

“What the Mountain Taught Me This August”: René Daumal’s (Meta)physical Alpinism

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French writer René Daumal’s (1908–1944) unfinished novel, Mount Analogue (Le Mont Analogue, 1952), tells of a group of mountaineers who set out to find an invisible mountain, the Analogue. All mountains have lost their analogical power, and thus a new mountain is needed. Daumal’s mountain serves a metaphysical goal and is linked to the desire for a change of consciousness, to be achieved through conquering the mountain. Even as a student, Daumal sought to expand his consciousness, not only through experimenting with drugs but also by means of sleep deprivation and somnambulism. In this regard, he was influenced by the Russian-Armenian esotericist George I. Gurdjieff (1866?–1949). Gurdjieff dealt with altered states of consciousness; he believed that the real world is hidden from us behind the wall of our imagination and that we therefore live a mechanical existence that we must break up by reaching our authentic selves. Mount Analogue is about this change of consciousness, and its ascent can be regarded as a metaphysical adventure. Daumal was also a passionate mountaineer who viewed mountains as a source of inspiration, stimulation, and physical adventure, but also as a place for recreation where he could rest his brain and heal his body, which was ill with tuberculosis. The idea for Mount Analogue came to him during a stay in the Alps in 1937. This contribution traces the genesis of Mount Analogue as an interplay between a physical and a metaphysical adventure.

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Le Mont-Analogue n'est pas fini, mais en bonne voie; le plus dur est fait—car il y a eu un passage très difficile, avec rimaie intérieure à sauter, verglas et gendarmes. Mais enfin, c'était assez avancé pour qu'aujourd'hui j'aie déjà dépensé une partie appréciable de mes droits d'auteur; j'espère le publier vers le printemps. (Daumal, *Correspondance III* 388)

Mount Analogue is not finished, but it is on the right track; the hardest part is done—because there was a very difficult passage, with an interior rim crevasse to jump, ice and gendarmes. But at last, it is advanced enough that I have already spent a considerable part of my royalties today; I hope to publish it around spring.¹

In a letter to Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes, dated 22 November 1943, French writer René Daumal (1908–1944) describes his difficulty finishing his novel *Le Mont Analogue: roman d'aventures alpines, non euclidiennes et symboliquement authentiques*, published in 1952, and translated in 1959 as *Mount Analogue: a novel of symbolically authentic non-Euclidean adventures in mountain climbing*. He does so allegorically, invoking the image of a path through the mountains. The challenges he faces resemble the difficult crossing of a crevasse, a confrontation with mountain pinnacles and black ice. Both the writer and the mountaineer have the same goal in mind: reaching the summit.

Mountains, mountain climbing, and the duality of height and depth have established themselves in language and literature as metaphors, allegories, and symbols. For Daumal, however, mountains served as more than literary allegories. He was both a writer and a mountaineer, someone for whom mountains were a place not only of inspiration, stimulation, and physical adventure, but also of recreation—a place to rest his brain and heal his body, which was ill with tuberculosis.

The idea for his unfinished novel, *Mount Analogue*, came to him during a stay in the Alps in 1937. In Daumal's famous unfinished novel, a group of mountaineers sets out to find an invisible, inaccessible mountain, the Analogue. All mountains, even those of the Himalaya, have lost their analogical power, and thus a new mountain is needed. Daumal's mountain serves a metaphysical goal; it is linked to a desire for an altered state of consciousness, to be obtained through conquering the mountain. Even as a student, Daumal sought to expand his consciousness, not only through experimenting with drugs but also by means of sleep deprivation and somnambulism. He continuously experimented with tetrachloromethane in order to experience a dis-

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, translations are mine.

solution of consciousness, the threshold between life and death. *Mount Analogue* is about this shift in consciousness and has been described as a “real manual for the aspiring seeker” (Ferrick Rosenblatt 210). Even though the mountain ascent portrayed in the novel can be regarded as a metaphysical adventure, the physical dimension should not be underestimated. For Daumal, however, mental conquest is linked to reality—this is reflected in the very idea of *Mount Analogue*, which is the result of the interplay between a physical and a metaphysical adventure. Daumal's (meta)physical passion for the mountain is described as follows by French journalist, and Daumal's friend, Emile Dermenghem:

