TOUCHING

Dr Sarah Jackson

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In *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon: A Journey Through Yugoslavia* (1941), Rebecca West recounts her travels through Macedonia with her husband and their guide Constantine. Visiting a monastery near Ochrid, they meet a young priest described by West as 'sensitive and a little sad'.[1] He is clearly keen for them to stay, bringing them wine, sheep's cheese and eggs, although they have already eaten, and asking questions about life outside Macedonia. West remarks: 'He spoke with something that was not quite curiosity, that was more tactile; the effect was as if a very gentle blind person were running his finger-tips over one's features'.[2] In these few tender words, West's description of the priest brings together a number of key ideas that are addressed in the present chapter: travel, touch, blindness, and the tactile properties of language.

Despite West's specific attention to the sensation of touch at this moment in her travelogue, accounts of the tactile remain largely overlooked by both authors and critics of travel writing. In light of such neglect, this chapter investigates the representation of touch in a region where multisensory perception is central to both navigation and survival: the Antarctic. It considers how travellers narrate their experiences of temperature and texture in seemingly un*touchable* territories, thinking about the ways that the extreme environment might mediate the perception and expression of contact. Rather than overlooking touch, Apsley Cherry-Garrard's *The Worst Journey in the World* (1922) and Sara Wheeler's *Terra Incognita* (1996), I propose, show us the significance of tact in the world's most inhospitable regions. These works are characterised not only by accounts of physical strength, but also

by a sensitivity to the texture of the ice. Considering the ways that the glacial features of the Antarctic ask us to confront the limits of tactile experience, this chapter asks whether and how a preoccupation with touch – and the threat of its loss – is explored through a poetics of tact.

I – The multisensory dimensions of travel

Before embarking on a discussion of tactile experience in the Antarctic, this chapter offers a brief survey of the representation of touch in travel writing. Addressing the impact of visual impairment on multisensory perception, it draws on recent research by Paul Rodaway, Eitan Bar-Yosef and Charles Forsdick in order to stress the importance of developing an aesthetic of touch. Indeed, as Carl Thompson notes, travellers have long been driven by 'a Romantic desire to visit sites of unspoilt natural beauty, and/or cultures seemingly untouched by modernity'.[3] And yet despite the desire to access destinations that remain hitherto untouched, tactile experience – cited by Santanu Das as the most 'intimate' and yet 'elusive' sense – is most often relegated to the background in literary representations of travel.[4] In *Sensuous Geographies*, for instance, Paul Rodaway argues that 'haptic geographies are often overlooked, since the tactile experience is such a continuous and taken-for-granted part of everyday encounter with the environment'.[5] The subordination of touch is evident in many aspects of Western culture and runs parallel to the ocularcentrism that has dominated since Aristotle set out the individuation of the five senses. The sense of touch, in particular, is traditionally associated with a proximity to the body and has thus been conceptualised as opposed to order and cognition. Vision, on the other hand, is linked to knowledge and enlightenment, and remains privileged in Western culture. Michel Serres, for example, points out that 'many philosophies refer to sight; few to hearing; fewer still place their trust in the tactile, or olfactory. Abstraction divides up the sentient body, eliminates taste, smell and touch, retains only sight and hearing, intuition and

understanding'.[6] This is notwithstanding the fact that contemporary critics recognise that the senses are co-implicated in a complex system and that, as Serres says, the skin itself can be understood as a '*sensorium commune*: a sense common to all the senses, forming a link, bridge and passage between them'.[7]

It comes as little surprise that this ocularcentrism pervades Western travel writing. Charles Forsdick, for instance, notes:

> Travel literature provides a telling illustration of the ways in which the visual has been progressively policed, framed, normalized, and also, particularly since the eighteenth century, increasingly privileged (beginning with the picturesque and scientific empiricism, and continuing via phenomena such as the imperial and tourist gaze).[8]

The relationship between vision and travel is neatly captured in the phrase 'sightseeing'. The *Oxford English Dictionary* dates the terms early as 1824, but it endures in present society's assumption that even if we have different modes of looking, we travel to 'see' the world. In her study of the origin of sightseeing, Judith Adler observes the pre-eminence of the eye as a detached and judicious measure of experience in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[9] The Romantics too, emphasised the importance of vision, even if, as Adler argues, there was an attempt to close one's eyes to external reality in order to see otherwise. Following Adler, Eitan Bar-Yosef remarks that this privileging of the eye was fortified by 'the rise of mass-tourism in the mid-nineteenth century'; he goes on to state that the 'growing democratization of travel reinforced the prominence of sight, encapsulated in the "tourist gaze"'.[10] However, in *The Tourist Gaze*, the text to which Bar-Yosef refers, John Urry points out that 'the concept of the gaze highlights that looking is a learned ability and that the pure and innocent eye is a myth'.[11] If the visualisation of the

journey is a cultural construction, it is one that we can challenge by re-reading the multi-sensorial dimensions of travel. In fact, as Adler points out, in the early sixteenth century the 'aristocratic traveler […] went abroad for *discourse* rather than for picturesque views or scenes'.[12] She goes on to illustrate other examples of travel writing that are packed with descriptions of smells, tastes and touch too, making specific reference to the 'many thermalists seeking tactile contact with waters of varying mineral composition' in the eighteenth century.[13] Challenging the ocularcentrism of much travel writing, she thus draws attention to a need to develop our understanding of tactile experience.

