



HEIGHTS OF REFLECTION

MOUNTAINS IN THE GERMAN IMAGINATION FROM
THE MIDDLE AGES TO THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

EDITED BY
SEAN IRETON AND CAROLINE SCHAUMANN

Heights of Reflection

Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture

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Edited by
Sean Ireton and Caroline Schaumann



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Introduction: The Meaning of Mountains: Geology, History, Culture

Sean Ireton and Caroline Schaumann

“MOUNTAIN” IS A RELATIVE and variable concept, not only across the diverse cultures of the world but also in geoscientific terms. As products of tectonic, volcanic, glaciological, gravitational, and meteorological forces, mountains continually form and deform all over the globe. What were once the highest summits on the planet are now reduced to weathered mounds, as attested for instance by the Appalachians or the even older Laurentians. On the other hand, geologically younger ranges such as the Alps, Andes, and Himalayas continue to rise. While mountain elevations are generally determined from sea level, the Hawaiian Islands contain the tallest peaks in the world if one measures them from the ocean floor. Mauna Kea officially stands at 4,205 meters or 13,796 feet above sea level but rises over 10,000 meters or 33,000 feet from its base in the Pacific Ocean; it therefore surpasses Mt. Everest (8,848 m/29,029 ft.) in height. The neighboring Mauna Loa (4,170 m/13,680 ft.), the largest volcano on earth in terms of sheer mass, has depressed the sea floor some five miles, thus attaining approximately 17,000 meters or 56,000 feet in total elevation. It can therefore be considered the frontrunner in long-standing debates about mountain altitudes. But nothing is clear-cut when it comes to the earth’s complex geomorphology. Owing to the imperfect sphere of our planet or its so-called “equatorial bulge,” the summit of Chimborazo (6,310 m/20,702 ft.), located only one degree south of the equator, is farther removed from the earth’s center than either Everest or the Hawaiian volcanoes. These submarine and subterranean considerations aside, Kilimanjaro (5,895 m/19,330 ft.) remains the highest freestanding mountain, towering more than 5,000 meters (16,000 ft.) over the East African plains. Beyond these geophysical criteria, the human perception of what qualifies as the loftiest world summit has changed throughout history. While Westerners first believed that the Alps were home to the high points of the world, European exploration and colonization of the Americas revealed even more towering peaks in the Andes. Chimborazo was consequently thought to top the list from the sixteenth to the early nineteenth century, when yet higher mountains were discovered in the Himalayas. The honor then fell to Dhaulagiri, and finally, in the 1850s, to Everest.

Given this confusion as to what precisely constitutes the highest mountain in the world, one cannot but question the contingency of this geological concept and anthropological construct. It thus comes as no surprise that there exists no universal definition of “mountain” in terms of elevation, volume, or gradient. In the cultural history of the Alps, for instance, one notes a tradition of conflating mountains and their surrounding terrain. The Middle High German *Albe* or *Alpe* (from the Latin *albus*: “white”) refers to a snow-capped mountain as well as to a high-altitude pasture (compare the modern German *Alm*). Both of these terms aptly describe the Alps or *Alpen*, which even at lower elevations remain under snow throughout much of the year; but they also indicate that pastoral meadows were at least equally important as peaks in the minds of local inhabitants. Indeed, up until the eighteenth century, *Alpen* was an appellation that encompassed not only summits and meadows but also mountain passes, which were commonly viewed as a topographical amalgam of peak *and* valley. Since pilgrims, traders, and war leaders considered routes of passage infinitely more vital than the peaks themselves, maps of the Alps identified only the St. Gotthard Pass, leaving out the names, location, and height of Alpine mountains. In sum, definitions and designations of mountains are closely related to their historical, cultural, and economic significance and function.

Trigonometric and topographical measurements notwithstanding, diverse cultures have fundamentally different ways of defining and relating to mountains. As Hartmut Böhme has observed, the mountain is an “absolute metaphor.” An “Urphänomen,” or primordial phenomenon, like water or light, mountains are inherently symbolic and play a crucial role in the cultural evolution of peoples around the globe. They are infused with “Bedeutungscluster,” or clusters of meaning, and these in turn “strukturieren die Topographie des Geistes” (structure the topography of the mind).¹ These clusters are readily discernible in the contrasting perceptions of mountains in Western and Eastern cultures. To the Western world, forests, deserts, and mountains were inhospitable places unsuited for cultivation and thus deemed of no value. Etymologically speaking, this “wilderness” was an uninhabited and undeveloped place where “wildeor” (wild beasts) roamed. This long-standing tradition of opposing *wild* (denoting “useless,” “disordered,” “alien”) and *civilized* (denoting “cultivated,” “fertile,” “flat”) terrain also has its roots in the Judeo-Christian belief system. The Hebrew word for “wilderness” is *midbar*, which not only connotes a forbidding place full of dangerous animals (“that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and droughts . . .”; Deut. 8:15) but also, in a more geographical or ecological sense, a transitional zone between the infertile, uninhabited desert and arable regions of human settlement (see Num. 21:13–18).² Whereas they have an originary presence in many Eastern religions, mountains go unmentioned in the

Hebrew story of Creation. Paradise was an abundant, well-groomed, and peaceful garden antithetical to the savage and threatening nature looming outside its confines (*pairidaēza* means “an enclosed garden or park” in the early Indo-Iranian language of Avestan). In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve enjoyed plentiful water, edible plants, and domesticated animals, in contrast to the “wilderness” (the English term first appeared in a fourteenth-century translation of the Latin Bible) that comprised the accursed “thirsty” land of “thorns and thistles” east of Eden. This stark contrast, already evinced at the dawn of Western culture, reverberates to this day. As Roderick Nash explains:

Today dictionaries define wilderness as uncultivated and otherwise undeveloped land. The absence of men and the presence of wild animals is assumed. The word also designates other non-human environments, such as the sea and, more recently, outer space. Of equal importance to these actualities are the feelings they produce in the observer. Any place in which a person feels stripped of guidance, lost, and perplexed may be called wilderness.³

It is no surprise, then, that Western civilizations busied themselves with clearing and burning down forests, domesticating animals, and raising crops in an attempt to eliminate “wilderness” and thereby better steer the course of their own existence.⁴

With specific respect to mountains, the Judeo-Christian tradition — somewhat paradoxically — tends to accord a privileged status to such desolate and elevated territory. In the Old Testament, Noah’s ark came to rest on Mount Ararat; Abraham bore Isaac to a mountaintop for sacrifice; Moses received the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai; and Elijah triumphed over the followers of Baal on Mount Carmel. As for the New Testament, one need only mention a few critical stations in the life and teachings of Jesus: the Mount of Temptation, the Sermon on the Mount, the Mount of Transfiguration, the Mount of Olives, and Golgotha. All of these physical heights function as symbolic sites of spirituality, sacrifice, and transcendence. But such spiritually enlightened views did not always carry over in full to the popular (Christian) mentality. Throughout much of human history in the West, mountains exuded both fear and fascination: while often regarded as the domain of dark spirits, demons, and dragons, they also attracted a great deal of curiosity. A case in point is Mount Pilatus (2,120 m/6,955 ft.) near Lucerne, Switzerland. According to legend, the Roman prefect Pontius Pilate — the very man who is said to have sent Jesus to Golgotha — was interred at the top, and the City Council of Lucerne barred any citizen from climbing the mountain for fear that it would unleash the wrath of Pilate. In 1387, six clergymen were jailed because they attempted to ascend the peak, which remained unclimbed until 1518, when professor of medicine



Fig. 1. "Images of Dragons," by Johann Jakob Scheuchzer, 1723.

From *Itinera per Helvetiae Alpinas Regiones*.

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Vadianus was issued a special permit to scale Pilatus and failed to encounter any supernatural beings. As late as the eighteenth century, mountains were believed to house terrestrial forces of evil, and in his four-volume *Itinera per Helvetiae Alpinas Regionis Facta Annis 1702–1711* (Travels through the Alpine regions of Switzerland made in the years 1702–1711), the Swiss professor of physics and mathematics Johann Jakob Scheuchzer compiled sightings, descriptions, and illustrations of dragons (fig. 1), distinguishing winged from unwinged, and footed from non-footed species.

By most accounts, this long-reigning superstition precluded any large-scale exploration of mountains up until the 1800s, when advances in the sciences and a shifting mental paradigm brought scholars, poets, and climbers into contact with Alpine terrain. This book, however, challenges what we see as the oversimplified assumption that human interaction with mountains is a distinctly modern development, one that began with the empowerment of the individual, whether in the wake of Enlightenment rationalism or Romantic subjectivity. The 1991 discovery of Ötzi, the Ice Man, a remarkably well-preserved mummy dating back to around 3,300 BCE, which two climbers stumbled upon at 3,210 meters or near 11,000 feet in the Ötztal Alps of Tyrol, testifies that Neolithic man frequented the high mountains — and these of course were even more glaciated at the time. Based on the arrowhead buried in his shoulder (presumably the cause of his death), blood from another human on his clothes, and a rudimentary backpack made of animal skins stretched over a wooden frame, scientists conclude that Ötzi had traveled across this section of the Alps, possibly as a trader or shepherd, and that had he had encountered other people — including his own killers — high above the realm of human habitation.⁵

In the Americas, numerous peaks from the Rockies to the Andes also display signs of human presence. Stone circles or so-called “enclosures” in Nevada and Wyoming (the highest such structure is located on the sub-summit of the Grand Teton) suggest that Amerindians climbed to remote heights in order to experience visions, an important rite of passage in many tribes. Arrowheads have been found on some of the highest reaches in the Rockies and Sierra Nevada. One furthermore finds pre-Columbian traces on more soaring heights in Mexico and South America, for instance structural ruins 1,200 feet below the Mexican summit of Popocatepetl (5,452 m/17,887 ft.) and an Incan burial site atop Llullaillaco (6,739 m/22,110 ft.) along the Chilean-Argentinian border. Again, it is important to note here that mountains have not always been utter *terra incognita* throughout anthropological history. They have, rather, borne witness to human activity — whether worship, hunting, exploration, or passage — on various continents and among a wide array of premodern cultures.

