Tales of exploration are necessarily shrouded in doubt. Whilst exploration trades in discovery, its truth claims are often ambiguous and reliant on a handful of first-hand accounts. Even when achievement seems clear-cut, its value is often questioned, even before we get to the complex entanglements of exploration and colonialism. Huw Lewis-Jones has written a book about how Arctic exploration was made to seem heroic in nineteenth-century Britain, by returning explorers and their biographers, as well as wider cultural apparatuses of spectacle, display, and performance. He outlines the ways in which heroism was constructed and why Arctic exploration proved so valuable for doing so, particularly in relation to the discussion and promotion of the Navy.

As a cultural history of Arctic exploration and travel, Lewis-Jones's text sits alongside the work of Robert David, Jen Hill, Hester Blum, Adriana Craciun, and Shane McCorristine, among others, as well as Beau Riffenburgh's work on exploration and its reception. The book is divided into six chapters, each showing, as Lewis-Jones puts it, "a common theme: to recapture the ways that explorers were imagined and why" (5). These are roughly chronological through the nineteenth century but show the range of the discussions which evoked or constructed heroism. The book is also well illustrated, with almost 100 black and white images. These are mostly contemporary press images, but significantly add to the theme, even if Lewis-Jones could at times refer to them more directly.

The introduction and first chapter set out the ways in which Arctic exploration served a particular type of naval heroism, one which drew heavily on the "romantic and imaginative potential" (24) of travel in the region. In the decades after the Napoleonic Wars, Arctic exploration provided a potent source of heroic peacetime behaviour, as well as a justification for continued material support for the Navy. Moreover, Arctic travel was utilised in the construction of particular kinds of heroism, creating a lineage back to a heroic past of chivalric values whilst simultaneously representing an "energetic, self-confident and patriotic" (34) Britain.

Admiral Lord Nelson was a central figure in nineteenth-century naval heroism and Lewis-Jones's second chapter considers how he was connected to the Arctic through a famous, and possibly apocryphal, encounter with a polar bear on a voyage to Svalbard as a young sailor. Lewis-Jones's focus here is the importance of myth to heroism and the recirculation of "Nelson's bear" as a key moment in Nelson's life in later biographies. The significance of

this as an Arctic encounter also meant that future Arctic exploration could be justified, with more young men given the opportunity to encounter their own bear, metaphorical or otherwise.

The third chapter continues to explore the construction of heroism, focusing on the reception of expeditions and perceptions of success. Here Lewis-Jones considers the aftermath of John Ross's Victory expedition, which returned to Britain in 1833 after four years away, and the relationship between celebrity and hero, in their permanence and visibility. Ross's involvement with public spectacles such as panoramas granted him celebrity status, but his poor relationship with key figures in the Admiralty such as John Barrow left him "in the borderland between fame and disgrace" (189), an inspiration to some but not fit to be lauded as a hero.

The subject of the fourth chapter is John P. Cheyne, whose plan to travel to the North Pole by hot air balloon left him similarly isolated from official Arctic exploration. Lewis-Jones emphasises that Cheyne's failure to realise his scheme was as much due to his inability to convince important figures of its value as its impracticality. Lewis-Jones stresses that public opinion towards Arctic exploration was neither consistently positive nor interested, with each expedition having to convince significant figures of their worth, particularly if they wished to be funded directly by the Admiralty. Despite Cheyne's prominence as a public lecturer, his expedition remained unrealised. As Lewis-Jones notes, failure can be as interesting as success when considering cultures of exploration.

This is made clearer in the fifth chapter, where Lewis-Jones considers the legacy of John Franklin and its use at the Royal Naval Exhibition of 1891. At a time when the British Navy felt increasingly threatened by other European powers, Arctic exploration was "relaunched in the service of peacetime naval propaganda" (249). Franklin and Nelson were key figures in the Exhibition and were called upon to serve as symbols of Britain's enduring naval and imperial power. This use of heroes continues to the present day, as Lewis-Jones shows in his final chapter, with particular focus on Stephen Harper's use of the discovery of the Franklin Expedition's ships to underpin Canadian sovereignty claims in the Arctic. This is combined with Lewis-Jones's personal reflections on exploration and its persistently contingent nature in the present.

Lewis-Jones's use of a wide range of archival material to consider the malleable and contested formations of heroism linked to Arctic exploration is impressive and allows a nuanced and detailed picture to emerge. However, it would have been valuable to think beyond the limitations of the idea of Arctic "blank space" and consider how this itself was constructed as part of imperial discourse. An overly narrow focus on exploration rather suggests that this "Arctic blank" is real and the absence of any discussion of Arctic Indigenous peoples or sense of the Arctic as a "contact zone" is limiting. A discussion of the strangeness of Arctic exploration, as McCorristine includes in his work on Arctic dreams and hauntings, would have contributed to a richer examination of the contingency of heroism. Lewis-Jones acknowledges the absence of comparison to other national cultures of Arctic heroism, a reasonable and necessary limitation, but the recent work of Max Jones on Fridtjof Nansen as a transnational hero is interesting for thinking beyond just national or comparative frames. Some discussion of the place of gender in heroism beyond naval masculinities would also have been welcome.

Overall, this is a valuable and interesting perspective on the construction of the Arctic as a region in the nineteenth-century British imagination, as well as having wider significance and interest for considering the importance of reception and performance when thinking about travel texts.