In recent work, Charles Forsdick brings together studies in disability and travel writing. In particular, he considers narratives by visually-impaired travellers, noting that despite a 'residual discursive normativity' in which texts are 'saturated with the vocabulary, tropes and devices of sightedness', their accounts '*illuminate* the ways in which differing configurations of sensory engagement lead to differing constructions of space and place in the journey narrative'.[14] This, he argues, encourages a move from the monosensory to the multisensory, considering the equally important roles that hearing, smell, touch and taste have to play in the ways that journeys are narrated. Forsdick also draws on the work of Bar-Yosef, who considers the ways that different disabilities 'affect the journey and its textual construction'.[15] The subjects of Bar-Yosef's study include James Holman, often known as the 'Blind Traveller'. Holman, Bar-Yosef points out, normalizes his disability by suggesting that all travellers are in some ways 'disabled': they are 'either deaf (to the local language) or blind (to the reality around them) or both'.[16] There are, this seems to suggest, other ways of 'seeing' the world. In *A Voyage Around the World*, Holman insists that although the 'picturesque' is denied to him, his circumstances afford

> a stronger zest to curiosity, which is thus impelled to a more close and searching examination of details than would be considered necessary to a

> traveller who might satisfy himself by the superficial view, and rest content with the first impressions conveyed through the eye.[17]

Stressing the need for a 'more close and searching examination', Holman suggests that his blindness offers him a certain insight. Ascending Vesuvius during its eruption in June 1821, for instance, he is reported to have insisted, 'I see things better with my feet'.[18] The irony of this is recounted by biographer Jason Roberts, who explains: 'The air was scarcely breathable, the ground audibly unstable. They were shifting in their stances, almost hopping. Too much contact with the fuming ground could burn their feet through their shoes'.[19] The notion of seeing with one's feet is something to which this chapter will return, but while his work retains a discursive normativity involving vision, Holman's narrative also demonstrates the particular significance of the intimacy of touch in a 'close and searching examination'.[20]

Bar-Yosef is concerned with the narrative strategies used by Holman to narrate his journey and cites his account of reaching the summit of Adam's Peak in Sri Lanka:

> We reached the summit just before the sun began to break, and a splendid scene opened upon us. The insulated mountain rising up into a peaked cone of 7420 feet above the level of the sea, flanked on one side by lofty ranges, and on the other, by a champagne country, stretching to the shore, that formed the margin of an immense expanse of ocean; I could not see this glorious sight with the *visual* orbs, but I turned towards it with indescribable enthusiasm; I stood upon the summit of the Peak, and *felt* all its beauties rushing into my very heart of hearts.[21]

Substituting feeling for seeing in his unfailingly accurate prose, Holman's narrative achieves an impressionistic quality. His sensory impairment actually enables him to acquire, he suggests elsewhere, 'so great a delicacy, as to afford degrees of information, which under ordinary states it is incapable of'.[22] But not only do references to touch form a rich component of his travel writing, his emphasis on feelings also opens up questions about the ways that language itself is textured by its attempts to communicate an experience of contact – to touch the reader.

II – Developing a haptic aesthetic

Adler, Bar-Yosef and Forsdick's challenges to Western ocularcentrism are characteristic of a recent turn towards multisensory perception in criticism and theory. Santanu Das, for instance, notes that 'there has been a sudden swell of interest in the senses', accompanied by a 'move towards a more physical understanding of past literatures and cultures'.[23] Touch in particular, he says, is the subject of recent critical attention. Rather than taking it for granted, critics are stressing its rich aesthetic and affective potential. This is central to Rodaway's aim to explore the emotional geographies that sensuous experience of the world arouses. In his discussion of touch, Rodaway examines the ways that our tactile encounters help us to 'make sense' of a place and its people. Rodaway's examination of the tactile clearly extends beyond the reach of the hand. He uses the term 'haptic', which comes from the Greek 'to touch' or 'to lay hold of', in order to emphasise a more complex relationship with the environment that includes touch, kinaesthesis (the sense by which the voluntary motion of the body is perceived), proprioception (the relative sense of the position and movement of different parts of our body), and the vestibular sense (our sense of balance or orientation). Drawing on James J. Gibson's 'haptic system', which defines touch as 'a system involving the coordination of receptor cells and the muscles of the body', Rodaway argues:

> Touch geographies are the sensuous geographies arising out of the tactile receptivity of the body, specifically the skin, and are closely linked to the ability of the body to move through the environment and pick up and manipulate objects. Touch can be passive and active, a juxtaposition of body and world and a careful exploration of the size, shape, weight, texture and temperature of features in the environment.[24]

Not simply referring to direct contact with the skin but to our position within and movement through our environment, the haptic enables us to consider the multisensory quality of geographical experience. Integral to this is an awareness of the body's perception of its own locomotion or movement through unfamiliar environments.

Considering this turn to movement, recent critics have drawn attention to the kind of travel that demands physical strength or perceptive subtlety. Examining the Victorian tactile imagination, for instance, Alan McNee observes the development of a philosophy of mountaineering in which 'the human subject's physical contact with the material reality of mountain landscapes was regarded as validating and supplementing visual evidence'.[25] Emphasising the 'connection between physicality and perception', McNee explains that the steepness of a mountain slope in the distance is not restricted to purely visual dimensions; its impact lies in the physical effort and haptic sensibility that encountering it induces.[26] He points out that 'sight alone was insufficient to fully understand and appreciate mountains. It had to be supplemented by evidence gleaned from […] physical experience'.[27] Rather than being reduced to a supporting sense-perception, the haptic is essential to the literary representation of movement. Moreover, the role of the haptic for Victorian mountain-climbers, McNee writes, introduces a 'new form of the sublime', which gives rise to 'a new prose style which increasingly emphasized the embodied experience of the climber, and the

physical sensations that climbing involves, just as much as the things climbers see on their expeditions'.[28] Although he does not go on to specify in detail the form that this prose style takes, he stresses its significance for communicating the haptic aesthetic. And while he does not consider polar exploration in particular, his account of the haptic sublime brings new light to such narratives, where the extreme conditions demand an acute sensitivity to textures and surfaces, temperatures and tact.

