

time with the Division in Italy was among their finest moments. By all means, read *Green Cognac* and enjoy the account of how a young man became a veteran mountain trooper and achieved an education in life.

ALBERT H. JACKMAN

*Antarctica: Both Heaven and Hell*, Reinhold Messner. Translated by Jill Neate. The Mountaineers, Seattle. 1991. 375 pages. \$35.00

Some of the glory attached to Scott, Shackleton, Herzog and Shipton is owed to their unsung language teachers. In adventuring, one has not only to do the deed but tell it well. Reading Reinhold Messner is like contemplating an unwrought sculpture and imagining the form that might lie inside. Not that Messner is short on words or, as Steve Jervis points out in the accompanying review, shy about going into print. Not that his literary persona is uninteresting: quite the contrary, Messner's obsessive quest for identity through the overcoming of extreme obstacles has led to magnificent achievements. What's more, he is a man of considerable charm and verve.

So why then is *Antarctica: Both Heaven and Hell* such a mind-glazer? Why is it that halfway into what should be a ripping yarn one cares so little?

This book actually starts out well. Messner is wracked by existential doubt. His South Tyrol neighbors urge him to stay home and tend to his castle, while his soul cries out with wanderlust. A bit melodramatic, but okay.

Then the story begins and we launch into the preparations, accompanied by copious historical snippets and photos from the Antarctic library. Here, too, we learn a little about his companion, Arved Fuchs, who has walked to the North Pole. Messner's friends warn that Fuchs may be a phoney. En passant, Messner confesses to a little phoney-ness of his own: when he got sucked into a "childish game . . . to impress the media public," which is what he now calls the Seven Summits on Seven Continents caper that got him to climb the Vinson Massif in 1986.

Once on the ice in December 1989, Messner has a row with Adventure Network International, who provide less air support than promised, and he makes an effort to get acquainted with the enigmatic Arved. Meanwhile, who should breeze through the camp but another trans-Antarctic expedition, the Steiger-Etienne six-man dog sled team bent upon a 6000-kilometer traverse of the continent, from the Palmer Peninsula to Queen Maud Land. What a break for the little press corps that Messner had lured to the scene. And when they tag along with the dog-sledgers for a few days, and file thousands of words back to their editors, the becalmed Messner tries not to feel too miffed.

Finally, Messner and Fuchs set off from a somewhat arbitrary coordinate, 500 kilometers south of the Ronne ice shelf and Shackleton's proposed jumping off point for his 1914 trans-Antarctic trip. Very soon Fuchs has a case of chronic blisters from boots that are too small. (Shucks, we all make mistakes sometimes.) Also Fuchs is much less fit than Messner. Both pull sledges with 80-kilo

loads, reprovision from an airdrop in the Thiel Mountains, arrive at the South Pole for a resupply and party with the USARP (U.S. Antarctic Research Program) crew there, and then make an exciting dash for McMurdo, more or less along Scott's route. A total of 2800 kilometers in 90 days.

From time to time Messner's writing about the journey communicates. And one suspects that some South Tyrolean high school teacher really made an impression. A random sample: "Arved and I were travelling without any scientific pretension and yet we endeavoured to grasp this white infinity, to assess it, to find a relationship with it. For the time being it held us fast, nevertheless we were not yet fully conscious of its significance."

But then comes an unconvincing passage about his feeling like a primitive man at the dawn of time. And so once again the sculpture inside the stone recedes from view. As with his mountaineering tales, only the most determined reader is going to be alert for the Messnerian gems amidst the dross. But they *are* gems, of sensibility more than close observation.

A satisfying account of this journey would need a more coherent narrative. There are deep flaws in its logic, chiefly because there are no rules of play, no clean "ethic." And the achievement itself is beset with a mass of contradictions, as well as false comparisons with other Antarctic crossings. For instance, Messner puts down the high tech, all-tractor Fuchs-Hillary trans-Antarctic venture of 1957, but himself uses planes for resupply. True, not nearly as frequently, he insists, as the Steger-Etienne crew, who had many more dumps and also a constant supply of fresh flown-in dogs. Nor did he have their lavish corporate sponsorship. But he did have one crucial corporate backer to defray the million Deutschmark cost.

