

Book Reviews

CHERRY: A LIFE OF APSLEY CHERRY-GARRARD. Sara Wheeler. 2001. London: Jonathan Cape. xiv + 354p, illustrated, hard cover. ISBN 0-224-05004-4. £17.99.

At last! The first authoritative and comprehensive biography of Cherry-Garrard, who was recruited by Robert Falcon Scott for the *Terra Nova* Expedition to the Antarctic in 1910 and became one of its best-known members through his classic masterpiece *The worst journey in the world*. And yet at the time Cherry seemed an unlikely candidate for a polar expedition. Although he had youth on his side (he was 24) and had travelled extensively, he had no experience of polar lands and seas, nor any direct knowledge of science, nor of expeditions. Moreover he was very short-sighted, which might be considered a major handicap in travelling over heavily crevassed icy surfaces in blizzard conditions. None the less, Scott offered him a place on the expedition, selecting from more than 800 other volunteers.

Cherry had met Scott when staying with Edward and Oriana Wilson in the Scottish Highlands at the bungalow of his cousin Reggie Smith, head of the well-known publishing firm, Smith, Elder and Co. A close rapport developed as they tramped the moors and shot the wildlife. Wilson had been with Scott on the *Discovery* Expedition (1901–04), and had been recruited for *Terra Nova*. At the time Scott was immersed in the final arrangements for his second expedition to the Antarctic. Cherry had no other immediate plans and applied for a place to accompany his friends to the southern end of the Earth. At first Scott rejected his application, but was persuaded by Wilson, and by Cherry's offer of £1000 for the *Terra Nova* funds. Despite his apparent disadvantages, his selection proved to be a great success. Cherry was one of the best liked of all the expedition members, and he played a full part in all the duties on board ship, in the huts, and on the long polar marches. He survived the horrendous winter journey with Wilson and Bowers to Cape Crozier to search for the emperor penguin hatchery, accompanied Scott's South Pole party across the Great Ice Barrier, and was part of the small group in the final search for the tented tomb. Here he found Wilson, whom he adored; Bowers, one of his greatest friends; and Scott, for whom friendship had developed into deep respect. 'That scene can never leave my memory,' Cherry wrote.

Rarely did he criticise his comrades. He would later find some faults in Scott's planning of the assault on the Pole, and of all the men he liked least Scott's second-in-command, Teddy Evans, but these misgivings he voiced privately or committed to his diary. After he returned to England he was involved for some time as an officer in the First World War, and it was not until 1922 that his highly

sensitive and literary masterpiece, *The worst journey in the world* was published. In his laconic style he commented, 'if you march your Winter Journeys, you will have your reward, so long as all you want is a penguin's egg.' Cherry lived longer than most of the other survivors of Scott's expedition, dying at the age of 73 in 1959. His Antarctic journeys were to affect him for the rest of his life, particularly as he saw his book through countless editions.

Sara Wheeler has researched meticulously Cherry's diary and other papers held at the Scott Polar Research Institute, as well as family papers, and has held discussions with members of the Cherry-Garrard family, including his widow, Angela Mathias. Wheeler retells, through Cherry's observations, the story of Scott's expedition, and writes at length of Cherry's earlier life and his subsequent adjustment to living back in England. Much of the story is set in the 1920s and 1930s, within the milieu of the social and political conditions following the First World War, and is enlivened by anecdotes of the many public figures known to Cherry and his associates. The narrative is compelling, composed in well-crafted prose, and in itself a masterpiece of biography.

Cherry was born in 1886 to a middle-class family in Bedford. He was baptised Apsley Cherry. His father had spent his life in the army and retired as colonel, but was given the honorary title and always known as 'General' Cherry. In 1887 the General inherited from his brother an estate in Denford, Buckinghamshire, which had originally been purchased by the young Apsley's paternal grandfather, and he moved his family from Bedford to this estate. It was large enough to generate a comfortable income for the family and to employ a substantial force of farm workers and servants. Apsley Cherry found himself heir to a landed estate, with no financial problems, and no reason to contemplate having to earn a living. Nor did he ever do so. In 1892 his father's aunt died, bequeathing him a much larger estate in Hertfordshire with the condition that her patronym should be forthwith linked to that of the Cherrys. Hence the compound Cherry-Garrard came into being. The new estate was Lamer Park, near Wheathampstead, and the General quickly moved his family to where Cherry (his nickname was 'Laddie') grew up with four sisters. When the General died in 1907 the two estates were inherited by his only son, and Lamer became Cherry-Garrard's home until after the Second World War.

He had a traditional upbringing for those days — educated at prep school in Folkestone, followed by Winchester, and Christchurch, Oxford, where he read history and rowed prodigiously for his college, the only sport he could comfortably manage with his short-sight. On coming down from Oxford, Cherry was embroiled in the running of the two estates, which had been valued at the

equivalent of £5 million at today's values. He helped in the Oxford Church Mission in London and then joined a cruise ship to Australia, returning by way of the Far East and India. He became passionate about sea cruising and whenever, later in life, he could manage it, he returned to this pastime. He returned to England in time to negotiate his enrolment with Scott and his major adventure began.