III – Frostbitten Fingers

In 1910, Apsley Cherry-Garrard joined Captain Robert Falcon Scott's final expedition to the Antarctic aboard the *Terra Nova*, describing his experiences as well as citing fragments from his diary, letters, and the records of the other explorers on the trip, in *The Worst Journey in the World* (1922).[29] Cherry-Garrard recalls in his diary: 'Before I left England people were always telling me the Antarctic must be dull without much life', but on arrival, he admits, 'the whole place teems with life'.[30] This is echoed more than eighty years later by another British traveller and writer, Sara Wheeler, who describes her experiences with the National Science Foundation's Antarctic Artists and Writers Program in 1994-5 in *Terra Incognita* (1996). She recalls her discussions with the 'Seismic Man': "'People call this a sterile landscape, because nothing grows or lives. But I think it's *pulsating* with energy – as if it's about to explode'", she tells him.[31] Similarly, Diane Ackerman, who travelled to the Antarctic Peninsula as a tourist and recorded her experiences in 'White Lanterns' (1991), notes: 'Before coming to the Antarctic, I had thought that penguins lived in a world of extreme sensory deprivation'.[32] She insists, however: 'I had found just the opposite – a landscape of the greatest sensuality. For one thing, there was so much life'; she even claims to have been unable to eat during the trip because she was 'being fed so thoroughly through [her] senses' (197). Time and again, visitors to the Antarctic are faced with the richness of sensory experience. Both Ackerman and Wheeler pay credit to Cherry-

Garrard's epic in their own work; its title, Ackerman points out, became 'synonymous with trekking to Antarctica' (197). It is interesting to note that Ackerman also describes Cherry-Garrard's classic as 'sensitive' (197), and it is this sensitivity – or at least its attention to the affective resonances of tactile experience – that reinforces the need to closely examine the haptic in accounts polar exploration. Cherry-Garrard, like Wheeler and Ackerman, demands a heightened attention to the connections between physicality and perception; his writing exposes the relationship between text and tact.

The Antarctic is, as Francis Spufford explains in the introduction to *The Antarctic: An Anthology*, a place of 'sensory extremes': 'In the winter dark, or in the strange depthless glow of a white-out,' he writes, 'it shut down your senses with tormenting thoroughness, but at other times it overloaded them with colour and dazzle'.[33] Particularly noteworthy are the 'visual delight[s]' described by early explorers, who, Spufford notes, 'learned to see beauty in the fractal, unplanned complexity of stone, of snow, of water, of ice'.[34] But these visual delights are frequently marked by an unreliability of optical information; the fact that vision is not always to be trusted in these conditions leads to an increased reliance on multisensory perception. In fact, these works tend to exhibit a curious attention to the *loss* of vision experienced while travelling through the region. Cherry-Garrard, for instance, who is already acutely short-sighted, describes 'curious optical delusion[s]' (246) during their journey; moreover, during the long harsh winter months, he says, 'it was too dark to do anything but feel our way' (277). The frequent blizzards ensure that 'you cannot see your stretched-out hand, especially on a dark winter day' (462), but the most common complaint arises as a result of snow-glare. He records: 'Our difficulties during the next four days were increased by the snow-blindness of half the men' (366). His companion, Henry 'Birdie' Bowers, describes the symptoms: 'My right eye has gone bung, and my left one is pretty dicky. […] It is painful to look at this paper, and my eyes are fairly burning as if someone had thrown sand into them' (366). These visual impairments contribute to a

multisensory approach that is particularly relevant to polar exploration precisely because the conditions in the Antarctic place demands on different perceptive skills. Cherry-Garrard makes this clear when he says: 'We began to realize, now that our eyes were more or less out of action, how much we could do with our feet and ears' (293), and recalls Wilson's acknowledgement that 'eventually we travelled on by the ear, and by the feel of the snow under our feet, for both the sound and the touch told one much of the chances of crevasses or of safe going' (258). *The Worst Journey in the World* is thus imbued with a multi-sensorial language. Rather than navigate by sight, the explorers are forced to 'feel' their way south; they are, as Cherry-Garrard admits, quite literally 'groping [their] way' (360).

In his definition of the haptic, Rodaway refers to thermoreception – our sensitivity to heat and cold. A preoccupation with thermoreception in polar travel writing may come as little surprise, but also notable are the ways that the extreme temperatures are bound up with a traveller's emotional regulation; as Francis Spufford notes in *I May Be Some Time*, 'heat and cold probably provide the oldest metaphors for emotion that exist'.[35] Sara Wheeler describes one man she meets as 'taciturn, as cold as the ice in which he buried his explosives' (167). Often, however, it is not so much the temperature that affects her moods; the degree of visibility is attuned to a sense of emotional enlightenment. She writes:

> On clear days, when I walked around the new Wooville or looked out from the long window by my desk, the landscape spoke to me so directly that it no longer seemed to be made of corporeal ice. It had become a kind of cosmic symbol of harmony and of a peaceful freedom beyond poverty, gas bills and unrequited love. (283)

