latter, for example, that she addresses in chapters 2 and 3 the appeal of Arctic imagery to three female writers. Nineteenth-century Arctic exploration was very much a male-only affair, in which women could not directly participate. The response of some female writers was accordingly to fashion in writing a role for themselves, and for women generally, in this great national endeavour; a strategy that Hill illustrates through an analysis of Eleanor Porden's poems *The veils* (1816) and *The Arctic expeditions* (1818). Also published in 1818, however, was another female-authored text that took a very different line on the homosocial world of Arctic exploration: Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, which like many critics before her Hill reads as a powerful critique of the masculinist tendencies of such exploratory enterprises. Positioned somewhere between Porden and Shelley, meanwhile, is Charlotte Bronte, whose use of Arctic imagery in *Jane Eyre* is discussed in chapter 3. Thereafter, Hill moves on to discuss in chapter 4 the response of Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins to the disappearance of Franklin's 1845 expedition. Focussing in turn on Dickens's rebuttal, in *Household Words*, of the allegations of cannibalism that surfaced in the aftermath of the disaster, then on Dickens and Collins' collaboration on the play *The frozen deep* (1857), and finally on Collins' rather bizarre novel *Poor Miss Finch* (1871), Hill here makes an interesting case for seeing the Franklin débâcle as a major stimulus to the emergence of the sensation novel. Her final chapter, meanwhile, explores the use made of Arctic settings in the adventure stories of R.M. Ballantyne; focussing on the novels *Ungava* (1858), *World of ice* (1860), and *Giant of the north* (1881), Hill once again emphasises the extent to which the Arctic could confound as much as consolidate imperialist myths of British heroism and racial superiority.

For the most part, Hill's arguments are persuasive, marshalling much useful historical and literary information and engaging with it in a theoretically sophisticated way. In places there are local points of interpretation one might take issue with, and equally there are moments when one feels Hill is straining to establish associations that perhaps are not really there: I am not entirely convinced, for example, that Jane Eyre's burnt porridge at Lowood would have put readers in mind of the dismal fare on which the first Franklin expedition survived. I also felt that *White horizon* would have benefited from a more extended discussion of the expeditions of Parry and Ross, and the role their narratives played in fostering the British fascination with the Arctic; as it stands, this study is very much centred on the ill-fated Franklin, and I think this emphasis leads to a slightly skewed picture of British Arctic exploration. These quibbles aside, however, *White horizon* is an enjoyable and informative study, which provides further evidence that the British in the nineteenth century were as fascinated by the Arctic's 'heart of whiteness' as by the African 'heart of darkness.'

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RACING WITH DEATH. Beau Riffenburgh. 2008. London and New York: Bloomsbury. xxii + 296 p, illustrated, hard cover. ISBN 978-0-7475-8093-5. £18.99. doi:10.1017/S0032247408008085

In writing about Sir Douglas Mawson's Australasian Antarctic Expedition (AAE) of 1911–1914, any popular historian faces a significant challenge: the fact that, unlike the *Endurance* and *Terra Nova* expeditions, the AAE currently enjoys practically no hold whatsoever over the popular imagination. Most of Beau Riffenburgh's intended audience will at least have heard of Sir Ernest Shackleton and Captain Scott, but Mawson's name is likely to elicit only blank looks. Riffenburgh acknowledges, and deplores, this fact in his preface, but takes the bit between his teeth nonetheless and presses on to deliver an engaging, comprehensively researched, and very well-written account of both the expedition and its leader.

As Riffenburgh is quick to point out, the AAE was not Mawson's first foray into the Antarctic and not, therefore, his only claim to fame. Between 1907 and 1909, he played a key role in Shackleton's British Antarctic Expedition (BAE), becoming, in all but name, the leader of the three-man party seeking the South Magnetic Pole. In order to introduce his hero, Riffenburgh begins with the magnetic polar trek, a subject that he covered comprehensively in his earlier work, *Nimrod*, but then swiftly moves on to the AAE. It is this expedition, Mawson's second, which gives *Racing with death* its primary focus, taking up 10 of its 16 chapters.

The AAE set off for the Antarctic on Saturday, 2 December 1911, on board the steam yacht *Aurora*, a ship that would later serve as expedition vessel to the Ross Sea contingent of Shackleton's *Endurance* expedition. Just over a month later, after a brief stop at Macquarie Island, Mawson and his team of specialists landed at Cape Denison, a windswept outcrop of rock jutting out into Commonwealth Bay. Locating a suitable landing place for the expedition had proved so problematic and so time-consuming that Mawson had been forced to rethink his scheme on board *Aurora*, deciding to reduce his planned three expedition bases to two. The discovery of Cape Denison was, therefore, seen as something of a godsend, but gratitude would soon turn firstly to disbelief and then to intense frustration. Even while disembarking stores and equipment, *Aurora* was struck by a series of gales that seriously hindered progress. Initially, these winds were assumed to be nothing but freakish occurrences that should not be allowed to interrupt the expedition's ambitious programme of exploration and investigation. Mawson, however, had unwittingly landed upon the windiest spot, at sea level, on the face of the planet. Buffeted by winds averaging 50 mph for a whole year and regularly experiencing gusts of well in excess of 200 mph, in such conditions it soon became clear that the expedition would be severely hampered in the completion of its work. The members of the expedition had to learn

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how to walk leaning into the wind to avoid being blown over and rolled into the tossing waters of the bay and the gathering of meteorological and other data became both time-consuming and extremely gruelling. The main sledging expeditions, too, had to be postponed until much later than Mawson had planned, and the first did not set off until 8 November 1912.