As intimated above in the examples drawn from Native America, non-Western civilizations tend to revere rather than fear mountains. Mount Meru occupies the center of the universe in Hindu and Buddhist cosmologies, while in Taoism the Kunlun Mountains form the cosmogonical origin of the “ten thousand things” that make up the world. Pilgrimages to high elevations for the sake of illumination have a long tradition that continues into the present. Famous examples include Mount Fuji (3,776 m/12,389 ft.), one of three holy mountains in Japan, whose symmetrical cone-summit is celebrated for its beauty in mythology, poetry, and painting, and was climbed as early as 663 CE; and Tai Shan, one of the Five Sacred Mountains in ancient China from whose relatively low-lying summit (1,533 m/5,029 ft.)

Confucius is said to have gained insight into the insignificance of the world below him. Today both Fuji and Tai Shan draw tens of thousands of visitors and pilgrims annually; over the course of its history, the latter peak has in fact been ascended by seventy-two emperors as well as Mao Zedong. Other prominent holy peaks and their respective worshippers around the world include Mount Emei (Buddhists), Ayers Rock (Aboriginal Australians), Mount Kenya (the Kikuyu people), Kilimanjaro (the Chaga people), Ol Doinyo Lengai or “The Mountain of the God” (the Masai people), and Adam’s Peak in Sri Lanka, whose rocky summit contains an indentation attributed to the footprint of Buddha, Shiva, or Adam, depending on one’s religious perspective. Moreover, two major prophets, Zoroaster and Mohammed, are identified with mountain topography: whereas the latter received his first revelation from the Angel Gabriel in the remote Hira Cave on Jebel-an-Nur (“The Mountain of Light”) just outside Mecca, the former is believed to have dwelled and elaborated his religious doctrines in the rugged heights of ancient Persia.⁶

This volume, however, is firmly rooted in European — more specifically, German — cultural history. Within this area, the subject of mountains has received little scrutiny, at least in any concentrated or sustained form, which seems curious given the (widely perceived) German penchant for both thorough scholarship and mountain climbing.⁷ Yet, as this volume shows in sixteen chronologically arranged chapters, references to mountains abound in the broader German-speaking humanistic tradition. Given the intellectual “tyranny of Greece over Germany,” to allude to E. M. Butler’s study of the modern German fascination with Hellenic culture,⁸ we begin with a prelude that addresses the role of mountains in the classical imagination. As Dan Hooley argues in “Classical Mountain Landscapes and the Language of Ascent,” mountains have always mattered, whether as objects of peril or attraction, of spiritual enlightenment or existential fulfillment, of philosophical contemplation or aesthetic inspiration. His opening contribution covers much historical and authorial terrain (Pindar, Euripides, Horace, Vergil, Seneca, Petrarch, and others) and helps to establish the discursive ground for the chapters that follow. Hooley’s discussion of Petrarch is of particular importance from the standpoint of mountaineering history. In April 1336, Petrarch decided to climb Mont Ventoux (1,912 m/6,273 ft.) in southern France, ostensibly for no other reason than the sheer desire to experience nature in all its fullness. Choosing his brother as companion and ignoring a local shepherd’s warning, Petrarch eventually reached the top of the “Giant of Provence,” where he marveled at the panoramic view that stretched from the Pyrenees to the Alps. Though Petrarch’s epistolary account of his climb is stylized, perhaps nothing more than a literary construct,⁹ many regard it as testimony of the first premodern example of mountain climbing for climbing’s sake. Petrarch, that is, seeks the summit of Ventoux based on individualistic,

non-utilitarian motives. In his classic study *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien* (The civilization of the Renaissance in Italy, 1860), Jacob Burckhardt famously called Petrarch “einer der frühesten völlig modernen Menschen” (one of the earliest completely modern human beings), in large part because of his “planloses Bergsteigen” (mountain climbing without plan).¹⁰ Petrarch’s aesthetic summit delight in the horizontal and vertical space below, and his simultaneous inward turn to a moral experience reinforce this fundamental connection between mountains and intellectual history.

The cultural importance of mountains increased during the Middle Ages, when their resources of copper and iron were increasingly needed for coinage, armor, and weapons. These material reserves underwent various literary-metaphorical transformations, resulting in fantasies of magnetism, water reservoirs, precious minerals, and treasure troves. Albrecht Classen’s “Terra Incognita? Mountains in Medieval and Early Modern German Literature” offers a survey of perceptions and evocations of mountains from the early to late Middle Ages. He shows that poets often focus on the depths rather than the heights of mountains; heroes do not so much climb peaks as explore their cavernous interiors. On a psychological level, this interiorization of geophysical terrain may be interpreted as a response to the harsh if not fatal mountainous environment looming on the horizon. Courtly culture was of course based in regions close to the Alps (Swabia, Bavaria, and Austria), and this major mountain range posed a formidable barrier — both physical and mental — to pilgrims, clergymen, and political officials on their way to and from Rome, the religious capital of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation. Nevertheless, in early modern woodcuts mountains rise to artistic prominence, intimating the beginnings of an artistic concern with the landscape: Alpine scenes become dominant background motifs, whether in Maximilian I’s *Theuerdank* of 1517 or in contemporary *vedute* of cities located both close to (Salzburg) and far from (Strasbourg and even Constantinople) the Alps.

Historical records reveal a number of intriguing ascents during the late medieval and early modern eras. These climbing milestones attest to both an intellectual interest and a physical participation in mountain landscapes well before the birth of Alpinism and the age of Romanticism in the latter half of the eighteenth century. Though it is not possible to discuss all of these landmarks in the present context, several deserve mention, again, if only to show that mountains were not altogether shunned by premodern Europeans or signified a *locus horribilis*.¹¹ In 1358, a knight by the name of Bonifacio Rotario D’Asti climbed Rocciamelone (3,538 m/11,607 ft.), a steep and partially glaciated mountain in the Graian Alps of Italy. While Columbus was making preparations to sail the Atlantic in late June of 1492, King Charles VIII of France summoned a party of seven led by Antoine de Ville to attain the summit of what was known back then as “Mons

Inascensibilis" (2,086 m/6,843 ft.), a relatively low-lying yet sheer peak in the French Dauphiné. Using ropes, ladders, and iron bars driven into the rock, the party (including three clerics) reached the top, after which they sang prayers, erected three crosses, and christened it Mont Aiguille (*aiguille* = "needle" or "spire"). Perhaps more importantly, de Ville drew up a notarized protocol of the ascent, which has become known as the "Magna Carta of Alpinism," an early form of guidebook in which he documented the difficulties of the climb. Leonardo da Vinci made various sketches of mountain landscapes and in 1511, at the age of sixty, scaled a peak by the name of Monboso. The primary motivation of his undertaking, however, differed from the pure joy in climbing that propelled Petrarch up Mont Ventoux. As an artist and scientist, Leonardo was more interested in studying light filtration, atmospheric conditions, and geological structures, and his descriptions of higher altitudes have been shown to possess vivid imagination. The first recorded ascent of an Alpine peak by a woman occurred in 1552, when Regina von Brandis and her daughter Katharina Botsch summited the Laugenspitze (2,433 m/7,982 ft.) in South Tyrol.

Mountain fascination and interaction is a recurrent theme in the life and work of Zurich botanist and physician Conrad Gesner, who climbed Mount Pilatus in 1555 and recorded his ascent in *Descriptio Montis Fracti juxta Lucernam* (Description of the jagged mountain near Lucerne), in which he dismissed the presence of Pilate or his ghost on the summit. To Gesner, mountains were blessed rather than cursed, a sentiment he expressed as early as 1541 in a letter to his friend, the physician Jakob Vogel, under the telling title *De montium admiratione* (On the admiration of mountains).¹² The following passage, albeit lengthy, offers insight into Gesner's passion with respect to a physical terrain that most people of that era failed to appreciate:

Ich habe mir vorgenommen, sehr geehrter Vogel, fortan, so lange mir Gott das Leben gibt, jährlich mehrere, oder wenigstens *einen* Berg zu besteigen; und zwar, wenn die Pflanzen in Blüte sind, teils um diese kennen zu lernen, teils um den Körper zu stärken und den Geist zu ergötzen. Denn welche Lust ist es, welche Wonne dem ergriffenen Geist, die gewaltige Masse der Gebirge zu bewundern und das Haupt gleichsam zu den Wolken zu erheben. Ich weiss nicht, auf welche Weise durch diese unbegreiflichen Höhen das Gemüt erschüttert und hingerissen wird zur Bewunderung des erhabenen Baumeisters. Die aber, deren Geist stumpf ist, wundern sich über nichts. Sie brüten in ihren Stuben und sehen das gewaltige Schauspiel des Weltalls nicht; in ihren Winkel verkrochen wie die Siebenschläfer im Winter, denken sie nicht daran, dass das Menschengeschlecht auf die Welt gesetzt wurde, um aus ihren Wundern etwas Höheres, ja das höchste Wesen selbst zu begreifen. Soweit geht ihr Stumpfsinn, dass sie wie die Schweine immer zu Boden schauen und nie mit erhobenem Antlitz gen Himmel blicken, niemals ihr Auge aufheben zu den Sternen.

