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# Reconsidering the “Tragic” Scott Expedition: Cheerful Masculine Home-making in Antarctica, 1910–1913

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## Abstract

Captain Robert Scott and his “doomed” polar party's fearless march to their deaths lingers in popular memory and it continues to inspire gender

historians concerned with the construction of imperial heroic masculinity in the pre-War era. Invariably described as “tragic,” the expedition appears well suited to analyse British masculinity's association with the stiff upper lip, a capacity to suppress intense emotions of fear and anxiety. However, the documentary record of the entire expedition—diaries, memoirs, photographs—provides the basis for an alternative reading of this emotional community. Among these men cheerfulness was normative; it was, above all, the emotional resource they cultivated to turn a hostile world into their happy home. Though this voyage took sixty-one men to the tip of the earth, it was less a flight from domesticity than an instance of masculine home-making in extremis. Fellowship and cheerfulness were generated through shared patterns of heterosocial family living as well as the customs of homosocial adventure, seafaring and scientific endeavour. The England of Scott's time demanded dour commitment to duty in the domesticated man but he could also enjoy a music hall joke or a rollicking sea shanty. Although cheer may be a form of emotional labor, exploited by employers, historians should remain alert to the possibility of its genuine and spontaneous expression in the history of masculinity—at the poles and beyond.

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