Wheeler, like other polar explorers, becomes particularly attuned to thermoreception. She notes: 'We came to know what temperature it was even before we looked at the thermometer hanging on the antenna, and we noticed every degree of change' (270). As a result, *Terra Incognita* is filled with detailed accounts of the relative temperatures of different stations: 'At McMurdo the mean temperature in January is minus three degrees Celsius, whereas at Rothera it is a sweaty two degrees above zero. At the Pole, the January mean is minus twenty-eight. It can reach minus fifty at McMurdo in the winter, but the lowest temperature ever recorded at Rothera is minus thirty-nine' (194). To put this into context, Wheeler explains that 'our eyes froze shut if we blinked for too long' (264) and describes the effects of the temperature on her manual handling of objects, recalling a visit to Robert Falcon Scott's hut when she found herself struggling with the door: 'To free up my hands,' she writes, 'without thinking I had put the key in my mouth, where it had instantly frozen to my lips. Lucia had been obliged to exhale energetically over my face to unstick the key without the loss of too much of the skin on my lips' (291). But also prevalent are her descriptions of the wind: 'When the wind whipped up it sliced through any number of layers like a pneumatically driven carving knife' (100). 'No one ever quite gets used to […] the brutalizing effect of the wind' (17), she writes, and on first walking down to Scott's hut on McMurdo Sound, she finds 'the exposed flesh between my goggles and balaclava immediately began to feel as if it were burning' (21-22). The primary sensory experience, it seems, is one of pain, and Spufford points out that 'almost all travellers seem to insist, in what they wrote afterwards, on the physical misery of Antarctic living'.[36] He continues: 'Sensations to look forward to included having the pus in your blisters turn to ice and expand, having wounds ten years old reopen, and having the soles of your feet fall off'.[37] This forms part of what Thompson describes as the 'curious logic' of travel: 'The dangers and hardships that travel can throw', he writes, 'seem actually to be part of the pleasure and

purpose of travel'.[38] But in testing the limits of physical endurance, these writers also confront the possibilities and the limits of the haptic.

Cherry-Garrard and Wheeler are faced with these limits precisely because survival in the region is bound up with sensation's *loss*. For conditions in the Antarctic are at their most critical when they result in the cessation of sensory perception – when frostbite threatens.[39] Cherry-Garrard cites Captain Scott – 'Our fingers [are] constantly numbed' (128-9) – and goes on to explain, 'The difficulty was to know whether our feet were frozen or not, for the only thing we knew for certain was that we had lost all feeling in them' (144). He also notes that when they wore their mittens, they could 'scarcely feel anything – especially since the tips of our fingers were already very callous' (251). Wheeler points out that while frostbite is not in itself 'a highly dangerous injury', it is one 'that can soon become fatal if untreated' (17). As a result, travellers must insulate the very limbs that enable them to perceive at all. In *Home of the Blizzard* (1915), the Australian explorer Douglas Mawson, records the condition of his feet:

> [T]he thickened skin of the soles had separated in each case as a complete layer, and abundant watery fluid had escaped, saturating the sock. The new skin beneath was very much abraded and raw. Several of my toes had commenced to blacken and fester near the tips and the nails were puffed and loose.[40]

With the aid of bandages, he binds the old skin back in place, and 'over the bandages', he writes, 'were slipped six pairs of thick woollen socks, then fur boots and finally crampon over-shoes. The latter, having large stiff soles, spread the weight nicely and saved my feet from the jagged ice encountered shortly afterwards'.[41] Mawson thus offers an example of the repeated efforts made to insulate the body from the environment. As much as the explorer might desire to make contact with uncharted territory, they also learn that this

contact must always be mediated by its withdrawal. Expressing the desire to conquer a territory whose very appeal lies in its inaccessible, unreachable and untouchable qualities, these writers offer us an account of a region that simultaneously invites *and* withdraws from close contact. In other words, the haptic aesthetic has an antithetical resonance: touch tends towards its own extremes, where one is always at risk of touching (or being touched) too much.

IV – Texture and Texturisation

Clearly, travellers to the South Pole endure extreme physical hardship. But to focus on this would be to deny what Spufford refers to as Antarctica's 'treasures for the senses', and readers might be struck by the repeated references to sensory pleasure in many accounts.[42] Mawson, for instance, recalls:

> So glorious was it to feel the sun on one's skin after being without it for so long that I next removed most of my clothing and bathed my body in the rays until my flesh fairly tingled – a wonderful sensation which spread throughout my whole person, and made me feel stronger and happier.[43]

Nevertheless, the majority of references to comfort in Cherry-Garrard's work (and there are many) highlight the benefits of bundling up rather than stripping off. He describes their 'comfortable warm roomy home' (192) at Cape Evans and notes that his 'personal impression of […] early summer sledging on the Barrier was one of constant wonder at its comfort' (333). He and his companions gain particular pleasure from the texture and warmth provided by different furs and fabrics. On the ship, Bowers clings to his dressing gown, which he describes as 'my great comfort, as it was not very wet, and it is a lovely warm thing' (53), and Cherry-Garrard refers to the 'delicate dog-skin linings' of Wilson's

gloves – 'beautiful things to look at and to feel when new' (298). These skins and furs mediate between the explorers and their environment, without limiting their sense of touch too much:

> The effect of walking in finnesko is much the same as walking in gloves, and you get a sense of touch which nothing else except bare feet could give you. Thus we could feel every small variation in surface, every crust through which our feet broke, every hardened patch below the soft snow. And soon we began to rely more and more upon the sound of our footsteps to tell us whether we were on crevasses or solid ground. (258)

As both Cherry-Garrard and Holman observe, seeing with one's feet is crucial to survival.