Mögen sie sich wälzen im Dreck, mögen sie kriechen, verblendet von Gewinn und knechtischer Streberei! Die Jünger der Weisheit aber mögen fortfahren, die Erscheinungen dieses irdischen Paradieses mit den Augen des Leibes und des Geistes zu betrachten, worunter die hohen und steilen Firste der Berge nicht die geringsten sind, mit ihren unzugänglichen Wänden, himmelanstrebenden ungeheuren Flanken, rauhen Felsen und schattigen Wäldern.¹³

[I made the plan, esteemed Dr. Vogel, from now on and as long as God grants me life, to ascend several or at least *one* mountain a year, when the vegetation is in bloom, partly to get to know the latter, partly to strengthen my body and delight my mind. What joy it is, what bliss to admire the mighty mass of mountains and to lift one's head into the clouds, so to speak. I do not know by what means these unfathomable heights stir the soul and cause one to gaze at them in admiration of the sublime master builder. But those whose minds are dull do not wonder at anything. They brood in their parlors and neglect to see the grand spectacle of the universe, holed up in their corners like dormice in winter, and they do not consider that human-kind was put on this world to grasp, from its wonders, something higher, indeed the highest Being itself. Their dullness goes so far that they always look to the ground like pigs and never lift their head to look at the sky, never lift their eyes to look at the stars. May they roll in the dirt, may they crawl, blinded by profit and menial conceit! The disciples of wisdom, on the other hand, with the eyes of their body and their mind, may continue to observe the phenomena of this earthly paradise. Among them are not least the high and steep ridges of mountains, with their inaccessible walls, their enormous flanks reaching to the sky, their rugged cliffs, and shadowy forests.]

The first detailed maps of the High Alps were printed in Gesner's time, publicizing and eventually popularizing these seemingly indomitable mountains with such evocative names as Schreckhorn (horn of terror), Gross-Grünhorn (great green horn), Jungfrau (virgin), Mönch (monk), and Eiger (ogre). Woodcuts and illustrations depict villages amid hilly landscapes or in pastoral valleys at the foot of towering peaks; the wilderness in the background looks increasingly accessible through the presence of pathways, chapels, and hospices. Later the Swiss scholar Scheuchzer followed Gesner's example: he was among the first to haul thermometers, barometers, and graphometers into the mountains, collecting and analyzing an abundance of material from twelve Alpine excursions undertaken between 1694–1711. In 250 manuscripts, Scheuchzer recorded his observations on a wide range of natural and cultural phenomena, from Swiss dialects and customs to flora, fauna, rocks, and minerals, even foehn winds and avalanches. In fact, his *Natur-Histori des Schweizerlands* (Natural History of Switzerland, 1716–18) later served Schiller as a prime reference work for the many cultural and geographical details in *Wilhelm Tell* (1804).

Scheuchzer greatly contributed to Alpine geology, history, meteorology, and cartography,¹⁴ and viewed the Alps as a product of divine benevolence (despite his still lingering belief in the existence of dragons), emphasizing the ineffable diversity of Swiss mountain terrain:

Bald steigen sie gemächlich in die Höhe / bald sind sie rauh / steil /
gähstotzig / und fast unersteiglich. Wer wollte alle Verschiedentheiten
der äusseren Form erzehlen?¹⁵

[Sometimes they rise leisurely upward / sometimes they are rugged
/ steep / precipitous / and almost unclimbable. Who could recount
all the differences in their external appearance?]

The notion of mountains as God's beautiful creation was perpetuated by the Swiss physiologist, anatomist, botanist, and poet Albrecht von Haller, who made numerous trips to the Alps to collect plant specimens. His poem "Die Alpen" (The Alps, 1732), inspired by his impressions from an excursion to Switzerland during the summer of 1728, signals a major turning point in the history of Alpine discourse, insofar as it celebrates the beauty of the mountains as well as the moral virtues of its citizens. As Caroline Schaumann's chapter "From Meadows to Mountaintops: Albrecht von Haller's 'Die Alpen'" relates, Haller combines his critique of civilization with aesthetic and scientific reflections on Alpine flora and minerals, thereby creating a lasting literary topos of mountain veneration. He thus helped transform the previously regnant paradigm of mountainous landscapes as a *locus horribilis* into the new and influential construct of a *locus amoenus*. Texts set in the Alps, for instance Haller's poem and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's novel *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse* (Julie, or the new Heloise, 1761), led to a gradual popularization of the range that culminated in the ascent of its highest peak, Mont Blanc (4,810 m/15,782 ft.). This mountaineering feat owes a great deal to the initiative of Horace-Bénédict de Saussure, a Swiss aristocrat, naturalist, botanist, and geologist, who became intimately acquainted with the Alps in 1760 while on a botanical mission directed by Haller. The two soon became friends, in large part because of their mutual enthrallment with the Alpine world. But in contrast to the less adventurous Haller, de Saussure engaged in mountaineering and became particularly obsessed with Mont Blanc. He put out a reward for its first ascent, and on 8 August 1796 the Chamonix natives Dr. Michel-Gabriel Paccard and Jacques Balmat cashed in on the prize. A year later de Saussure reached the summit, its third official ascent, having his eighteen guides transport bulky scientific instruments, appropriate reading material (Homer), and lavish provisions to the top. His scientific observations and ecstatic descriptions of this and other outings were published in the eight-volume *Voyages dans les Alpes* (1779–96), a book that was translated into English and Italian and that laid the foundation for his later reputation as the father of Alpinism.

Although the essays in this volume focus on conceptions and representations of mountains rather than on the history of Alpinism per se, there is an underlying connection between mountaineering practice and aesthetic theory. Accordingly, the chapters on texts of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries probe the tenuous relationship between actual mountaineering experiences and aesthetic conceptualization. Just as de Saussure and many others in his wake were scaling peaks previously believed to be inaccessible, sublime painting and literature began to disrupt the conventional sense of balance with respect to the dimensions of depth and space, thereby calling for new categories of aesthetics. Anthony Ozturk's "Geo-Poetics: The Alpine Sublime in Art and Literature, 1779–1860" serves as an interlude to situate the subsequent discussion of mountains in the German cultural and aesthetic tradition within a greater framework of Western European discourses. Concentrating on notions of the Alpine sublime in the works of William Coxe, Louis-François Ramond de Carbonnières, Helen Maria Williams, William Wordsworth, and John Ruskin, among others, Ozturk examines the fusion of aesthetic, ethical, political, metaphysical, and geomorphological concerns during the period of Revolution and Romanticism. He subsumes these wide-ranging concerns under the concept "geo-poetics." As Ozturk suggests, the Helvetic myth emerging in accounts of British and Continental European travelers in the late eighteenth century is imbued with malleable, interdependent paradoxes such as conservative nostalgia (Coxe), geological inquiry (Ramond de Carbonnières), feminized revolutionary vision (Williams), romantic imagination (Wordsworth), and finally, mountain reverence (Ruskin). In a similar vein, Sean Franzel's "Time and Narrative in the Mountain Sublime around 1800" more specifically considers discourses of the sublime in the context of theories of narration. Contrasting dynamic movement with quiet contemplation, Franzel contends that the new paradigm of an Alpine sublime destabilizes not only existing spatial and temporal frames but also narrative logic. He compares the idealist aesthetics of Kant, Schiller, and Fichte — all of whom posit a dynamism that evokes mental and moral transcendence — with Goethe's description of the Alpine landscape, which is characterized by a more direct human engagement with the natural environment. In contrast to both these approaches, Franzel finds the conventional narrative sequence of the sublime disrupted in Hegel's travel descriptions of the Bernese Alps. For Hegel, Alpine scenery is both monotonous and meaningless, a landscape of privation that can offer only an epistemologically unproductive experience of boredom. Franzel's analysis brings a fresh, unsentimental, and critical perspective to sublime mountain veneration. Heather Sullivan's chapter, "Faust's Mountains: An Ecocritical Reading of Goethe's Tragedy and Science," continues this approach by pointing to the material dimensions of *Faust*, which have received little attention in scholarship. Using theories of ecocriticism to question both idealized concepts of nature and environmen-

tal rhetoric, Sullivan argues that Faust's transformations are always rooted in concrete reality and often hindered by physical or bodily limitations. She examines three mountain ascents that take place in *Faust I* and *II*, suggesting that mountains do not figure as sites of heroic or moral transformation but rather of material interventions.

