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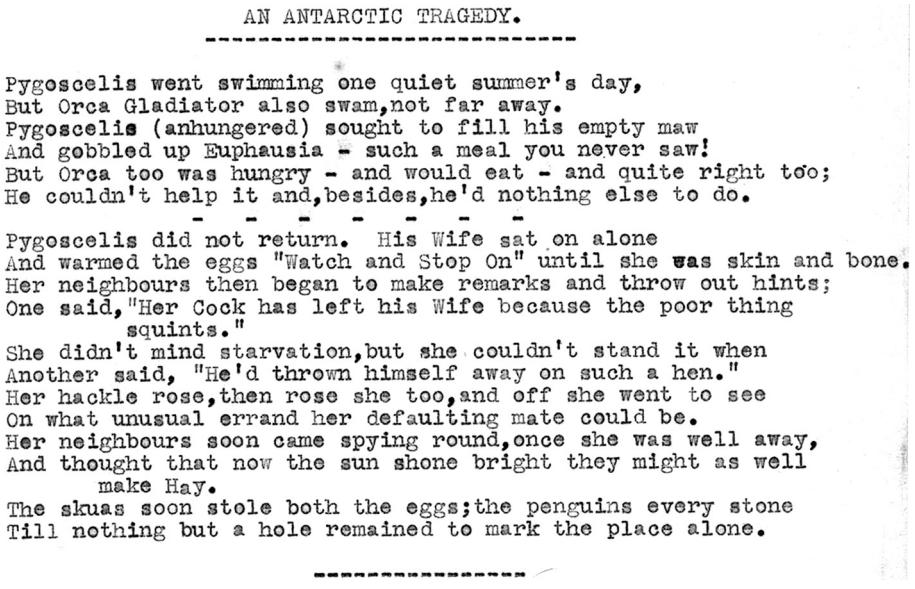
An Antarctic tragedy: a polar poem

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ABSTRACT. A newly discovered Antarctic poem, probably by Raymond Priestley, is presented.

Raymond Priestley (1886–1974) served as geologist on Ernest Shackleton's *Nimrod* expedition (1907–1909) and Robert Falcon Scott's *Terra Nova* expedition (1910–1913); he later visited west Antarctica with Prince Philip on the R.Y. *Britannia* (1957) and returned to the Antarctic for the last time as United Kingdom adviser to the American Deep Freeze IV expedition (1958–1959). After Priestley's death, his estate disposed of his library. In his copy of *The South Polar Times* was laid a loose sheet of paper on which was typewritten a poem in red ink, obviously very old, entitled *An Antarctic tragedy*. Presumably Priestley wrote it, but attribution must remain speculative because he did not sign it or otherwise append a notation. Attribution seems reasonable, if not obvious, however, under the circumstances of its discovery. *An Antarctic tragedy* is a clever, humorous, and poignant poem about an unfortunate Adélie penguin (*Pygoscelis adeliae*) pair during the nesting season. All who have observed Adélie penguins in their colonies will understand this poem perfectly, with true sympathy for these remarkable and lovable creatures. (Fig. 1)



AN ANTARCTIC TRAGEDY.

Pygoscelis went swimming one quiet summer's day,
But Orca Gladiator also swam,not far away.
Pygoscelis (anhungered) sought to fill his empty maw
And gobbled up Euphausia - such a meal you never saw!
But Orca too was hungry - and would eat - and quite right too;
He couldn't help it and,besides,he'd nothing else to do.
- - - - - - -
Pygoscelis did not return. His Wife sat on alone
And warmed the eggs "Watch and Stop On" until she was skin and bone.
Her neighbours then began to make remarks and throw out hints;
One said,"Her Cock has left his Wife because the poor thing squints."
She didn't mind starvation,but she couldn't stand it when
Another said, "He'd thrown himself away on such a hen."
Her hackle rose,then rose she too,and off she went to see
On what unusual errand her defaulting mate could be.
Her neighbours soon came spying round,once she was well away,
And thought that now the sun shone bright they might as well make Hay.
The skuas soon stole both the eggs;the penguins every stone
Till nothing but a hole remained to mark the place alone.

Fig. 1. *An Antarctic tragedy*

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