue in New York and which had been saved for something special. It was sheer whimsy but just exactly what in that moment I felt was needed. […] I never regretted the decision. I also tucked in a bottle of Chanel No. 5, just for the hell of it. If there were going to be women in the Antarctic, I thought, they’re going to be feminine and I never changed my mind on that score at any time. (1969, p. 37)

Chanel No. 5 – apparently the polar fragrance of choice – reappears as a symbol of the maintenance of femininity in adversity. It is not only her gender that makes Braxton an outsider. She is a passenger on only the second ship to carry tourists to the Ross Sea region. While the small American base, Cape Hallett, proves welcoming, workers at the larger McMurdo base treat the tour group with the disdain usually reserved for women, as tourists fulfil the same function of stripping Antarctica of its masculine mystique.

While Darlington describes parts of Antarctica in detail, Braxton is oddly reticent for a journalist, including only brief descriptions of the landscape and her emotional response to Antarctica. One reason for her reluctance is revealed when she mentions the difficulty she finds in writing her observations:

I’d dearly loved to have flown over it [the Beardmore Glacier] to see if I could do what so many of my male colleagues had failed to do […] write an adequate description of it. Writers have set out with pen and paper to put down in words their impressions as they flew over its enormous crevasses, its green pinnacles and ice faces, but all say that after a time it became impossible for them to take their eyes off it and that they became hypnotised by its grandeur. (1969, p. 127)

The practicality of her descriptions also stems from her profession, which she describes as one where personal emotions are not supposed to colour the writing, and objectivity is given the highest value. Braxton makes it clear at the end that the
journey has been profound, not only because she has realised a cherished ambition, but because it has been ‘a deep emotional experience’ that she finds hard to put into words (1969, p. 195), and in fact is never able to articulate. Surprisingly, like Young, she steps on to dry land with the feeling that ‘none of the last four weeks had happened’ (1969, p. 200), but even so, she is left with the strong desire to return, and fantasises about flying to the South Pole (where at that time, no women had landed). While Braxton’s ambition to reach Antarctica in spite of her sex is feminist, she maintains the concern with maintaining a conventional femininity that characterises memoirs from the pre-feminist era. In this regard, Braxton’s narrative is a bridge between Legler’s pre-feminist and feminist generations, showing elements of both.

A comparative reading of Darlington, Young and Braxton’s memoirs shows the development from pre-feminist to early feminist narratives in relation to Antarctica. These female narratives of polar regions have tended to focus on concerns considered traditionally female, the starting point being the justification for their presence in the harsh polar environment. Each of the three memoirs, to a different degree, is concerned with issues of femininity in a masculine space – hiding it, maintaining it, demonstrating it. Their narrative challenge is how to deal with femininity in an environment where it is not the norm. The narrative ambitions relate to gender issues in a way that men’s narratives do not. Gender could not be invisible in the writing of these women – it haunts it.

The Fate of Antarctica’s Early Female Travel Narratives

While these early female narratives of Antarctica could be viewed as forming a foundation of female story-telling related to the continent, they have not achieved the status of iconic texts. Darlington’s remains the best known, but none of the six memoirs are in print and several are difficult to access. While Scott’s narrative has grown in stature over the years and achieved a ‘quasi-religious’ mythological status (as well as being reworked and reimagined many times), these narratives remain fixed in the conditions within which they were created and largely fail to create an alternative vision of women finding a space to exist in Antarctica. Part of what characterises female narratives from this time is what they have avoided, as much as what they have focused on. While relationships are physically present within the real time of the narratives, serious marriage problems (if they existed) are not addressed,
and sexual experiences are largely ignored (though the fact of Darlington’s pregnancy hints at them). The experience of the sublime is, at most, a minor component. In analysing two female polar narratives from the pre-feminist era, one from the north and one from the south, Hansson points out: ‘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’ (2009, p. 108). In illustrating the gender relations of their times, these texts now seem old fashioned.

Modern female writers, now having access to Antarctica, have produced a significant body of work incorporating female experiences of the continent. These include both openly feminist works and those that Legler characterises as ‘post masculinist’, which move past consideration of gender to other concerns:

Ulgeraga’s and Joyce’s stories are tales of everyday life, not tales of conquest or hardihood or erasure or acquiescence or adaptation or even of overcoming gender discrimination. The role these working women have played in the US Antarctic community is deeply integral to its functioning. Their positions as Antarctic citizens allow them the privilege of being able to tell stories of Antarctic life without having to, in any way, justify their presence there as women. (2011, p. 220)

Intimate relationships remain a theme in Antarctic literature, but they are now explored in a level of explicit detail unimaginable in Darlington’s time. For example, Nikki Gemmell’s novel *Shiver* (1997), which has a narrative construction suggestive of its roots in memoir, explores in explicit detail the main character’s sexual and emotional adventures in Antarctica, culminating in the tragic death of her lover. It is hardly surprising that modern readers find little to relate to in Darlington’s chaste memoir when they can choose contemporary narratives like Gemmell’s. While Scott’s journal offers a moral fable that lifts it out of its Edwardian setting, Darlington, Young, Braxton and the other female writers achieve their narrative goals by maintaining a sense of the femininity of their era in a masculine environment. Their challenge to the construction of the heroic masculine self in early Antarctic literature is indeed ‘subtle and contested’ as Legler identifies (2011, p. 212). Though by the standards of their time their travels were adventurous, their narratives appear, to a modern sensibility, outdated, and their memoirs have largely fallen into obscurity. Their importance, however, lies in how they show many of the challenges facing the earliest women who travelled to Antarctica, and the survival
strategies these women employed. They help set the scene for examining the experiences of the earlier generation of women who travelled to Antarctica in the 1930s – those who left no memoirs of their own.
Chapter Two: Ice Blink

_Ice blink_: A bright white to yellowish glare or light in the sky above the horizon, reflected upwards from extensive areas of ice beyond the viewer’s site, and therefore indicating its presence (Hince, 2000, p. 175)

In 1992, New Zealand maritime historian Joan Druett published the first in a series of fiction and non-fiction books as part of her quest to recover detailed histories of women who were captains’ wives and seafarers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.  

Druett produced histories and biographies, recovered and edited diaries, and wrote a novel, _Abigail_ (2000a), about a young woman who sailed on a whaling ship in the 19th century. Her feat of reimagining and recovering the history of female participation in nineteenth century whaling and shipping has not been carried out to the same degree with Antarctic history. The project that comes the closest – Chipman’s – is a single book that covers a broad sweep of history, meaning that detailed examination is not possible. The history of women in Antarctica seems to be considered a completed subject, attracting no further research interest since 1998, when Ian Norman and his colleagues in the _Polar Record_ (Norman, Gibson, & Burgess, 1998) argued convincingly that Caroline Mikkelsen was not the first woman to set foot on the mainland and posed the question: who was? This question intrigued me and I wondered why no scholars had responded (Norman, 2011, personal communication). Were women exempted from the obsession with first arrivals that characterised Antarctic history? Did their perceived

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lack of agency render the question irrelevant – for no matter which woman arrived first, she was carried there by a man, playing no active role in the event herself?

In the previous chapter I noted Kolodny and Page’s recommendation to consider the context in which historical female narratives were produced and in which their writers lived and acted. I propose that a feminist analysis of the first women to land in Antarctica needs to take into account female desire to travel south and the unsuccessful struggles of women to be included in early Antarctic expeditions. In this chapter I argue that the historical context of active female desire to travel south makes Ingrid Christensen’s voyages historically significant. I explore this context through evidence that women actively strove to participate in Antarctic exploration and I propose that their efforts to participate should inform the later stories of women who managed to reach Antarctica. I reconstruct the history of Christensen and the other Norwegian women who travelled to Antarctica on the Christensen fleet during the 1930s, and conclude that the absence of texts written in their own voices still leaves much about the nature of their engagement with Antarctica unknown: in the ‘ice blink’ metaphor, light is visible on the horizon but the ice from which it is reflected is not yet in sight.

I begin with those women who started applying to Antarctic expeditions in the early 1900s. Theirs is an untold story, scattered in news clippings and letters around the world. Their exclusion and their silencing lie underneath later female experiences of the south.

**Unearthing Evidence of Female Desire for Antarctica**

One of the earliest and most famous women who wanted to go to Antarctica was Marie Carmichael Stopes. Most people know her as the contraception and sexuality advocate, and author of *Married Love* (1918). But before she became known for her radical ideas on women’s sexuality, Stopes was making her mark as a palaeobotanist. In slightly different circumstances she might have been the first woman on Antarctica, as she met Robert Falcon Scott while he was raising funds for his second ill-fated Antarctic expedition. According to Liz Truswell, Fellow of the Australian Academy of Science, in a radio interview:

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27 Stopes was awarded first class honours in botany and geology from the University College London in 1902, a PhD in palaeobotany from the University of Munich in 1904 and was the youngest person to be made a Doctor of Science by the University College London (Truswell, 2011).
They met at a lunch, later at a ball, where, obviously impressed by the
dashing naval officer, she confided to a friend that he was the most
divine waltzer and reverser she had ever met! She tried to persuade Scott
to take her on his next expedition. He, being a diplomatic soul, agreed to
give her his decision at the end of the evening. Feeling unable to accede
to her wishes, (due no doubt to naval protocols, and perhaps to the fact
that he was by then married to the Bohemian sculptor Kathleen Bruce) he
said that he would however search for the plant fossils she thought must
be there. Later, he visited her at the University to familiarise himself with
the fossils – accepting her offer of a crash course in palaeobotany. (2011)

Stopes wanted to look for rocks that showed traces of fossilised Glossopteris indica,
as she was working on proving the Gondwana theory, which proposed that the
continents had once been joined. Truswell speculated that the meeting with Stopes
may have influenced Scott: ‘it was he who insisted that the fossils be kept in spite
of their critical extra weight – was this an instinct that they might be valuable, or was it
a recollection of his meeting with the young woman scientist in Manchester?’ (2011).

Stopes asked to participate in the expedition in her own right, as an eminent scientist
with specific Antarctic research that could advance a new theory. However, even
these qualifications were not enough to secure her a place. Though Scott was clearly
impressed by her scientific project, he declined to include her.

Stopes was in a rare position as a female scientist, being theoretically qualified
for inclusion in the expedition, but most women who applied to Heroic Era
expeditions had to consider other ways to forward the cause of their applications.
Two surviving examples suggest that some believed repressing their femaleness
through masculine disguise offered their best chance. When Mawson was preparing
for the 1911–1914 Australasian Antarctic Expedition, he received a letter that asked:

Will you take me as your cabin boy, a servant, on your antarctic [sic]
expedition? I am a girl in the twenties, strong, healthy and fearless, &
could make up as a boy perfectly. You will find the nimbleness of youth
combined with the knowledge of a woman, a very useful factor. Yours
truly Marjory Collier Alias Jack Séall. (as cited in Leane, 2012, p. 99)

Collier realised she had little chance of being accepted on the expedition as a woman,
and that the position of honorary man (with the additional benefits hinted at by the
words ‘with the knowledge of a woman’) might have given her a better chance. She
was not the only woman to understand the likelihood of a female applicant being
knocked back and to offer instead to ‘make up as a boy’. A similar suggestion
appears in this oft-cited letter of application to Shackleton:
We are three strong healthy girls, and also gay and bright, and willing to undergo any hardships, that you yourself undergo. If our feminine garb is inconvenient, we should just love to don masculine attire. We have been reading all books and articles that have been written on dangerous expeditions by brave men to the Polar regions, and we do not see why men should have the glory, and women none, especially when there are women just as brave and capable as there are men. (Pegrine, 1914)

Their letter indicates that the three young women consider themselves well read, intrepid and ready to take risks. However they unintentionally reveal their youth and inexperience. Shackleton dismisses them with a single sentence: ‘Sir Ernest Shackleton begs to thank Miss Peggy Pegrine, Miss Valerie Davey and Miss Better Webster, for their letter but regrets there are no vacancies for the opposite sex on the expedition’ (Shackleton, 1914). While Pegrine uses the boys-own-adventure language that appeared in polar literature, her gender ensured it worked against her. According to Spufford, ‘the language that had seemed to offer them common access to the heroic experience might appear absurd to men […it] in fact only ensured their request would be taken as harmless’ (1996, p. 144). Numerous men with no previous experience were included on polar expeditions, including Scott himself (Spufford, 1996, p. 288), but lack of experience was one reason given why women were kept out.

