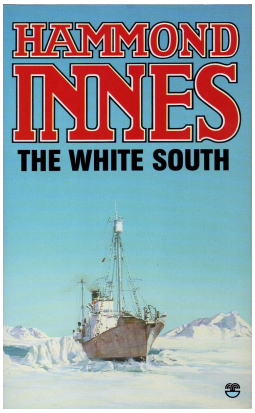
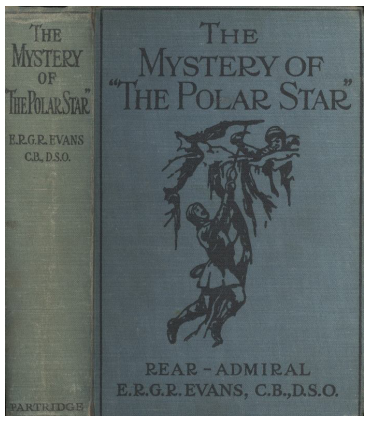
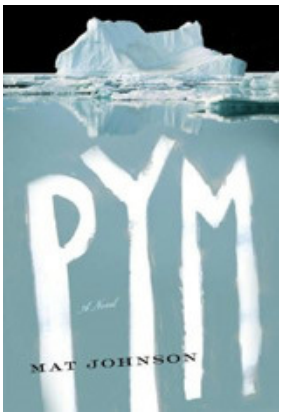
Monthly Lunchtime Talks Program
Tuesday, 6 June 2017

A History of Antarctica in Twenty Novels







Presented by Associate Professor Elizabeth Leane
University of Tasmania

Few people realise exactly how much fiction has been set in or around the Antarctic continent. Since the turn of the nineteenth century, when humans began to venture into high southern latitudes in significant numbers, hundreds of novels have been written in response to the region. They vary markedly. Some are highly 'literary', produced by acclaimed writers such as Edgar Allan Poe, James Fenimore Cooper, Thomas Keneally and Beryl Bainbridge. Others are unabashedly commercial: almost every popular genre, from the adventure thriller to the Mills and Boon romance, can boast an Antarctic title. Some are written in response to historical events and strive for realism, while others are wildly speculative; and many are somewhere in between, combining imagination with contemporary knowledge of the region.

The presentation draws on this imaginative tradition to offer a new perspective on the history of humanity's relationship with the far south. Elizabeth will focus on twenty novels published in English over the last 250 years, chosen for their influence, their historical significance or simply their quirkiness. Many other selections and many other histories are possible, but through these twenty books she hopes to give a small taste of the richness and diversity of Antarctic fiction.

Assoc. Prof. Elizabeth Leane holds an Australian Research Council Future Fellowship split between the School of Humanities and the Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies at the University of Tasmania. With degrees in both science and literature, she is interested in building bridges between disciplines, and particularly in bringing the insights of the humanities to the study of the Antarctic.

She is the author of South Pole: Nature and Culture, Antarctica in Fiction, and Reading Popular Physics and the co-editor of Considering Animals and Imagining Antarctica. A past recipient of an Australian Antarctic Arts Fellowship, Elizabeth is currently co-chair of the Humanities and Social Science Expert Group within the international Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research and Arts Editor of The Polar Journal.

Time: 12.00-1.00pm, Tuesday 6 June 2017
Place: Royal Society Room, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Customs House, 19 Davey St entrance.

Phone the Maritime Museum on 6234 1427 for more details or email john.wadsley@maritimetas.org