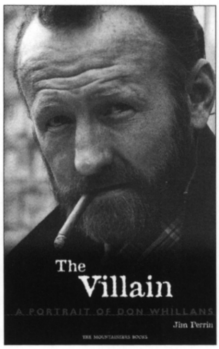
another report of a mountain fatality. You get the impression that the Grim Reaper is the most successful of all Himalayan climbers. But rest assured, when he comes down from the mountains even he will have to make his report to Elizabeth Hawley.

Despite its abundance of information, McDonald's book does have limitations: to view the history of Himalayan mountaineering singularly through the lens of Elizabeth Hawley's life does entail significant vignetting—a falling off of light around the edges of the picture. One comes away from *I'll Call You In Kathmandu* with the nagging sense that a great many interesting and important stories—some involving Hawley herself—remain hidden in the shadows. In the final analysis, however, Hawley's life story serves as an admirable counterpoise to the bravado and bluster too often encountered in mountaineering literature and history. While she is notoriously shrewd at ferreting out the truth in climbers' claims, she can also provide the occasional psychological insight, as when she describes a certain climber infamous for his falsehoods as "a complicated man, as so many climbers are, and I have the feeling that he really believes his claims. I really think he is a Walter Mitty type. He lives in a world of fantasy and he believes he was successful." Yet on a certain level isn't this true of anybody who sets out to climb a dangerous peak? All climbing accounts are the stuff of dreams and heroic imaginings. In the rarefied air of the world's highest peaks, a human being might sometimes, forgivably, be inclined to continue the ascent beyond the actual summit into the realm of fantasy. Fortunately, Elizabeth Hawley has been around to bring us all—climbers and readers alike—back down to earth.

JOHN P. O'GRADY

The Villain: A Portrait of Don Whillans. **JAMES PERRIN. SEATTLE: THE MOUNTAINEERS BOOKS, 2005. 360 PAGES, B&W PHOTOS. SOFTCOVER. $16.95.**



Here's a Whillans story I've been dining off for the last five years, told to me by a Brit climber who was 20 when Whillans died in his sleep at 53 in 1985.

A public schoolboy type enters the pub, his hands bloodied from a day of crack climbing. "Look at these," he says to his mates," I've been jamming all day. See how much skin I've lost. They're like raw hamburger!" Whereupon Whillans, at a nearby table, steely-eyed under the brim of his trademark cloth cap, thrusts out lily-white hands, knuckles up, and says "Them's jammer's hands, lad."

The incident, if it ever happened, may have taken place years after Whillans gave up gritstone jamming. In *The Villain* Jim Perrin tells us that gritstone cracks, in which Whillans excelled, were climbed without tape and ate up plenty of skin. But it's certainly true that good jammers lose much less of it than average: so the joke is that the upper class twit in the pub makes a show of his incompetence. Many of the Whillans' stories (true and false) celebrate proletarian emancipation just at the historical moment of decline in the class system's control of British climbing. Without Whillans' iconic status as a working-class hero, neither his climbing achievements, his wit, or prodigious talent as a brawler would have earned the fame that undergirds this book.

With enormous exactitude and sensibility, and painstaking fairness to everyone, Perrin gives a rounded picture of this man. And he does so without a word of psychological interpreta-

tion. His restraint in this regard is in perfect accord with his subject. Whillans' anti-social traits, as much as his achievements, seem to have emerged out of a non-dysfunctional childhood.

But although Whillans is the focus, what makes this a magnificent book is the social history of a great era of British climbing, sketched with loving detail by one of the participants. The controversies of the period are deftly handled, and Bonington, Haston, Scott, and lesser luminaries like John Streetly, Paul Ross, Al Harris, and others make cameo appearances.

The pity is that many who played a role in these times, as well as scores of potential readers, are no longer with us. Perrin demurred from publishing the manuscript until after the death of Audrey, Whillans' "good natured, long suffering" wife. Although she wanted a "warts and all" picture, Perrin decided that a full account of Whillans' parasitism, misogyny, bloody-mindedness, alcoholism, and numerous marital infidelities were more warts than Audrey needed in her closing years. Twenty years is a long time to sit on a book this good and give up maximum sales potential. Yet Perrin's attention to Audrey's feelings helps to balance the moral ledger that Whillans so infrequently consulted.

In the mountains Whillans now and again did demonstrate human virtue, when his alpine smarts and concern for others averted many a life-threatening crisis. But these qualities were more than balanced by an obdurate self-entitlement that alienated many: notably in his refusal to make a meal or brew a cup. And lo, what a surprise that after hitting the summit of Annapurna via the south face in 1970, he was marginalized and outmaneuvered for a place in British expeditions. Even the decade previous to that triumph had not been exactly covered with glory. As Perrin sees it, Whillans' fire burnt out quickly. "Before he is even out of his twenties, the Alps are beginning to fade from focus and his rock climbing pioneering is over." Later, Perrin says Whillans had the air of one "unloved by the gods who bestow good fortune"—in stark contrast to the favor shown his old climbing mate, Joe Brown, who continued to climb and pioneer new routes into his seventies, and is rich, celebrated, and happily married besides.

The final treat in *The Villain* is Perrin's descriptions of cragging—notably in a long digression about gritstone. Years of experience come pouring out in prose of amazing power. These few excerpts should give a taste of it. "The keynote to gritstone climbing is aggression… characteristically they [these climbs] deal with inordinately large quantities of pain and fear." He also makes fine distinctions between a typical Whillans route and a Brown route. Whillans' rock climbs were bold and in your face—an "affront" Perrin says at one point. (Such was once the power of his reputation that any truly daunting local crack was dubbed a Whillans route, often ones he'd never tried.) Brown's climbs, however, were seldom obvious, and required "lateral thinking, adjustment, balance." "On gritstone the difficulty of Joe's climbs is something to do with keeping enough of that flooding aggression back (into oneself) to channel into guile and technical inventiveness.... With Don's routes you always knew that if you wound yourself up to a particular pitch of focused aggression, you'd get up them without having to think too hard about it."

In the end *The Villain* left me with a dull ache as I considered my library shelves and the biographical material on dozens of climbers far greater than Whillans (Terray, Cassin, Robbins, Bonatti). If only they'd been delivered up from the past by a talent like Perrin's, how much richer the annals of mountaineering would be!

JOHN THACKRAY

Editor's note: The Villain received the best book award for Mountaineering History at the Banff Mountain Book Festival, 2005 and was co-winner of the Boardman-Tasker Award, 2005.