References to texture are rife in works by Cherry-Garrard, Ackerman and Wheeler. The most striking accounts, however, are related to the surfaces of the snow and ice – textures that are discerned via 'haptic visuality': when, as Laura Marks puts it, 'the eyes themselves function like organs of touch'.[44] Drawing on and adapting Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's account of smooth and striated space, Marks distinguishes haptic from optic visuality by explaining:

> Haptic looking tends to move over the surface of its object rather than to plunge into illusionistic depth, not to distinguish form so much as to discern texture. It is more inclined to move than to focus, more inclined to graze than to gaze.[45]

In this manner, as her eyes graze the scene, Ackerman explains that icebergs are 'not always smooth':

> Many had textures, waffle patterns, pockmarks, and some looked pounded by Persian metalsmiths. A newly calved iceberg lay like a chunk of glass honeycomb, spongy from being underwater. […] Another had beautiful blue ridges like muscles running along one side. (230)

Cherry-Garrard stresses, however, that these textures are not simply of aesthetic concern, but are central to his survival. He describes surfaces that are 'appallingly soft' (113), 'very heavy' (126), and 'beastly, slippery, sloping' (239). In particular, the men loathe the 'hardest and smallest snow crystals', pulling a sledge through which 'was just like pulling through sand' (245), or for Bowers, 'pulling a sledge over treacle instead of ice' (174). In fact, these difficult surfaces ultimately prove fatal for Captain Scott's team. Discovering their frozen bodies eight months after Scott's last diary entry, eleven miles from the nearest depot on their return from the Pole, Cherry-Garrard discerns, 'The immediate trouble was bad surfaces' (517). Haptic perception, then, moves beyond aesthetic experience to a matter of life and death.

Antarctic travel narratives are packed with descriptions of texture, thus providing a new and apt context for McNee's account of the 'haptic aesthetic'. But it also becomes clear that literary representations of the region are themselves 'textured' by expressions of touch and feeling; in a sense, the embodied surface of the prose, what we might – after Renu Bora and Jenny Chamarette – call its 'texturality', is characterised by an acute sensitivity to changes in our contact with other people, as well as with the landscape that surrounds us.[46] Wheeler's prose, for instance, is frequently terse, but not without lyricism. Discussing her preparations for the journey and the texture of her new clothes, she writes: 'When we had satisfied ourselves that no part of our extensive new wardrobe would chafe or pinch or expose our soft flesh to the rigours of frostbite, we packed up our bags and the

scowler despatched us into the sunshine' (12). Direct and incisive, her prose is also textured by a sensitivity to the affective resonance of the landscape: 'The sun moved steadily, always at the same elevation, and the ice glinted secretively, shimmering in the distance like heat. The surface was creased with tiny ridges and embossed with minuscule bumps' (105). Cherry-Garrard's prose also provides evidence of this texturality. For instance, describing his depot journey of January 1911, he writes: 'Only where the stream presses against the Bluff, White Island and, most important of all, Cape Crozier, and rubs itself against the nearly stationary ice upon which we were travelling, pressures and rendings take place, forming some nasty crevasses' (114). Here, verbs such as 'pressing', 'rubbing' and 'rending' convey a sense of the physicality of the environment, and the relative roughness or smoothness of the language contributes to its texturisation. Shifting away from the detached scientific prose that characterises much of *The Worst Journey in the World*, Cherry-Garrard also incorporates passages rich with intimacy; recalling Alice Fulton's account of the 'materiality' of words and their 'sensual, and especially tactile presence',[47] the reader observes the full range of linguistic registers employed as he describes a summer blizzard:

> You may sleep dreamlessly nearly all the time, rousing out for meals, or waking occasionally to hear from the soft warmth of your reindeer bag the deep boom of the tent flapping in the wind, or drowsily you may visit other parts of the world, while the drifting snow purrs against the green tent at your head.
> But outside there is raging chaos. It is blowing a full gale: the air is full of falling snow. (115-16)

The purring, drowsy warmth of this passage jars with its raging chaos, and as a result, the haptic aesthetic of Cherry-Garrard's narrative is simultaneously hypnotic and terrifying. This texturisation is heightened by the fragments of letters, diary excerpts and other

accounts that he incorporates into his own; a narrative collage in which texts rub up against each other to generate their own comforts and frictions. This texturality communicates something of the 'feel' of Antarctica. While Spufford insists that Antarctica teaches us that 'words […] are not what the world is made of', what is in fact increasingly clear is the way that the texture of Antarctic experience writes itself into literary language.[48]

V – The Human Touch

But there are other ways of touching, and a sensitivity to texture extends itself to accounts of human contact; after all, haptic experience involves not only an encounter with the natural landscape and its extremes, but also one's contact – or lack thereof – with other people. In *Terra Incognita*, Wheeler stresses that despite the isolation, close relationships are formed. Her companion Pete explains:

> 'Well, relationships here are especially close,' he said eventually. 'It's obvious, isn't it – you can't share it with anyone else. I hardly ever talk about Antarctica at home. No one would understand. There's no place like this, and because of that it becomes emotional.' (148)

This closeness often translates into physical touch experiences, and Wheeler frequently refers to 'hugging' (178), 'kissing' (45) and even 'a flurry of awkward embraces' (237) as she and her colleagues arrive and leave the ice. She recounts her experience of being on nightwatch: 'This involved creeping into pitrooms and shaking slumbering male bodies by the tautly-muscled shoulder' (237). In fact, this physical intimacy also tends towards discomfort. Finding the hut where Cherry-Garrard, Bowers and Wilson camped during their winter journey to collect the Emperor penguin eggs, she lies down in its ruins:

> The crewman and pilot leapt over the low wall and landed on top of me.
> 'Bit cramped in here, with three,' the crewman shouted over the wind. Indeed. Cherry's party had bulky reindeer sleeping bags to contend with, too, and the stove. (139-40)

Wheeler's narrative indicates the difficulties of finding a balance between distance and proximity, between touching and not-touching, even in a place where human contact appears so remote.

