

quest, embraced readily by a tired and exhausted people, to show that the life and death of an individual could still have meaning, that the war had not expunged everything heroic and inspired. The image of the noble mountaineer scaling the heights, climbing literally through a zone of death to reach the heavens, high above the sordid reality of the modern world, would emerge first from the imagination and through the lens of John Noel.”

Mallory would come to epitomize the image of the death-defying mountaineer embracing a noble end; hence his inclusion in the subtitle of Davis’s book. But what is striking about this Everest history is Mallory’s absence until Chapter 5 (entitled “Enter Mallory”). Indeed, until the narrative reaches the 1924 expedition, nearly 500 pages in, Mallory is often a subsidiary character in the unfolding drama. That this is the least Mallory-centric history of Everest in the 1920s works to the book’s advantage, for it creates room for such important but often neglected figures as Alexander Kellas (student of high-altitude physiology, champion of the Sherpas) and George Finch (champion of the use of bottled oxygen) to come into their own.

Davis seems at times a little irritated with Mallory’s shortcomings in the practical skills of exploration, even as he acknowledges his stellar abilities as a climber. In 1921 Mallory repeatedly missed a key landscape feature, the mouth of the East Rongbuk Glacier, that would provide the expeditions of the 1920s and beyond a route to the North Col and potentially the summit. It was Canadian Edward Oliver Wheeler, the expedition’s mapmaker and topographer, who correctly read the mountain’s secrets, while Mallory floundered around pursuing dead ends. Wheeler’s journals and personal correspondence, uncovered and used to good effect by Davis, will be as crucial to future accounts of the 1921 expedition as Mallory’s papers have been in the past.

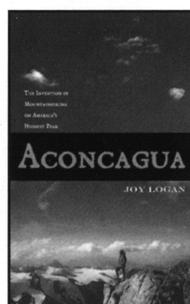
“The challenge from the start,” Davis writes in a detailed bibliographic essay that supplements his narrative, “was to go beyond the iconic figure of George Mallory...” He has succeeded splendidly in meeting that goal.

MAURICE ISSERMAN

***Aconcagua: The Invention of Mountaineering on America’s Highest Peak.* Joy Logan. The University of Arizona Press, 2011. 256 pages. Photos. Paperback. \$35.00.**

If you have a keen interest in mountaineering history, Joy Logan’s richly researched *Aconcagua: The Invention of Mountaineering on America’s Highest Peak* may be for you. This book adds to a growing list of sophisticated cultural critiques of mountaineering that do not simply recount the various exploits and drama surrounding alpine achievement and failures, but situates mountaineering within its cultural context.

As one example, this book considers the impact of Dick Bass, Frank Wells, and Rick Ridgeway’s *Seven Summits*, published in 1986. As a result of this book, lots of people became interested in tagging the highest point on each continent; therefore Aconcagua became essential. But how many mountaineers who put the peak on their tick list have any knowledge of its cultural history or surroundings? All that matters about the peak is that summiting it fulfills a mountaineer’s desire; in essence, the mountain is “mapped” in his imagination to conform to his own fantasies of prowess. Logan sees Bass’s “Tarzan yell” on Aconcagua as symbolic: summiting Aconcagua was an act of masculine rejuvenation that prepared Bass to reenter the



rough and tumble business world from which he had come.

According to Logan, the imaginative erasure of local cultural history and meaning is part of an imperial tradition in Western mountaineering. Mountains around the world fulfill masculine fantasies, she claims, just as exploring “blank spaces” in Africa, the Orient, or North America fulfilled European imperial adventurers. And when these mountaineers employ local muleteers—*arrieros*—to help transport their equipment, the locals are often treated in condescending ways that reinforce the Western sense of superiority.

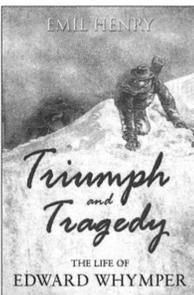
Even middle-class mountaineers from Mendoza, the city that is the launching pad for expeditions to Aconcagua, tend to align themselves with the Western narrative. They, too, create hierarchical divisions between themselves and the *arrieros*. Logan traces these trends back to Argentina’s rise as a nation intent on aligning itself with the Western global narrative.

Logan argues that other formulations of Aconcagua define the mountain through the lens of regional or indigenous identities. A prime example is the *Cementerio de los Andinistas*. Located five miles outside Aconcagua Provincial Park and often visited by tourists and mountaineers, this cemetery points to what Logan calls the “hybrid, fluid, postmodern identities of nation and self that Aconcagua constructs.” The fact that *arrieros* who have perished on the mountain are also buried in the *cementerio* puts their stories on equal footing with those of mountaineers aligned with imperial tradition. As Logan writes, “the *Cementerio* offers a rich and complex reading of local, national, and global interactions that include images of non-Western, non-male, and non-heroic subjectivities.”

Just as the cemetery offers “a rich and complex reading” of Aconcagua, so does this book. The book’s style is one of academic discourse, but it remains accessible to the intellectually curious non-academic reader.

PETER L. BAYERS

***Triumph and Tragedy: the Life of Edward Whymper.* Emil Henry. Matador (U.K.), 2011. 428 pages. B&W Sketches taken from Whymper’s published works. Hardcover. \$29.95**



There are two justifications for a new account of a historical figure marbled by time and previous biographies. One is new information from the attic or basement. The other is to see the life through the prism of a modern sensibility. The latter appears to be Emil Henry’s intent with *Triumph and Tragedy*. Unfortunately he lacks the psychological depth or freshness for the task. As to the writing, when he deals with Whymper’s late-life unhappy marriage to 21-year-old Edith Lewin, his style reminded me of women’s magazines in the 40s and 50s. In the following passage Edith has just written a note to a family friend, the young American H.F. Montangier, thanking him for a present to her daughter. Henry speculates on the woman’s state of mind: “Edie had made the bed she lay in, but the poignancy of her words was touching. Between the lines of her letter was a longing, a wish for more than she could give or receive in her hapless marriage to Whymper. Her joy as a new mother shone clearly but not brightly enough to conceal her loneliness. The warmly expressed thanks were tinged with sadness—for Edie’s plight and from concern for the future of young Ethel herself, to whom Whymper would always seem an emotionally distant grandfather. The cautious venting