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Writing the Himalaya in Polish and Slovenian

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**Writing the Himalaya in Polish and Slovenian**



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# Contents

- 8 **Writing the Himalaya in Polish and Slovenian: Introduction**  
Pisanie Himalajów po polsku i słoweńsku. Wstęp  
✂ **JERNEJ HABJAN**
- 16 **Passion and Politics: An Outline of the History of Polish Himalayanism**  
*Pasja i polityka. Zarys dziejów polskiego himalaizmu*  
✂ **EWA ROSZKOWSKA**
- 46 **Liminal Literature and the School of Vertical Promotion  
in Polish Mountaineering**  
*Literatura liminalna i szkoła awansu pionowego w polskim alpinizmie*  
✂ **MAREK PACUKIEWICZ**
- 70 **On Polish Himalayan Literature, Then and Now**  
*Uwagi o polskiej literaturze himalajskiej. Historia i współczesność*  
✂ **EWA GRZĘDA**
- 98 **The Vertical World and the Mountains Upside Down,  
or, a Four-handed Himalayan Climbing Autobiography  
by Olga Morawska and Piotr Morawski**  
*Pionowy świat i góry na opak, czyli autobiografia  
na cztery ręce Olgi i Piotra Morawskich*  
✂ **ELŻBIETA DUTKA**
- 122 **Climbing the Already Climbed: Tadeusz Piotrowski's Account  
of the Polish-Yugoslav Expedition to Tirich Mir**  
*Zdobyć zdobyte. Polsko-jugosłowiańska wyprawa na Tiricz Mir  
w relacji Tadeusza Piotrowskiego*  
✂ **PRZEMYŚŁAW KALISZUK**

- 152 **The Mountains that Wrote Them: Slovenians Climbing and Writing about Eight-Thousand-Metre Peaks**  
*Góry, które ich napisały. Słoweńcy wspinający się na i piszący o ośmiotysięcznikach*  
✚ **PETER MIKŠA**
- 176 **Towards a Bi-polar Typology of Slovenian Mountaineering Literature**  
*W kierunku dwubiegunowej typologii literatury górskiej autorstwa słoweńskich wspinaczy*  
✚ **TOMO VIRK**
- 200 **Writing the Death Zone: The Slovenian Case**  
*Pisanie strefy śmierci. Przypadek Słowenii*  
✚ **JERNEJ HABJAN**
- 228 **Vertical Trials: Three Narrative Texts of Slovenian Mountaineering Literature**  
*Oświadczenie pionowe. Trzy teksty narracyjne słoweńskiej literatury górskiej*  
✚ **ALENKA KORON**
- 254 **Between Loyalty to the Original, Customer Expectations and Reader Orientation: Translators' understanding of Their Roles Using the Example of the German Translation of the Slovenian Classic Book *Pot***  
*Między lojalnością wobec oryginału, oczekiwaniami klientów a zorientowaniem na czytelnika. Tłumacze i ich rozumienie własnej roli na przykładzie niemieckiego przekładu kultowej słoweńskiej książki *Pot**  
✚ **LARS FELGNER**

## IN MEMORIAM

- 284 **A Never-Completed Reading. Boris Paternu (1926–2021)**  
✚ **IVAN VERČ**



# **Writing the Himalaya in Polish and Slovenian: Introduction**

Pisanie Himalajów po polsku  
i słoweńsku. Wstęp

Mountaineering literature is a genre which is as popular as it is under-researched.<sup>1</sup> Book accounts of high-altitude mountaineering expeditions written by mountaineers themselves are under-researched even though, if not precisely because, they engender not only new books but also new mountaineers. For mountaineering literature engenders readers some of whom go on to become the next global legends of mountaineering – legends who in turn write the next bestselling mountaineering books. As such, mountaineering is the sport which takes more lives than any the other sport, while also giving us more non-ghostwritten autobiographies than any other sport – autobiographies which in turn give us new mountaineers.