As evidenced above, some of the essays in this book focus on representations or interpretations of mountains in works by canonical writers, while others examine nonfictional accounts of mountaineering expeditions. This juxtaposition of distinct narrative and generic modes not only allows for a reading of literary works in conjunction with actual mountaineering history and vice versa, but also expands the field of inquiry by pointing toward multifaceted, interdisciplinary connections. In her chapter "Spectacular Scenery and Slippery Descents: Narrating the Mountains of Tropical Polynesia," Sabine Wilke discusses George Forster's 1773 and 1774 scientific explorations of Tahiti (at first glance an unlikely site for mountain climbers), delineating the intersections of such discourses as mountaineering, colonialism, ecocriticism, and tropicalization. Wilke argues that Forster's narrative is characterized by an intermingling of these discourses, from mountaineering's models of (colonial) conquest to tropical tropes of fecundity and superabundance. Forster is thus a pivotal figure in transferring the mentality of early Alpinism to a topographically exotic locale, where "conquering" a mountain is integrally tied to the larger project of colonialism. Turning to Forster's friend and even more renowned explorer Alexander von Humboldt, Oliver Lubrich's "Fascinating Voids: Alexander von Humboldt and the Myth of Chimborazo" examines the mythical and literary aftermath of Humboldt's celebrated climb of Mount Chimborazo in 1802. While Humboldt failed to reach the Ecuadorean volcano's summit, Lubrich proposes that it is precisely Humboldt's nuanced response to this abortive undertaking that captures the essence of a self-reflective pioneer in the realms of both geographical and intellectual exploration. Humboldt's narratives of Chimborazo offer, in the end, an innovative, if not postmodern, poetics of failure.

Later in the nineteenth century, the fascination with another distant equatorial summit would also elicit a variety of discursive practices and narrative techniques. Mount Kilimanjaro, whose existence — at least in the European imagination — had long been conflated with the fabled Mountains of the Moon, is the principal object of scrutiny in Christof Hamann's "'An Apparition from Another World' — Kilimanjaro and the Mountains of the Moon from the Perspective of Nineteenth-Century Germany." Using his own novel *Usambara* (2007) as a point of departure, Hamann examines assorted fictional and nonfictional encounters with the African volcano, beginning with mid-century missionary reports, then turning to Hans Meyer's classic travelogue *Ostafrikanische Gletscherfahrten* (Across East African glaciers, 1890), and concluding with a discussion of

Wilhelm Raabe's *Abu Telfan oder die Heimkehr vom Mondgebirge* (Abu Telfan, or The return from the Mountains of the Moon, 1867). Hamann shows that the normally separate provinces of fact and fiction tend to overlap in nineteenth-century discourses about Kilimanjaro, which had only recently been "discovered" by Europeans, and the Mountains of the Moon, a nebulous geographical construct that had been mythologized since Ptolemy. Indeed, Hamann's *Usambara*, which blends the narratives of Meyer, Raabe, and his own semi-fictionalized journey to Africa's rooftop, gives perfect testimony to these blurred lines between fact and fable.

Two other chapters that deal with nineteenth-century texts do not venture to distant continents but remain grounded in German-Austrian mountain terrain — if not soil. "From Eros to Thanatos: Hiking and Spelunking in Ludwig Tieck's *Der Runenberg*," by Peter Arnds picks up precisely on this historically problematic metaphor of *Boden* or soil, drawing a sweeping interpretive arc that encompasses Heidegger, Nietzsche, Euripides, and Freud. As Arnds illustrates through his multiperspectival approach, Tieck's tale typifies the Romantic attraction to mountainous landscapes, both to their precipitous heights, as expressed through the activity of mountain climbing or *Bergsteigen*, and to their hidden depths, as evidenced in frequent allusions to mining or *Bergbau*. A vast psychological dimension, if not abyss, is laid bare in the subtext of *Der Runenberg* (Rune Mountain, 1802), one that is closely tied to mountain discourse and German etymologies, for example *Berg* (mountain), *bergen* (to rescue, recover) *Bergung* (rescue, recovery), *verbergen* (to conceal) and *Verborgenheit* (concealment). Tieck's paradigmatic Romantic text is thus replete with mountain images and metaphors, which it playfully exploits on numerous semantic levels. Sean Ireton's "Geology, Mountaineering, and Self-Formation in Adalbert Stifter's *Der Nachsommer*" interprets the semantic levels of a different word, *Bildung* (formation). This term, along with its many lexical variants, permeates the pages of Stifter's colossal novel, which is commonly classified as a Bildungsroman. Published in 1857, at the height of European Alpinism, *Der Nachsommer* (Indian Summer) draws a sustained analogy between the inner formation of its main character, Heinrich Drendorf, and the geological formations that comprise its principal setting: the Austrian Alps. Drendorf is, moreover, largely modeled on Stifter's friend Friedrich Simony, a professional geologist and accomplished mountaineer who published widely on his Alpine explorations, whether on his groundbreaking scientific discoveries or his equally impressive climbing feats. Stifter's novel is thus not only a literal brand of Bildungsroman, one that capitalizes on the multi-faceted notion of *Bildung*, but is solidly grounded in the nineteenth-century discourse and practice of mountaineering.

During the "Age of Empire," to borrow from the title of Maurice Isserman and Stewart Weaver's recent history of Himalayan climbing,

mountaineering became inextricably connected with male conquest and national competition on the one hand and flight from urbanity on the other. As Isserman and Weaver point out, the emerging Himalayan expeditions espoused colonial and military strategies, while simultaneously attracting individual climbers who sought to escape the conventional principles of their respective societies.¹⁶ Even though Germany had no colonial presence in India, nationalists traced their ethnic history back to Indo-European origins and a mythic Aryan homeland. In Europe, the construction of railroads and tunnels, the opening of numerous health resorts, and the development of skiing contributed to an unprecedented tourist boom in Switzerland, spurring debates about Alpine development and exclusivity. Some essays in this book reflect these tensions and ideological turns while examining diverse representations of climbing in both textual and nontextual forms. Peter Höyng's "Leaving the Summit Behind: Tracking Biographical and Philosophical Pathways in Richard Strauss's *Eine Alpensinfonie*" retraces the steps of Strauss's own *Bergpartie* (mountain tour) during the summer of 1879 in the Bavarian Alps, but this autobiographical approach forms only one strand in Höyng's argument. Strauss's musical composition grew from a life-long personal experience of the Alpine world yet also pays tribute to the composer's late friend, the artist and climber Karl Stauffer, as well as to the works of Friedrich Nietzsche, in particular *Der Antichrist*. Höyng fuses these various approaches in his effort to interpret Strauss's musical Alpine journey as a composition that is at once rooted in Nietzsche's critique of modernity and in the modern appropriation of the Alpine landscape. The Swiss resort town of Davos epitomizes the growing touristic infrastructure that took hold of the Alps around the turn of the century, and it is here that *Der Zauberberg* (The magic mountain, 1924) is set. As Johannes Türk demonstrates in "Elevation and Insight: Thomas Mann's *Der Zauberberg*," this modern novel breaks with the traditional tripartite structure of mountaineering narratives, which are generally oriented around ascent, summit arrival, and descent. Mann's novel dilates this trajectory to such a degree that the plot turns into an erring digression, typified by the famous "Schnee" chapter. Within this narrative configuration, Türk focuses on the physiological processes of life and disease, grounding his analysis in the broader medical discourse of infection and immunity. High altitudes, Türk argues, require an adaptation — or, more accurately, acclimatization — that challenges bourgeois physiology, and over the course of his extended stay in this foreign Alpine environment the lowlander Hans Castorp continually gains new insight into human existence and mortality.

Castorp's Alpine sojourn also serves as a point of departure for Scott Denham, who contends that any mountain journey in modern German literature inevitably harkens back to Castorp's dangerous, aimless, yet liberating wanderings in the snow. In his chapter "W. G. Sebald's Magic

Mountains,” Denham urges us to read Sebald’s pervasive and iconic representations of mountains in the wake of Castorp’s near-death experience, and with the same degree of irony. Sebald’s characters encounter the romantic sensibility of the sublime in the mountains, but what they take away from this potentially transformative moment remains ambiguous. The mountain is imagined as the precipice of both life and death, the sublime and the macabre, and is imbued with the potential to provide existential knowledge about the human condition. Sebald’s characters, however, are not always able to live up to this potential. This quest, straddling the polarities of conquest and dissolution, also informs the book’s final chapter, Olaf Berwald’s “Conflicting Ascents: Inscriptions, Cartographies, and Disappearance in Christoph Ransmayr’s *Der fliegende Berg*.” Berwald uncovers the multiple metaphorical dimensions of the titular “flying mountain,” as manifested in the text’s lyrical prose and free verse, which mirror both surrender to and mastery of nature, and in the diametrical characters who seek to immerse themselves in and ultimately appropriate the mountain. Yet Berwald’s examination reveals that both of these seemingly irreconcilable modes of ascent overlap and ultimately hinder existential insight: Liam’s geodetic computer simulations fail to give an adequate sense of the mountain’s power and leave the brothers in a state of helplessness; consequently, the narrator ignores the danger of solo glacier travel, falling into a crevasse and barely escaping with his life. Though he later makes it to the summit with his brother via a less dangerous route, their descent during a snowstorm results in failure: Liam dies and it can be argued that the narrator does too.