Towards the end of the Heroic Era women continued to apply to expeditions and their interest was reported in the media:

THE ANTARCTIC. ANOTHER EXPEDITION.
WOMEN WANT TO GO.
LONDON October 18.
Captain Cope is inviting applications from experts in the following sciences to accompany his expedition to the Antarctic regions: Geology, meteorology, biology, photography, surgery, cartography, and hydrography. The party will number 51, of whom 17 will be engaged on shore work. A number of the members of the expeditions which accompanied Captain Sir R. F. Scott and Captain Sir Ernest Shackleton have joined the expedition. Several women were anxious to join, but their applications were refused. (The Advertiser, 1919, p. 7)

There still appeared to be no question of women being accepted for expeditions, but the fact that their desire to participate was considered newsworthy (and included in

28 The letter prompted a brief scene in the television miniseries Shackleton, where Kenneth Branagh, playing Ernest Shackleton, strode through the expedition office as his men were reading a similarly-worded letter aloud. Without pausing he shook his head and snapped ‘No!’ (Sturridge, 2002).
the headline) was possibly a small step forward for their efforts, bringing their efforts some visibility.

In the Mechanical Era of polar exploration from the 1920s onwards, the use of planes and motorised ships meant that conditions became more comfortable. Times were changing for women on all fronts, but even though some more applicants were now ‘qualified’, they were still excluded from Antarctic expeditions, in spite of making inroads into other fields of endeavour. In 1929, as plans were underway for Sir Douglas Mawson to lead the British, Australian and New Zealand Antarctic Research Expedition (BANZARE), *The Argus* reported that ‘Captain Davis, in an interview said that hundreds of men and a few women had wanted to join the expedition’ (1929, p. 9). Although women had since achieved universal suffrage in Britain, Mawson proved no more amenable than he had been 18 years earlier, refusing the women who applied to join BANZARE, though acknowledging some of them had the required expertise:

Sir Douglas Mawson stated today that 25 women had applied to him to take part in his Antarctic expedition, their letters revealing that most of them were attracted by the novelty of the adventure, but some were undoubtedly qualified to take part in the establishment of bases. The forthcoming expedition was unsuitable for women, he said, as sleighing was too arduous, but under proper conditions these women would probably do as well as men. For the most part they were capable scientists though they were prepared to act in all sorts of capacities. (*The Times*, 1929, p. 13)

As was previously evident in Shackleton’s response to Peigrine, a double standard applied in expedition appointments. Attraction ‘to the novelty’ might have been seen as a kind of bold confidence in a male, but was considered ignorance and naivety coming from a female. The responses of the female applicants were not recorded, but at least one man found Mawson’s attitude unreasonable and out of date, as shown by a public expression of disappointment in a farewell speech to Mawson:

In 1930, Mr Turner, Warden at the Hobart Marine Board, said in his address to Sir Douglas and Lady Mawson, ‘One thing disappoints me a little – that no women are accompanying the expedition. In these enlightened times, women have invaded all professions and all businesses, with credit to themselves and to the advantage of the professions and businesses. It is said that no woman could survive the rigours of life in the Antarctic but, as Mrs T. Murdoch reminds me, Miss Nina Demney, 28 years of Age, a graduate of the Leningrad Geographical Institute, is now second in command of the Soviet Arctic Expeditions’. (as cited in Burns, 2005, p. 2)
These examples represent a small handful of women, and may have been reported in the newspapers because of their novelty value, but women’s desire to participate in polar adventures appears to have been growing. In 1937 an extraordinary number of women applied to join the proposed British Antarctic Expedition:

**WOMEN WANT TO GO TO POLE—1,300 Applications—‘NO,’ SAYS LEADER**

Applications from 1,300 women for permission to join the British Antarctic Expedition were received by the commander Mr. W.E. Walker, but he does not intend to accept any as he believes that women could not stand up to the conditions in an expedition which will spend a long period in the South Polar regions. (*The Argus*, 1937, p. 17)

By that time, the independently wealthy American polar explorer Louise Arner Boyd had funded, mounted and led three scientific expeditions to Greenland, including one that she dedicated to searching for the missing Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen (Berg, 2006, p. 136). American Amelia Earhart had achieved international recognition for her solo flights around the world (Polk & Tiegreen, 2001, p. 218) and another aviatrix, Frances Wilson Gracon, had been lost south of Newfoundland in the race to be the first female to cross the Atlantic by plane (Berg, 2006, p. 136). Mina Benson Hubbard had explored Labrador in 1905 and Geraldine Moodie became the first woman photographer to work above the Arctic Circle in 1904 (Polk & Tiegreen, 2001, pp. 48, 49). But adventurous achievements elsewhere did not help women gain access to Antarctica.

It appears that of all the aspiring female explorers who attempted to join Antarctic expeditions between 1904 and 1937, none were successful. The only women who did manage to reach the Antarctic mainland before the mid-1940s were those Norwegians who went in association with the Lars Christensen whaling fleet. The thwarted desires of women to be included in polar expeditions form an important backdrop to Christensen’s story, placing her in the context of a female struggle to reach Antarctica. Christensen and her companions found a way into the masculine preserve of Antarctica after women had been trying unsuccessfully to do so for some 30 years.

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29 For her exploration achievements Arner Boyd was the first American woman to be awarded Norway’s Chevalier Cross of the Order of Saint Olav. Later in her life she was awarded honorary membership of the American Polar Society, with the comment that she had ‘contributed more to our knowledge of Greenland, Spitsbergen, Franz Josef Land and the Greenland Sea than the work of any other explorer’ (Anema, 2000, p. 96).
Reporting of Christensen by Recent Scholars and Historians

In spite of this significance, Antarctic history and gender scholarship have both relegated Ingrid Christensen and her companions to minor or non-existent roles. Caroline Mikkelsen functions as a depersonalised ‘place marker’ rather than an individual in her own right, a convenient name when a reference is required for the first woman to land on the continent. In most sources she is covered in a few sentences, and nowhere more than a handful of paragraphs. While some information about Christensen, Mikkelsen and the other Norwegian women who went to Antarctica in the 1930s has been reported, much of the reporting lacks detail and contains errors that have never been corrected. For example, Land (1981) is dismissive, allocating them just a few sentences in the first book-length work on women in Antarctica. She describes the first landing of a woman on the continent thus:

Caroline Mikkelsen, wife of a Norwegian whaling captain, accompanied her husband on a voyage to the Antarctic. Klarius Mikkelsen’s ship, one of a fleet directed by Lars Christiansen [sic], was not at all like the fragile sailing vessels that carried earlier explorers. It was a sturdy factory ship, big enough to carry airplanes to look for whales as well as all the heavy equipment necessary for processing whale oil.

On February 20, 1935, the captain and his wife went ashore in a small boat, landing on the eastern coast of Antarctica near the present location of Australia’s Davis Station. They looked around briefly and then Caroline was taken back to the ship [...] Two years later, Christiansen [sic] himself went down to see his ships at work. The whaling magnate’s wife and daughter and two of their female friends went along. Now, on any detailed map of Antarctica, you can find Four Ladies Bank, just off the Ingrid Christensen Coast – permanent reminders that women were among the early Antarctic tourists. (1981, p. 17)

Inherent in the report is the assumption that Mikkelsen travelled in safety on a ‘sturdy factory ship’ and was passive in her participation, being ‘taken back to the ship’ after briefly looking around during her Antarctic landing. Land gives just two sentences to Christensen’s ‘tourism’, incorrectly reporting that she visited Antarctica just once, in 1937. She does not consider her, or her companions, significant enough to name.

Chipman provides the most detailed account of Christensen’s four voyages to Antarctica. She notes that on the first voyage, in early 1931, Christensen and Wegger ‘became the first women on record to sight the Antarctic continent’, though
‘Christensen makes no mention of the women going ashore on the Continent in this nor his second (1932–4) [sic] or third (1933–4) expeditions’ (1986, p. 72). Chipman briefly describes Christensen’s third voyage (in 1934–5 with Ingebjørg Dedichen) and Ingrid’s unsuccessful attempts to land during her fourth voyage in 1936–7, noting that Christensen was a passenger on a flight that discovered unknown land (1986, p. 76). Chipman also describes Mikkelsen’s landing:

The party that stepped ashore around 10.30 am on 20 February 1935 included a woman. Caroline Mikkelsen was aboard the rowing boat that carried her husband and seven seamen from the ship to the shore. So far as records show, Caroline Mikkelsen was thus the first woman to set foot on the Antarctic continent. (1986, p. 75)

Burns briefly reports the first landing as: ‘On 20 February 1935, Danish-born Caroline Mikkelsen, wife of the captain of the Norwegian whaler Thorshavn, became the first woman recorded to step ashore on the Antarctic continent, near the present Davis station’ (2001, p. 11). She does not mention Christensen or her companions.

Lewander briefly touches on their history when exploring evidence that women did travel to Antarctica between the 1930s and the 1990s. She names Mikkelsen as one of the early travellers to the Antarctic mainland, but incorrectly concludes from Norman et al.’s (1998) article that Mikkelsen was on the same 1937 voyage as Christensen and her three companions, when in fact Mikkelsen was the only woman on the 1935 voyage:

It had been known by the mid-60s that the whaler had been at Vestfold Hills in 1935 but there had been no mention of Caroline. In 1998, however, the story was questioned and 1937 was put forward instead as the first year in which a woman trod the Antarctic continent. But while this did tell people about Caroline Mikkelsen, in reality she had been accompanied by three other women on board and the story did not tell which of them was the first to step onto the continent (Norman 1998). Would this omission have been possible if the quartet had been men? (Lewander, 2009, p. 92)

Neither Burns nor Land claim to be reconstructing the continent’s early female history – both are providing background information to their main area of inquiry – but their work perpetuates the paucity of information about these women and taken together, feminist texts show ongoing instances of error and omission. Land has Christensen making a single trip to Antarctica in 1937 as a ‘tourist’, accompanied by her daughter and two friends, none of whom are named, and she records no landing on the continent. Chipman reports Christensen’s voyages in detail, but only knows of
an aborted landing attempt on her final 1937 voyage. Burns does not include her at all, and Lewander mistakes the details and confuses several different voyages. These are easy enough errors to make in light of the dearth of information about these Norwegian travellers, but it seems strange that no feminist scholar or gender studies specialist has explored them any further, presumably at least in part because of the lack of primary sources.

None of the Norwegian women from the Christensen fleet published memoirs about their travels and there appear to be no primary sources documenting their experiences in their own words. Without evidence to the contrary, scholars have been content to let them remain in the small role that could be allotted to women in the dominant Antarctic narrative: domestic companions who were conveyed there by men and who set foot on the continent as appendages to their husbands. Setting out to discover more about Christensen and her companions from the archives, I was wearing my novelist’s hat, looking for gems of information rather than a series of historical facts. But as it turned out, more information about their travels to Antarctica was there to be uncovered, including further details about the first female arrival on the Antarctic mainland.

**An Overview of the Christensen Expeditions**

When she first travelled to Antarctica (in early 1931), 38-year-old Ingrid Christensen left her six children at home. This was surely unusual, even in progressive Norway and even in the relatively liberated 1930s. For Christensen, like Boyd, it was wealth and class status that gave her freedom. Unlike women who tried applying to Antarctic expeditions, Christensen had privileged access to the opportunity to participate in Antarctic travel. Her husband was an entrepreneur who owned a large pelagic whaling fleet and personally funded much of Norway’s Antarctic exploration. His nickname in Cape Town, the departure point for his whaling fleet, was ‘the Whaling King’ and in 1936 the *Cape Times* described him as ‘the millionaire controller of one of the biggest whaling fleets in the world’ (cited in Christensen, 1936–37, p. 150). This was in the heyday of Antarctic deep sea whaling, when up to 40,000 whales were killed each season, mostly for margarine and soap. When Christensen travelled on *Thorshavn*, the refuelling vessel for the factory fleet, she travelled in the style that befitted the wife of the fleet owner, as did her
companion Mathilde Wegger, a widow from Sandefjord and mother of two children (who stayed behind). After refuelling the whaling factories and offloading their whale oil for transport back to Cape Town, *Thorshavn* sailed through little known waters and icefields looking for the mainland. The expedition found a prominent cape on 5 February 1931 and named it Bjerkö Head. The surrounding area had been named Lars Christensen Coast by one of Christensen’s whaling captains earlier in the season. With that sighting, Christensen and Wegger became the first identified women to see Antarctica (Chipman, 1986, p. 72). Travelling (in a large ship loaded with whale oil) through unfamiliar territory and constantly shifting sea ice, landing on the continent was a tricky endeavour and a suitable site was not found. Christensen did not make the all-important first footprint needed to secure her place in the history books. Wegger, the companion’s companion, fared even worse. Apart from Chipman’s accounts (1986) little other information about Wegger survives in English (or, it seems from my fairly limited research, in her native Norwegian).