In the end Messner's claims to have used only "fair means" don't hold up very well. While his boast to a better manhauling speed than Shackleton's on his run for the Pole—who had no air support, no satellite tracking, no freeze-dried foods, no high-tech skis—is ridiculous. As to the trip's other motive—to express personal commitment to an Antarctic World Park—it remains throughout an abstraction, a slogan.

To be sure, nearly all adventure raises tricky ethical questions of appropriate risk, the fairness of the contest, the utility of the quest. These existed even when there were some blank spaces on the map. But the flaws, inconsistencies, presumption and even serious mistakes of a venture get excused when there's good writing, as Scott's last journey demonstrated.

Following the show-and-tell to newspapers and TV, the two explorers rift. Apparently a pattern with Messner. He is caught off guard and cannot believe the stories given out by Arvid Fuchs—or maybe just his handlers—the unkindest being that Fuchs, who Messner says took the lead only once, for a paltry 10 kilometers, was the trailbreaker throughout the march. Messner is hurt. One by the betrayal. Two by the fact that Arvid—such a nice quiet boy on the ice—seems to have bested him in the media.

Alas, Messner's letting-it-all-hang-out style destroys his effort to identify his epic with the Antarctic Greats. *They* never blabbed. Yet one cannot help but root

for him, and his ingenuous determination to be honest at all costs. On page 267 he declares that “just because I write openly about fears, egotism and aggression, I have frequently been called an *all-consuming* (kilometers, summits, successes, people) *Super-Neandertaler*. My claim to be sincere *vis-à-vis* myself and my readers was construed continually as me showing off.” And then just as one feels this guy really is too much, in the next sentence he says something Goethe might have written: “I know only that the word you have torn out of your soul has power.”

JOHN THACKRAY

*Second Ascent, The Story of Hugh Herr*. Alison Osius. Stackpole Books, Harrisburg, PA, 1991. 240 pages. Black-and-white photographs. \$19.95.

I knew Hugh Herr. First, as a teen-age prodigy smoking his way through Shawangunk test-pieces. (He soloed “P.R.”, 5.11+, when he was sixteen.) Then, after the event which cost him both legs, I knew him during his remarkable recovery and spectacular comeback as the Mechanical Boy, a prodigious feat of an altogether higher order of magnitude. We weren’t close, not even casual friends, barely acquaintances. But I had a strong sense of Hugh Herr. And I can tell you that the portrait Alison Osius paints in her stunning biography, *Second Ascent, The Story of Hugh Herr*, captures his likeness with total accuracy.

Osius has honed her literary skills on numerous articles for outdoor periodicals and now is Senior Editor at *Climbing* magazine. To my knowledge, this is her first full-length work. Hugh’s story has all the ingredients for soap-opera tragedy which could be easily told with saccharine sympathy, recrimination and other pseudo-literary conceits. However, Osius resists every pitfall and does more than justice to her material, telling Hugh’s story with a forthright directness worthy of and no doubt inspired by those very qualities embodied in her subject.

Osius starts the book with a discussion of Hugh’s Mennonite ancestors who settled in eastern Pennsylvania in the early 18th century. Examining the values which shaped that culture, she puts Hugh into a context that informs his personality and nature in terms of the ongoing and unbroken tradition from which he springs. She speaks of the extremely close-knit family whose summer trips out West first introduced Hugh to the mountains. The non-climbing reader then learns about technical rock climbing as Hugh and his older brother, Tony, first learn about it themselves, as young boys reading instructional manuals and then putting their information about these techniques into practice on the local crags and outcrops near their home farm.

What becomes clear early in the story and runs as a leitmotif throughout the book is Hugh’s passion for climbing. He is driven! Virtually every other aspect of his life is subsumed in his obsession with climbing. (He even gets involved with gymnastics at school to improve his climbing.) Hugh discovers as a boy