Not unlike Socrates, then, mountaineering literature corrupts the youth into taking up something as dangerous as mountain climbing themselves. Could this ability to corrupt be the reason that mainstream literary scholars privilege books about mountains written by their national poets rather than by mountaineers themselves? Aesthetic literature which quietly builds a nation rather than life-writing which so often preaches a better world? In any case, in search of ideas of what it is that mountaineers do in their books one has no choice but to turn to these books themselves. In the absence of a sustained scholarly interest, mountaineering books seem to be the best starting point of any research on mountaineering books, if only by default. To do that without either succumbing to their self-image or joining those who prefer to research the mountains in canonical literature – this is the ambition of the present collection of essays.

As literary scholars generally privilege thematisations of mountains by canonical authors, while non-fiction writers tend to prefer non-scholarly dimensions of literature written by mountaineers, this kind of literature remains a lacuna in literary studies. In literary

**1** Jernej Habjan's editorial work on this special issue of *Slavica Tergestina* has been funded by the Slovenian Research Agency in the framework of the research project *Mountaineering Literature: Slovenia and Beyond (16-1808)* and the research programme *Studies in Literary History, Literary Theory and Methodology (P6-0024)*, both of which have been hosted by the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts.

studies, then, mountains remain mainly a theme, instead of becoming a form-giving element. In literature written by mountaineers rather than poets, however, mountaineering is not just a topic, a theme as susceptible to aesthetic refraction as any other theme the author happens to select; instead, it is the very praxis which informs the narrative, the narrative's end rather than means.

But if literary scholars tend to look at the literary canon even when it comes to mountains, this begs the question, Can the mountaineers speak? If we address this question we can gradually also pose the question to which it alludes, namely Gayatri Spivak's groundbreaking question to subaltern studies, 'Can the subaltern speak?' In other words, only if we are able to question literary studies in its favouring of poets over mountaineers in matters of mountains can we question the ways in which mountaineers speak for Sherpa guides and porters and their widows (to finally approximate Spivak's ultimate case of subalternity, Hindu widow sacrifice [see Spivak: 36–78]).

To this end, this issue of *Slavica TerGestina* focuses on the twentieth century as the period in which the single-authored book became the main medium of the mountaineering culture. This was the century in which the focus shifted from the Alps to the Himalaya and the Karakoram, and from climbing Alpine peaks to climbing even more difficult peaks in the same, so-called alpine style. If the first decades of the century were marked by the so-called last problems of the Alps, these were solved and replaced with Himalayan problems by mid-century, which in turn were superseded by the same Himalayan problems tackled in alpine style, the light and fast style which had been limited to the Alps at the beginning of the century. Thus, climbing the Eiger North Face was negated by climbing the Lhotse South Face, which was negated by climbing the same South Face as if it were Eiger

North Face: the Alps, the object of the first negation, returned in the second negation as the very style of climbing. The Hegelian sublation, *Aufhebung*, resulted in a style.

But once the style of the climb became key (with climbers doing alone and quickly what in mid-century the previous generation had been doing army-like and slowly), style no longer seemed to matter in literary accounts, as these gave way to documentaries and social media posts (with even Reinhold Messner recently following his project of Messner Mountain Museum with Messner Mountain Movie). The short form of early twentieth-century accounts written for prestigious national Alpine journals (*The Alpine Journal*, *The American Alpine Journal*, *La Montagne*, *Mitteilungen des Deutschen und Oesterreichischen Alpenvereins*, *La Rivista*, *Taternik*, *Planinski vestnik*...) returned by the end of the century as the short form of accounts posted on social media.

Thus, between the journal article and the Instagram story unfolds the history of the mountaineering book. If the century started with accounts written mostly for Alpine journals, its first half ended with one of the first classic book accounts, Anderl Heckmair's *Die 3 letzten Probleme der Alpen* (The Last Three Problems of the Alps). A dozen years later, Lionel Terray launched the term 'conquistadors of the useless' ('les conquérants de l'inutile' in his original French) in a book tellingly subtitled *From the Alps to Annapurna* (*Des Alpes à l'Annapurna*). In 1986, Reinhold Messner became the first person to climb all 14 eight-thousand-metre peaks, and published *Wettlauf zum Gipfel* (Race to the Top). And four years later, Tomo Česen tackled Lhotse South Face, a problem for the twenty-first century according to Messner (see McDonald 2012: 175), who quickly became Česen's most famous fan, but who also quickly joined the doubters because Česen had little

proof and did the climbing alone. ‘Alone’ (or *Sam* in Slovenian) is also the title of the book which Česen wrote in the same year.