Mawson spotted two women – who may have been Christensen and Wegger visiting another ship – as he was in the same area on the second year of his BANZARE expedition. Part of the article he wired back to the Australian media reads:

**A PLEASANT SURPRISE**

On one occasion, emerging from a belt of sparkling pack, we came upon two vessels lying side-by-side, coaling in a calm ice-girt pool. This prosaic business provoked little interest but as we drew near enough to distinguish those on board, much astonishment was excited by the dramatic appearance on their decks of two women attired in the modes of civilisation. Theirs is a unique experience, for they can make much merit of the fact that they are, perhaps, the first of their sex to visit Antarctica. *(The Sydney Morning Herald, 1931, p. 13)*

His men, it seems, were less ‘pleasantly surprised’. Historian David Day’s recounting of this event suggests there was confusion about the number of women and which ship they were on (Day, 2012, p. 264). Stuart Campbell, reporting the incident in his diary, notes that:

Shortly afterwards, we were amazed (others horrified) to see a woman leaning over the bridge of the ‘Vesteris’. A woman in the Antarctic, man’s last place of exclusive retirement gone. Poor old Ken took it to heart properly and turned away with ‘That I should have lived to see this come to pass’. *(1983, diary entry 6 Feb 1931)*
However, Campbell’s fellow sailor Harold Fletcher remembers both the number of women and their location differently:

All hands were on deck awaiting events when Simmers said, ‘I can hardly believe my eyes’. Two women were looking over the rail of the _Falk_; one with bare arms and the other in a thin dress. (1984, p. 290)

_Falk_ was one of Lars Christensen’s ships, but the confusion in the reports raises the possibility that women other than Christensen and Wegger were travelling on ships in Antarctica that year, whose presence has gone unreported. Mawson may have been ‘pleasantly surprised’ to see women in Antarctica after he had, only the previous year, refused to take any on his own expedition, but he did not stop and make their acquaintance, though he had previously boarded Norwegian whaling and exploration ships during his expeditions.

Two years later, in 1933, the Christensens travelled to Antarctica for the second time, again leaving their children at home. This time Christensen’s companion was Lillemor (Ingebjørg) Rachlew, a Norwegian who had been doing charity work in the London slums in the aftermath of the Wall Street Crash. She had recently become the wife of Cato Rachlew, the Norwegian naval attaché in London, who had divorced his wife (and mother of his three children) to marry Rachlew. It seems Rachlew was a personality to be reckoned with. She kept a lively diary (later quoted at length in Christensen [1935] and from that source, requoted in Chipman [1986]), took photographs, hunted seals with a rifle, had a sense of humour, and according to the surviving quotes from her journal, participated energetically in the voyage.

The Christensens went to Antarctica for the third time in 1933–34 on _Thorshavn_, taking another wealthy, upper-class friend, the heiress Ingebjørg Dedichen (Chipman, 1986, p. 172) and their oldest son, Lars Junior. Christensen was acknowledged as a pioneer by _The Times_, which reported prior to their departure that ‘Mrs Christensen, who accompanied him on his previous visit earlier this year, has probably travelled further South than any other woman in the world’ (_The Times_, 1933, p. 12). However, once again they did not manage a landing, though they circumnavigated almost the entire Antarctic continent. By 1934 Christensen had made three voyages (each of at least six weeks duration) to Antarctica, but she had

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30 Some of Rachlew’s photographs were later published in the French journal _L’Illustration_ as part of a story about Christensen and Rachlew’s travel to Antarctica (Rabot, 1934).
not managed a landing. Lars Christensen set about writing his first book on their travels, *Such is the Antarctic* (1935), and the following season, the 1934–35 austral summer, the Christensens stayed at home.

**The First Female Landing on the Antarctic Mainland**

Another woman headed south that year. Danish-born Caroline Mikkelsen had recently married one of Lars’s whaling captains, Klarius Mikkelsen (the man who had discovered and named Lars Christensen Land in 1931). She was around 28 years old, much younger than her new husband, and was considered a beauty – too beautiful, perhaps, to be left at home unattended (Patterson, 2010b personal communication; Wangen, 2011 personal communication). So she joined her husband, who was that year employed by Lars Christensen as the captain of *Thorshavn*. After completing transfers of oil and cargo with the whaling ships, *Thorshavn* followed the Antarctic coastline until it was approximately five nautical miles off a snow-free coast that ran to the southwest. According to the expedition report in the *Polar Record*, ‘the weather was splendid, with light winds from the east’ (Christensen & Mikkelsen, 1935, p. 136). Mikkelsen was in luck – conditions were ideal for landing. Her husband launched and manned a lifeboat with her and seven crewmembers, and set out for shore. They landed in a small bay with a freshwater lake and a steep rocky hill, on the slopes of which were young Adelie penguins in an extensive colony. Mikkelsen raised the Norwegian flag and a depot was laid under a stone cairn. Her husband named the area Ingrid Christensen Land and the party had a meal of sandwiches and coffee, took photographs and collected rock samples (Norman et al., 1998, p. 295). Mikkelsen’s was, it appeared, the first female footstep on Antarctica.

However, little fanfare was given to this first female landing. The fact of Mikkelsen’s inclusion in the landing party (though not her name) was mentioned in the *Polar Record* report (Christensen & Mikkelsen, 1935, pp. 126–129), but no mention was made of her being the first woman to land. Her name does not appear in the report of the landing in the *New York Times* (1935, p. 21) nor *The Times* of London’s report (1935, p. 13). A year later, when reporting on the Christensen’s next voyage, *The Cape Argus* mentions in an article about the Christensens: ‘Hitherto, only Mrs. Mikkelsen, the wife of the man after whom the mountain is named and
who is captain of Thorshavn, had set foot on the continent’ (as cited in Christensen, 1936–37, p. 152). Christensen does not mention Mikkelsen’s landing in any of his writing. The Norwegian historian Hans Bogen reported it some 22 years later in Main Events in the History of Antarctic Exploration (1957, p. 85). A clue to the silence around Mikkelsen’s landing can be found in this account from a report in The Antarctic Society Newsletter:

Klarius Mikkelsen, master of the oil tanker Thorshavn during the 1934–35 season, took his Danish wife Karoline to Antarctica with him too. They penetrated the pack ice as far south as 68°29’ and at a latitude of 78°36’ East, where they landed on February 20, 1935, thus making Mrs. Mikkelsen the first woman on record to set foot on the Antarctic Continent. They modestly named the land they had discovered the Ingrid Christensen Coast, and only Mount Karoline (or Caroline) Mikkelsen on that coast commemorates Mrs. Mikkelsen’s record ‘first’. (Crary, 1978, p. 3)

Klarius Mikkelsen was Lars Christensen’s employee. He would almost certainly have been aware that the Christensens hoped to make their own landing, but had failed to find the right opportunity on their previous three voyages. Mikkelsen had previously discovered and named Lars Christensen Land, and ‘modestly’ naming his and his wife’s landing site after Ingrid Christensen may have been an attempt to ease any disappointment or resentment felt by Ingrid about not being the first woman to land on the mainland. Mikkelsen’s later behaviour supports this hypothesis, as she remained silent about her adventure. Just a few years after the landing her husband died. Mikkelsen remarried and, with a new husband and new name, made a decision not to talk about her Antarctic experiences ‘to spare her husband’s feelings’, a stance she maintained for decades31 (Patterson, 1995, p. 44).

Despite the lack of fanfare, Mikkelsen is remembered as the first woman to reach Antarctica. What Christensen thought about missing out on the first female landing – if she thought anything – was never written down. Her husband exhaustively recorded their travels in diaries, photographs, articles, speeches and a book. If Christensen kept diaries of her own, they have disappeared. There is no known repository of her papers.

Christensen did return to Antarctica one last time, in the 1936–7 austral summer. The aim of the trip was to carry out a full aerial mapping of the Antarctic

31 Mikkelsen eventually accepted publicity about her Antarctic landing sixty years after, after Patterson’s efforts to track her down were successful in 1995 and she spoke to the Norwegian newspaper Aftenposten for the first time about her journey (Patterson, 1995, p. 44).
coastline to ‘lay the foundation of the coastal lands discovered by Norwegians in the East Antarctic’ (Christensen, 1937, p. 5). Lillemor Rachlew went again as her companion and this time Christensen took her youngest daughter Augusta Sofie Christensen (‘Fie’), who was then eighteen. Another woman, Solveig Widerøe, wife of the aviator on the ship, also joined them, making the ‘four ladies’ for whom an underwater bank near the continent was named during the voyage (Christensen, 1937, p. 8). Christensen had the chance to fly (as a passenger) over the land that had been named for her two years earlier, and she dropped the Norwegian flag out of the window (Bogen, 1957, p. 89). With that flight, she became the first woman to see Antarctica, including previously undiscovered areas, from the air (Bogen, 1957, p. 90). After the flight, the weather was fine and sunny and they thought it time to try for a landing at last. But it was not to be, as Lars Christensen reports:

We got into a motorboat we had brought for the purpose, but before we had rounded the bow of the Thorshavn the sea turned rough and waves broke on the boat, drenching us to the skin. So quickly does it change in the Antarctic from idyllic calm and sunshine to storm. We thought better of it, and turned back to Thorshavn, where we had not a little trouble getting on board again, on account of the heavy seas. (Christensen, 1937, p. 9)

It seems like Christensen’s efforts to land were jinxed and according to most recorded history her Antarctic story ends at that point. Without the glory of making the ‘first footstep’, Christensen’s trips were largely forgotten. Along with her daughter and Wegger, Rachlew and Widerøe, Christensen lapsed into a footnote in history.

Analysis of Mikkelsen’s Antarctic Landing

My own interest in Ingrid Christensen was sparked by the knowledge that she travelled to Antarctica four times, but was beaten to a landing after her third visit. From a novelist’s point of view, this presented an opening into her story and a potential for narrative conflict. However, as I researched further it became apparent that the question of the first woman to land on Antarctica was not settled. This piqued my interest as both a novelist and a scholar. In 1960 expeditioners at Davis Station inadvertently rediscovered the Mikkelsen landing site as part of their explorations of the surrounding area (Norman et al., 1998, p. 296). Expeditioners visited the site again in 1962, finding the ‘flagpole and box’ left by the Norwegians,
but did not appreciate their significance (Norman, et al., 1998, p. 297). Further visits took place in 1973 without detailed records of the location, but it was not until 1995, the sixtieth anniversary of Caroline Mikkelsen’s landing, that a formal attempt was made to locate the site and the cairn. Station leader Patterson notes that ‘a ‘clue sheet’ was developed and circulated among the seventeen winterers and ‘subsequent field trips to the north of the station saw closer attention being paid to the coast than ever before’ (1995, p. 44). At the same time, Patterson and other researchers were trying from a distance to track down Mikkelsen in Norway, knowing nothing about her whereabouts or fate. Polar researcher Susan Barr, then of the Norwegian Polar Institute, assisted by putting a notice in a Norwegian newspaper. Mikkelsen’s son saw the notice and contact was made. Patterson reports:

We were still celebrating ‘our’ discovery of Caroline when the very next day a Davis field party, consisting of heritage consultants Martin Davies and Sam Rando, and myself, found the original landing spot […] The flagpole was still standing; the cairn and depot we can only assume are buried between a deep snow drift. The flagpole is located on the edge of an Adelie penguin rookery – too close to satisfy our immediate curiosity. (1995, p. 44)

Patterson notes that heritage consultants had found references in old field logs to the Norwegian depot and flagpole ‘on a larger island in the Tryne group to the north of Davis’ (1995, p. 44). While she does not comment on the significance, the implications were not lost on several Australian polar researchers interested in the exploration activities of the Norwegians during the 1930s.

