

Books and Mountains (An Introduction)

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The modern fascination with mountains and mountain climbing has been noticed in such classical texts of cultural history as Georg Simmel's "Alpenreisen," Roland Barthes' *Mythologies*, Paul Veyne's "L'alpinisme," Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man*, and Simon Schama's *Landscape and Memory*. In the process, mountaineering has been associated with "the wholesale opening-up and enjoyment of nature" (Simmel 95), the "old Alpine myth . . . which Gide rightly associated with Helvetico-Protestant morality" (Barthes 74), "the discovery and inventory of the world" (Veyne 41), "the desire to be recognized as superior" (Fukuyama 319), and "a peculiar mixture of self-affirmation and self-effacement" (Schama 498). No such interest exists for mountaineering literature. Whereas mountaineering has long been recognized as a feature of modern culture, mountaineering literature remains underresearched, despite its obvious potential for a cultural history of mountains and mountaineering.

Worse still, there is a scholarly interest in literary approaches to mountains, but it seems to be limited to canonical poetic thematizations of mountain landscapes. In literary studies, mountains are a theme rather than a form-giving element. The focus is on canonical writers and their thematization of mountains, not on mountaineers and their autobiographical informing of experience where mountaineering is not just one of a myriad of possible themes but the very praxis that informs the narrative, the narrative's end rather than means.

This cluster of essays aims to remedy this state of affairs. It brings together work by scholars who are interested in both rethinking the literary canon and unearthing the uncanonical. The poets are stripped of their aura, while the mountaineers are acknowledged for their writing. As a result, the canon is questioned both for what it includes and for what it does not. Mountains cease to be one possible source of literary inspiration and instead become the very reason for the existence of one kind of literature. Ultimately, one type of author and reader, the national one, makes way for a new, potentially international community of letters.

The cluster opens with Aleksander Bjelčević's article on the constitutive properties of mountaineering autobiographies, including

narrative flashbacks and flash forwards, juxtapositions of motives, metaphoricity, dynamic narrative tempos, reflexivity, multiple narrators, dramatic dialogue, and jargon. Against this backdrop, Delphine Moraldo's article can be read as a kind of contextualist complement to Bjelčevič's textual analysis, as it provides a literary sociology of British and French mountaineering autobiographies in order to trace their role in the construction of the modern ideology of excellence. German, the third major language of early mountaineering literature, is covered by Johann Georg Lughofer, who shows that the contemporary German-language demythologization of the Alps belongs to an older tradition dating at least back to the literary writings of Joseph Roth and Ödön von Horváth. This is followed by a series of case studies, starting with Jernej Habjan's article on *Pot (The Path)* by Nejc Zaplotnik, a key text of Slovenian mountaineering literature and a characteristic example of a narrative built on the interplay between the literal search for the climbing route and the metaphorical search for meaning. A similar relation between a physical and a metaphysical adventure is at work in *Mount Analogue (Le Mont Analogue, 1952)*, René Daumal's unfinished novel about a group of mountaineers who set out to find an invisible mountain, the Analogue; the genesis of the novel is provided by Martina Kopf. Kopf's article is both preceded and followed by analyses of Polish mountaineering texts. The first one, by Przemysław Kaliszuk, sketches the development of the haptic sublime as the aesthetics that has helped Polish mountaineering writers to reconcile perceived literary conventions with the concreteness of the climbing experience. The second article, by Marek Pacukiewicz, adds to Kaliszuk's focus on modernism a case study on contemporary Polish mountaineering literature, as it develops a Latourian reading of the final diary of one of the most accomplished climbers in the Himalaya, Jerzy Kukuczka.

Approaching mountaineering writings from the perspective of literary studies, the contributors are careful to cite them in their original languages, which they then also translate into the languages of their respective articles if they cannot provide published translations.

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