La dernière fois que je vis Daumal, c'était aux pieds des plus hautes montagnes du Dauphiné. Il aimait passionnément la montagne, d'un amour physique et métaphysique. Il s'y exaltait et s'y rassérénait. Son corps, touché pourtant par la maladie, semblait s'y alléger, s'y libérer. Il venait de faire seul, et comme sans effort, la Barre des Écrins, ce qu'on avait peine à croire. Il en redescendait un peu comme d'un Sinai, d'un Horeb ou d'un Thabor, la vision comme purifiée par les neiges, ou comme d'un mont Mérou, centre et pilier du monde, axe immuable autour duquel se déroule la multiplicité des apparences, ou comme d'un mystique mont Qaf qui est la montagne de l'Unification, où l'oiseau Simourgh chante les chants dont les musiques de ce monde sont l'écho périssable et délicieux. (Dermenghem 510)

The last time I saw Daumal was at the foot of the highest mountains in the Dauphiné. He loved the mountains passionately, with physical and metaphysical love. He was exalted and reassured there. His body, though affected by illness, seemed to lighten and free itself there. He had just climbed the Barre des Écrins alone, and without effort, which was hard to believe. He came down as if from a Sinai, a Horeb, a Tabor, his vision as if purified by the snow; as if from a Mount Meru, center and pillar of the world, an unchanging axis around which the multiplicity of appearances unfolds; as if from a mystical Mount Qaf, the mountain of Unification, where the Simurgh sings the songs of which the music of this world is an ephemeral, delicious echo.

This contribution seeks to trace the genesis and conception of *Mount Analogue* by considering Daumal's experience as a (meta)physical mountaineer, as documented above all in his correspondence.

(Meta)physical Formation: Becoming a Writer, Becoming a Mountaineer

Although *Mount Analogue* has achieved cult status, Daumal is known only to a select readership. When he died of tuberculosis in Paris in 1944 at the age of 36, he had published only a slim volume of poetry, *Le Contre-Ciel* (1936), and the short novel *La Grande Beuverie* (*The Long Drunk*, 1938). In addition, he wrote articles and reviews in various literary journals, alongside his work as a translator. As a teenager, he had already read Teresa of Avila, Emanuel Swedenborg, Alfred Jarry, and Arthur Rimbaud and was influenced by Antonin Artaud's Surrealism. In 1928, he founded the magazine *Le Grand Jeu*, whose editors (Roger Gilbert-Lecomte, Robert Meyrat, Roger Vailland, and André Rolland de Renéville), long before the Second Manifesto of Surrealism, aimed to convince readers that poetry, far from being a luxury, could only be understood as reflection. The metaphysical project initiated as early as 1922 by Daumal and Lecomte (who were still students at the Lycée in Reims at the time), was at once poetic, philosophical, and human-centered. It was primarily devoted to three themes: the process of rationalism and its limits; the search for a so-called absolute word that would restore language's intuitive character and original power, as well as poetry's value as a spiritual exercise; and finally, the rediscovery of religion in its purity, leading to a practical metaphysics and making it possible to concretely revive and experience the concepts of the soul, redemption, and initiation (see Biès 19). In the experimental metaphysics of the group that had formed around *Le Grand Jeu*, whose members called themselves *phrères simplistes*, drug-enhanced waking dreams and sleep renunciation were used to achieve dream-like states of dissociation.

Daumal thus had his first spiritual experiences during his time at the lycée—experiences that would become a central part of his life. He developed a fascination for India and Hinduism and, by the age of 17, had already learned Sanskrit to be able to read the Bhagavad Gîta. He experimented with alcohol, tobacco, and noctambulism and tried to poison himself with gasoline. He was guided early on by a desire to achieve the dissolution of his own consciousness: He wanted to know how consciousness disappears and the power he had over it. He was influenced by the Russian-Armenian esotericist George I. Gurdjieff (1866?–1949), one of the most influential teachers of the twentieth century. Gurdjieff dealt with altered states of consciousness, including sleep and waking states; he believed that the real world is hidden from

us behind the wall of our imagination and that we therefore live in a dream, a mechanical existence that must be broken by waking up, as it were, and reaching our authentic selves. Gurdjieff's goal was to lead humankind to a new consciousness of itself and thus change behavior and attitudes: "The first step in the search for greater awareness involves seeing oneself more objectively and developing an impartial moment-to-moment attentiveness toward impressions of the body and senses." (Ferrick Rosenblatt 129) The state of sleep, by contrast, metaphorically stands for lack of consciousness and must be overcome by waking up. Rather than being a constant state, however, waking up is to be understood as a constantly repeated process that corresponds to an actual awakening from sleep (see Magee 296). The method of waking up is based on the assumption that we are normally not awake and must remain continuously active in order to avoid falling back asleep. Daumal believed in revelations evoked by disappearances and changes of consciousness (see Kopf, "Berg"). He conceived of literature as a means of experiencing consciousness, as the allegorical conquest of Mount Analogue shows.