Researchers Ian Norman, John Gibson and Jim Burgess went back to the original records and sketches of Klarius and Caroline Mikkelsen’s 1935 landing site to examine Norwegian explorations in relation to contemporary Antarctic investigations and politics (Norman et al., 1998). They referred to the original ship logbooks, sketch maps and historic accounts, including those in Norwegian, as well as later Davis Station logbooks and field reports of travels to the site. After combing through the evidence in these documents, they looked again at the map sketched by Mikkelsen’s husband showing their landing site as being on the continent. The sketch shows ‘no major islands indicated (even around the landing site), and, although many icebergs were offshore pack ice was not reported’ (1998, p. 295). However, contrary to the sketch, the flagpole marking the landing spot, as discovered by Patterson and others, is on the largest island of the Tryne group, a few kilometres from the shore.
The Mikkelsen landing site rediscovered by the Australians is not on the Antarctic mainland. Norman et al. (1998) propose several possible explanations for this discrepancy, including ‘errors relating to accuracy of sightings and hence the reported latitude and longitude’, later misunderstandings or mistranslations of the claims of the landing, and/or the possibility that ‘the nature of the site was irrelevant at the time and that the landing itself was paramount, with its continental attributes becoming, subsequently, politically more important’ (1998, p. 300). But their conclusion is clear: Mikkelsen did not land on the mainland. The authors pose the question: ‘If Caroline Mikkelsen was not the first woman to set foot on the Antarctic mainland … who was?’ They suggest four possibilities: Ingrid Christensen, Lillemor Rachlew, Augusta Sofie Christensen, or Solveig Widerøe (Norman et al., 1998, p. 301).

When the article appeared in the *Polar Record*, along with a follow up article four years later filling in some further details (Norman, Gibson, Jones, & Burgess, 2002), the news that the title of first woman to land in Antarctica was up for grabs did not raise a stir. No scholars took up the question, critically or otherwise, and the issue of the first female landing, raised after thorough and detailed investigation of the Mikkelsen’s landing by Norman et al., was left unanswered.

**Christensen’s Antarctic Mainland Landing**

Though Norman and his colleagues suggest that Ingrid Christensen and her three companions landed at Scullin Monolith on 30 January 1937, the details of this landing were obscure. None of the female historians recovering the stories of women in Antarctica, nor the feminist scholars looking at issues around gender, mentioned Christensen or her friends landing on the continent on Christensen’s fourth voyage. In his 1937 address to the Norwegian Geographical Society, Christensen describes his own landing, but does not mention the women participating:

> On the 30\(^{th}\) of January 1937, at two in the morning, I experienced the unique pleasure of setting foot on the Antarctic mainland, where we made a depot. Klarius Mikkelsen Mountain was a remarkable one, with precipitous, crevassed sides. The stillness was almost uncanny: only the rhythmic beat of the waves and the unceasing, soft chatter of the penguins broke the solemn silence. (1937, p. 10)
The Norwegian historian Hans Bogen accompanied the Christensens on their 1936–37 voyage. In his description of the first woman to reach the continent, he believes Caroline Mikkelsen to have taken the honour and describes it as follows:

Mrs. Mikkelsen was the first woman to set foot on the Antarctic mainland. The next were Ingrid Christensen, Mrs. Ingebjorg (Lill) Rachlew, Mrs. Solveig Wideroe and Miss Augusta Sophie (Fie) Christensen, now Mrs. Ake Bratt. This was on January 30th 1937 on Klarius Mikkelsen Mountain (Mawson’s Scullin Monolith). (1957, p. 85)

However, his description of the landing consists of a reproduction of Lars Christensen’s quote above, with no further details. It was clear that the women had made a landing, but the sparse details of that landing were buried in relatively obscure publications.

In 2011 I travelled to Sandefjord in Norway to research Christensen’s life in more detail, and spent time at the Whaling Museum, Sandefjord, which holds Lars Christensen’s personal ‘logbook’ diaries from his second (1933–4) and fourth (1936–7) voyages. Lars kept a photo album but not a diary of his first voyage (Bogen, 1957, p. 65) and the diary of the third voyage is in the keeping of one of his grandchildren, who only discovered it three years ago in a box when her own mother died (Wangen, 2011, personal communication). The diaries are handwritten in Norwegian and their existence is not widely known – they do not appear in any online catalogue system and Norman and his colleagues were not aware of them. It appeared that even the staff of the Sandefjord Whaling Museum, which holds the diaries, were unclear about their existence at that time (Norman, 2011, personal communication). I was able to arrange to see the diaries when visiting the museum and to have some sections translated. There, in Lars Christensen’s personal description of what it felt like to finally land on Antarctica, lay the answer:

‘Firern’ came at around midnight. There was considerable rumbling (hollow echo sounds) and booming, a dim dusky twilight, a little layer of snow and a two and a half hour trip. So it was in fact uninviting, but ashore I wanted to go. Captain Mikkelsen was feeling uneasy. He had telegraphed advising that only I attempt to go ashore, that it was bad over there – and we came, six of us who all dreamed of going ashore. We had coffee, daylight started to break, it stopped snowing and the wind settled a bit. So our spirits started to rise gradually. We came high up on the mountainside and pass first two reefs which signals unchartered waters. The walls of the mountain jut straight up approximately 500 feet with a small plateau down towards the water. Here sit dozens of penguins watching us. ‘Firern’ is stopped quite close to land and the lifeboat is lowered on to the water.
Ingrid and I along with Mikkelsen are the first. The swell heaves Braaten up and down and the only place we can land is at a slippery ledge on the mountain. Mikkelsen jumps ashore, slips and nearly ends up in the sea so it looks frightening. He has a line behind him and he calls out, telling me to jump. I did and took the line with me upwards so the others had something to hold on to. Ingrid came ashore well and the others followed one by one. We had a flag with us which was raised over the depot and there was a sense of ceremony in the air when we bared our heads and I, in a short speech, thanked the people who had allowed this land to bear my name [...] The whole thing was one of life’s big experiences and it was so good that Ingrid and Fie were there on shore too. Every southern trip I’ve dreamed about Ingrid and me setting foot on land, on the very South Pole continent, and today at two in the morning, the 30 January, 1937, we succeeded. (Christensen, 1936-37, p. 109)32

Lars Christensen had set down the answer in his own handwriting: ‘Ingrid came ashore well and the others followed one by one’. Christensen was the first woman to land on the Antarctic mainland, followed by three other women, presumably in the order originally provided by Bogen (1957, p. 85): Lillemor Rachlew, Solveig Wideroe and Augusta Sofie Christensen. The knowledge that Christensen, along with her husband, had ‘dreamed of going ashore’ and that her husband had, on every trip, ‘dreamed about Ingrid and me setting foot on the land’ meant I could locate Christensen among the legions of women who desired to travel south. It also indicated that Lars Christensen held a different view about women travelling to Antarctica than the reported attitudes of English and Australian polar explorers.

I visited Mikkelsen’s landing site in November 2011 when I travelled to Davis Station as the 2011/12 Antarctic Arts Fellow. It was there, sitting near the flagpole in the midst of the Adelie penguin rookery, that I experienced the sensation of the jigsaw pieces falling into place. What had been names inscribed on maps became embodied landscapes, where I sat, walked and observed. But, as Chipman observes, ‘many of the “firsts” in the Far South are suspect and coloured by prevailing attitudes’ (1986, p. 6). When I got back to Davis Station after visiting the Mikkelsen landing site, I discovered that although in the ‘real world’ there was not much interest in the work of Norman et al., on the ground in Antarctica, close to the site of the physical artefacts, the history is alive and regularly investigated. Davis Station residents have discussed Mikkelsen’s landing site since the cairn on Tryne Island

32 The diary entry has been translated from the original Norwegian by Australian translator Tonje Ackerholt.
was rediscovered in 1960 (Norman et al., 1998). Alan Parker, the Davis Station leader in 1977, wrote an unpublished paper on the subject some time after 1998, claiming that Norman and his colleagues were mistaken (Parker, n.d., p. 1). Parker believes it unlikely that the Mikkelsen landing party would not have realised they were on an island and that for such a historic moment as the landing of the first woman they would have made sure they were on the mainland. He proposes instead that Norwegian crewmen, serving on the American 1939 Ellsworth Expedition, secretly placed the cairn and flagpole on Tryne Island to counter potential claims of territory for America being made by Ellsworth (Parker, n.d., p. 8). Parker believes the real Mikkelsen landing site, on the mainland, has not yet been found. For years he has supplied Davis Station leaders with maps, descriptions and suggested search areas and urged them to go looking for what he believes is the undiscovered landing site (Cook, 2011 personal communication).

Over the years since 1998, Davis Station residents have worked on the basis that there are two ways to ‘ground truth’ the issue: find an alternative landing site for the Mikkelsens on the mainland, or prove beyond reasonable doubt that the Tryne Island site is where Mikkelsen landed. Davis expeditioners have made efforts on both accounts, extensively searching for Parker’s suggested alternative sites, and using comparative photographs to match Mikkelsen’s landing with the site as it is today, over numerous seasons in Antarctica. No mainland landing sites have been discovered. It is the opinion of at least two Davis Station leaders that the Mikkelsen photographs do in fact depict Tryne Island and that therefore the first landing of a woman on the continent was indeed Christensen and her companions at Scullin Monolith.

**Contemporary Reporting of Christensen’s Journeys**

Ingrid Christensen, as far as is known, kept no diary of her travels. While her husband’s three detailed diaries (which include photographs and news clippings)

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33 It is known that the Australian Sir Hubert Wilkins, who was also a member of that expedition, did the same thing, secretly laying down what’s now called the Wilkins Cairn with documents declaring the land to be Australian territory, while Ellsworth was away flying. Wilkins notified the government of the fact on his return to Australia (Wilkins, 1939).

34 The 1995 Davis Station leader Diana Patterson went to the Tryne Island site, then tracked down and visited Caroline Mikkelsen in Norway in 1996 and looked through her photograph albums (Patterson, 1995, 2011). Patterson is certain that the Tryne Island site is the correct landing place. The 2010–11 Davis Station leader Graham Cook has carefully compared rock formations in the historic and contemporary photographs, as well as visiting the area, and also believes they show the same site (Cook, 2011).
survive, the only words I know of in Christensen’s voice are a single sentence transcribed from a wireless message and pasted into one of his diaries. In the message from the plane back to her husband on the ship she writes, ‘greetings to the Consul from his wife [...] I bless my land and baptise it with my own hand’ (Christensen, 1936–37, p. 97). However, while little was made of her travels in English language publications, some stories did appear within Europe that show more enlightened attitudes to female travel. The French magazine *L’Illustration* ran an article ‘Travels of a Woman in the Antarctic’ in 1934. It begins:

> The success of feminism reaches to the polar world. After the brilliant expedition of Miss L Boyd and Mrs Smet into the difficult areas of the Arctic (see *L’Illustration* 5 August last year) here we have a Norwegian, Mrs Ingrid Christensen, who in 1931, having already successfully completed a trip to the Antarctic, has had another expedition during the last southern summer. Before her, no woman has dared undertake an adventure into the ice of the southern hemisphere. (Rabot, 1934, p. 52)

While there is little further detail of the women’s experiences within the article, the tone is in contrast to the British and Australian newspaper reports of women wanting to go to Antarctica but being refused. Rabot refers to the ‘success of feminism’, and categorises Boyd’s earlier expedition, the subject of a previous story, as ‘brilliant’. Although much of the remainder of the article focuses on the activities carried out by Lars Christensen, the introduction at least suggests Ingrid Christensen’s agency through the phrase ‘has had another expedition’, before mentioning her husband.