A further strand of essays examines the ways in which German cinema, from the early *Bergfilm* to Werner Herzog’s portrayals of contemporary climbers, has transposed and primed the mountainscape for public consumption, as well as mediated a particular set of national-cultural values associated with it. The *Bergfilm*, an exclusively German genre pioneered by Arnold Fanck in the 1920s, remains one of the most important and successful artistic homages to Alpine sports to this day, promoting the Alps as a destination where men can seek refuge from frenzied life in the Weimar Republic and find greater physical and spiritual meaning in a monumental setting. As Fanck himself explains:

Und all diese Schönheit einer Bergwelt, allen Jubel und alles Leid, das wir als Jugend einst selbst da hinaufgetragen, nunmehr den großen Massen in den Städten zu zeigen und mitzuteilen — das war die Aufgabe, die mir übrigblieb, nachdem der Tod aller Jugendfreunde (Walter Schaufelberger und Hans Rohde) dem eigenen Bergglück ein Ende gesetzt hatte.¹⁷

[To show and convey to the urban masses all this beauty of the Alpine world, all the jubilation and suffering that we took up there with us

back in our youth — this was the task left to me after the death of all my childhood friends [Walter Schaufelberger and Hans Rohde] had put an end to my own mountains bliss.]

More recently, the two big-budget German film productions *Nordwand* (dir. Philipp Stölzl, 2008) and *Nanga Parbat* (dir. Joseph Vilsmaier, 2010) can be interpreted as contemporary variations on the *Bergfilm*. *Nordwand* dramatizes the ideologically laden story of Toni Kurz and Anderl Hinterstoßer's fatal attempt to climb the Eiger North Face in the summer of 1936 but manages to transform the two German climbers into opponents of the Nazi regime. While Stölzl decidedly rejects the *Bergfilm*'s ideological implications, his film recalls both Fanck's innovative camera work and editing and the genre's problematic division of the Alpine environment and civilized society. *Nanga Parbat*, which fictionalizes the 1970s Messner-brothers' ascent of the mountain that ended in Günther Messner's death, attempts a similar balancing act. While the film's overly dramatic plot emphasizes brotherhood, heroism, and the struggle for survival, Vilsmaier lends the story an unequivocally anti-Nazi spin by heralding Messner as a postwar child who, in the spirit of 1968, rails against his antiquated and restrictive mountaineering leader. Both films seem to continue the *Bergfilm*'s dichotomist structures, carrying on the genre's ambivalent legacy.

In "The Essence of the Alpine World is Struggle": Strategies of *Gesundung* in Arnold Fanck's Early Mountain Films," Wilfried Wilms departs from the much-contested notion of the *Bergfilm* as prefascist premonition to understand the genre as a product of war and defeat in 1918. Drawing on the theoretical underpinnings of the social philosopher Georg Simmel and the chairman of the Munich Alpine Club, Gustav Müller, Wilms contends that the icy heights of the Alps were fashioned into a corrective for a nation suffering from the consequences of a lost war, heights that offered remedies for *Gesundung* (recuperation). Fanck's early films can likewise be read within this context, promoting national redemption and deliverance by staging a process of affective stabilization on a collective and individual level while outlining a vital generational and gender identity. Harald Höbusch's "Mountain of Destiny": The Filmic Legacy of Nanga Parbat" furthers this premise, interpreting the German missions to Nanga Parbat in terms of national renewal. Höbusch investigates the filmic documentations of the 1934, 1937, and 1953 expeditions, exposing the militaristic and mythical undertones of the 1934 and 1937 films. While Hans Ertl's *Nanga Parbat 1953* seeks to distance itself from the previous (National Socialist-sponsored) productions, Höbusch emphasizes some core continuities pertaining both to Ertl himself, who began as an assistant to Arnold Fanck and continued as a cameraman under Leni Riefenstahl, and to the ideological values propagated in the earlier films. *Nanga Parbat*

1953 thus straddles a fine line between embracing the capitalistic market doctrine of the postwar decade and perpetuating the language of the Nazi past.

Finally, Roger Cook's chapter, "Spatial Orientation and Embodied Transcendence in Werner Herzog's Mountain Climbing Films," also considers the impact of visual media on its audience. Cook, however, focuses not on ideological messages but on spacial orientation. Examining Herzog's television documentary *Gasherbrum — Der leuchtende Berg* (The dark glow of the mountains, 1985), which relates Reinhold Messner's and Hans Kammerlander's unprecedented climb of two 8,000-meter peaks in succession, Cook suggests that the film not only visually presents the mountain landscape in images meant to stir the viewer's own imagination but also seeks to physically track the very climbing experience itself. To explain such different visualizations of space, Cook distinguishes two modes of spatial orientation, cognitive mapping and proprioception. Contrasting Herzog's *Gasherbrum* with his later feature film, *Cerro Torre: Schrei aus Stein* (Cerro Torre: Scream of stone, 1991), Cook elucidates the ways in which the former engages both modes of spatial orientation, enabling the viewer to share in the mind-body experience of the climber.

In sum and true to its title, *Heights of Reflection: Mountains in the German Imagination from the Middle Ages to the Twenty-First Century* focuses on conceptions and representations of mountains in the German-speaking intellectual tradition over the course of approximately one thousand years. "Reflection" here implies philosophical and aesthetic contemplation and, more literally, artistic replication. This volume of essays thus seeks to provide multiple answers to questions regarding the meaning of mountains as well as of climbing them, questions expressed for instance in typically provocative fashion by Thomas Bernhard, who spent much of his life in the shadow of the Austrian Alps: "Was ist das schon, das Bergsteigen? Was ist für ein Unterschied, ob ich dreihundert Meter hoch oben bin oder dreitausend?"¹⁸ (What is it, really, mountain climbing? What difference does it make whether I'm three hundred meters high up or three thousand?) As evidenced in the wide-ranging chapters that comprise this volume, mountains acquire meaning through a variety of dynamic perspectives, including philosophy, literature, aesthetic theory, music, politics, film, and fine arts.¹⁹ In response to Bernhard and in further allusion to the main title of this book, *Heights of Reflection*, the crucial "difference" in understanding mountains lies not in their objectively measurable height but in one's own chosen mode of interpretive reflection.

Notes

¹ Hartmut Böhme, “Berg,” in *Wörterbuch der philosophischen Metaphern*, ed. Ralf Konersmann (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2007), 46–49.

² Quoted from the Authorized King James Version of the Bible. For this observation, we are indebted to Max Oehlschlaeger, *The Idea of Wilderness: From Prehistory to the Age of Ecology* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1991), 356–57.

³ Roderick Frazier Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 4th ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2001), 3.

⁴ For a detailed study of Western views of wilderness and its gradual eradication over millennia, see Oehlschlaeger, *The Idea of Wilderness*.

⁵ Other theories propose that Ötzi may have been sacrificed after an asteroid crashed in present-day Austria, or that he might have been killed at a lower elevation and placed upon a burial platform at higher altitude. In any case, the proof remains that Chalcolithic man frequented regions long thought inhabitable and inhospitable.

⁶ Nietzsche exploits this geographical detail in *Also sprach Zarathustra* (Thus spoke Zarathustra, 1883–85), a work whose central idea of eternal recurrence he conceived in an ideal Alpine setting: 6,000 feet above sea level at the foot of a massive rock on the shores of Lake Silvaplana in the heart of the Swiss Alps. See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce homo*, in *Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, section 6, vol. 3, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1969), 333.

⁷ An exception is the recent volume of essays entitled “Über allen Gipfeln . . .”: *Bergmotive in der deutschsprachigen Literatur des 18. bis 21. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Edward Bialek and Jan Pacholski (Dresden/Wrocław: Neisse, 2008). While this voluminous collection deals with the role of mountains in German literature in a fairly comprehensive fashion, most of the essays regard the textual presence of mountains as mere literary motifs or symbolic backdrops rather than as a fundamental interactive landscape that informs the deeper thematic core of the works in question.

⁸ See E. M. Butler, *The Tyranny of Greece over Germany: A Study of the Influence Exercised by Greek Art and Poetry over the Great German Writers of the Eighteenth, Nineteenth, and Twentieth Centuries* (London: Cambridge UP, 1935).

⁹ See Peter Grupp, *Faszination Berg: Die Geschichte des Alpinismus* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2008), 26.

¹⁰ Jacob Burckhardt, *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 3 (Basel: Benno, 1955), 200, 201. Burckhardt also points to the importance of Dante, whom he considers one of the first individuals since antiquity to climb mountains with the express purpose of gaining a summit vista (200).

¹¹ For some of the following historical facts and figures, we are indebted to Grupp, *Faszination Berg*; Gabriele Seitz, *Wo Europa den Himmel berührt: Die Entdeckung der Alpen* (Munich: Artemis, 1987); and Aurel Schmidt, *Die Alpen — schleichende Zerstörung eines Mythos* (Zurich: Benziger, 1990).

¹² Conrad Gesner, *On the Admiration of Mountains, the Prefatory Letter Addressed to Jacob Arvenus, Physician, in Gesner's Pamphlet "On Milk and Substances Prepared from Milk,"* trans. H. B. D. Soulé (San Francisco: Grabhorn, 1937).

¹³ Quoted in Peter F. Kopp, "Natur und Berge — erforscht, erlebt und angebetet," in *Natur: Ein Lesebuch*, ed. Rolf Peter Sieferle (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1991), 279–80. All translations in this chapter are our own.

¹⁴ In this respect, his work was anticipated by Josias Simler, who never set foot in the Alps yet wrote about them with great detail and sensitivity in such texts as *Vallisiae descriptio* (Description of the Valais Alps) and *De Alpibus commentarius* (An Alpine commentary), both written in 1574. Here Simler describes, much like Scheuchzer, a wide range of natural phenomena (including storms, glaciers, and avalanches) as well as human-made devices for the exploration of this mountainous environment (ropes, alpenstocks, crampons, and snowshoes).