Like Wheeler, Cherry-Garrard observes the contradictory conditions of human contact in the Antarctic. He says that 'both sexually and socially the polar explorer must make up his mind to be starved' and at the same time admits, 'life in such surroundings is both mentally and physically cramped' (596). For the most part, descriptions of physical contact are markedly restrained. Continually emphasising the companionship between the men, he acknowledges only that 'to be absolutely accurate I must admit to having seen a man in a very "prickly" state on one occasion. That was all' (230). Notwithstanding this restraint, his narrative, like Wheeler's, is rich with intimacy. Perhaps most interesting is the way that his companions are frequently characterised in terms of their capacity to touch, despite their withdrawal from contact. He emphasises Wilson's 'great gift of tact' (2) on several occasions, for instance, and Oates is often admired for having 'capable hands' (183). He also reports Scott's suggestion: "'I should like to have Bill to hold my hand when we get to the Pole'" (514).[49] Thus, while accounts of physical human contact in *The Worst Journey in the World* are relatively sparse, the experience is nevertheless represented using a vocabulary of tact.

Nobody knows, of course, if or how the polar party comforted each other in their final days. What is remarkable, however, is the reference to touch that lies at the heart of Francis Spufford's retelling of Scott's journey. In *I May Be Some*, as he imagines Scott's

death alongside Wilson and Bowers, Spufford introduces a compelling desire to touch: 'Scott has a terrible desire that he must keep quelling, to reach and shake them, to try and summon again their company'.[50] Yet, he suggests, Scott knows that 'he must not touch them at all. He is entirely alone, beyond all hope'.[51] Eventually, however, having written his famous final words – 'For God's sake look after our people' – Scott (according to Spufford) reasserts this need for human contact:

> Scott kicks out suddenly, like an insomniac angry with the bedclothes. Yes, alright, but *quickly* then, without thinking. He pulls open the sleeping bag as far down as he can reach, wrenches his coat right open too, lays his arm deliberately around the cold lump of the body of his friend Edward Wilson (who is not sleeping, no, but dead) and holds tight.[52]

This passage expresses not only the contradictory injunctions surrounding touch, but also indicates our desire for human contact in extreme isolation. While Rodaway argues that haptic geographies are overlooked because tactile experience is so taken-for-granted, when such experience is threatened, our need to dispel isolation through the tactile is clearly paramount, even if it can only take place in the imagination.[53]

There are, of course, many different ways of making human contact, but it is the recurrence of the handshake that is most remarkable. In *The Worst Journey*, Cherry-Garrard includes Lashley's description of the moment they leave Scott and the polar party: 'the time came for the last handshake and good-bye. I think we all felt it very much' (399). This British trait recalls Henry Stanley's famous meeting with Dr Livingstone. Stanley, a Welshman, admits that he 'would have embraced' Livingstone, but 'he being an Englishman, I did not know how he would receive me'.[54] The greeting is instead accompanied by a firm handshake: 'I replace my hat on my head and he puts on his cap,

and we both grasp hands, and I then say aloud, "I thank God, Doctor, I have been permitted to see you.'"[55] But the handshake is far from restricted to the British in accounts of polar travel. In *The South Pole* (1912), when Roald Amundsen reaches his destination, the Norwegian notes: 'We all shook hands, with mutual congratulations; we had won our way far by holding together, and we would go farther yet – to the end'.[56] And in *Terra Incognita*, Wheeler also describes the triumph of a Japanese explorer named Susumu Nakamura: 'After handshakes all round (anyone would think they were English), the party began unfurling corporate flags for the inevitable sponsorship photographs' (118). Her own encounters, likewise, are dominated by experiences of the hand – she describes shaking the 'bearpaw extended by the hapless wing-commander' (2), and meeting a 'tall loose-limbed Alaskan': '"They call me Too-Tall Dave", he said as he pumped my hand, crushing a few unimportant bones' (154). Most acutely, however, she notices the absence of the handshake when she arrives at Rothera, the British base. In fact, she warms only to Ian, 'one of the few who came up to shake hands when I arrived' (214). Ironically, it is the British who seem less inclined to shake her hand.

A welcome or greeting, a gesture of friendship or the confirmation of a contract, the handshake – and its gendered connotations – of course means different things in different places and at different times. Geoffrey Bennington explains that 'a handshake is of course not a simple thing, either historically or phenomenologically'.[57] He describes it as 'somewhere between the "blow" and the "caress"'; 'supposedly a gesture of trust and confidence, […], originally it would appear as proof that [the hand] is not holding a weapon'.[58] Considering the imperial accounts of polar exploration, the significance of the handshake in the Antarctic multiplies: if imperial eyes, why not imperial hands?[59] Signalling triumph at the South Pole as well as mediating ongoing battles over territories rich in natural resources, the handshake perhaps signifies the tact that surrounds touch: when is touching too much?