Norwegian historian Hans Bogen accompanied the Christensens on their final 1936–37 voyage. He later wrote a biography of Lars Christensen in Norwegian (1955), as well as *Main Events in the History of Antarctic Exploration*, which was published in English (1957). In the former, Bogen describes Ingrid Christensen, who later in life was a recipient of Norway’s Knight, First Class, Order of St Olav, as follows:

> Ingrid Dahl was exactly what in our time we call a *kjekk og frisk jente*.\(^{36}\)

> She was the natural leader of the girls in her age group because of her initiative, humor and fearlessness, qualities she has preserved unwaveringly to the present day. She was and is a fun-loving person who spreads Sunday’s sunshine over every weekday. Her hospitality,

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\(^{35}\) This English translation from the original French was provided by Constance Ellwood.

\(^{36}\) *Kjekk og frisk jente* is a Norwegian expression meaning a girl who could be at once one of the boys, then one of the girls, without losing her femininity or charm (Egede-Nissen, 2012, personal communication).
friendliness, thoughtfulness and generosity have long been legendary. (1955, p. 240)\textsuperscript{37}

When she married Lars, ‘a more beautiful bride than Ingrid was rarely to be seen’ (1955, p. 240).\textsuperscript{38} In the second book Bogen quotes two commentaries about Ingrid Christensen. The first is from the archaeologist Professor Brøgger, published as the cover story in the inaugural issue of the Norwegian magazine *Verden I Bilder* (*The World in Pictures*):

In all the excursions, Lars and Ingrid Christensen have been united in the undertaking – in thick and thin, in storm and bad weather, in good weather and joys. It is almost unique in the history of exploration that two persons have thus thriven for the same goal, kept the distant target in sight and never given up before achieving it. A happy coincidence in a seal hunting milieu, rich in traditions, in the old Sandefjord, created these two for the great undertaking – the daughter of Thor Dahl, that splendid business man, shipowner, and organizer; the son of Christen Christensen, that old organizer of seal and whale hunting and the last of the Vikings. Ingrid Christensen’s part in the whole enterprise is not the smaller, by reason of her incredibly bold, fearless personality, and it is symbolically right that it should be she who, from an aircraft threw down the Norwegian flag on a part of the Antarctic continent in the sector which is now laid under the Norwegian King. (as cited in Bogen, 1957, p. 66)

Bogen also quotes one of the expedition pilots in relation to Christensen:

And with regard to Mrs. Christensen, she is a worthy representative of Norwegian women. Without thought of the great risk, she took part in several flights over the pack ice and broken ground and threw down the Norwegian flag twice on unexplored areas of the Antarctic. (1957, p. 91)

These texts need to be regarded with some care. Ingrid Christensen was married to one of the most powerful men in Sandefjord, if not Norway, and Bogen travelled with them as a guest. Brøgger was also a friend of Lars Christensen. But what is interesting about these snippets is not whether they are sycophantic or not, but what they indicate about Ingrid Christensen’s role. The quote from Brøgger emphasises the equal nature of the partnership between the Christensens, with the phrases ‘united in the undertaking’, ‘thriven for the same goal’, ‘created these two for the great undertaking’, and finishes by noting that Ingrid Christensen’s role is no less than her husband’s, which tallies with Lars Christensen’s sentiments, as stated in his record of their landing. Bogen’s inclusion of quotes in Lars Christensen’s biography celebrates Ingrid Christensen’s personal qualities, especially her ‘intrepid, fearless and

\textsuperscript{37} This English translation from the original Norwegian was provided by Thor Egede-Nissen.

\textsuperscript{38} This English translation from the original Norwegian was provided by Tonje Akerholt.
undaunted’ personality. Rather than a ‘rare bird’, Christensen is presented as a ‘worthy representative of Norwegian women’, who gives no thought to her ‘great risk’ in flying over uncharted lands in Antarctica.

Lilllemor Rachlew travelled with the Christensens in 1933 and 1936/37. Although she had married Cato Rachlew, the Norwegian Naval Attaché in London in 1928, she went without him on the Christensen’s voyages. Rachlew kept a diary of her Antarctic travels, at least on her first trip in 1933. Unfortunately, I have been unable to find any trace of Rachlew’s original diaries. The Norwegian institutions that might have held such material (the National Archives of Norway, the National Library of Norway, the Sandefjord Whaling Museum and the Norwegian Polar Institute) have no records of them. It does not appear that Rachlew had children and I have not been able to trace any next of kin who might know if the diaries survived.

**Christensen’s Known and Unknown Life**

Through various sources I have been able to reconstruct many of the facts of Ingrid Christensen’s Antarctic travel and suggest a correction to the historical record in relation to the first woman to land on Antarctica (extending the significant work of Norman et al. (1998; 2002) confirming that Caroline Mikkelsen did not land on the mainland). However, I come to this project not as a historian, but as a novelist. In shining a light on the stories of the earliest women to reach Antarctica I have a different motivation. I am looking for incidents, events, and revelations of character that will help in an imaginative engagement with the historical record. Preparing to structure a fictional narrative around Christensen’s Antarctic travels involved detailed historical research, but material that arose during the course of the research – including that offered during informal meetings and through personal communications – shows gaps not only in the historical record in relation to Christensen, but between her public and private personas. While public tributes to Christensen, such as those of Bogen and Brøgger above, describe her as a woman of legendary generosity who spread ‘Sunday’s sunshine over every weekday’, her grandson Thor Egede-Nissen tells of another side to her character: ‘one of the stories about her involves a shouting match in Saks Fifth Avenue between the red-headed comedienne movie and TV star Lucille Ball and her over a dress which both of them wanted’ (Egede-Nissen, 2012, personal communication). Extracts from her second
daughter Bolle’s diary suggest that Christensen’s powerful personality was extremely challenging for some of those close to her (Egede-Nissen, 2012, personal communication). Jerome de Groot proposes that ‘historical novelists take the bare bones of history, some facts, some atmosphere, some vocabulary, some evidence, and weave a story within the gaps’ (2010, p. 10). These significant gaps, such as the one that opens up between the public and private worlds of Christensen, are essential in making a space for a creative intervention. My intention, through the medium of fiction, is to bring the polar stories of Christensen and her companions out of the darkness, illuminating these characters so their presence is more than a reflection of light on the horizon. But what questions must be considered in taking the stories of these real women and recasting them into fiction? In his discussion of history and the creative imagination, Griffiths proposes that ‘history and fiction are a tag team, sometimes taking turn, sometimes working in tandem, to deepen our understanding and imagination’ (2009, p. 74.5). My research has come to the changeover point in the tag team, where history passes the baton to fiction, so that meaning may expand and flourish in a different genre. Before stepping into the fictional creation, I turn to consider some of the issues raised by using historical fiction to recount real events and characters.
Chapter Three: Southern Lights

*Southern lights*: a visible play of light in the dark sky, the result of charged solar particles channelled by the earth’s magnetic field into the polar regions, where they cause gases to fluoresce in the upper atmosphere (Hince, 2000, p. 36).

Sometime shortly before 1932, a Norwegian woman whose name may have been Olga, a ‘pretty blonde with roguish china-blue eyes’ (Ferguson, 1932, p. 128), was so determined to become the first woman to look upon Antarctica that she hid herself in the forehold of the Norwegian whaling vessel *Christianna* when it left Sandefjord in Norway, making for the Antarctic. Olga remained hidden for almost 80 hours without food or light, sleeping on coiled ropes with a piece of sack to keep her warm. By the time she was discovered, the ship was well into the Atlantic and there was no question of taking her back. The captain was keen to keep her busy, and she was put to work in the galley, where she showed something of her determined spirit:

She would not be bullied by the morose chief cook. She would be almost shrewish at times. So arsenical were her sallies, that often they must have wished that Norwegian had not been her native tongue. Yet she was a great favourite with the younger men, especially the unmarried ones. (1932, p. 130)

Olga’s presence quickly caused the kind of trouble on board that men feared would result from a woman in a masculine enclave. ‘The fair stowaway invested the voyage with a zest and piquancy which demolished numerous cases of home-sickness. But not for long was harmony to prevail’ (1932, p. 130). Jealous quarrels broke out; knives were flashed. When the ship’s captain heard ‘the friction that was being created among a section of his crew by the stowaway’s physical charms’ (1932, p. 131), he decided to offload Olga on South Georgia, into the care of the resident doctor’s wife – the only woman on the island. A lookout was set on the mother ship *Christianna* to make sure Olga could not return, and ‘not a few hearts were
despondent because the stowaway was left behind’ (1932, p. 131). But so close to her goal, the enterprising Olga was not going to give up her dream of seeing Antarctica so easily. She gave the doctor’s wife the slip, disguised herself as a man, sneaked on board one of the whale chasers that was accompanying Christianna, and hid in a lifeboat. Although racked by seasickness from the rolling of the small catcher in the rough seas, Olga once again did not reveal herself until it was too late to turn back. To punish her, Christianna’s captain refused to take her back on the mother ship and ordered her to stay on the chaser for the rest of the trip, knowing she would suffer from the lack of bathroom and washing facilities (there were none for any of the crew), poor food, and the ever-present reality of seasickness on the small vessel. ‘Not without suffering and sacrifice did the stowaway earn the dubious honour of being the first woman to visit Antarctica,’ the story finishes (1932, p. 134).

Is Olga’s story fact, or fiction? The anecdote appears in the 1932 book Harpoon by Henry Ferguson, an account of his working voyage on the Norwegian whaling vessel Southern Princess to Antarctica. The Southern Princess is a real whaling ship, and it seems fair to presume that Harpoon is indeed a memoir. Ferguson’s account of Olga is hearsay, related to the author by one of the Norwegian able seamen, Nils Hendrickson, who claims to have seen the woman himself. Nils ‘could not recall her name, but he thought it was Olga or something’ (1932, p. 128). Should the story be true, Olga would have seen Antarctica before Ingrid Christensen and Mathilde Wegger, as her trip took place ‘a few years earlier’ (1932, p. 128) – making it sometime in the late 1920s. I investigated the story further while visiting Norway. However, there is no mention in official shipping records held by the Sandefjord Library of a Norwegian whaling ship by the name Christianna, and discussion with the shipping historian of the Sandefjord Whaling Museum suggested that no such whaling ship existed in Norway (Børresen, 2011, personal communication). Olga’s surname is unknown, and her first name may not be correct. My search for evidence to prove Olga’s story hit a blank.

Truth or fiction, in that 1932 book the possibility of a woman showing courage and initiative to reach Antarctica found expression. The notion of a woman determined to reach the southern continent, and acting with agency to succeed against all the barriers (even if related from a male perspective), was recounted in print, albeit as a small anecdote in a book about a whaling voyage. The aspirations of Marjory Collier, who wrote to Mawson (as cited in Leane, 2012, p. 99), and Peggy
Pegrine, Valerie Davey and Betty Webster, who wrote to Shackleton (Pegrine, 1914), all offering to dress as men to join those expeditions, may not have been as ridiculous as they appeared at the time, for if Olga’s story is true, a woman of initiative who dressed as a man found a way to travel south where others of her sex had failed. Yet Olga’s story seems likely to be apocryphal, its origins even more obscure than most of the women reported in Chipman’s history (1986). I couldn’t help wondering if Olga’s story might have made a difference to women and their problematic relationship with Antarctica over the past 70 years, had it been published in her own words, or as a story in its own right.

In chapter one I explored reasons why the Norwegian women who reached the Antarctic mainland prior to 1937 (along with many other early female visitors to Antarctica) remain largely invisible in the landscape, victims of a particular kind of ‘snow blindness’. Recovering aspects of their history – the task of chapter two – I concluded that much about their personal stories remains unknown – they are an ‘ice blink’, reflected, but not yet in sight. As a segue to the creative component of the thesis, in this chapter I argue that historical fiction provides a different possibility for engagement with the grand heroic narratives of Antarctica, a method for illuminating the known experiences of Ingrid Christensen and her companions further, providing a ‘visible play of light in the dark sky’.