¹⁵ Johann Jakob Scheuchzer, quoted in Robert Felfe, *Naturgeschichte als kunstvolle Synthese: Physikotheologie und Bildpraxis bei Johann Jakob Scheuchzer* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2003), 87.

¹⁶ Maurice Isserman and Stewart Weaver, *Fallen Giants: A History of Himalayan Mountaineering from the Age of Empire to the Age of Extremes* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2008), xi.

¹⁷ Arnold Fanck, "Die Zukunft des Naturfilms (1928)," in *Berge, Licht und Traum: Dr. Arnold Fanck und der deutsche Bergfilm*, ed. Jan-Christopher Horak and Gisela Pichler (Munich: Bruckmann, 1997), 143.

¹⁸ Thomas Bernhard, *Frost* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1972), 133.

¹⁹ Though we have tried to incorporate as many different academic discourses and artistic media as possible, some inevitably remain neglected, whether for reasons of space or because they have received sufficient attention elsewhere. One will of course note a glaring omission of pre-filmic visual arts, particularly the mountain paintings of Caspar Wolf, Caspar David Friedrich, and Joseph Anton Koch. However, Bettina Hausler's *Der Berg: Schrecken und Faszination* (Munich: Hirmer, 2008), a voluminous book that features numerous reproductions, cannot be surpassed in the scope of its art history and presentation of images. An adequate treatment of mountain landscapes in the realm of painting and other graphic media requires precisely this kind of pictorial approach, which one more readily finds in studies from fields such as art history.

Prelude: Classical Mountain Landscapes and the Language of Ascent

Dan Hooley

Let it be yours to walk in this time to the heights
— Pindar, *Olympian 1*

A PAGE OR TWO INTO HIS *When Men and Mountains Meet* (1946), the great British mountaineer of the early-mid twentieth century H. W. (“Bill”) Tilman allowed himself a rare, almost lyrical passage:

This would be my sixth visit to the Himalaya, and though occasionally I had qualms about such indulgence, I had so far managed to stifle them without any severe struggle. The appetite grows as it is fed. Like the desire for drink or drugs, the craving for mountains is not easily overcome, but a mountaineering debauch, such as six months in the Himalaya, is followed by no remorse. . . . Having once tasted the pleasure of living in high, solitary places with a few like spirits, European or Sherpa, I could not give it up. The prospect of what is euphemistically termed “settling down,” like mud to the bottom of a pond, might perhaps be faced when it became inevitable, but not yet awhile.¹

Readers of mountain literature will recognize, through the laconic wit of this post-Edwardian sensibility, one of those maddening passages that hints at but never quite explains the urge to climb. Instead, we hear the play of analogy — addiction *versus* muddy stagnation — to rationalize his abandonment of all good prudence: indulgence, appetite, drink, drugs, debauch, craving, relapse (“my sixth visit to the Himalaya”), remorse, pleasure. The last term distills the rest and entails much unspoken: the rise of the mountaineering “movement” in the Alps particularly since 1750, and the entailed enthusiasms of precedent (getting there first), conquest, nationalism (and national alpine clubs), exploration; the rise of the “sublime” (or various sublimes) in European aesthetics (Shaftesbury, Burke, Kant, Schopenhauer) and Romanticism and American transcendentalism in literature; the metamorphosis of climbing from research and exploration to something like sport. These factors, to be discussed in the essays that follow with respect to the German tradition, inform the mountaineer’s pleasure but do not, as they are often said to do, explain it. Repeatedly we

are told that climbing as a pleasure-oriented activity begins as Enlightenment sensibility melds into Romanticism; that, earlier, “primitive” and agrarian, societies saw mountains as barriers, hazards, and inconveniences rather than attractions. And there is some truth to the notion, particularly in respect to the related late Romantic fascination with frozen places, the Frankenstein monster’s natural habitat,² and the race for the poles. But the absurdity of the broad claim is evident in the play of any child scrambling up a rock or tree.³

Of course, it’s more complicated than this. Scott’s decision to take on the commission of the Royal Geographic Society to be the first to reach the South Pole had nothing to do with pleasure, or, for that matter, with any particular competence in polar travel.⁴ And the obsessive and often unscrupulous competition of alpinists literally to plant their flags first on alpine summits, much less the Nazi drive to claim conquest of the Eigerwand, can have had little to do with pleasure in any ordinary sense. National politics, personal ambition, self-justification, and compensation for failure elsewhere have all driven the climber up, and down to death. The mystery of climbing lies in this elusive connection of these and other factors more and less admirable — with the deep, addictive urge Tilman hints at. In that connection something “chemical” happens, perhaps; discrete elements meld into a focused, nearly imperative urgency, maybe not far from the transgressive pleasure Lacan called *jouissance*. Lyotard writes of the mind’s *aporia* before the sublime, which is not quite the same as the Socratic *aporia*, but Plato’s rendering of the mind’s helpless paralysis, or more crucially its inability to grasp and formulate something viscerally *there*, is near the truth. Climbing as a serious, life-risking proposition, because so strange to most, requires explanation; people always ask. Yet those who are in the best position to know the answers are most often aphasiac. They evade, say the silly things Mallory did about “why,” or reveal, as Tilman has, just a little: “Having once tasted the pleasure of living in high, solitary places. . . .”

“Pleasure,” “high,” “solitary”: the collocation implies that this mountaineer’s pleasure is lonely and in this regard unlike that of game or sport. The experience of being “up” and “away” from the rest of us is naturally isolating and that complicates things, paradoxically by simplifying them. Once removed from the distracting noise of quotidian life, attention naturally turns inward. The ascent’s physical demands and the climber’s exposure to frequently mortal hazards — to rockfall, avalanche, storm, cold, crevasse, an untimely slip or broken hold, the caprices of an indifferent mountain — prompt self-assessment and, frequently, radical interrogation of priorities. The mountain thus can be the locus of meditation, as it long has been in divers religious traditions. This is true even when the mountain itself is not a sacred site, as in the case of Petrarch’s famous 1336 description of his ascent of Mt. Ventoux.⁵

To-day I made the ascent of the highest mountain in this region, which is not improperly called Ventosum [windy]. My only motive was the wish to see what so great an elevation had to offer. I have had the expedition in mind for many years; . . . the mountain, which is visible from a great distance, was ever before my eyes, and I conceived the plan of some time doing what I have at last accomplished to-day. The idea took hold upon me with especial force when, in re-reading Livy's *History of Rome*, yesterday, I happened upon the place where Philip of Macedon, the same who waged war against the Romans, ascended Mount Haemus in Thessaly, from whose summit he was able, it is said, to see two seas, the Adriatic and the Euxine. Whether this be true or false I have not been able to determine, for the mountain is too far away, and writers disagree. Pomponius Mela, the cosmographer — not to mention others who have spoken of this occurrence — admits its truth without hesitation; Titus Livius, on the other hand, considers it false. . . .⁶

He then proceeds to describe the climb: his brother, partner for the occasion, takes a straight route up the ridge, while Petrarch, wearying, turns off to apparently easier approaches that take him down or away from his goal. As he reflects on his error, the climb quickly becomes figurative:

But nevertheless in the end, after long wanderings, thou must perforce either climb the steeper path, under the burden of tasks foolishly deferred, to its blessed culmination, or lie down in the valley of thy sins. . . . These thoughts stimulated both body and mind in a wonderful degree for facing the difficulties which yet remained. Oh, that I might traverse in spirit that other road for which I long day and night, even as to-day I overcame material obstacles by my bodily exertions!⁷

Standing at the summit in wonder, “like a man dazed,” he contemplates the distant Alps, the Pyrenees, and himself — his past, his education, his attachments, and his soul. He thinks to consult his Augustine, conveniently to hand on this peak, and opens the book to this: “And men go about to wonder at the heights of the mountains, and the mighty waves of the sea, and the wide sweep of rivers, and the circuit of the ocean, and the revolution of the stars, but themselves they consider not.” Upon reading which, Petrarch renounces his summit view in favor of tendance within, something the Stoics would call *anachoresis*, a “retreat into the self,” a generic recourse to which we will return later.

Now, scholarship has had its way with this supposed “first European ascent of a mountain for pleasure,” noting the obvious allegorical elements of the report and suggesting that the climb may never have occurred⁸ — though Petrarch was undeniably a lover of nature (“Would that you could know with what delight I wander free and alone among the mountains, forests, and streams”⁹). To those weighing the place of this account in the

mountaineering literature, the climb's historicity is not of crucial import, while its allegory surely is. For it is a curious fact that, in the case of the Alps, an accidental folding of the earth's superficial crust at a tectonic impact zone during the Oligocene and Miocene epochs matters, prepossessingly, to the human mind. As Petrarch demonstrates, and as the essays to follow will illustrate, mountains are always significant. They are not always loved, they are not always beautiful, but they do always stand above us in ways more than topographic. They "look down" upon us, they intimidate, they inspire fear and, paradoxically, draw us to them. Once attaining their high ridges and summits, one gains perspective; one sees more and farther — and further too, for there is always something metaphysical in that view. The mountain experience, then, is nearly always invested with significance. Petrarch's allegory invests his mountain as deeply, for him, as possible: it is the "place" where life's journey, quest, ambition, conflict, disappointment, grief, loss, hope, sin, and triumph are staged. It is perhaps the only place it could be staged so effectively.