A year earlier, in the spring of 1989, Messner himself had led an all-star international expedition to that same wall, and failed. By the autumn of that year, Lhotse South Face took the life of Jerzy Kukuczka, the mountain climber who had lost the so-called Crown of the Himalaya to Messner when he finished his project of scaling all eight-thousanders one year behind the much better equipped South Tyrolean. So, in 1989, Messner had lost his greatest challenger; in the aftermath of Česen’s 1990 attempt, he will have lost his perhaps greatest successor.

Nevertheless, in the new millennium Messner would assess the end of the 1980s as a time when the course of Himalayan climbing began to be dictated by Česen’s Slovenian compatriots after a decade of outstanding achievements by the Polish compatriots of Kukuczka. ‘Between 1980 and 1989, Polish climbers were giant, worldwide leaders as high-altitude climbers, especially in the Himalayas’, reads Messner’s endorsement of Bernadette McDonald’s book on Polish Himalayan climbers (see McDonald 2010). ‘Finally, after the Polish, Slovenian climbers took traditional alpinism one step further’, reads his blurb for McDonald’s book on Slovenian Himalayan alpinists (*ibid.*). More importantly, of the seven popular-history books which McDonald wrote on Himalayan mountaineering five focus on either the Poles or the Slovenians.

This volume disputes neither Messner’s nor McDonald’s assessments of Polish and Slovenian achievements in Himalayan climbing. It simply aims to show how these achievements went hand in hand with the seemingly incompatible activity of writing. In one way or another, the articles which follow all shed light on the genre of mountaineering literature at a crucial moment when its extralinguistic topics reached

their Himalayan apex while its linguistic structures included those offered by Polish and Slovenian. ♡

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**Passion and Politics:  
An Outline of the History  
of Polish Himalayanism**

Pasja i polityka. Zarys dziejów  
polskiego himalaizmu

Polish Himalayan climbing took its first steps long before the first eight-thousand-metre peak was scaled. Later, when the climbing world set out to conquer the Himalaya, Poles were stuck in a difficult socialist reality. Thanks to a great passion for mountains, Polish mountaineers broke through the barrier of the Iron Curtain. In frantic competition with Western climbers and chasing their own dreams, they helped define Himalayan climbing for the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The golden age of Polish Himalayanism left no successors, though; Polish Himalayan climbing was only reactivated after 2000. This article works with published source material to present the history of Polish activity in the highest mountains in the world, including the golden age of Polish Himalayanism and its influence on the current form of Polish activity in the Himalaya.

MOUNTAINEERING, POLISH  
HIMALAYANISM, CONTEMPORARY  
POLISH HISTORY, JERZY KUKUCZKA,  
WOJCIECH KURTYKA

Polski himalaizm stawał pierwsze kroki na długo przedtem, zanim zdobyto pierwszy ośmiotysięcznik. Później, gdy wspinaczkowy świat ruszył na podbój Himalajów, Polacy tkwili w trudnej socjalistycznej rzeczywistości. Dzięki ogromnej, pielęgnowanej od XIX stulecia pasji do gór, polscy taternicy przełamali barierę żelaznej kurtyny i rozpoczęli szaleńczą pogoń za własnymi marzeniami i osiągnięciami zachodnich himalaistów, stając się w XX wieku potęgą himalajską i wyznaczając na dwadzieścia następných lat kierunki rozwoju himalaizmu. „Złota epoka polskiego himalaizmu” minęła nie pozostawiając po sobie następców. Polski himalaizm zniknął, przestał się liczyć na arenie międzynarodowej. Jego reaktywacja nastąpiła na początku XXI wieku, kiedy „Lodowi Wojownicy” ponownie pobudzili go do działania.