**The Importance of ‘Story’ in Antarctica**

Stories – both fictional and non-fictional – play a vital role in Antarctica as a way of passing on information that may be needed for survival, and creating a sense of shared culture and history. Alongside the current growth of human interest in Antarctica related to geopolitics and climate change, Antarctic literature (produced by writers from different nations) has undergone a ‘massive expansion’ in the past two decades (Leane, 2012, p. 5), with a corresponding scholarly interest in the continent’s cultural production. The literature of, or about, Antarctica has a unique relationship to its setting, which is a continent with a constantly changing and multinational population. Leane notes:

No one has been raised entirely in the far south, let alone inherited the deep sense of place that generations of inhabitation bestow […] For this reason alone, the literature of Antarctica will always be distinct from that of the inhabited places of the world. (2012, p. 2)
Antarctic literature is at once primarily concerned with place (focused on the experience of being in a powerful landscape that demands attention), and at a remove from place (lacking the deep sense of inhabited place to which Leane refers). The continent’s inaccessibility means most humans will only ever experience it through some form of story. However, the importance of ‘story’ in Antarctica runs deeper than providing travelogues for distant readers. Stories – including historical ones – are important for those who travel and/or work there (for periods of time ranging from a few days to a few years) to make sense of their experiences and find ways to locate themselves in the continent. Griffiths recognises this need in *Slicing the Silence* (2007), a narrative that weaves together Antarctic history, historiography, reflections and diary entries, moving between Antarctica’s past and the author’s present experience as a humanities fellow on a 2002–03 round trip voyage. In reflecting on the particular need for history in Antarctica, Griffiths notes:

> History down south, as in any society, is a practical and spiritual necessity, but especially so in a place where human generations are renewed every summer and the coordinates of space and time are warped by extremes. And on a continent claimed by various nations but shared by the world, history carries a special international obligation. It is the fundamental fabric of a common humanity […] To survive, you need food, you need warmth, you need stories. (2007, pp. 3–4)

Stories of Antarctic history are a form of knowledge. The narratives that have come to form Antarctica’s foundation myths – such as Scott’s journal, reprised by writers of fiction and non-fiction for more than a century – still function as cautionary tales that teach about survival in Antarctica, warning of the risks inherent in long journeys, bad weather and dangers such as crevasses (for people still regularly die in accidents in Antarctica). They are a form of shared culture, building an understanding of what it means to be present in Antarctica, in a dangerous landscape, without a permanent home, in the knowledge that everyone sooner or later leaves the continent. Leslie Carol Roberts, whose book *The Entire Earth and Sky: View of Antarctica* is, like Griffiths’, a blend of memoir, history, historiography and reflection,\(^39\) claims that ‘place’ is the constant that links Antarctica’s stories, as the continent is

> A place that serves as lure and obsession for a small percentage of those who go there […] In the end, these are stories of people who seek, in a variety of manners, the unknown […] Antarctica offers us a lens on deep

\(^{39}\) Roberts travelled to Antarctica in 1987 as a journalist aboard a Greenpeace vessel, and returned to New Zealand 15 years later as a Fulbright Fellow to research little-known Antarctic histories.
Negotiating these stories is part of approaching the place, for ‘just as one cannot voyage to Antarctica without negotiating the band of sea ice, so it is impossible to imagine the continent without first navigating a way through the legends of exploration’ (Griffiths, 2007, p. 9). Antarctica’s historical narratives are never entirely left behind, and they wield an ongoing influence on present human occupation and modern Antarctic literature.

For contemporary women to imagine female experience in Antarctica, and for those who work and visit there to ‘survive’ and thrive (physically and psychologically), stories have a particular, and gendered, role to play. Women, having been physically and culturally excluded from Antarctica for the majority of its human history, have been in the darkness of Griffiths’ ‘long polar night’, and have need of the ‘vivid tales of winters past’ (2009 p. 74.11) to help makes sense of their experiences. As I suggested in chapter two, the memoirs of early female travellers to Antarctica, though providing some insights into their journeys, largely fail to speak to contemporary audiences. Their value is as historical artefacts, illustrating gender relations of their particular time and place. They leave an absence; a lack of nuanced, detailed narrative of female experience of the majority of the twentieth century in Antarctica. In this empty space, there is room for activating a historical imagination to create a narrative that speaks to contemporary female audiences, filling in some of the gaps existing in Antarctica’s historical records, and imaginatively exploring experiences for which little or no evidence survives. In other words, there is room for stories that illustrate different kinds of truths, to help women emerge into the light at the end of the long polar night.

The Interplay Between Historical Fiction and History

In the past two decades there has been an enormous growth in historical fiction by female authors, across a huge variety of eras and settings, that functions to recover, re-imagine and represent missing female experiences. Covering a gamut of styles, geographies and eras, writers such as (to name but a few) Margaret Atwood, Geraldine Brooks, A.S. Byatt, Tracy Chevalier, Anna Funder, Kate Grenville, Hilary Mantel, Sarah Waters and Jeanette Winterson ‘have made history and their
characters’ personal and political engagements with, entanglements in, and possessive desires of the past central features of their fiction’ (Heilmann & Llewellyn, 2004, p. 137). This growth in the genre has its origins in the desire to give voice and agency to those who have been left out of or marginalised in ‘official’ histories. Many authors are explicit in their motivation to recover lost voices. Byatt claims that ‘one of the most fundamental impulses towards the writing of historical novels remains the political desire to write the histories of the marginalised, the forgotten, the unrecorded’ (as cited in Heilmann & Llewellyn, 2004, p. 143), while Atwood asserts: ‘It’s the very things that aren’t mentioned that inspire the most curiosity in us. Why aren’t they mentioned?’ (1998, p. 1509). It is these gaps in history, the ‘things that aren’t mentioned’, which inspire the creative intervention of historical fiction by providing the empty space – the silence – where such fiction can imagine different possibilities. This gap, while being a place full of creative potential, is at the same time dangerous territory where truth and fiction mingle, opening up the potential for conflict and transgression. The concerns of these writers, and their efforts to recover missing voices and lost stories within this space, constitute the heart of the relationship between historical fiction and the ‘truth’ of such voices (including their status as history).

The broad question of historical fiction’s status as ‘truth’ and its relationship to history has been the subject of ongoing debate. The two disciplines are partners in a complex and intriguing dance, according to Griffiths, with much to offer each other:

They are contrasting genres that offer different truths; sometimes one or the other is more clearly demanded by the social moment; they are in symbiotic relationship, always responding to, and watchful of, each other. (2009, p.74.4)

The notion of ‘different truths’ can, however, be problematic when the two disciplines come into conflict. In Australia, a now well-known debate played out around the supposed claims by historical novelist Kate Grenville (in relation to her novel The Secret River [2005]) that she was writing a new kind of history. Grenville was publicly criticised by two historians: Mark McKenna, who takes exception to her apparent claim that historical fiction is superior to history (2005, p. 4), and Inga Clendinnen, who criticises Grenville for her suggestion that an author’s imagination and empathy are valid methods for understanding the past (2006, p. 10). Grenville refutes the accusation that she claimed to be writing history (2007a, p. 66), but
interest in the public discussion remains high today. Similar issues have been aired in other places around the world and the Australian debate still informs discussions about the role of historical fiction and its relationship to history in Australia. However, as Hayden White points out, ‘unless a historical story is presented as a literal representation of true events, we cannot criticise it as being either true or untrue to the facts of the matter’ (1999, p. 30). Some of the central questions discussed during this debate – including the validity of historical fiction as a source of truth about history, and the use of contemporary imagination and empathy as a method for understanding the past – can be further explored by examining some of the alternative roles that historical fiction can play in relation to history, not as a source of truth but as a form of historiography.

Skilled writers of historical fiction use the techniques of its construction not only to tell a story, but to question the nature of history, storytelling, truth and time, giving the genre an historiographic element. According to Heilmann and Llewellyn, the historical novel incorporates the ‘self-conscious project of problematizing the very nature of the authored and authorized character of historical narrative’ (2004, p. 138), with many contemporary female writers choosing to explore ‘the relationship of the present to the past and the inescapability of the historical in the contemporary’ (2004, p. 138). Novelists engaged in this self-conscious project can draw on their repertoire of narrative techniques to reflect on, foreground and undermine notions of truth, memory, history and fiction, examining ‘through the emplotment of her imaginary characters’ actions, the line that divides the real of that time and place from what historians would recognise as the truths we know about it’ (White, 2005, p. 4). Historical fiction’s leading authors explore and challenge the idea of a singular historical truth through the manipulation of elements including point of view, structure, the construction of time and narration styles (such as use of the ‘unreliable narrator’). Their narrative techniques draw attention to the nature of the work being read, inviting the reader to become aware of, and reflect upon, how a historical narrative is created and presented, and its relativising and sometimes problematic

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40 In 2012 Grenville replaced the essays she wrote responding to criticisms by McKenna and Clendinnen on her website (having removed them in 2011) because of the stream of requests she was still receiving for them (Grenville, 2012, personal communication).

41 In the United Kingdom, the media recently reported historian David Starkey’s comment that it was ‘ludicrous’ to suggest that historical novelists had authority, immediately before he appeared with novelists Hilary Mantel and Philippa Gregory on the BBC television program ‘The Last Days of Anne Boleyn’ (Davies, 2013).
relationship to ‘truth’. Such techniques, with their historiographic function, hold promise for an imaginative intervention in Antarctica’s heroic master narrative, given its grounding in Antarctic history.

**Placing Women in the Heroic Era**

The literature of the southern continent has its own tradition (over many decades) of reworking and reimagining the stories of the Heroic Era (Leane, 2012, p. 85). This attraction for poets and novelists, usually means fresh articulations and re-visionings of the heroic age of exploration, especially of the Scott and Shackleton expeditions, often resulting in stories where terms like heroism and sacrifice, though muted, still ring with some conviction. (Manhire, 2004, p. 15)

Although many novels by contemporary female writers reflect on and engage with the known facts of Antarctic history as a way of expressing contemporary female experience, the physical absence of women from the continent’s early history is taken as a given and it is relatively rare that historical fiction has been applied to express the female voices of Antarctica’s pre-1947 history. In her analysis of fiction focusing on the ‘periphery’ of the Heroic Era, Leane posits a genre of literature relating to marginalised voices, providing refreshing responses by stepping back from the famous personalities and working instead from the margins:

> A whole genre of Antarctic literature is premised on imagining exploration of the continent otherwise than through the eyes of the famous men who undertook it: by speculating about what expeditions would have looked like from marginalized perspectives or, more radically, positing an alternative history in which those traditionally excluded from exploration take centre stage. (Leane, 2012, p. 97)

Leane comments that ‘left behind’ literature generally allows women only the stereotypical, limited role of ‘domestic martyr who puts her partner’s polar quest before her own needs’, often casting Antarctica as a feminised rival (Leane, 2012, p. 97). While she identifies the phenomenon of ‘women-who-wanted-to-go’ (including the women who wrote to Shackleton and Mawson), there are relatively few examples of Heroic Era fiction in which such women move beyond the ‘left behind’ role. Some examples of fictional works in which they do so are Le Guin’s ‘Sur’ (1982), Mojisola

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42 Novels that engage with Scott’s narrative to bring in contemporary female voices include, for example, Robin Mundy’s *The Nature of Ice* (2009) in which a female photographer’s experience in contemporary Antarctica is interwoven with Mawson’s sledging journey, and Elizabeth Arthur’s *Antarctic Navigation* (1995) in which a female adventurer re-enacts Scott’s sledging journey.
Adebayo’s *Moj of the Antarctic* (2006), and within Spufford’s recounting of Scott’s journey in the final chapter of *I May Be Some Time* (1996).

