

WOMAN WITH THE ICEBERG EYES: ORIANA F. WILSON. By KATHERINE MACINNES. Cheltenham: The History Press, 2019. ISBN 978-0-7509-9153-7. 319p., b&w illus., bib., index. Hardbound. Cdn\$31.46.

One expedition that looms large within the history of polar exploration is the British Antarctic Expedition also known as the *Terra Nova* Expedition of 1910–1913, during which Robert Falcon Scott, Edward Wilson, Henry “Birdie” Bowers, Lawrence “Titus” Oates, and Edgar Evans reached the South Pole on January 17, 1912, only to learn that Roald Amundsen had beaten them by fewer than five weeks. The tragic fate of Scott’s team on the gruelling return journey across the Ross Ice Shelf and the subsequent discovery of the collapsed tent with the team members inside are well known to all polar enthusiasts. Over time, Scott’s public image has waxed and waned following the publication of various biographies with some writers, most notably, Roland Huntford vilifying Scott in *The Last Place on Earth* (1999), and others, including Sir Ranulph Fiennes (2003), fiercely defending him in *Captain Scott*. Recent historians such as Solomon (2001), Crane (2005), and Barczewski (2007) have adopted a more nuanced and balanced assessment of Scott.

While the reputation of the *Terra Nova* Expedition leader has fluctuated, that of his chief scientist, Edward Adrian Wilson, has only shone brighter over time. Wilson was Scott’s closest confidant and had participated with him on the earlier British National Antarctic Expedition also known as the *Discovery* Expedition of 1901–1904. Known affectionately by the team as “Uncle Bill,” Wilson was the field naturalist and ornithologist on the *Terra Nova* and his evocative drawings of the Antarctic landscape and wildlife will forever conjure up this ill-starred expedition. George Seaver’s three separate biographies of Wilson (published in 1933, 1937, and 1948) were researched and written with the co-operation and under the authoritative eye of Wilson’s widow. Seaver’s books convey the valiant hero, loyal friend, talented artist, dedicated scientist, stalwart man of faith, and loving husband. Isobel William’s more recent *With Scott in the Antarctic* (2009) presents Edward Wilson as imperfect as the next man, noting his highly-strung nature, quick temper, and acid tongue.

In *Woman with the Iceberg Eyes: Oriana F. Wilson*, MacInnes provides the reader with a deeper understanding of beloved polar icon Edward Wilson as well as a different perspective on Scott and the *Terra Nova* Expedition. Most importantly, she introduces the world to a woman of spirit whose life is inextricably interwoven with 20th century polar history.

Oriana Fanny Souper was born in 1874 in Bradfield, Yorkshire, England. In her early twenties, a chance meeting between vicar’s daughter “Ory” as she was always known, and young medical student Edward “Ted” Wilson, revealed a strong mutual interest in the natural world and a shared sense of faith. Ted was a confirmed bachelor plagued by

ill health and Ory Souper was an independent woman who worked full-time as a school matron. Their engagement in 1900 coincided with an extraordinary and unexpected invitation to the young naturalist to join the proposed *Discovery* Expedition. For the devout young couple and particularly for Ted, it must have seemed a message from God. Before marrying in July 1901, Ted convinced Ory to sign a document declaring that she supported his decision to join the expedition. A mere two weeks after the wedding, Ted was on his way to Antarctica with Scott, Shackleton, and the rest of the *Discovery* crew. He would be gone for almost three years.

Ory eventually travelled with family to New Zealand and established long-lasting friendships there. It would be the first port of call for Ted when the expedition returned. In the spring of 1903, she greeted the relief ship *Morning* that was supposed to be accompanying the returning *Discovery*. It was then she learned that Scott, Wilson, and most of the original party had remained behind for another year. Unexpectedly, team member Ernest Shackleton returned on the *Morning* due to scurvy. Although the *Discovery* team had as yet been unsuccessful in reaching the South Pole, they had accomplished a new polar first through reaching the Farthest South of 82°17' S. Buoyed by letters from her husband, Ory maintained the façade of the jubilant spouse declaring, “There is nothing like being married to a “Discovery” man, there is quite a glamour of romance over one and I am having a splendid time” (p. 62). After reuniting in the spring of 1904, Ory and Ted began their married life together in England with Ted seeking a living as an artist, illustrator, and writer. But domestic bliss only lasted a few years as Ted accepted Scott’s invitation to join another expedition. Despite the alarming news that Amundsen also sought to conquer the South Pole that year, Ted sailed with Scott on the *Terra Nova* Expedition in November, 1910. Ory never saw her husband again.