ALPINIZM, POLSKI HIMALAIZM,  
HISTORIA WSPÓŁCZESNA POLSKI,  
JERZY KUKUCZKA, WOJCIECH KURTYKA

The Himalaya and Karakoram have kindled the imagination of mountaineers since late nineteenth century. Polish mountaineers are no exception in this regard. But the road from mere dreams to their realisation seemed unattainable for them, as they lacked not only experience, climbing skills, equipment and financial resources, but above all the existence of a state. There was also a need for someone who would make conquering the highest mountains their lifelong goal. All these barriers were overcome in the interwar period, after Poland regained its independence in 1918. Thanks to the determination of the mountaineering community, steadfastly inspired by Adam Karpiński, the first Polish expedition to the world's highest mountains was organised. Polish mountaineering activities began on 2 July 1939 with the ascent by a two-man team, composed of Jakub Bujak and Janusz Klarner, on the previously unclimbed summit of Nanda Devi East (7,434m). This was both an organisational and a sporting success: the Polish altitude record was established and would remain unbeaten for the next 30 years. But there was also a tragedy: Karpiński and Stefan Bernadzikiewicz died while attempting to summit Tirsuli (see Klarner).

This achievement was overshadowed by the Second World War and the difficult socio-political situation in Poland after its end. At that time, it seemed that the link with Himalayan climbing had been completely cut, particularly due to the fact that two Polish conquerors of Nanda Devi had disappeared in unknown circumstances.

After the Second World War, Polish mountaineering revived spontaneously, initially maintaining the model developed in the Second Polish Republic. Mountaineers active in the pre-war period started to appear in the Tatra Mountains, the High-Mountain Club resumed its activity, and trips to the Alps began. Plans were completely detached

from what was being prepared by the communist authorities. These quickly undertook an indoctrination campaign of the mountaineering circles, which numbered only several dozen people at the time.<sup>1</sup> Articles discussing the achievements and presuppositions of Soviet mountaineering appeared in specialist press. They emphasised the advantages of Soviet mountaineering as a school of bravery and patriotism, a tool for shaping the character of the devoted citizen, and a 'builder of communist society' (Radwańska-Paryska). In order to encourage those who contested the post-war political system to support communist initiatives, mountaineering management was left in the hands of the pre-war staff. In 1948, the activists of the Polish Mountaineering Club from the interwar Sanation period decided to popularise mountaineering in order to assure its further development, and so it was able to function in the new socio-political system. The Mountain Training Commission was established at the High-Mountain Club of the Polish Tourist Society. It organised courses for tourists, instructors, guides, mountain rescuers and mountaineers. This was not sufficient, however. All manifestations of social life behind the Iron Curtain were forced to emulate Soviet administrative, political, cultural and sports institutions. They were to be unconditionally obedient to the directives coming from the East. Most important were those directives whose goal was the isolation from the non-communist world, and even from other so-called people's democracies. Hence, Stalinism quickly showed its true colours: it confined Polish mountaineers to the Tatras, in practice restricting climbing to a single valley. It undertook to change the organisational structures of Polish mountaineering in order to eliminate the so-called bourgeois remnant, and adopt the Soviet model of mountaineering. This is how Jan Alfred Szczepański described the Soviet model in 1953:

**1** Before the Second World War, the Polish climbing community consisted of about 200 active mountaineers.

2

Paper presented at the briefing at GUKF on 19 October 1948, Central Office of Physical Culture, reference number 10, k. 30, Archive of New Files, Warsaw.

*Mountaineering plays an important role, as it is practiced by hundreds of thousands of people and enjoys the support of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The Party notes that the great Kirov was a mountaineer, and appreciates the myriad social values of mountaineering and the contributions of mountaineers. Alpinism has its place in a community built by the revolutionary working class, and will become increasingly important. And is it not telling that the great leader of the Italian people and of the Communist Party of Italy, Palmiro Togliatti, avidly practices mountaineering, and that in the Soviet Union the Alpine Games are a serious social matter? Mountaineering has a tremendous scope for activity in Poland, and let us hope that soon Polish expeditions will set off for the great mountains of the Soviet Union, and later on for other mountains. (Szczepański: 27-28)*

