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Slicing the Silence: Voyaging to Antarctica. Tom Griffiths. New South, 2007.

Original unedited version of review by Gillian Dooley published in *The Adelaide*

Review 17 August 2007, p. 30.

Historian Tom Griffiths went to Antarctica in 2002, and the bones of this book are his diary entries for three weeks – the sea voyages and his five-day sojourn at Casey Station. The flesh, however, is in the essays interleaved with these (sometimes overwritten) diary notes. In these essays he covers an impressive array of perspectives on the great southern continent, from its early exploration and the international politics of the various treaties, to the psychology of wintering – apparently shy, withdrawn people survive polar winters best, and the place of women – excluded entirely at first except as objects of blessedly distant desire, later grudgingly admitted as equals. Particularly engrossing is the chapter on food: although ‘early Antarctica was full of men who hadn’t cooked much before, working with very limited ingredients,’ which sounds like a recipe for comedy, food was never a laughing matter for Scott and Shackleton. Griffiths writes powerfully of the ‘intellectual physicality’ of those drawn to the south, and of the spiritual pull it exerts. He is not averse to drawing on all the chilly possibilities of metaphor, giving his narrative scope to expand beyond the merely factual. Despite occasional grandiloquence, it’s an absorbing read.