Le Guin’s short story about a group of South American women who reach the South Pole by sledge before both Amundsen and Scott, but decide not to report their achievement, inserts active female voices (and female presence) into the Heroic Era. It ‘imagines an alternate history of Antarctic exploration that is not premised on conquest, nationalism, fame, or a race to the finish line’ (Leane, 2009, p. 512). While placing women retrospectively into the historical narratives, ‘Sur’ at the same time questions the values upon which the Heroic Era is based. Le Guin, who says she is a great admirer of Scott, claims she has no desire to devalue individual explorers. ‘All I want to do is lose the hero myths so I can find what is worth admiration’ (1989, p. 174). Instead, her narrative is about her desire to join the adventure of Antarctic exploration: ‘I had been along with them so many times in their books; why couldn’t a few of us, my kind of people, housewives, come along with them in my book… or even come before them?’ (1989, p. 172). However ‘Sur’ undermines the Heroic Era’s history and values at every turn, from the narrator’s disdain of the state of Scott’s hut when the party finds it – ‘it was dirty, and had about it a mean disorder […] a lot of dog turds were underfoot – frozen, of course, but not a great deal improved by that […] housekeeping, the art of the infinite, is no game for amateurs’ (Le Guin, 1982, p. 41) – through to the ‘addendum’ to the story’s end advising the reader not to let Amundsen know of the journey because it would cause him embarrassment:

> We are old women now, with old husbands, and grown children and grandchildren who might some day like to read about the Expedition. Even if they are rather ashamed of having such a crazy grandmother, they may enjoy sharing in the secret. But they must not let Mr. Amundsen know! He would be terribly embarrassed and disappointed. There is no need for him or anyone outside the family to know. We left no footprints, even. (1982, p. 46)

The lack of ‘footprints’ – the primary symbol of the Heroic Age as the ‘mark of embodied movement and progress upon the terrain’ (Glasberg, 2002, p. 101) is also symbolic of the lack of narratives about women in the Antarctic landscape from the early period of its history. Le Guin’s techniques of fiction mean the story also functions as historiography, for example in the way it plays off the title of Shackleton’s 1919 account of his expeditions *South*, indicating both her indebtedness to normative history and her intention to rewrite that history or, better, to reroute its focus on first-world centres of
culture and on European agents to a consideration of history from the perspective of its southern hemispheric other. (Glasberg, 2002, p. 99)

‘Sur’ has become an Antarctic classic of a different sort, cited and examined in texts that explore how Antarctica is represented (such as Leane, 2012; Moss, 2006), and Antarctic gender relations (such as Glasberg, 2002, 2012; Leane, 2009; Legler, 2011; Rosner, 2009). Its symbolism has been a rich subject for analysis – for example, Glasberg uses it to reflect on the effectiveness of feminist historical revisionism, and as a metaphor for problems of feminism telling its own origin story (2002, p. 103). ‘Sur’ also holds echoes of Olga’s story – the woman who made her own way south and left no mark or record of her arrival. But ‘Sur’ only makes a symbolic attempt to insert women into the historical narratives of early Antarctica, as Le Guin does not use real female characters and in spite of its hoax format as an expedition journal, the story is clearly fictional.43

English playwright Mojisola Adebayo’s Moj of the Antarctic (2006) aims radically to challenge Heroic Era norms and conventions of race, gender, sexuality and imperialism through both its form and content. A one-woman physical storytelling piece, it incorporates poetry, dance, movement, projected images and audience interaction to recount a story inspired by real events:

The odyssey of Moj, a woman who escapes slavery in the deep south of America by cross dressing as a white man,44 travels to England, becomes a sailor on board a whaling ship bound for the southern ocean, and becomes the first African woman to step foot on Antarctica. The play is inspired by Ellen Craft, a mid-nineteenth century African-American woman who in 1848 actually escaped slavery by cross dressing as a white man. (Adebayo, 2009, p. 92)

A second character, William Black, who makes a brief appearance in the play to encourage Moj to board a whaling ship heading south, is also inspired by a mysterious real life cross-dressed woman.45 Although these two characters have historical equivalents, and Adebayo’s inspiration derives from the real life of Ellen Craft, the play is not an attempt to realistically depict the real women’s experiences.

43 Chipman, determinedly thorough in her quest to create an accurate list of every woman who reached Antarctica prior to 1984, wrote to Le Guin to check if her characters might have been real (Chipman, 1998). Le Guin’s rather tongue-in-cheek letter in response to the request for contact details for her character, said: ‘I am, to be sure, the only person who has ever been in touch with her at all; unfortunately, she seems to have gone back to Lima, if indeed that is where she came from in the first place. She gave me her story, but she did not even tell me her name’ (Chipman, 1998).

44 The character of Moj is the daughter of a black slave and a white slave master, and is able to pass as a white man.

45 William Brown was an African-Scottish sailor who served in the British Royal Navy until she was discovered to be female in 1815 (“William Brown, ‘a female African’,” n.d.)
Instead she draws connections between the discourse of polar exploration (layered with the language of white supremacy), and the corresponding colonisation of Africa, along with ‘the racist ideologies that justified the actions of European nations’ (Adebayo, 2009, p. 96). The play explores relationships between self and terrain and challenges the hierarchical world view that Legler describes as attempting to ‘dichotomize ways of being and knowing into competing dualisms: nature/culture, male/female, reason/emotion, objectivity/subjectivity […] the system of values and ideas that influenced the experiences and narratives that lie at the beginning of Antarctic literature’ (2011, p. 209). In the play, the supercontinent Gondwana symbolises a unified worldview that existed before such binary oppositions:

Once,
We were
Gondwana,
Africa and Antarctica
Antarctica and Africa
One content
Continent. (2006, p. 151)

Continents and bodies come from a common beginning, one in which oppositions such as black/white do not exist. The belief that one half of such binary oppositions is in fact part of the other half is played out around notions of ‘whiteness’:

And under all this white
Antarctica is a broken rock as Black as my great-
Grandfather […]

White is a cover up
Is a beautiful lie. (Adebayo, 2006, p. 185)

The construction of whiteness is foregrounded throughout the play, highlighting ways that Antarctica itself has been constructed. The protagonist, Moj, is herself a mixed-race character, able to pass as male or female, white or black, and the theme of ‘crossing’ is central to the play’s concerns as a ‘boundary-breaking trans-gender, trans-racial, trans-geographical performance’ (Adebayo, 2009, p. 92). She uses fiction to teach herself how to ‘play a white man’ (2006, p. 167) and quotes from Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick* (2003) to reflect on the role of ‘whiteness’ in racial oppression and on whiteness as a source of horror (Adebayo, 2006, p. 168). Adebayo references authors such as Coleridge, Shackleton and Melville to link the play to the wider body of Antarctic literature, and uses Oates’s line ‘I am just going outside and may be some time’ as the character of Moj exits the stage (2006, p. 188). Leane
concludes that Adebayo ‘successfully politicizes Antarctica in the play, while simultaneously acknowledging its undiminished role as a site of personal odyssey’ (2012, p. 107). The result of using ‘historical fiction’ (in an experimental and performative form) to introduce a queer, black, female voice to Antarctica is a piece of theatre rich in allusion and metaphor, encompassing the ‘global’ (in references to the continents), the astronomical (with references to Earth’s orbit around the sun and its ‘wobbling’ queerness) and the personal.

In a very different style, Spufford creates a piece of historical fiction called ‘I Have Always Taken My Place, Haven’t I?’ in the final chapter of *Ice and the English Imagination* (1996) that puts a different ‘left behind’ female perspective into a Heroic Era narrative. His partly fictional recreation of Scott’s expedition and death makes Kathleen Scott a central – and active – character in the recounting, one who (as Spufford says of another work), ‘inhabits the experience of waiting without the suggestion that the ice elsewhere has primacy’ (1996, p. 149). While Kathleen Scott is physically ‘left behind’ when Scott goes to Antarctica, Spufford’s reimagining casts her as a character of equal strength and will to her husband. Spufford opens the narrative with Kathleen Scott and two other wives disembarking from the ship as they farewell the expedition in New Zealand waters. Over the next 11 pages (approximately a fifth of the story) he builds a character portrait of Kathleen Scott, drawing on quotations from her diaries (K. Scott, 1949), woven into the fictional narrative. Kathleen Scott, it transpires, is a bohemian artist, who prior to her marriage lived alone in Paris, studied sculpture under Rodin and maintained numerous romantic (though chaste) friendships with men. She cherishes her self-sufficiency and independence to the point where she ‘often wished she could have a son without a husband’ (Spufford, 1996, p. 293). Her husband deeply admires her, taking ‘her work seriously, as an exciting manifestation of the new world of London art and literature he had been admitted into’ and showing his respect for her independence by offering her an ‘escape-hatch [from their marriage] anytime she cared to back out’ (1996, p. 294). Her independence is of central importance to Kathleen Scott, and it forms the basis of their marriage:

She is protecting the tricky equality their marriage maintains between two different centres of hope and ambition. Neither of them can be allowed to collapse onto the other, or it would be the end of mutual independence. (1996, p. 297)
Spufford’s nuanced portrayal of the marriage between Robert and Kathleen Scott, and his construction of their relationship as central to the story of Scott’s death on the way back from the pole, functions on several levels. It illustrates how the Scott myth can be reworked innumerable times, drawing out different meanings. In this reworking, the lone heroic explorer is painted as an intrinsic and equal part of a living, complex relationship. It fuses fact with fiction, blending Spufford’s creative imagining of the narrative with actual diary entries selectively scattered through the text in short, unreferenced phrases. The punctuated diary entries are obviously quotes, but where does the remainder of the material – including opinions about Katherine Scott’s character, for example, or speculation on what Scott’s death was like – come from? Spufford notes that in his depiction of Scott’s death scene ‘I had to describe events for which there can be by definition no written evidence. That section is pure invention’ (1996, p. 8). The narrative suggests, but does not make entirely clear, where ‘fact’ ends and fiction begins. The movement between past and present tense indicates that other aspects of the story must also be invented (while being obviously grounded in research). Spufford also foregrounds the construction of time by his use of present tense – the narrative is clearly not in ‘the present’ in spite of being presented as such. Overall, the piece gives Kathleen Scott a far more active role than the left-behind wife who puts her husband’s needs first – rather, she is one dynamic member of a team, in which two independent people pursue their own goals and support each other in their endeavours. Kathleen is not presented as perfect or unrealistically modern – she is in fact an opponent of female suffrage and claims to dislike women. Spufford has drawn her as a complex character, underpinned by his detailed research into the imaginative relationship between the English psyche and the ice that makes up the rest of the book.

The three pieces of historical fiction all function to restore marginalised voices to Antarctic history through different imaginative interventions. Le Guin’s story, written in the apparently realist style of an expedition journal, uses fictional characters to place women in the Antarctic landscape, present yet leaving no lasting trace, while gently making fun of heroic endeavour. Adebayo, who places a black, queer woman in the same landscape, draws on real historical characters for inspiration, but uses a non-realist form to move the narrative beyond these characters and raise questions about Antarctica in relation to gender, sexuality and race. Spufford takes a real and well-known person from the Heroic Era and mixes her
actual published words with his text to produce a narrative that reminds the reader constantly of its quasi-fictional status. Each of the writers has made ethical decisions about their creative choices – explicit in the case of Adebayo, implied in the cases of Le Guin and Spufford. Using the stories of real women from history to make an imaginative intervention in Antarctic literature raises questions of ethics, and it is to these I turn before concluding this chapter.

The Ethics of Historical Fiction

Adebayo reflects on how her ethical choices relate to drawing on the lives of real characters in writing *Moj of the Antarctic*, noting that for her the debate is an ongoing activity:

> In using this style of devising/writing and citing deceased authors in creating the play, I was struck by certain ethical questions. Was it right to use other people’s words, lives, deaths in my text? How can I ask permission if the person is already dead? (2009, p. 99)

The question has relevance for all writers of historical fiction who draw on real characters. I return to Griffiths’ question, originally posed in his discussion of the uses of the historical imagination by both historical novelists and historians: ‘When a novelist takes a real historical person or event and re-imagines them freely, what responsibilities do they observe?’ (2009, p. 74.9). He poses the same question to historians:

> To whom are we responsible? To the people in our stories, to our sources, to our informants, to our readers and audiences, to the integrity of the past itself? How do we pay our respects, allow for dissent, accommodate complexity, distinguish between our own voice and those of our characters? The professional paraphernalia of history has grown out of these ethical questions. (2009, p. 74.9)

By implication, the ‘professional paraphernalia’ of history – including constructions such as a professional code of ethics – forms a regulating mechanism for historians, for which there is no equivalent for historical novelists, of whom Clendinnen says ‘their only binding contract is with their readers’ (as cited in Griffiths, 2009, p. 74.9). However, the lack of a formal mechanism for guiding ethical choices does not mean novelists are not concerned with ethical questions, nor that they do not carry responsibilities. Griffiths’ question is instructive, carrying intimations of the answers to these ethical questions for novelists. Like historians, historical novelists dealing
with real events and people need to acknowledge responsibility to their characters, sources and audiences, pay respects, allow for dissent, accommodate complexity, give consideration to the ‘integrity of the past’, and (in a different manner to historians) distinguish between their own voices and those of their characters. The methods available to novelists to do so are necessarily different to those used by historians, but a set of practices and conventions continues to develop and be discussed – privately and publicly – by historical novelists in their practice. For example, ethical issues were the subject of ‘Ethical Imaginations’, an Australian academic conference on creative writing run by the Australasian Association of Writing Programs in 2011 (Conway-Herron, Costello, & Hawryluk, 2011), in which participants presented papers on their engagement with ethics in relation to a variety of questions including subject matter (including queer writing, race, using marginal characters) and genre (creative nonfiction, memoir, crime, historical fiction and others).