Polish mountaineering was to become an element of the system. First and foremost, a new, centralised organisational model of sport and physical culture was introduced in Poland, headed by the Central Office of Physical Culture, soon after renamed the Central Committee of Physical Culture. The objective was unambiguous: the psycho-physical reconstruction of the human being; the upbringing of a 'politically-aware, creative, socially sophisticated, decisive type of a new citizen'.<sup>2</sup> In this spirit and following the guidelines formed in December 1948, Polish mountaineering was to be modernised; in other words, the absurd practices of Soviet mountaineering were to be transferred to Polish mountaineering. Apart from the aforementioned mass training courses, the Polish Tatra Society was merged with the Polish Sightseeing Society to form the Polish Tourist and Sightseeing Society (Polskie Towarzystwo Turystyczno-Krajoznawcze – PTTK), to which the High-Mountain Club was also incorporated in 1950 (see Żuławski). The large-scale

approach to training was maintained by way of organising the School of Mountain Tourism and Mountaineering at the PTTK High-Mountain Club in Zakopane. The School director was Witold Henryk Paryski, a pre-war mountaineer, mountaineering instructor, Tatra Volunteer Search and Rescue Service rescuer, Tatra guide and editor of *Taternik*, the press organ of the Polish mountaineering movement. The activity of the School undoubtedly contributed to the increase of interest in mountaineering, but it also resulted in the loss of elitism and the organisational independence of the Polish mountaineering movement. Attempts by the PTTK to impose its authority and rules of operation on the Club led to a discord between the management boards of the two organisations with regard to the specific nature of alpinism and the methods employed in climbing activities. This conflict led to the liquidation of the High-Mountain Club and the establishment of the Mountaineering Section of the PTTK under the rule of people who held no authority in the Polish mountaineering community.

As a result, Polish mountaineering lost all organisational support, which limited climbing activities to the Tatras and made it impossible for Polish climbers to participate in the race for the highest peaks on Earth. The publication of *Taternik* also ceased. Similarly as in the Soviet Union, a classification system for mountaineers was introduced which was ‘a constituent part of the Unified Sports Classification in effect in the People’s Republic of Poland, covering all sports disciplines’ (Chwaściński 1956: 13). Climbers in the Tatras had to be verified within this system. This culturally alien system was opposed by Polish mountaineers, especially as special permits were required for authorisation to climb border peaks (see Sonelski: 50). The only legal way to climb in the southern, Czechoslovak part of the Tatras was by participating in Alpine Games, which were also organised in winter. Their purpose

was to propagate and popularise winter mountaineering, emphasise recent achievements, gain experience in long expeditions, assimilate and popularise Soviet mountaineering techniques, prepare Polish mountaineering assets for expeditions to foreign mountains, and propagate the ideas of the PTTK (see Anonymous).

The spreading Stalinist cult of personality, repression against the clergy, widespread axiological chaos and general social anomia led many young people to mountaineering as a kind of escape from everyday life. Although they were confined to the Polish part of the Tatras, they seized every opportunity to practice mountaineering. This included the above-mentioned Alpine Games, during which they were able to climb border peaks and other places which were otherwise closed off. The so-called friendship border between Poland and Czechoslovakia also became a challenge for Polish mountaineers in the Tatras. Disregarding bans, they crossed the border illegally and climbed on the Czechoslovak sides of the mountains. In order to survive in communist conditions, mountaineering had to deny its essence, at least officially. In reality, the Polish mountaineering community bypassed orders and bans imposed from above, escaping centrally dictated procedures in order to maintain its identity. Only occasionally, particularly in public discourse in the press, did it compromise (see Kacperczyk).

The idea of mass popularity of mountain sports and a break with elitism brought with it the need to change the socio-demographic composition of the mountaineering community, as it had to be enriched with representatives of the working class. This was not entirely successful and the Polish mountaineering community remained largely hermetic despite the attempts of the authorities to infiltrate the community. Polish mountaineers faced numerous accusations, including the charge that a considerable portion of them

did not find their proper place in contemporary Poland, as they did not sufficiently understand the rights and duties imposed on everyone by life in a country which is building socialism. Those Polish mountaineers are not able to work out new forms of mountaineering. They stick to the old forms and ideas. Simply put, they are stuck in the ideology of bourgeois mountaineering, and show no attempt to create their own Polish mountaineering ideology. [...] The ideological backwardness of individual mountaineers is the most important cause for the current [...] weakening of Polish mountaineering. This has resulted in a lack of understanding of certain needs, certain rights, certain duties. Some mountaineers [...] must come to understand the impropriety of their behaviour, analyse their mistakes, and learn to think. (Szczepeński 25–26)

