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21L.007 World Literatures: Travel Writing
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We pick up the story in the middle of the journey towards the Pole. Below, you'll find some important context for the reading followed up by selections of pages to read and thumbnail summaries (hyperlinked above).

Geography

: A general sense of the geography is useful here, both in terms of the terrain and in terms of the food depots that define the stages of the journey. If you are looking at an overview map of Antarctica, with the tip of South America at the top, Scott's base (Ross Island) is on the left side of the continent at about 8 o'clock. Shackleton You'll find it useful to look at these maps, which are available both in the Penguin edition and the Project Gutenberg e-text, as well as on meta-media: "From New Zealand to the South Pole" gives an overview of the whole journey; "McMurdo Sound" gives a closer view of Ross Island, where the expedition set up camp (at Cape Evans and Hut Point), and the first depot laid on the ice barrier (more or less permanent ice extending from the coastline, aka the Ross Ice Shelf); "The Polar Journey" shows the series of depots laid across the ice barrier to the bottom of the Beardmore glacier, and then across the Antarctic plateau to the Pole itself. Around Ross Island, the presence or absence of sea ice will condition whether the men are able to travel from one camp to the other, as well as whether their supply ship can reach them, and how close it can come; on the Barrier (the ice shelf), they are traveling across more or less permanent ice, which may be flat, but may also be characterized by deep chasms and ridges formed by pressure; having crossed the Barrier, there is then a considerable gain in elevation to go up the Beardmore glacier onto the plateau. Incidentally: the distance from Scott's base to the Pole was about 800 miles. From Amundsen's base, the Pole was about 60 miles closer; he chose a route never used before.

Logistics

: as you should remember from the end of our discussion of *Atanarjuat*, the Antarctic is a place that does not support unassisted human habitation; limited as they were to ground transportation, Scott's team had either to carry with them or arrange to have deposited in advance all the supplies of food, fuel, and fodder that they and their animals would need on the journey to the Pole and back. Food and fuel have mass, hauling this mass takes energy, having animals transport it means the additional weight of food for them as well. Those are the equations of polar travel, old style.

Many of these supplies had been deposited the previous year (as far as One Ton Depot, about 130 miles out). On the actual polar journey, a series of teams went out, most of them hauling supplies either on sledges pulled by dogs or ponies, or on "motors" (these did not work terribly well, and had to be abandoned en route, with supplies hauled on foot). The dog teams would pull supplies to the bottom of the glacier and return; the ponies pulled supplies and were gradually killed along the way, forming part of the food depots being laid for the return journey -- the last animals were killed at the bottom of the glacier (at the end of chapter 9), and again became part of the food supply. From there on, supplies were hauled on foot, at this point about 800 pounds on each sledge. The men are

wearing skis to pull the sledges, and Cherry comments on "a great deal of competition between the teams which was perhaps unavoidable but probably a pity" (351) – since it depleted energy they would need later. At the end of Chapter 10, Scott makes a final decision about who he will take with him to the Pole, and tells Cherry that he will be sent home along with three others from this point. At the beginning of chapter 11, 8 men are still going south towards the Pole, pulling supplies on sledges; at the end of the chapter, Scott decides on the final party -- himself, Bowers, Oates, Wilson, and Seaman Evans (to be distinguished from Lt. Evans). The last three men who return from 87° 32' will be Thomas Crean, Edward Evans, and William Lashly. Cherry refers to these three as "the Last Supporting Party." We will follow their story first, then the story of all those back at camp, followed by the eventual search for the Polar Party, their story, and Cherry's conclusions in the final chapter.

Crucial details

: you can read these for yourself on the last two pages of Chapter 11, but several things happened at this point which would prove to be fairly momentous. First: Scott had originally planned for the final stage to be undertaken by four men, but changed his mind to include five -- affecting all the equations of transportation and supply. Second: one of the five, Seaman Evans, injured his hand shortly before the last of the supporting parties turned back; this injury would not heal. Third: as Cherry will mention elsewhere, Scott had gotten the dog teams to come further towards the Pole than initially planned, which affected both the supplies they were able to leave (they needed more food to make it out and back) and also their ability to make another journey out after returning to base; the dogs were too exhausted for this to be done. Had this journey been made as planned, more supplies would have been left on the homeward track of the Polar Party, and -- crucially -- dog food would have been deposited in case it was decided to meet the returning Polar Party with dog teams to get them back more quickly. These decisions and events, relatively trivial at the time, would prove to have cascading effects.

Chapter 12 : 378-99 (" when I was looking for data concerning the return of the Last Supporting Party..." through the end of the chapter).

Cherry wrote in the introduction that one of his intentions in writing this book "above all things was to show what work was done; who did it; to whom the credit of the work was due; who took the responsibility; who did the hard sledging...." In this chapter, like chapter 7 ("The Winter Journey"), we follow some of the expedition's other members, the three men of the Last Supporting Party. Most of the chapter consists of Cherry's transcript of a diary ("some dirty thumbed sheets of paper") written on the return journey by William Lashly. You may notice that Lashly's writing sounds different than Cherry's; one reason is their difference in class. There is also a difference in rank to notice. Lashly was a stoker in the Royal Navy -- in other words, an enlisted man who did the heavy work of supplying coal to ship's engines. Crean was a petty officer (a noncommissioned officer, roughly equivalent to Sergeant) in the Navy. Both men had accompanied Scott on an earlier expedition to the Antarctic, and Crean would also go with Shackleton on the *Endurance*. The third man was Lt. Edward Ratcliffe Garth Russell Evans, aka "Teddy"

Evans, a Royal Navy officer who was Scott's second in command. The events of this chapter merited a medal for Crean.

Chapter 13 : 400-19 (from the beginning of the chapter through the paragraph beginning "again and again in these days someone would see one or the other of the missing parties coming in.").

In this chapter, we are back at the expedition's base at Cape Evans. Their supply ship, the *Terra Nova*, arrives bringing supplies, with the intention of staying long enough to pick up any members needing to return. At this point, some of the decisions made earlier in the season began to have unforeseen consequences. Two dog teams are sent out with the double purpose of 1/ dropping off remaining supplies (food for three men has already been dropped off, and since the Polar Party is five, there are two left to feed) for the Polar Party's return journey about 130 miles out from base and 2/ giving Scott a lift back to base in case he should wish to return to England on the ship before the end of the Antarctic sailing season. I think you will understand as you read further why Cherry goes into so much detail about this particular journey.

Chapter 14 : 427-34 (from the beginning of the chapter through the paragraph beginning "it is impossible to express and almost impossible to imagine how difficult it was to make this decision.").

The travelling season is now over. As the remaining members of the expedition wait out the Antarctic winter, they must decide what to do once the weather improves: should they look for the Polar Party, or try to rescue "Campbell's party," a group of six men who had been dropped off by ship elsewhere on the Antarctic coast, and had been stranded there over the winter when ice made the coastline inaccessible.

Chapter 16 : 461-72 (from the beginning of the chapter through "Copy of Note Left at the Cairn"); OPTIONAL.

The Polar Party is found; Cherry transcribes his own diary for much of this chapter.

Chapter 17: 484-512.

Cherry begins to reconstruct what happened to Scott and the other four from their letters and diaries, from which he quotes at length. This is the end of the reading for 11/18: 69 pages without the optional reading.

Chapters 18 -19: 513-64 (all).

This story of the Polar Party continued to its conclusion. In the final chapter, "Never Again," Cherry takes "the broad perspective opened up by 10 years' distance" from the events: he compares Scott with the successful Amundsen, complains about scientific funding, tries to understand the causes for what happened, and considers the question of whether it was worth it, after all.