Against this exceptional background for a polar explorer, Sara Wheeler has examined the effects on Cherry of his Antarctic adventure, in his resonance to an environment of extreme cold and bitter winds at the time, and subsequently. 'His reward for the worst journey in the world was an affirmation of the value of dignity and the abnegation of the self' she writes (page 119). He came to value greatly the friendship of his comrades, particularly the warmth of his relationship with Bowers and 'Atch' (Dr Edward Atkinson), and he admired the intense asceticism of Wilson. On returning from the 35-day search for the penguin embryo at Cape Crozier in appalling winter conditions he wrote in his diary: 'I'll swear there was still a grace about us when we staggered in. And we kept our tempers — even with God.' He was haunted all his life by feelings of guilt that he had not moved forward with the dogs another 12 miles from One Ton Depot, to reach the tent, perhaps even to have found the remaining members of the Polar Party still alive. Back in Lamer, he resumed his leisured way of life, but suffered from periodic bouts of depression, approaching mental breakdown, and these would last for several months. Sir Raymond Priestley, in a lecture on 'The polar expeditions as a psychological study,' commented: 'Polar madness was a characteristic symptom of exploration work, usually (but not always) after the expedition had returned to civilisation.' In his happier times, Cherry would walk down to visit his neighbours — George Bernard Shaw and his wife Charlotte at Ayot St Lawrence (they read the drafts of *The worst journey* and offered much advice) — or drive in his yellow Rolls-Royce to see Debenham in Cambridge, or to have lunch in London at the Berkeley Hotel.

Cherry married Angela Turner in September 1939. She was 30 years younger, but devoted herself to him and cared for him in his illnesses. Lamer was sold after the war, and Cherry and Angela moved into a block of fashionable flats, Dorset House in London. Cherry became an avid collector of antiquarian books. As guest speaker in 1952 at the Antiquarian Booksellers Association he spoke about books in general: 'I think they are ultimately important as a record of conflict, between wisdom and human folly, between good and sheer human infamy, between light and darkness; and because the best of them include truth and beauty... The best stories are not what people do, but why they do it.' The enigma of Cherry is enshrined in his only book, *The worst journey in the world*, and in this biography Sara Wheeler goes a long way to explain it — even to the extent of visiting Ross Island in the Antarctic. The book is a valuable addition to the literature of the Heroic Age. It is well illustrated, fully referenced in the notes at the end, and includes a select bibliography. Do read it! (Peter

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Reference

Cherry-Garrard, A. 1922. *The worst journey in the world*. London: Constable.

TUNDRA PASSAGES: GENDER AND HISTORY IN THE RUSSIAN FAR EAST. Petra Rethmann. 2001. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press. xxiv + 219 p, illustrated, soft cover. ISBN 0-271-02508-X. US\$22.50.

While the Soviet Union's northern regions remained closed to foreign ethnographers, few English language books appeared on the indigenous peoples of the Russian north. Since access became available (c. 1989), a number of valuable book-length ethnographies have allowed the non-Russian reader an understanding of the lives and the challenges facing some of the different peoples of the Russian north (Grant (1995) on the Nivkhi; Balzer (1990) on the Khanty and Mansi; Golovnev and Osherenko (1999) on the Nentsy; Anderson (2000) on the Evenki; Kertulla (2000) on the Yup'ik and Chukchi). Petra Rethmann's *Tundra passages* adds to this opportunity, and also provides us with a distinct focus. She chooses to examine contemporary (post-Soviet) Koriak life through the lens of gender relations, centering her attention particularly on the creativity with which Koriak women are coping with the ruinous predicaments of post-Soviet life on the periphery. Both because of this focus, and because of the attention paid to local interpretations of transition, Rethmann provides us with an especially fecund study.

Rethmann decries the lack of attention to the north and its indigenous population in the literature on post-Soviet transition, and offers her own work as one investigation into 'local struggles for power and meaning' (page xiii). She asserts the need for more attention to such locality studies, which examine indigenous/local persons as active participants in imagining and trying to shape their future, if within the severe constraints imposed by geography, bureaucracy, racism, politics, and economics. She gives special primacy to the need for examining women's strategies, long ignored by Russian and western ethnographers alike. Her book suggests a map for others who might wish similarly to advance our understanding of the local and gendered face of 'transition.'

The first chapters of *Tundra passages* set the stage, describing the study area of the northern tundra and villages of the Kamchatka Peninsula (the southern portion of the Koryak Autonomous Okrug), and surveying key moments of Tsarist and Soviet colonial penetration. Rethman then offers a critique of the state's and regional authorities' imaginings of 'Koriak-ness' as bounded up in traditionalism, primitiveness, and child-likeness. One wonders if stronger examples of such 'imaginings' might not have been proffered — the poem by Kosygin (page 28), for instance, seems tame compared with comparable texts on other indigenous Siberians. If offering not particularly