The climb thus *means*, and what and how it means depends on the intellectual and cultural gestalt that informs it. For Petrarch, that mental calibration is an early humanist recursion to Graeco-Roman bearings: hence his reference to Philip's climb of Haemus in Livy, classical discussion of *its* historicity, and finally a turn to Augustine, presiding genius of that late antique *mentalité* that reprocessed classical learning for a new Christian world. Just as Petrarch is a pivotal Renaissance figure, Augustine is a transitional and transformative figure; they both stand at the threshold of something excitingly new, and both look back. Petrarch thus reflects on this matter of ascending mountains or "mountains" in multiple ways: through his classical books, through his Christian identity, through Augustine's similar situation and authority, and through the renunciatory lens of Augustine's own regard of his once-beloved classics. Figures like Petrarch are important to us because, precisely in speaking of more than the climb, they address the infrastructure of its significance.

Historians of mountaineering, who naturally enough look to mountains as the site of a particular, rather narrowly defined activity, sometimes forget this. Seeing the activity as they do, they are bound to observe that sporting ascents began late in European history, perhaps Antoine de Ville's 1492 ascent of Mt. Aiguille being the real "first" (though even that was commissioned by his king), and that earlier, from "primitive" through classical and most of early modern European history, mountains were viewed as obstacles, defenses, or dangers — anything but objects of fascinated attention. The single exception to that common wisdom is the wide recognition that mountains have always been the haunts of the gods. This seems true of the preponderance of heights of relative significance (a "mountain" need not be high) in virtually all cultures. In the Americas, the intact remains of Machu Picchu with its sacred rock stand as a conspicuous

example of the inclination to sanctify high peaks. Explorers in the northern hemisphere routinely discovered traces of native peoples' ceremonial presence on mountain tops, and even to this day vertical features remain sacred to First Americans: Baboquivari Peak, Bear Lodge (Devil's Tower), Rainy Mountain, Bear Butte, and many others, from the relatively tiny Pilot Knob in Minnesota to the vast eminence of Denali.¹⁰ Egeria's famous fourth-century pilgrimage to the top of Sinai, perhaps our earliest "route description," along with longstanding fascination with Nebo, the Carmel range, and Ararat reflect the same tendency in the Hebrew and Christian traditions. In Asia, Tai Shan in China, Fuji in Japan, Chomolungma (Qomolangma, Sagarmatha, Everest) on the edge of Tibet and Nepal — all are sacred. In Greece, Helicon, Cithaeron, Ida, Dicte, Cyllene, and of course Olympus among many more figure in myth as divine habitat. Gods are born on mountains, they glide nimbly across their peaks, they occasionally entrap or seduce human interlopers, and they look down from their heights with bemused indifference on human folly, striving, and dying. While all mythologies have divinity located in groves, deserts, seas, forests, or rivers, mountains uniquely represent a physio-spatial and ontological separation between human and divine spheres.

This human ascription of divinity to high places cannot be separated from contingent conceptual semantics. Mountains' visual perspective, their proximity to sources of nonhuman power, sky and water in particular, and their topographical abnormality articulate terms of human orientation and thought. Where they impede linear progress or stand as distant bearings, mountains require adjustment, response, and are thus frequently the physical stuff of which humans make meaning. Richard Buxton in his structuralist study of Greek imaginary mountains describes them as those places that stand in opposition to the polis and the domesticated plain,¹¹ thus describing a characteristic triangulation of sea, polis, and mountain to orient foundational ideas. The well-defended polis makes sense in opposition to the sea, which is dangerously fickle and the locus of necessary trespass for trade and food, and to the mountain, where human incursion, again necessary for timber and transhumance, is perilous. The Greek polis per se could not have existed as a relatively independent political entity were it not for the mountain-riven geography of Greece; its several experiments in governance, including the radical democracy of Athens, could scarcely have arisen.

But if the domesticated life of polis and plain, in contradistinction to sea and mountain, is the ground from which forbidding boundary conditions are observed, transgression of those frontiers, imaginary or real, is a regular occurrence. In their studies of Greek topography, Buxton, A. R. Burn, and W. K. Pritchett have described several customary uses of real mountain terrain in Greece: pasturage, and exploitation of material resources, particularly wood and charcoal; the hunt, travel, defense,

ambush, and battle; sanctuaries and temples; scientific research; (perhaps) infant exposure.¹² Buxton continues into imaginative territory (that is to say, literature), noting “three primary aspects to the mythical image of the *oros*” (mountain): first, mountains are wild places inhabited by wild creatures (centaurs, the sphinx) and sites of wild violence; second, “mountains are before,” originary habitations of men and gods; third, mountains are places for reversals, where humans come into contact with the divine (“almost any hunter or herdsman on an imaginary Greek mountain will probably meet a god”), and where normal social relationships are reversed.¹³ In this last regard, the uncharacteristic presence of women on mountains is emblematic of dangerous anomaly: Atalanta, Procris and others, the goddess Artemis, the bacchantes of Euripides raving in their madness.¹⁴ In Euripides’ eyes, Cithaeron is the locus of a dark power that eclipses any merely administrative or coercive attempts to contain it.

At this we fled
and barely missed being torn to pieces by the women.
Unarmed, they swooped down upon the herds of cattle
grazing there on the green of the meadow. And then
you could have seen a single woman with bare hands
tear a fat calf, still bellowing with fright,
in two, while others clawed heifers to pieces. . . .
Like invaders they swooped on Hysiae
and on Erythrae in the foothills of Cithaeron.
Everything in sight they pillaged and destroyed.¹⁵

If women’s presence in mountainscapes is anomalous for Greeks — while at the same time a recognition of the deep necessity for the liberating inversions of normative social custom — mountains are themselves also conceptually apart from *nomos* (custom, law). Mountains are outlaw landscapes, where real brigands often lurked to waylay travelers. They also persistently escape human efforts to chart or control them. They resist us, and they move. And precisely because they are places where the laws of men and human nature do not apply, they are landscapes where miracles can occur, and where, as Euripides’ chorus sings (of Dionysus), ecstasy is possible:

He runs to the mountains of Phrygia, to the mountains
of Lydia he runs! . . .
And he cries, as they cry, Evohé —
On, Bacchae!
On, Bacchae!
Follow, glory of golden Tmolus,
hymning god
with a rumble of drums,
with a cry, Evohé! to the Evian god,

with a cry of Phrygian cries,
 when the holy flute like honey plays
 the sacred song of those who go
to the mountain!

to the mountain!

— Then, in ecstasy, like a colt by its grazing mother
 the Bacchante runs with flying feet, she leaps!¹⁶

Though less disposed to such transports, the Romans also went to the mountains for timber, for the views, hunted their ridges, grazed herds on their flanks, and of course waged war around and over them. Petrarch, as we have seen, pointed out Livy's description of the Macedonian Philip's climb of Mt. Haemus, and both Livy and Polybius write of the epic crossing of the Pyrenees and Alps by Rome's great enemy Hannibal. The dread that Hannibal provoked in the Roman mind came not just from his having terrorized Italy for years but also from the superhuman act of having surpassed Italy's mountainous fortifications. In the literary landscape, since Rome was almost inseparably Greece's cultural debtor, the same gods inhabit the same mountains. Olympus still rules in the Roman world, the muses still dwell on Helicon and Parnassus. In the case of the latter two mountains particularly, Rome's cultural sophistication is enfigured by Greek mountainscapes. The great literary efflorescence at the cusp of the late Republic and early Empire is largely driven by aesthetic ideas inherited from the Greek Hellenistic period, which fostered a taste for smaller, *recherché*, non-mainstream literary works. The figurative reflex for invoking these literary values was reference to the pure Castalian spring, which runs down from the snows of Parnassus. So too, the springs of poetic inspiration, Aganippe and Hippocrene, flow from the top of Helicon. The clarity of mountain spring water, its proximity to the divine (Apollo and the Muses), and the narrow defile leading to it, draw out and refocus Greek ideas about the art and nature of poetry; in Rome nearly every poet climbs a Greek mountain.¹⁷

What man or hero, Clio, will you take up
 to celebrate on lyre or clear flute?
 Or what god? Whose name will witty
 echo play
 in Helicon's shady reaches
 over Pindus, or frigid Haemus,
 where the forest once moved
 to hear Orpheus sing.¹⁸

Yet Horace's ode on Mt. Soracte, a limestone extrusion of only a few hundred meters just north of Rome in the Tiber valley, conveys something subtly different about certain Roman mountains.