Daumal first became a serious mountain climber in 1937, but he had been introduced to the mountains ten years earlier. In August 1927, a 19-year-old Daumal was invited by Richard Weiner to a visit in Bourg-d'Oisans, in the Dauphiné. In a letter to his host dated 8 August 1927, he seemed to anticipate the creative, refreshing potential of the Alpine landscape: "J'ai l'impression d'aller te rejoindre dans une terre vierge où chaque pas est une création nouvelle, où l'on n'est plus attiré par les anciennes pistes. (I feel like I'm going to join you in a virgin land, where every step is a new creation, where we are no longer drawn to the old tracks.)" (Daumal, *Correspondance I* 163–164) In a letter to Gilbert-Lecomte written on 30 August in the French Alps, Daumal compared the landscape to "un plateau désolé qui ressemble au Tibet (a desolate plateau that looks like Tibet)" (171). The mountains would continue to trigger strong emotions in Daumal for the rest of his life. On 22 August 1927, he wrote a letter to his parents in which he expresses the simple satisfaction and joy he feels toward the Alpine landscape and in practicing alpinism: "Je grimpe, vois et respire et je n'ai pas la place pour m'étendre sur ce sujet; je dirai seulement que je suis heureux. (I climb, see, and breathe, and I don't have the space to dwell on that; I'll just say I'm happy.)" (169)

Ten years later, Daumal's correspondence documents his further experiences in alpinism. As his letters indicate, he spent the summer in Vaujany, a commune in the canton of Oisans-Romanche, in the

Isère department of southeastern France. Suffering from tuberculosis, he sought to restore his health, as we read in his letter to Marianne Lams, dated 19 August 1937 (see Daumal, *Correspondance III* 110). On 10 August 1937, writing to Vera Milanova, he describes the Alpine landscape as “la mère Nature” (‘mother Nature’), a place to recover after “des mois de vie artificielle (months of artificial life)” (Daumal, *Correspondance III* 104). His days in the mountains were filled with various trips to the region. In typical mountaineering style that he adopts on 19 August in a further letter to Milanova, he describes the mountain as his antagonist and the struggle against it as a challenge: “Hier, j’ai constaté que j’avais vaincu cette rude nature, après un combat assez dur. J’avais donc eu raison de me traiter comme une bête sauvage, c’est à dire sans trop de douceur; et maintenant je puis regarder la montagne d’égal à égal; et même je vais commencer à m’en nourrir. (Yesterday, I found that I had overcome this harsh nature, after a rather hard fight. I had been right to treat myself like a wild beast, that is to say, without too much gentleness; and now I can look on the mountain as an equal; and I will even start to feed on it.)” (Daumal, *Correspondance III* 107)

Daumal ultimately comes to view the challenges of the mountains and his contact with an animated nature as an experience of the self:

Ce qui est toujours remarquable, c’est comme l’animisme (pour parler comme les savants) est naturel à l’homme; dans les passages difficiles, on parle à la montagne, on l’insulte, on crache dessus, on la menace, on lui souhaite que la foudre l’abatte, puis on l’implore, on la flatte, on lui promet toutes sortes de choses—et, en fait, il faut dire qu’à la fin tout cela réussit: c’est une manière de parler à sa propre nature en faisant semblant de parler à la nature extérieure; c’est la grande comédie naturelle. (Daumal, *Correspondance III* 105)

What is always remarkable is how natural animism (to speak like the scholars) is to man; in the difficult passages, we talk to the mountain, we insult it, we spit on it, we threaten it, we wish that lightning will strike it, then we implore it, we flatter it, we promise it all sorts of things—and in fact, it must be said that in the end all this succeeds: it is a way of talking to one’s own nature while pretending to talk to an external nature; this is the great natural comedy.