V. The Law of Tact

Antarctica, it seems, provides us with a rich tactile geography, but it is one that veers between sensation and its loss: our ability to write about travel in the region demands that we touch, but not too much. Touch, then, must be mediated by tact, which Steven Connor explains means 'subtlety, refinement and so on', in other words, a 'particular kind of lightness of touch'.[60] Tact, he says, is a touch that 'retracts itself, but not fully'; like the Antarctic handshake, it plays at the border between not-touching and touching too much.[61] In his study, Connor draws on the work of Jacques Derrida, who writes in *On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy* that tact warns against the excess of touch, it is a 'moderation of touch', where 'some kind of reserve holds it on the brink of exaggeration'.[62] Touch, it seems, is inhabited by a '*law of tact*', as Derrida calls it, a law that means 'do not touch or tamper with the thing itself, do not touch on what there is to touch'.[63] Referring to the effects of tampering, Derrida also alludes to an unlawful or unethical touch – a tact that takes on a particular resonance in terms of the imperial legacies of exploration. By the end of the nineteenth century, Antarctica was considered to be the last 'untouched' territory on earth. In the early twentieth century, nations including Britain, Norway, France, Japan and Germany were all involved in competition to reach the South Pole under the name of scientific advancement and the claim to new territory. Following the race to the South Pole and subsequent scientific research in the area, the Antarctic Treaty established in 1961 aimed to 'demilitarise Antarctica', to 'promote international scientific cooperation' and to 'set aside disputes over territorial sovereignty'.[64] Polar exploration is thus mediated by its own law of tact: do touch, but not too much. Derrida's two contradictory orders – 'do do and do not do' – are inscribed in efforts to leave one's mark on unexplored territories – to make it one's own *and* to leave it looking pristine, virginal, intact.[65] Literary representations

of Antarctica are thus bound up in this law of tact: touch, but do not appropriate; touch, then withdraw.

An exploration of the haptic aesthetic suggests that these travelogues – in different ways – each confront a law of tact: a law issuing from the extreme conditions of the landscape, from social expectations as well as from international politics. Despite this, works by Cherry-Garrard and Wheeler, among others, show us that touch lies at the heart of Antarctic exploration. Representing the texture of their travels in their own texturised prose, these tactile geographies are always poised at the extremes of haptic experience – where attempts to touch new places and peoples are marked by a withdrawal of contact. This law of tact – and the mediation of contact with remote territories and untouched lands – has significant implications for how we read the haptic aesthetic in travel writing; while the conditions of the Antarctic might present us with an extreme case, I propose that tactile geographies are nevertheless always already mediated by Derrida's law of tact: 'touch *without* touching, without touching *too much*, where touching is already too much'.[66]

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[1] Rebecca West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* [1941] (Edingburgh: Canongate, 2006), 726; with particular thanks to Tim Youngs for alerting me to this passage.

[2] West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, 727.

[3] Carl Thompson, *Travel Writing* (London: Routledge, 2011), 54.

[4] Santanu Das, *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 20.

[5] Paul Rodaway, *Sensuous Geographies: Body, Sense, and Place* (London: Routledge, 1994), 42.

[6] Michel Serres, *The Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies (I)*, trans. Margaret Sankey and Peter Cowley (London: Continuum, 2008), 26.

[7] Serres, *The Five Senses*, 70.

[8] Charles Forsdick, 'Travel Writing, Disability, Blindness: Venturing Beyond Visual Geographies', in *New Directions in Travel Writing Studies*, eds. Julia Kuehn and Paul Smethurst (London: Palgrave, 2015), 115.

[9] Judith Adler, 'Origins of Sightseeing', *Annals of Tourism Research*, 16 (1989): 7-29.

[10] Eitan Bar-Yosef, 'The "Deaf Traveller," the "Blind Traveller," and Constructions of Disability in Nineteenth-Century Travel Writing*, Victorian Review*, 35.2 (2009): 140.

[11] John Urry and Jonas Larsen, *The Tourist Gaze 3.0*, 3rd edition (London: Sage, 2011), 1.

[12] Adler, 'Origins of Sightseeing', 9.

[13] Adler, 'Origins of Sightseeing', 24.

[14] Forsdick, 'Travel Writing', 122, 116-7; my emphasis.

[15] Bar-Yosef, 'The "Deaf Traveller"', 134.

[16] Bar-Yosef, 'The "Deaf Traveller"', 139.

[17] James Holman, *A Voyage Round the World* [4 volumes], volume 1 (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1834), 5.

[18] Cited in Jason Roberts, *A Sense of the World* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2006), 2.

[19] Roberts, *A Sense of the World*, 3.

[20] It is worth noting that Roberts and Holman also stress the importance of sound and smell for Holman's navigation.

[21] James Holman, *A Voyage Round the World*, volume 3 (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1835), 227-8, cited in Bar-Yosef, 'The "Deaf Traveller"', 145.

[22] James Holman, *The Narrative of a Journey* (London: Rivington, 1822), vii, cited in Bar-Yosef, 'The "Deaf Traveller"', 144.

[23] Das, *Touch and Intimacy*, 12.

[24] Rodaway, *Sensuous Geographies*, 41-2, 41; James J. Gibson, *The Senses Considered as Perceptual Systems* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1966).

[25] Alan McNee, 'The Haptic Sublime and the 'Cold Stony Reality' of Mountaineering', *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century,* 19 (2014): 4. See also Alan McNee, *The New Mountaineer in Late Victorian Britain: Materiality, Modernity and the Haptic Sublime* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

[26] McNee, 'The Haptic Sublime', 3.

[27] McNee, 'The Haptic Sublime', 4-5.