See how Soracte stands, gleaming with deep drifts,
 and how the trees, struggling, cannot any longer
 bear their snowy burdens, and how
 its rivers stand still in frozen ice.¹⁹

Whether Soracte was ever this forbiddingly arctic is less important than the counterpoint Horace constructs with the image in the remainder of the poem: dissolve this cold, throw logs on the fire, drink aged Sabine wine, think not about the future (its frozen image is there, right outside the window), but about friends and sweet love now. The mountain here operates symbolically, a multivalent image that structures the poem's larger meanings. For the purposes of this volume, we can observe that a mountain functions (for the first time?) as an object of meditation quite apart from its material, mythological, or ritual "uses" in the world. It stands as both an ineluctably real thing, like the cold death it is meant to suggest, and as a psychic reality or knowledge that bears meaning in the frame of the poem. Horace is still a long way from wanting to "go up there" but his deft sketch of the physical features of the peak registers an aesthetic appreciation that prefigures characterizations of the sublime in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Not unrelated is the feeling of other-worldly power latent in mountainscapes. The natural scientist Pliny the Elder wrote long books on Greek and Italian geography, mentioning mountains with fair frequency. Often they serve merely to locate inhabitants or to characterize topography. But he was particularly taken with volcanic mountains, and writes of the terrible wonders of fire, lava, and fume emerging from Etna, Mt. Chimaera, the "mountains of Hephaestus," and others.²⁰ Commenting on the sometimes fatal, sometimes intoxicating emanations (inspiring prophets at Delphi, for instance) to be found in such volcanic landscapes, he writes: "What other cause could any mortal infer but that the divine power of nature breaks out now and then in this or that place."²¹ Pliny's interest in the subject was to lead to his death when he sailed across the Bay of Naples to witness the eruption of Vesuvius close up in 79 CE. That death, accepted with philosopher-scientist's calm, is described by his nephew the younger Pliny in a letter to Tacitus that is still commonly read today. Several peaks in the region are volcanic, and their ominous power was a source of mythological elaboration and simple human curiosity. Etna, into whose active crater the pre-Socratic philosopher Empedocles was said to have cast himself, became a kind of tourist attraction. Diogenes Laertius claims that Plato himself traveled there to see the crater, and the emperor Hadrian is said to have slogged up the peak before dawn to witness the multi-colored sunrise at the summit in 125 CE.²² Yet more colorful are the literary descriptions of the seething energy of the volcanic mountain, as for instance where Vergil's Cyclopes hammer in their subterranean smithies.

The Cyclopes were working iron in the vast cave, Brontes, Steropes and Pyragmon, with bare arms. They had in their hands a rough thunderbolt, partially polished, which in great numbers the Father of Gods and Men casts down onto the earth . . . Now they were forging together in the work terrifying fires and thunder and fear and wrath with pursuing flames.²³

Those who have witnessed or seen images of the pyrotechnics of electrical storms around erupting volcanoes will know this is less fanciful a description than it may seem.

The first century CE Stoic philosopher and writer Seneca also expressed an interest in Etna in a letter to his friend Lucilius (Epistle 79):

If you will write me a full account of these matters [Lucilius' tour of Sicily], I shall then have the boldness to ask you to perform another task, — also to climb Aetna at my special request. Certain naturalists have inferred that the mountain is wasting away and gradually settling, because sailors used to be able to see it from a greater distance. The reason for this may be, not that the height of the mountain is decreasing, but because the flames have become dim and the eruptions less strong and less copious, and because for the same reason the smoke also is less active by day. . . . But let us postpone this discussion, and look into the matter when you have given me a description just how far distant the snow lies from the crater, — I mean the snow which does not melt even in summer, so safe is it from the adjacent fire. . . . Now if Aetna does not make your mouth water, I am mistaken in you. You have for some time been desirous of writing something in the grand style and on the level of the older school. For your modesty does not allow you to set your hopes any higher; this quality of yours is so pronounced that, it seems to me, you are likely to curb the force of your natural ability, if there should be any danger of out-doing others; so greatly do you reverence the old masters. Wisdom has this advantage, among others, — that no man can be outdone by another, except during the climb. But when you have arrived at the top, it is a draw; there is no room for further ascent, the game is over. . . . Men who have attained wisdom will therefore be equal and on the same footing. . . . I do not know whether this Aetna of yours can collapse and fall in ruins, whether this lofty summit, visible for many miles over the deep sea, is wasted by the incessant power of the flames; but I do know that virtue will not be brought down to a lower plane either by flames or by ruins. Hers is the only greatness that knows no lowering; there can be for her no further rising or sinking. Her stature, like that of the stars in the heavens, is fixed. Let us therefore strive to raise ourselves to this altitude.²⁴

This and related passages in Seneca have been studied by scholars, most recently Sylvia Montiglio, by way of addressing Seneca's attitude toward travel: that is, whether he deems it good, as a means of increasing knowl-

edge, or bad, as a distraction from the Stoic's quest for wisdom within.²⁵ Montiglio argues against others that the case is not clear cut, that Seneca frequently deplors travel for the sake of learning, but nearly as frequently yields, as in the quoted passage, to the yearning to know what is out there. Her assessment is persuasive, but for the present purposes it is helpful simply to note that the debate was an active and lively one in the ancient world, and Seneca's ambivalence is not unusual. Horace, in a famous line from *Epistles* 1.11 writes that "those who sail across the sea change their sky, not their minds."²⁶ Yet elsewhere he too writes less negatively of travel. There was a long tradition of travel for learning's sake that goes back at least to Herodotus, and later proponents looked to the Homeric model of Odysseus, who became a model for the restless searcher after new knowledge. We know the image from Tennyson ("I cannot rest from travel; I will drink / Life to the lees. . ."²⁷) and Nikos Kazantzakis's modern epic poem, but both Greeks and Romans were fascinated with this figure of the traveler encountering the often perilous wonders of the world. Indeed, the understanding that the world was full of wondrous spectacles, literally, things to be seen — in distant lands, on the mountains, on the seas — was widespread.

Seneca writes fully aware of that fascination, aware of its dangers and distractions too, and in this passage he prefigures Petrarch's own reaction upon arriving at the top of Mt. Ventoux. For both writers in the end, the ascent of Mt. Virtue displaces any value a merely physical climb may entail. Yet . . . Seneca *does* want to know; he has thought about that glacier at the summit, wonders about its integrity, will have heard of the strangely colored sunrises that drew Hadrian, knew the mythology associated with the mountain and Empedocles' apocryphal end there, and remembers that Plato, too, once looked on the storied peak. Other traditions would call it a place of power. For Seneca it is a thing to be seen and learned about. He wants a full account from Lucilius, and asks for it in its proper register, "something in the grand style and on the level of the older school," a register the aesthetician "Longinus" (first-to-third century CE, dates and identity uncertain) would call the sublime. The emotional impact of the presentation of events is at the heart of Longinus's treatise, *Peri hypsous* (*On the sublime*), and this too Seneca, tragedian as well as philosopher, understood. Burke and others in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries would read Longinus and develop their own theories of aesthetic and psychological sublimity, which directly informed the mountaineering and polar quests of the period. The first phase of those climbs too, with their barometers, thermometers, and other scientific instruments stuffed into rucksacks or porters' loads, participates in the tradition of scientific inquiry known to Seneca and his contemporaries. It is interesting that as the Alpine climbing movement grew in the later nineteenth century, the gathering of scientific data increasingly became otiose, a mere pretext, a few instruments hauled along for the

sake of appearances. The appeal of simply getting to the top by increasingly technical and dangerous routes overshadowed the quest for more data. Yet now, in the age of climate change, science is again emerging as one good reason to go to the tops of the world and document what is happening there. The two appeals have always been linked in shifting imbalance; both sublimity and knowledge seem to reside up high.

Which is why ascetics, hermits, priests, monks, and holy men have always gone there: Meteora, the monasteries on Athos, the Skelligs in Ireland, among many others. The precisely arranged Amerindian ritual stones discovered by John Wesley Powell mark, exactly, this conjunction of knowledge and dangerous, extraordinary access to greater-than-human forces. But, as any mountaineer will be quick to add, the Skelligs, Athos, and their like are not among the exceptionally high places on this planet, and on the latter one does not live. As the Greeks understood, these are places where trespass is just that. A serious mountain peak offers to the lucky and skilled a momentary access to rare knowledge — call it that or simply access to *something* not found elsewhere — a singularity of experience too precarious and dangerous to savor for more than a few minutes before the climber's retreat. In descent, there is always loss, and of the summit moment only ghostly memory remains; it cannot be “brought back” to ordinary life. This ephemerality is surely part of the addictive chemistry that draws some, as it did Tilman, to go back. He never stopped going back (“not yet awhile . . .”) to mountains, and then cold seas, disappearing in his eightieth year while sailing to the Falklands.

Yet for others, the thing to be valued is often *not* the summit but the climbing itself, the process of getting up. A. F. Mummery put it prosaically but effectively looking back on his own brilliant nineteenth-century climbing career: “The essence of the sport lies, not in ascending a peak, but in struggling with and overcoming difficulties.”²⁸ The statement would not make sense were such difficulties simply a matter of a job to be done; but in the context of the climb it is where one's response to the mountain's complex meanings, as invested by centuries of human engagement, is most manifest. The upward movement becomes a heuristic process, sorting the business out for oneself, enacting significance, just as Petrarch's divagations from the direct route were meant to signify. And here too Seneca informs. “Now if Aetna does not make your mouth water, I am mistaken in you,” he writes to Lucilius, meaning, we may think, both getting up there to see the sight and writing some account appropriate to its scale and significance. Then, shifting focus from literary ambition and achievement to moral attainment, he slips into the perennial language of ascent: *nemo ab altero potest vinci, nisi dum ascenditur. Cum ad summum perveneris, paria sunt, non est incremento locus, statur* (No man can be outdone by another, except during the climb. But when you have arrived at the top, it is a draw; there is no room for further ascent: the game is over).²⁹