Daumal’s personification (or anthropomorphization) of the mountain is a central characteristic of literary alpinism. It corresponds to mythic-animistic thinking, according to which the personification of the mountain renders it accessible in its function as a higher power, as a god, making sense of non-personified entities by attributing human motivations, characteristics, and activities to them. Mountains have historically been held responsible for certain events in their function

as higher powers with a will of their own (see Kopf, *Alpinismus* 43). It was only through secularization that the mountain came to be viewed as an equal opponent who could be defeated. This secular conception of the Alpine ascent represented a shift in thinking: the aesthetically motivated mountain climb replaced the religiously motivated journey, establishing an old meaning in a new way. The mountain experience still promised enlightenment, but not as a result of any god or higher power. Rather, the focus was a modern, cognizant subject who was seeking him- or herself and who embodied autonomy: by conquering the mountain, often depicted as an opponent, the subject found self-confirmation. The mountain thus became a place of self-experience and self-affirmation (50). Thus, Daumal succumbed to the power of this animism only temporarily and would ultimately describe the external challenge as an internal one: the struggle against the mountain is revealed to be a struggle against oneself.

That summer, Daumal not only learned how to cross crevasses with neither ice pick nor crampon (see Dranty 34) but also set off in the middle of the night with a 58-year-old bearded companion with whom he would go on to conquer the highest mountain in the region, thus solidifying, in his own mind, his status as a genuine alpinist. Here is what he wrote to Milanova on 21 August 1937:

Il y a eu une très belle promenade à travers un immense glacier poudre de neige, puis des rocs et des neiges et des rocs et des neiges, une halte avec confiture au pied du plus grand pic de la région, et puis on l'a escaladé sans peine. Il paraît que lorsqu'on a fait cela, on est consacré alpiniste, mais j'avais déjà fait bien plus rude. C'est pourtant la 1^{re} fois que je montais si haut (3470m), et le spectacle était étonnant; même difficile à supporter, cette brillante peinture de nuages et montagnes tout autour de l'immense sphère creuse de cristal bleu au centre de laquelle je me trouvais; il semble qu'à rester là une heure de plus, on deviendrait fou, tellement les habitudes de la vision sont dérangées. (Daumal, *Correspondance III* 112)

There was a very nice walk through a huge glacier powdered with snow, then rocks and snow and rocks and snow, a stop with jam at the foot of the largest peak of the region, and then we climbed it without difficulty. It seems that when you have done that, you are a dedicated mountaineer, but I had already done much harder things. It is, however, the first time I climbed so high (3470 m), and the spectacle was astonishing; even difficult to bear, this brilliant painting of clouds and mountains all around the immense hollow sphere of blue crystal, at the center of which I found myself; it feels as though if one were to remain there one hour more, one would go insane, so disturbed are one's visual habits.

For Daumal, the mountains became a revealing power in which he found stimulation and inspiration, above all for his magnum opus, *Mount Analogue*. Not only did the physical effort—which became a routine of sorts—free him from negative emotions, as he wrote to Milanova on 19 August 1937 (see Daumal, *Correspondance III* 108), but, according to a letter from 10 August, the mountains taught him slowness and calmness (104), giving his mind a break through a physical routine, “monter, grimper, souffler, manger un pruneau, frotter les doigts avec de la neige, déblayer le rocher, écarter les quatre membres (to climb up, climb, blow, eat a prune, rub fingers with snow, clear the rock, spread out one’s four limbs)” (Daumal, *Correspondance III* 126), as he wrote to Jean Paulhan on 10 September 1938. This interplay of physical and metaphysical experiences and adventures in the mountains is summarized by Daumal himself in a conclusion that also highlights, again, the recreational effects on his body. His letter to Milanova, dated 21 August 1937, reads:

J’en conclus que sur les hautes cimes, la pensée est substantielle ou n’est pas; les nombres, par exemple, deviennent pesants et résistants comme des pièces de mécanique. Si l’on pense à quelqu’un, de même toute la gangue d’émotions confuses s’évanouit et il ne reste que le sentiment très simple et très clair que l’on a envers telle ou telle personne. Je comprends pourquoi les sages chinois, le Christ, Moïse, les adeptes de Çiva et autres allaient penser sur de hauts sommets; j’en vois du moins quelques raisons. Physiquement, non seulement j’ai changé de peau, mais j’ai l’impression que toutes les cellules se sont renouvelées. Il n’y a que le tympan gauche qui reste toujours comme un tambour crevé, mais, au fond de mon instinct animal, il y a un espoir qu’après la montagne, la réaction se poursuivant, cela pourra peu à peu se raccommoder. (Daumal, *Correspondance III* 112–113)

I conclude that on the high peaks, thought is either substantial or not; numbers, for example, become heavy and resistant, like pieces of machinery. If you think about someone, the whole gangue of confused emotions vanishes, and only the very simple and clear feeling you have toward this or that person remains. I understand why the Chinese sages, Christ, Moses, the followers of Çiva, and others went to think on high peaks; I see at least some reasons for this. Physically, not only have I shed my skin, but I feel like all my cells have been renewed. Only the left eardrum is still like a broken drum, but in the depths of my animal instincts there is hope that after the mountain, as the reaction continues, it may gradually heal.