Was their behaviour really improper? The Polish mountaineering community had emerged from the intelligentsia. They were representatives of former landed gentry, nobility, petty bourgeoisie, as well the Home Army (Armia Krajowa). The Home Army in particular was disrespected and discriminated against by the authorities. Despite being limited to climbing in the Tatras during the first half of the 1950s, and only able to follow reports from the Himalaya, Polish mountaineers dreamed of the highest mountains. The desire to fight for the world's highest peaks was bolstered by books such as *Walka o szczyt świata* (Fight for the Top of the World) and *Człowiek zdobywa Himalaje* (Man Conquers the Himalaya) by Jan Kazimierz Dorawski; *Nanda Devi* by Janusz Klarner; and *Człowiek Everestu*, the Polish translation of *Man of Everest*, which is Tenzing Norgay's account of his ascent of Everest. The community aspired towards a systematic improvement of climbing skills, particularly in winter mountaineering in the Tatras, which was seen as preparation for the Himalaya. After the October thaw in 1956 and

**3**

In 1958, Jerzy Hajdukiewicz participated in a Swiss expedition to Dhaulagiri which, however, did not reach the summit. This was followed by a Polish-Swiss expedition to Dhaulagiri in 1960; Max Eiselin withdrew from the project under pressure from sponsors, but invited Hajdukiewicz and Adam Skoczylas to participate.

the introduction of the short-lived Polish road to socialism, mountaineering was separated from tourism. The Mountaineering Club was reactivated under its pre-war name as an independent organisation responsible directly to the Main Committee of Physical Culture and Tourism (see Chwaściński 1974). The borders were also opened, allowing Polish mountaineers to return to Alpine peaks in 1957. However, Poles missed out on the golden age of Himalayan mountaineering, the exploration of the world's highest mountains in the 1950s and '60s.

Climbs in the Mont Blanc region and in the Bernese Highlands contributed to paving the way to the Himalaya. They allowed Polish mountaineers to establish contact with world alpinism and, as a consequence, to go to the Himalaya in 1958 and 1960.<sup>3</sup> Although Kurt Diemberger, the Austrian conqueror of Dhaulagiri, emphasised that reaching the summit was also a 'Polish mountaineering success' (Kurczab), the Poles had a different view. They began to look for chances to organise a Polish expedition. Unfortunately, by the early 1960s hopes for democratisation in Poland were dashed. The so-called minor stabilisation programme was implemented in isolation from so-called rotting capitalism, bringing stagnation and a general atmosphere of malaise. The lack of prospects for a better life, and the Party's omnipotent control over all aspects of life, pushed Poles to find ways to survive. They learned to function in a split reality: one was coarse and difficult and the other was filled with the lies of propaganda and socialist celebrations. These daunting perspectives caused many intelligent and sensitive people to give into their passions completely – to escape to the mountains, to climb. The Tatra mountain hostel in Morskie Oko became a second home for them and the centre of their climbing lives. The mutual fuelling of passion, dreams of conquering legendary Alpine routes, competitiveness within the community, and the desire to gain recognition in the

eyes of mountaineering authorities and later in the eyes of western alpinists mobilised them to train hard and form a tight community. This was not only an escape from the apathy of everyday life, but also an opportunity for the best mountaineers to obtain passports from the authorities, leave the Eastern bloc, or even travel to far away countries (see Sonelski: 52).

Ways were also found to organise Polish expeditions to high mountains. The first chosen destination was the Afghan Hindu Kush, a veritable terra incognita in the mountaineering world at the time. The proximity of the border with the Soviet Union made the organisation of expeditions politically and financially straightforward. Poles paid in zloties to travel to the Soviet-Afghan border (see Pleskot: 353), and the field for exploration was wide open. The first Polish Hindu Kush expedition took place in 1960. From that point until the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Hindu Kush was the main area of high-mountain activity for Polish mountaineers. It was the staging ground for Polish Himalayanism and an opportunity to catch up to Western Europe in terms of high-altitude mountaineering. For this reason, in the annals of the Polish exploration of the highest mountains, Andrzej Paczkowski considered the 1960s the period of Polish Hindu Kush Himalayanism (see Kłosowicz).