Mawson himself led the far eastern party, accompanied by Lieutenant Belgrave Ninnis, an English army officer, and Xavier Mertz, a Swiss lawyer and ski champion. It was during this journey, on 14 December 1912, that tragedy struck. Approximately 310 miles from winter quarters, the lid of a deep crevasse disintegrated under Ninnis' weight, propelling him hundreds of feet to his death. The loss of such a popular member of the expedition was tragic enough, but in his descent into the abyss, the young soldier took with him his sledge, most of the party's food, their tent, equipment, and the best of the sledge-dogs. A tragic accident resulting in the loss of one man thus became a calamity threatening the destruction of all three. Nearly overcome with the suddenness of their loss, Mawson and Mertz were now forced to begin a return journey of over 300 miles in an appallingly handicapped condition. Obliged to slaughter and eat the remaining dogs as they went, both men quickly succumbed to vitamin A poisoning, which brought on lethargy and caused them to slough large areas of skin and hair. With 100 miles still to travel, Mertz finally collapsed and died, leaving the exhausted Mawson to first bury his friend and then to brace himself for the rest of his trek.

Mawson's final journey has become legendary in the annals of Antarctic exploration. The sole survivor of the three men, not merely undernourished but actually poisoned, he staggered through 100 miles of crevasse- and sastrugi-strewn wilderness, his physical condition deteriorating to such a degree that he found it necessary to tie on the separated soles of his feet to complete his agonising marathon. When he finally limped back into winter quarters, however, Mawson discovered that his trial was far from over. He had been so delayed that the recently returned *Aurora* had been forced to sail, leaving behind a small relief party to determine the fate of the far eastern party. Abandoned for yet another year, these men quickly learned that ennui and homesickness would be the least of their problems. To their dismay, it became apparent that one of their number, the replacement wireless operator, Sidney Jeffryes, had become insane: suffering from delusions and extreme paranoia, occasionally turning to violence. Not until November 1913 did the ordeal finally draw to its conclusion with the early return of *Aurora* under the command of Captain John King Davis.

The remaining chapters of *Racing with death* are occupied with Mawson's final Antarctic expedition: the British, Australian and New Zealand Antarctic Research Expedition, or BANZARE, of 1929–1931. And it is in these chapters that one of the few flaws of the book becomes apparent. In introducing the Mawson of the AAE, Riffenburgh deftly portrays the young scientist: conscientious, courageous, and ambitious, certainly, but also somewhat unsympathetic towards those weaker, or less driven, than himself. It is this last characteristic that has led to the prevailing image of Mawson as a being apart: aloof, cold, and all too often unable to make any allowance for the foibles of others. And this reputation has perhaps also been underpinned by the fact that he was, above all else, a scientist. According to his code, science must always come first: above individual ego, certainly, but also, as was at times demonstrated during BANZARE, above the territorial conquest that was inseparable from Britain's imperial ambition. In the AAE chapters, Riffenburgh fully acknowledges Mawson's unflinching and single-minded dedication, but the portrait is very largely a sympathetic one, paying particular tribute to Mawson's undeniable courage and to his love for his ever-patient fiancée, Paquita Delprat. Where he quotes from the diaries of those members of the expedition who were less than complimentary about their leader, particular care is taken to contextualise those criticisms, as, for instance, in the case of Cecil Madigan, the meteorologist, whose resentment of Mawson stemmed, in part at least, from his fear that his Rhodes scholarship would lapse as a result of his extended absence from Oxford. In the last chapters of *Racing with death*, however, the reader is introduced to a different Mawson: petty, quarrelsome, interfering, and obsessed with minutiae. So pronounced did these unamiable characteristics become that they seriously threatened the lifelong friendship between Mawson and J.K. Davis although the irritable nature of the latter certainly contributed its fair share to the discord that so nearly overwhelmed the expedition. The problem here is that it is unclear whether these traits existed previously but were not fully acknowledged in the earlier chapters of the book, or whether, instead, they were a later growth, the psychological legacy, perhaps, of the stresses and strains of Mawson's extreme experiences during the AAE. Unfortunately, this failure to acknowledge or explore what the reader must, in the context of this book, consider to be an evolution in Mawson's character does somewhat undermine the strengths of an otherwise successful portrait.

All in all, however, Riffenburgh has produced an excellent and highly readable introduction to the AAE and its complex leader. Mawson's story, as told in *Racing with death*, is thrilling, heroic, and hugely impressive; it should appeal to anyone interested in the heroic age of Antarctic exploration, and clearly demonstrates that Mawson was a leader on a level with Shackleton, Scott, and Amundsen. One can only hope that the prevailing neglect of, and indifference to, the AAE will not render Riffenburgh's considerable efforts nugatory, but that, instead, they will serve as a stepping-stone to a longer and more comprehensive study of this hugely important expedition. (Stephen Haddelsey, Ashleigh, Radley Road, Halam, Nottinghamshire.)

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