Daumal spent the summers of 1939, 1941, 1942, and 1943 in Pelvoux, a former commune in the Hautes-Alpes department in the Provence-

Alpes-Côte d'Azur region in southeastern France. Although he continuously suffered from illness and chose the valley for “oro-hydro-anemo-meteorological” reasons, as he wrote to Ribemont-Dessaignes on 27–28 July 1939 (Daumal, *Correspondance III* 166), he still undertook mountain hikes, on which he was confronted with himself. On 17–21 November 1941, he wrote to Ribemont-Dessaignes as follows:

Les 24 et 25 septembre, pour le dessert de mon repos annuel de montagne, je montai au Pelvoux (aller et retour par les Rochers Rouges, décor pour Sisyphe, agrémenté de la vision des plus fantastiques séracs que j'aie vus—ceux du Clot-de-l'Homme—, mais, en haut, sous un soleil chaud, dans un air immobile, une de ces vues qui vous clouent le bec). Depuis 2 h de l'après-midi jusqu'au lendemain soir à 10 h—32 heures—aucun contact avec nul être humain. Ce fut une révélation—de ce que je croyais déjà cent fois savoir—Seul, je bavardais sans arrêt! (Daumal, *Correspondance III* 254)

On 24 and 25 September, for the dessert of my annual mountain rest, I went up to Pelvoux (outward journey and return by the Rochers Rouges, a setting for Sisyphus, enhanced by the sight of the most fantastic seracs I have ever seen—those of the Clot-de-l'Homme—but at the top, under the hot sun, the air still, one of those views that takes your breath away). From 2 p.m. to 10 p.m. the next day—32 hours—no contact with any human being. It was a revelation—of what I thought I already knew a hundred times—Alone, I chatted without stopping!

With his health deteriorating, Daumal spent the summer of 1940 with Vera in the Pyrenees, in Gavarnie, where he sought rehabilitation. In a long letter to his brother, Jack Daumal (see Daumal, “A Jack”), he describes his climbs to the Sarradets (2740 m), the Piméné (2800 m), and Brèche de Roland (2800 m).

While he would find relaxation in the mountains, his stay in Paris just prior to his death painted another picture entirely. On 5 January 1944, he wrote the following in a letter to Pierre Granville: “Il n'y a pas de ciel, pas de mélèzes, pas de vaches. Un monde souterrain. Les murs et les meubles en vibration perpétuelle. (There is no sky, no larches, no cows. An underground world. The walls and furniture in perpetual vibration.)” (Daumal, *Correspondance III* 394)

Conquering Mount Analogue

In 1939, during a stay in the Alps, Daumal began work on *Mount Analogue*, a sci-fi adventure novel à la Wells which was also considered an introduction to alpinism. The idea for his mountain novel had come to him a few years earlier, as a letter to Jean Paulhan written in September 1937 attests: “Maintenant je vais enfin finir la Grande Beuverie, et après cela j’écirai peut-être ce que la montagne m’a appris ce mois d’août. (Now I will finally finish la Grande Beuverie, and after that I may write about what the mountain taught me this August.)” (qtd. in Dranty 34)

Unfortunately, Daumal died before he could finish his novel, and the unfinished text was published posthumously in 1952. The concept of *Mount Analogue*, a symbol of the human spirit, becomes clearer when Gurdjieff’s influence on Daumal’s thinking is taken into account. *Mount Analogue* can be understood as a symbolic narrative documenting the spiritual experience of a group and their guide—as experienced by Daumal himself. In this sense, it has been described as a “many-leveled symbolic allegory of man’s escape from the prison of his robotic, egoistic self” (Ferrick Rosenblatt 197). Daumal, who was introduced to Gurdjieff by the painter and leading exponent of Art Nouveau Alexandre de Salzmann (1874–1934), and to Gurdjieff’s thought by his wife, Jeanne de Salzmann (1889–1990), followed Gurdjieff’s teachings between 1932 and 1944. Daumal was convinced by Gurdjieff’s concept of awakening, although he had already been developing similar thoughts of his own. His early metaphysical quest, his view of the absurd, and his belief in asceticism led him to a realization that was ultimately confirmed by his readings of Hinduism and by Gurdjieff’s teaching: the importance of evolving and changing one’s consciousness.