Many historical novelists have devised and expressed their own personal codes of ethics in dealing with real characters and situations. Two-time Booker Prize winner Hilary Mantel puts her own ethical approach succinctly: ‘the only requirement is for conjecture to be plausible and grounded in the best facts one can get’ (2009, p. 15). Her succinctness, and use of the phrase ‘only’ is somewhat deceptive, as the research required to gather the ‘best facts available’ is, of course, substantial. The degree of work required to build a basis for plausible conjecture comes to light when examining Margaret Atwood’s process in writing Alias Grace (a novel about the real person, Grace Marks, who was imprisoned for life when convicted of murdering her employer and his housekeeper in 1843). Her ethical guidelines appear to be relatively straightforward:

I devised the following set of guidelines for myself: when there was a solid fact, I could not alter it; long as I might to have Grace witness James McDermott’s execution, it could not be done, because, worse luck, she was already in the penitentiary that day. Also, every major element in the book had to be suggested by something in the writing about Grace and her times, however dubious such writing might be; but in the parts left unexplained – the gaps left unfilled – I was free to invent. Since there were a lot of gaps, there is a lot of invention. Alias Grace is very much a novel rather than a documentary. (Atwood, 1998, p. 1515)

However, Atwood’s invention is underlaid with substantial research, an approach that, together with her explicit boundary around fact and fiction, Clendinnen praises:
Atwood decided to make a novel out of those beginning clues. She researched everything she could research about her character’s social context – the immigrant ship, terms of employment for Irish immigrant domestic servants, the degree of sexual vulnerability of a young woman in domestic service in that particular place at that particular time; on what principles and assumptions courts of law and asylums were run according to what models of mental derangement. And then she says: ‘We don’t know anything about what happened to Grace after she was sentenced, so from now on I’m going to make it up’. Which she most memorably does. (Clendinnen, 2006, p. 32)

What separates Atwood from Grenville, according to Clendinnen, is not what she is attempting in her novel, but what she claims about it – that it is ‘made up’, with a clear boundary around where the fiction begins. Grenville, in fact, sets out her own fact/fiction boundaries in the acknowledgements for The Secret River: ‘one of my ancestors gave me the basis for certain details in the early life of William Thornhill, and other characters share some qualities with historical figures. All the people within these pages, however, are works of fiction’ (2005, p. 336), and she explains her stance in more detail in her response to Clendinnen’s critique: ‘whenever possible I based events in the book on recorded historical events, adapting and changing them as necessary’ (2007a, p. 67). Grenville reflects that by refusing to take refuge in the novelists’ standby of having made it up, she was interested in trying to do something a little more nuanced than that: to acknowledge the complex relationship, backwards and forwards across an invisible line, between the world of fiction and the world inhabited by living people. In talking about the book in public, I was trying to describe my own journey around that line. (2007a, p. 68)

So interested was Grenville in this journey that she wrote Searching for The Secret River (2006), a book reflecting on aspects of the process by which she shifted from writing a non-fiction account of one of her ancestors to creating a work of fiction, and how she incorporated historical material into the novel. For Grenville, exploring the ‘invisible line’ and expressing her historiographic reflections was significant and, together with her later writings on the topic on her website, forms part of her expression of an ethical stance. Like Atwood and Mantel, Grenville demonstrates a respect for demonstrable facts, a willingness to spend the research time to ensure the

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46 Delia Falconer points out that in Searching for The Secret River (Grenville, 2007b), Grenville rather disingenuously avoids any mention that the novel was written as part of a doctoral thesis, and comments that it would have been fascinating had Grenville ‘dramatised the difficulties and pleasures for such an accomplished writer of working within the halls of academe’ (2006). Griffiths notes the same thing, commenting that Grenville in fact worked with a historian as a supervisor (2009, p. 74.7).
facts are as good as possible, and grounds for plausible conjecture — guidelines for other novelists devising a personal code of ethics for their writing.

The use of paratextual additions, such as forewords, afterwords and footnotes, is a key technique used by historical fiction authors to make their personal code of ethics (and sources of information) explicit. The ‘author’s note’ has become so common as to be a convention within historical novels that incorporate real characters and/or events, with de Groot commenting:

It might be a rule of thumb to define the historical novel as something which has an explanatory note from the writer describing their own engagement with the period in question, either through schooling or, more commonly, through their reading and research. (2010, p. 6)

It usually takes the form of a brief essay, varying in length from a page or two, through to a detailed exegesis that might include an overview of the ethical stance taken by the author, factual information about the subject, reflections on the author’s departures from known facts (if any), and an acknowledgement and listing of sources, including official histories. It is the space where authors can, in Griffiths’ terms, acknowledge responsibility to characters, sources and audiences, pay respects, allow for dissent and accommodate complexity. Geraldine Brooks uses paratextual materials to set out the ethical territory of her work in Caleb’s Crossing, warning her readers in a brief foreword that she is using a real name, based on a real person, but making up much of the story as an act of ‘honouring’:

This is a work of imagination, inspired by the life of Caleb Cheeshahteaumauk [...] the first Native American to graduate from Harvard College [...] I have presumed to give Caleb’s name to my imagined character in the hope of honouring the struggle, sacrifice and achievement of this remarkable young scholar. (2011, p. iii)

Brooks concludes with an afterword that reiterates the novel’s fictional status, introduces the factual material that inspired the novel (acknowledging her sources), and relates some of the ethical issues that arose during its creation. Anna Funder, in All That I Am (2011), which moves between World War II and contemporary Australia and was inspired by the experiences of her friend Ruth, writes in her afterword that her story is ‘reconstructed from fossil fragments, much as you might draw skin and feathers over an assembly of dinosaur bones, to fully see the beast’ (2011, p. 365) before listing her sources, the details including archival file numbers and page references. Numerous other female historical novelists have done likewise
Hutcheon says of such paratextual insertions: ‘what they all do, however, is ask us one important question: how do we come to know the past? And what do we know of the past?’ (1986, p. 312). Their presence signals to the reader that the fictional story is in a form of conversation with another story, or a series of facts.

The afterword also functions as a method of accountability and an expression of taking responsibility, a way of reporting on process and ethics to those with an interest in the novel beyond entertainment. In an afterword, a novelist may report on how she chose to deal with conflicting information, a lack of information, or different opinions about the subject. For example, Brooks makes clear in the afterword that members of the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head/Aquinnah were not united in support of her writing the book, with some expressing strong concerns that the fictional Caleb might be misinterpreted as the factual one. She puts forward the afterword itself as her attempt to ‘address those reservations somewhat by distinguishing scant fact from rampant invention’ (2011, p. 367), a method of allowing for dissent, while paying respect to the individuals who have expressed it.

At the end of Funder’s list of references, in the acknowledgements section, she says:

My story, of course, lifts off from the facts as known; I have made connections and suppositions, a plot and characters which cannot be justified solely by reference to the historical record, and for that I take full responsibility. (2011, p. 369)

Funder uses her afterword as a place to take responsibility for departing from the historical record, and she goes as far as advising that her interpretation cannot be justified only by the known facts of the story. However, paratextual material has a broader function than its setting out of an author’s ethical stance. Such additions to historical novels, in Hutcheon’s terms, are:

- a means of directing our attention to the very processes by which we understand and interpret the past through textuality – in both history and fiction [...] such paratexts have always been central to historiographic practice (1986, pp. 303-304).

Paratexts have an historiographic function in the way they draw the reader’s attention to the artificiality of the historical novel, an articulation that ‘introduces a fundamental metafictional element to the form and demonstrates that as a genre the historical novel provokes a certain anxiety and disquiet on the part of the writer’ (de Groot, 2010, p. 9). Mantel, in her author’s note at the end of Bring up the Bodies
(2012), highlights the metafictional element by expressing what she has set out to do with the novel: ‘I am not claiming authority for my version; I am making the reader a proposal’ (2012). The paratexts, then, set out the terms of the offer being made by the author to the reader, delineating boundaries between known historical fact and creative invention, and making a statement of the author’s ethical position. This expression gives such textual additions – particularly afterwords – a narrative force, an additional conclusion to the novel where the author reveals the answer to a kind of narrative meta-question that has kept the reader engaged until the end: ‘Is it true?’

There are numerous (and individual) answers to the question of what responsibility a historical novelist observes when using real events and characters in her fiction, and this chapter has briefly highlighted some of them. Novelists make creative choices about structure, character, emplotment and other narrative devices to draw historiographic attention to the ‘fiction’ of their historical fiction. They make individual ethical choices, through sometimes explicit personal codes of ethics, which may be expressed in terms such as those used by Mantel: a respect for demonstrable facts (a respect that can be expressed in various ways) and ensuring grounds for plausible conjecture. Authors can – and often do – choose to express these choices (often in the context of the mainstream history that has supported their story) by using paratextual elements such as forewords, afterwords and footnotes to make them explicit. They claim responsibility for imagining the characters and events within their novels, creating works of art based on the mingling of fact and fiction. Like historians, they face the public reception of their works through the ‘professional paraphernalia’ of the fiction publishing industry, including reviews, scholarly attention, and public events such as literary festivals, in which audiences are free to ask questions and where authors of historical fiction are regularly been interrogated about the relationship of their works to truth (for example Peter Carey, as discussed in Clendinnen, 2006, p. 32). The act of making values, decisions and ethics explicit is the crucial element.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this exegesis has been to examine issues around creating a piece of historical fiction inspired by the journeys of Ingrid Christensen and her female companions to Antarctica during the 1930s. It demonstrates the ‘darkness’
around women’s participation in early Antarctic history and casts light on their shadowed experiences through historical revision, through analysis of narratives, and in the next part of this thesis, through fiction.

*Chasing the Light* (Blackadder, 2013a) was initially inspired by a photograph of Ingrid Christensen and Mathilde Wegger – a frozen moment of light, chemical and paper – and the silences in the historical record in relation to their travels. The novel does not claim to represent the historical truth of Christensen’s four journeys to Antarctica, though it draws the reader’s attention to the known facts of those journeys (including through a foreword that states I have chosen to use real names for imagined characters, and an afterword that summarises the material presented in chapter two of this exegesis about Ingrid Christensen’s actual journeys). Rather, I aspire to Atwood’s rationale for historical fiction:

> The past no longer belongs only to those who once lived in it; the past belongs to those who claim it, and are willing to explore it, and to infuse it with meaning for those alive today. The past belongs to us, because we are the ones who need it. (Atwood, 1998, p. 1516)

The intention of this thesis is to infuse Ingrid Christensen’s story with meaning that will speak to today’s readers. I contextualise her journey with evidence that women desired to travel to Antarctica but were forbidden for decades. The novel is infused with the yearnings of hundreds of women who applied to Antarctic expeditions from 1904 onwards, but who were refused. It carries the legacies of Marie Stopes, Marjory Collier, Peggy Pegrine, Valerie Davey, Betty Webster and all the women who longed to cast off the shackles of constricted femininity, dress in the freedom of male garb, and join the adventure. It holds the possibility that Olga – and perhaps other women – reached Antarctica without anyone knowing, and without leaving a mark in history. It is informed by what I learnt of Ingrid Christensen in non-official sources, including talking to her descendants, and reading notes from the diary of one of her children. It takes as a departure point the surviving scraps of Lillemor Rachlew’s diaries. And it is illuminated by my own longings – inchoate and inexplicable – to voyage to little-known lands, to feel myself humbled in a vast and wild space, to locate myself in the mysterious icescape of the south.
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