[28] McNee, 'The Haptic Sublime', 14, 8. The relationship between travel writing and the sublime has been discussed at length elsewhere. Thompson, for instance, notes that in the Romantic era, 'a growing interest in the Sublime made mountains objects of aesthetic pleasure' (Carl Thompson, *The Suffering Traveller and the Romantic Imagination* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2007), 29). McNee, however, points out that in contrast to Edmund Burke's argument that the sublime gives delight only when viewed at a distance, the haptic sublime 'involves the presence of real physical danger, rather than the potential or imagined threat that had previously been associated with the sublime' (15). His account of the haptic sublime thus depends on close physical contact between the mountain and the climber.

[29] For a history of Antarctic exploration prior to Apsley Cherry-Garrard's *The Worst Journey in the World*, see: *Travels, Explorations and Empires: Writings from the Era of Imperial Expansion 1770-1835*, volume 3 'North and South Poles', ed. Peter J. Kitson (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2001); *Nineteenth-Century Travels, Explorations and Empires: Writings from the Era of Imperial Consolidation, 1835-1910,* volume 1 'North and South Poles', ed. Peter J. Kitson (London: Routledge, 2003).

[30] Apsley Cherry-Garrard, *The Worst Journey in the World* [1922] (London: Vintage, 2010), 98. Further references are included parenthetically in the text.

[31] Sara Wheeler, *Terra Incognita: Travels in Antarctica* (London: Vintage, 1997), 161. Further references are included parenthetically in the text.

[32] Diane Ackerman, 'White Lanterns', in *The Moon by Whale Light* (New York: Vintage, 1992), 197. Further references are included parenthetically in the text.

[33] Francis Spufford, 'Introduction', in *The Antarctic: An Anthology*, ed. Francis Spufford (London: Granta, 2007), 7.

[34] Spufford, 'Introduction', in *The Antarctic*, 6.

[35] Francis Spufford, *I May Be Some Time: Ice and the English Imagination* (London: Faber, 1996), 13.

[36] Spufford, 'Introduction', in *The Antarctic*, 2.

[37] Spufford, 'Introduction', in *The Antarctic*, 2.

[38] Carl Thompson, *The Suffering Traveller*, 4, 2.

[39] Roberts also highlights Holman's fear of frostbite during his fated journey in Siberia, noting that 'As touch was the primary sense by which he comprehended the world, numbness was a sort of second blindness. The threat of frostbite held special terrors' (Roberts, *A Sense of the World*, 203).

[40] Douglas Mawson, *The Home of the Blizzard* [1915] (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2000), 187.

[41] Mawson, *The Home of the Blizzard*, 187-8.

[42] Spufford, 'Introduction', in *The Antarctic*, 6.

[43] Mawson, *The Home of the Blizzard*, 188.

[44] Laura Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 162.

[45] Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, 162. See also Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, '1440: The Smooth and the Striated', in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 523-51.

[46] Renu Bora, 'Outing Texture', in *Novel Gazing: Queer Readings in Fiction*, ed. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 94-127; Jenny Chamarette, 'Flesh, Folds and Texturality: Thinking Visual Ellipsis via Merleau-Ponty, Hélène Cixous and Robert Frank', *Paragraph*, 30.2 (2007): 34-49.

[47] Alice Fulton, *Feeling as a Foreign Language: The Good Strangeness of Poetry* (Saint Paul, MN: Graywolf Press, 1999), 77.

[48] Spufford, 'Introduction', in *The Antarctic*, 15.

[49] Wheeler also employs such metaphors; she describes Wilson as Scott's right-hand man' and notes that Shackleton 'always has his finger on the pulse of his men' (*Terra Incognita*, 53, 35).

[50] Spufford, *I May Be Some Time*, 332.

[51] Spufford, *I May Be Some Time*, 332.

[52] Spufford, *I May Be Some Time*, 336.

[53] Although it is beyond the scope of the present study, this also raises questions regarding our efforts to keep 'in touch' with other people and the role of communication technologies in travel writing. The sending of correspondence and the use of the radio, telephone and email recur throughout accounts of polar exploration. Rodaway notes: "'Keeping in touch" is most often, it seems, referring to letter writing or, nowadays, the ubiquitous phone call, rather than a literal connectedness with other people and places' (Rodaway, *Sensuous Geographies*, 54).

[54] Henry Morton Stanley, *How I Found Livingstone: Travels, Adventures and Discoveries in Central Africa, Including Four Months Residence with Dr. Livingstone* [Abridged] [1871] (Auckland: The Floating Press, 2010), 439.

[55] Stanley, *How I Found Livingstone*, 439.

[56] Roald Amundsen, *The South Pole: An Account of the Norwegian Expedition in the Fram, 1910-12,* volumes 1-2 [1912], trans. Thorvald Nilsen, Kristian Prestrud and A. G. Chater (London: C. Hurst, 1976), cited in Spufford, *The Antarctic*, 110.

[57] Geoffrey Bennington, 'Handshake', *Derrida Today*, 1.2 (2009): 168.

[58] Bennington, 'Handshake', 168.

[59] Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992).

[60] Steven Connor, *The Book of Skin* (London: Reaktion Books, 2004), 259.

[61] Connor, *The Book of Skin*, 262.

[62] Jacques Derrida, *On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy*, trans. Christine Irizarry (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 47.

[63] Derrida, *On Touching*, 66.

[64] See https://www.bas.ac.uk/about/antarctica/the-antarctic-treaty/ [accessed 28.04.2015].

[65] Derrida, *On Touching*, 68, 47.

[66] Derrida, *On Touching*, 67.