Mount Analogue describes a journey to an unknown mountain located on an island. The adventurers are led by a spiritual teacher, Pierre Sogol, whose name may be an allusion to Gurdjieff and is an anagram of the word *logos*. In the novel, the narrator mentions *Mount Analogue* in an article on the mountains of the world, which prompts Sogol to ask him to contact him. From *Mount Analogue*, the group expects to gain a new perspective on the universe. The text, peppered with digressions and enumerations, is characterized by the hybridization of different text forms, on the one hand a work of science fiction, on the other an adventure novel, as Daumal had set out on 29 November 1939 in a letter to André and Cassilda Rolland de Renéville:

“Il y aura dedans de substantielles digressions scientifiques, psychologiques, métaphysiques (et-pata),² linguistiques, rhétoriques, éthiques, mythologiques, mais je voudrais qu'un lecteur de 15 à 18 ans puisse, les sautant à son gré, lire le tout comme un roman d'aventures. (There will be substantial scientific, psychological, metaphysical (and pata), linguistic, rhetorical, ethical, mythological digressions in it, but I would like a reader of 15 to 18 years old to be able, skipping them as he pleases, to read the whole thing as an adventure novel.)” (Daumal, *Correspondance III* 177)

The idea for Mount Analogue matured in Daumal's mind between the two World Wars, in a time of disillusionment in which the only thing left to do was to search for “another world” in order to break out of “prison.” Daumal found himself, as he wrote in a letter to Raymond Christoffour, dated 24 February 1940, “in search of that higher humanity, freed from prison, where they can find the help they need (à la recherche de cette humanité supérieure, libérée de la prison, où ils pourront trouver l'aide nécessaire)” (Daumal, *Correspondance III* 185).

Originally revered as sacred spaces, mountains had long since become a commonplace. Above all, their size and vertical position, which give them a specific structure and function as a boundary, make mountains special places. Symbolically, they represent a center, an expression of the sacred par excellence; they become the center of the cosmos, the world, or a region. Particularly important is their role as an *axis mundi*, separating heaven and earth but also connecting them, a place of divine encounter with humanity, as Mircea Eliade points out: “La montagne est plus voisine du ciel et cela l'investit d'une double sacralité: d'une part, elle participe au symbolisme spatial de la transcendance ('haut', 'vertical', 'supreme', etc.), et, d'autre part, elle est le domaine par excellence des hiérophanies atmosphériques et, comme telle, la demeure des dieux. (The mountain is closer to the sky, and this invests it with a double sacredness: on the one hand, it participates in the spatial symbolism of transcendence ['high,' 'vertical,' 'supreme,' etc.], and on the other hand, it is the domain par excellence of atmospheric hierophanies and, as such, the abode of the gods.)” (Eliade 94)

Overused and worn, and now imbued with commercial value, the mountain no longer serves as a privileged reference point for the cul-

² With “pata,” Daumal is referring to Alfred Jarry and his parody of science, the so-called pataphysics, which Jarry describes in his book *Gestes et opinions du docteur Faustroll, pataphysicien* (*Exploits and Opinions of Dr. Faustroll, Pataphysician*, 1897–1898). Daumal published a study in 1929 entitled “La pataphysique et la révélation du rire” (“Pataphysics and the Revelation of Laughter”).

tivation of aesthetic experience. It either succumbs to the picturesque or risks becoming a leisure attraction, a place of mass recreation. An originally untamable element thus becomes the victim of modern rationalization and disillusion.

