ANTARCTICA: A BIOGRAPHY. David Day. 2013. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 624 p, hardcover, illustrated. ISBN 978-0-19-967055-0. £ 18.75.

There is a lengthy tradition of scholars attempting to provide wide-ranging overviews of the Antarctic and Southern Ocean, which in so doing place due emphasis on discovery, exploration, science, law and geopolitics. Like many people with an established interest in the polar continent, my bookshelf is filled with popular, academic, and literary manifestations and their presence remind us that there are multiple genres at play (Leane 2012).

Continuing in this scholarly and popular tradition, the Australian scholar, David Day has written a substantial and substantive book with some 60 pages of scholarly notes, which are of interest to readers in their own right. As with many books, heavily armed with endnotes, I often wish these insights were not buried away at the back of the book. The sub-title 'a biography' is a little strange and I would have thought the portmanteau word 'bio-geography' would have been a better one given his interest in how and where the human encounter was shaped by exploratory, commercial and scientific routes across the Southern Ocean and polar continent. But that might have put off readers even if bibliography was another plausible alternative.

Described as 'Australia's greatest historian', which might rankle with some of his professional compatriots, Day offers a well-written narrative account of the period of exploration and discovery of the Antarctic, in the post Captain Cook era. In other words, the substantial elements of the book reflect on the last two hundred years or so rather than say the imaginative and material pre-histories of the Euro-Western encounter. I don't think, therefore, there will be much to surprise more seasoned observers of this part of the world and its connections to other areas of the world.

Antarctica's history is one, in the main, of importation as humans brought to bear ideas, objects, practices and narratives on to Antarctica. He shows, in considerable and useful detail, how discovery, exploration, commerce and science (undertaken elsewhere including the Arctic) informed one another. Commercial agendas informed much of the 18th and 19th century activities such as sealing and whaling. The commercialization of the Antarctic was large scale, and ensured that this southerly region was connected to wider flows and networks of a global society with emerging markets in objects like seal pelts and whale oil. This remote and poorly mapped space was being enrolled into the world-economy, and later a world of competing nation-states and their imperial agendas, including Britain and its imperial allies, Australia and New Zealand. Whaling and sealing were brutal if lucrative businesses and industrial innovation was important in ensuring that exploitation continued apace. Having visited abandoned whaling stations in the Antarctic Peninsula and South Georgia, there was much in Day's account that resonated with this reader.

Day has some useful things to offer about the way in which the contested politics of sovereignty in the early 20th century onwards meant that the explorers and scientists, acting as sovereign agents of states such as Argentina, Australia, Chile, Britain and the United States, undertook mapping, naming, flag waving, acts of possession and proclamation, base construction to the polar continent. For good reason, a former British diplomat, Bill Hunter Christie described, in a typical piece of under-statement, the existence of 'the Antarctic Problem' in 1951. For a continent devoid of human population, there was plenty of speculation about resource wealth. Perhaps it was that apparent emptiness, which encouraged and sustained such febrile speculation.

By the 1950s, the Antarctic was a geopolitically contested space. So within one hundred and fifty years of barely registering on European and American maps, the continent was being claimed, mapped, occupied and symbolically (in the main) fought over. Science and scientists were key accomplices in this 'sovereignty game'. Antarctica had a claimants club – Argentina, Australia, Chile, France, Norway, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. For three countries, as Hunter Christie recognized, there was an additional problem – their claims overlapped in the geographically proximate and commercially attractive Antarctic Peninsula region. Argentina, Chile and Britain remain locked in a geopolitical struggle to this day involving, of course, the Falkland Islands and wider South Atlantic region. The United States and the Soviet Union/Russia reserve the right to make a claim in the future and every other country rejects the claimants club.

Rightly, Day devotes a great deal of attention to the more contemporary geopolitics and history of Antarctica. Mega events such as the International Geophysical Year (1957/58), the equivalent of a scientific Olympics, are addressed because this period of scientific co-operation provided the pretext for the Antarctic Treaty of 1959. Day is right to stress that scientific co-operation and geopolitical competition made for awkward bedfellows. But without the spectre of possible conflict over the ownership of the Antarctic and its hidden resources, a co-operative treaty might not have been possible. The terms of the treaty are straightforward but important; all signatories agree to work together and in doing so defer their rival positions on sovereignty. New pressures such as outer continental shelf delimitation, resource management, and growing scientific station numbers contribute to this day as stress-testing factors of the Antarctic Treaty System.

For the polar aficionados, you will notice a few errors along the way. I am not going to dwell too long on that (for example *Polar Record* is not an American journal). I also note that Day's view on Scott's final expedition is rather more critical than some would care for. To focus on these things, however, is to miss the point of this book. Day is trying to bring to a wider audience a point that I passionately share; Antarctica has never been a 'pole apart'. And there is much to be concerned with in the here and now as well as the future; ocean acidification, living resource exploitation, mineral prospecting, further sovereignty claiming, and ongoing anxieties about climate change and ice cap stability. Having written a very short introduction to the Antarctic (Dodds 2012), it was a pleasure in large part to read a book by an author unburdened with the need to be concise. There is room for all kinds of literary encounters with the Antarctic (Klaus Dodds, Royal Holloway, University of London, Department of Geography, Egham, Surrey, TW20 0EX, UK (k.dodds@rhuc.ac.uk)).

References

Dodds, K. 2012. *The Antarctic: a very short introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Leane, E. 2012. *Antarctica in fiction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.