News of her husband’s death and the final days of the Scott party reached Ory in February, 1913. She and Kathleen Scott became public widows, swept up in the near-hysterical patriotism that descended on Great Britain following the tragedy. What the women felt in private was almost immaterial. Although the two women were not close personally, they presented a united front. Determined to preserve the reputation of their husbands and create a lasting legacy, the women were “active and empowered” (p. 165). “They began writing letters and erasing letters. Ignoble phrases, critical comments and incriminating observations in their husbands’ diaries were carefully edited. The diaries reached the public as ‘magnificent, invigorating document[s] with which to face the world-wonderful records of valiant, clear-headed courage’” (p. 165–66).

In the decades that followed, Ory embraced community service, working with the New Zealand War Contingent Association (for which she was awarded a CBE) during the First World War and pursuing her passion as a naturalist. Ory remained loyal to Ted’s memory for the

rest of her life by maintaining close bonds with the Wilson family, assisting Ted's first biographer, and upholding the reputation of the *Discovery* Expedition until her own death in 1945. Sadly, by burning the vast correspondence between herself and her husband, she did a grave disservice to polar historians. But it was an act undertaken with love in a misguided attempt to preserve the heroic ideal of all who perished on the *Terra Nova* Expedition.

MacInnes has done very well with this first biography of Oriana Wilson and contributes to the list of books delving into the lives of other polar wives which includes works by Flannery (2005), Herbert (2012), and Young (2014). The book would have benefitted from a sharper editorial pen thereby avoiding typographical errors sprinkled throughout the text as well as clunkers such as "Ory was not above a dusting of frost when the situation required" (p. 261). MacInnes' roots as a dramatist are revealed through the occasional passage which seem better suited to a play. Finally, a more extensive bibliography would have been helpful. Regardless, this is an admirable addition to the Scott, Wilson, and *Terra Nova* canon and would be appreciated by the general reader and polar historian alike. MacInnes' next work, *Snow Widows—The Scott Expedition and the Women They Left Behind*, due to be published by HarperCollins UK in 2022, promises to illuminate the lives of these women further.

REFERENCES

- Barczewski, S. 2007. *Antarctic destinies: Scott, Shackleton, and the changing face of heroism*. London: Hambledon Continuum.
- Crane, D. 2005. *Scott of the Antarctic. A life of courage and tragedy in the extreme south*. London: HarperCollins.
- Fiennes, R. 2003. *Captain Scott*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- Flannery, N.R., ed. 2005. *This everlasting silence: The love letters of Paquita Delprat and Douglas Mawson, 1911–1914*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.
- Herbert, K. 2012. *Polar wives*. London: Greystone Books.
- Huntford, R. 1999. *The last place on Earth. Scott and Amundsen's race to the South Pole*. New York: Random House.
- Seaver, G. 1933. *Edward Wilson of the Antarctic: Naturalist and friend*. London: John Murray.
- . 1937. *Edward Wilson: Nature lover*. London: John Murray.
- . 1948. *The faith of Edward Wilson of the Antarctic*. London: John Murray.
- Solomon, S. 2001. *The coldest March: Scott's fatal Antarctic Expedition*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Williams, I. 2009. *With Scott in the Antarctic Edward Wilson Explorer Naturalist, Artist*. Cheltenham: The History Press, Ltd.
- Young, L. 2014. *A great task of happiness: The life of Kathleen Scott*. Toronto: HarperCollins.

Joanna Kafarowski
205–365 Waterfront Crescent
Victoria, British Columbia V8T 0A6, Canada
joannakafarowski@gmail.com