Against this background, Daumal's idea of Mount Analogue can be understood, even if, like the novel itself, it remains abstract. Daumal does not provide a concrete definition of Mount Analogue—the only thing that becomes clear is that it seems to dwarf all other mountains:

[L]e Mont Analogue doit être beaucoup plus haut que les plus hautes montagnes jusqu'ici connues. Son sommet doit être inaccessible par les moyens jusqu'ici connus. Mais, secondement, sa base doit nous être accessible, et ses pentes inférieures doivent être habitées d'ores et déjà par des êtres humains semblables à nous, puisqu'il est la voie qui relie effectivement notre domaine humain actuel à des régions supérieures. (Daumal, *Le Mont Analogue* 77)

Firstly, Mount Analogue must be much higher than the highest mountains known today. Its summit must be inaccessible by means known up to now. But secondly, its base must be accessible to us, and its lower slopes must already be inhabited by human beings similar to us, for it is the path that links our present human domain to higher spheres. (Daumal, *Mount Analogue* 73)

Daumal's protagonist, a connoisseur of the symbolism of mountains in different cultures, reflects as follows at the beginning of the novel:

Et ce qui définit l'échelle de la montagne symbolique par excellence—celle que je proposais de nommer le Mont Analogue—, c'est son inaccessibilité par les moyens humains ordinaires. Or, les Sinaï, Nebo et même Olympe sont devenus depuis longtemps ce que les alpinistes appellent des "montagnes à vaches"; et même les plus hautes cimes de l'Himalaya ne sont plus regardées aujourd'hui comme inaccessibles. Tous ces sommets ont donc perdu leur puissance analogique. Le symbole a dû se réfugier en des montagnes tout à fait mythiques, telles que le Mérou des Hindous. Mais le Mérou—pour prendre cet unique exemple—, s'il n'est plus situé géographiquement, ne peut plus conserver son sens émouvant de voie unissant la Terre au Ciel; il peut encore signifier le centre ou l'axe de notre système planétaire, mais non plus le moyen pour l'homme d'y accéder. (Daumal, *Le Mont Analogue* 57)

And what defines the scale of the ultimate symbolic mountain—the one I propose to call Mount Analogue—is its inaccessibility to ordinary human approaches. Now, Sinai, Nebo and Olympus have long since become what mountaineers call "cow pastures"; and even the highest peaks of the Himalayas are no longer considered inaccessible today. All these summits have therefore lost their analogical importance. The symbol has had to take refuge in wholly

mythical mountains, such as Mount Meru of the Hindus. But, to take this one example, if Meru has no geographical location, it loses its persuasive significance as a way of uniting Earth and Heaven; it can still represent the center or axis of our planetary system, but no longer the means whereby man can attain it. (Daumal, *Mount Analogue* 42–43)

Since all mountains have lost their analogical power, a new mountain is needed: “Pour qu’une montagne puisse jouer le rôle de Mont Analogue, concluais-je, il faut que son sommet soit inaccessible, mais sa base accessible aux êtres humains tels que la nature les a faits. Elle doit être unique et elle doit exister géographiquement. La porte de l’invisible doit être visible. (For a mountain to play the role of Mount Analogue, I concluded, its summit must be inaccessible, but its base accessible to human beings as nature has made them. It must be unique, and it must exist geographically. The door to the invisible must be visible.)” (Daumal, *Le Mont Analogue* 57; *Mount Analogue* 43)

What does the unreachable peak stand for, symbolically? What does “analogue” mean? André Rousseaux interprets “analogue” in such a way that the peak of the mountain corresponds to the peak of our spirit (Rousseaux 39). The ascent of Mount Analogue thus symbolically stands for a metaphysical experience in the sense of a transformation of consciousness. The mountain thus becomes a mediator, a link or door between the “prison,” that is, a condition to be overcome, and a “humanité supérieure (superior humanity)” to be achieved, as he wrote in the letter to Christoflour (Daumal, *Correspondance III* 185).

For Daumal, however, the mental conquest is linked to reality—this is reflected in the concept of Mount Analogue. It is not an imaginary mountain; it has a concrete geographical location, on an island in the South Pacific. As we read in the novel, “La porte de l’invisible doit être visible. (The door of the invisible must be visible)” (Daumal, *Le Mont Analogue* 57; *Mount Analogue* 43). The base of the mountain is natural, while the summit is supernatural. Thus, setting out for the mountain is at first, indeed, a physical enterprise with a metaphysical dimension. The conquest of the mountain is accompanied by the achievement of a new state: as the group is about to ascend, it sheds its “old self”: “Nous commençons à nous dépouiller de nos vieux personnages. (For we were beginning to shed our old personalities.)” (Daumal, *Le Mont Analogue* 115; *Mount Analogue* 131)

Père Sogol ultimately attempts to put this self-discovery and new beginning into words:

Je vous ai conduits jusqu'ici, et je fus votre chef. Ici je dépose ma casquette galonnée, qui était couronne d'épines pour la mémoire que j'ai de moi. Au fond non troublé de la mémoire que j'ai de moi, un petit enfant se réveille et fait sangloter le masque du vieillard. Un petit enfant qui cherche père et mère, qui cherche avec vous l'aide et la protection; la protection contre son plaisir et son rêve, l'aide pour devenir ce qu'il est sans imiter personne. (Daumal, *Le Mont Analogue* 116)

I have brought you this far, and I have been your leader. Right here I'll take off the cap of authority, which was a crown of thorns for the person I remember myself to be. Far within me, where the memory of what I am is still unclouded, a little child is waking and making an old man's mask weep. A little child looking for mother and father, looking with you for protection and help—protection from his pleasures and his dreams, and help in order to become what he is without imitating anyone. (Daumal, *Mount Analogue* 132)

The traditional symbolic meaning of the mountain as a link between heaven and earth, the summiting of which changes the subject, is thus confirmed: a precondition of reaching another world, another consciousness, another time, is turning away from one's previous state. The characters gradually become aware that there is something else and that they must rid themselves of everything in them that characterized their previous lives. Reaching the summit of Mount Analogue symbolizes reaching another sphere, a new consciousness, thus becoming a changed person. The mountain ascent allegorically demonstrates this transformation of consciousness.

When the group begins its ascent, however, the novel breaks off after a comma. This has an extraordinary aesthetic effect and invites readers to attempt their own metaphysical ascents of Mount Analogue: they must continue the climb individually, finding within themselves the peak to be conquered. Literature thus confirms itself as a metaphysical exercise in a Daumalian sense.

Toward a Continuous Alpinism

Despite, or perhaps because of, its fragmentary character and its open ending—the comma at the end of the novel has been described as the “ice pick of a continuous alpinism” (Dranty 47)—Daumal's novel has proved extremely powerful, as its international reception shows: from directors Alejandro Jodorowsky and Philippe Parreno, to musicians Patti Smith, Marilyn Manson, and John Zorn, to the artist Ben Russell—many have been fascinated and inspired by the idea of Mount

Analogue. For François Mitterrand, the novel even became a kind of fetish (see Tonet 22).

In a new edition published by Gallimard in 2021, which, in addition to a foreword and afterword by Patti Smith, also documents the artworks of an exhibition held that year in Reims entitled *Monts Analogues* (*Mounts Analogue*), the editor explores Daumal's conception of the mountain as a connection point leading to creation (see Bergmann 12). Thus, Daumal's metaphysical alpinism lives on. Yet it would hardly have been possible—in the form it took—without Daumal's physical experience in the mountains. What the mountain “taught” him that August cannot, and should not, be underestimated.

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»Kaj me je gora naučila v tem avgustu«: (meta)fizični alpinizem Renéja Daumala

Ključne besede: literatura in alpinizem / francoska književnost / alpinistična literatura / Daumal, René / ezoterizem / sprememba zavesti / Gurdžijev, Georgij I.

Le Mont Analogue, nedokončani roman francoskega pisatelja Renéja Daumala (1908–1944) iz leta 1952, pripoveduje o skupini alpinistov, ki išče nevidno goro, imenovano Analog. Vse gore so izgubile svojo moč analogije, zato je potrebna nova gora. Daumalova gora služi metafizičnemu cilju in je povezana z željo po spremembi zavesti s pomočjo osvajanja gore. Daumal je že kot študent poskušal širiti svojo zavest s pomočjo drog, a tudi z odtegotvanjem spanca in somnambulizmom. V tem pogledu je nanj vplival rusko-armenski ezoterik Georgij I. Gurdžijev (1866?–1949). Gurdžijev se je posvečal spremenjenim stanjem zavesti; verjel je, da je resnični svet zakrit za zastorom naše domišljije in da živimo mehanska življenja, ki jih moramo preseči s pomočjo spoznanja svojega pristnega jaza. Daumalov roman tematizira tovrstno spremembo zavesti, vzpon, ki ga opisuje, pa je v tem smislu metafizična pustolovščina. Daumal je bil tudi strasten alpinist, ki je v gorah iskal vir navdiha, stimulacije in fizične pustolovščine, pa tudi prizorišče rekreacije za svoje možgane in od tuberkuloze načeto telo. Zamisel za roman *Le Mont Analogue* se mu je porodila leta 1937 med oddihom v Alpah. Članek predstavi genezo romana, ki ga obravnava kot igro fizične in metafizične pustolovščine.

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