In 1966, Jerzy Warteresiewicz published an article entitled 'Himalaje z nami czy bez nas' (The Himalaya, with or without Us). He presented a new programme of mountaineering expansion and called for the rapid undertaking of the exploration of the highest mountains (see Warteresiewicz: 80). The answer was an unequivocal 'with us'. In 1969, a Polish reconnaissance expedition set off to Karakoram, led by Ryszard Szafirski. Andrzej Zawada was supposed to be the leader, but the authorities had refused him a passport because they suspected

**4** Maciej Kozłowski was a historian, opposition activist in communist Poland and later a diplomat. In 1966, he took part in the fourth Polish expedition to Hindu Kush, where, together with Jerzy Potocki and the Belgian Jean Bourgeois, they made the first ascent of Sad Istrağh (5,859m) and the second Polish (and fourth overall) ascent of Noshag (7,492m). In 1968, Kozłowski climbed with Marek Głogoczowski and Andrzej Paulo in Norway, reaching the Brudgommen east pillar in the Trolltindan massif, for a historical first.

**5** This was initiated by two achievements in 1970: the ascent of the south face of Annapurna by Donald Whillans and Dougal Haston, and the ascent of the massive southern Rupal face by Günther and Reinhold Messner.

him of smuggling publications of the Paris-based Literary Institute through the Tatras (see Ziółkowski: 60). After an ongoing investigation, the so-called Trial of the Tatra mountaineers began. Zawada was not charged, but several young climbers were accused and sentenced (including Maciej Kozłowski).<sup>4</sup> They were regarded as students of diversionary craft, and they were accused of collecting, compiling and passing on to an enemy centre, namely the Literary Institute in Paris, materials and information which defamed the nation, the system and the authorities of the People's Republic of Poland (this included documents from the Polish political crisis of 1968). Despite terrible weather conditions, the expedition was a success. The climbers ascended the Northern Malubiting and a previously unknown pass, which was named Polan La (Polish Pass). Ghulam Rasulow, the leader of the Pakistani porters, assessed the Poles as follows: 'They didn't have much money, their equipment and food weren't the best either, but they were tough and stubborn, and that was what determined their success.' (Szafirski: 107)

This important success for the Poles meant nothing in terms of the history of Himalayan climbing, which was just becoming a sport.<sup>5</sup> But Polish Himalayan climbers were not deterred. They acted against all odds, including a political situation at home which had not really changed since the 1960s. They believed it was possible to escape from politics and create a separate space in which one could live and seek self-fulfilment. The mountains, climbing and the climbing environment which existed in those years were just such a space, a kind of asylum: '[M]aintaining pre-war traditions, it created its own, separate subculture, community lifestyle, folklore and even language. It gathered people who were unconventional and sometimes extraordinary, and paid a lot of attention to maintaining and emphasising the culture-forming role of mountains and climbing.' (Kolbuszewski: 93)

The Polish climbing community of the 1970s and '80s was still elitist and this did not change with the arrival of mountaineers who had finished their education at the vocational or secondary school level (see Zdebski: 228–34). It still consisted mainly of people belonging to the intelligentsia, brought up and educated in the spirit of traditional ideals and values by pre-war professors. They cared about Polish identity and tried to distance themselves from the decisions of state authorities, sometimes organising climbing activities in the pre-war, Western European spirit. For young Polish mountaineers, in the light of the sad reality of Sovietisation or simple poverty, everything pre-war, everything originating in an independent Poland, had the flavour of a better life. It was part of the European aspirations passed on by previous generations, and it ran counter to the patterns of real socialism (see Wilczyński).

The hermetic state of the Polish alpine community was reinforced by the fact that the status of a member of the High-Mountain Club could only be obtained by having previous mountaineering experience and by being vouched for by two members (as so-called sponsors). The decision to accept or reject a candidate was taken by the Club's Board. Membership in the Club was a form of ennoblement, a social advancement for those who treated mountains and climbing as a field of free, unrestricted activity. Climbing was a life in itself for them, a form of counterculture, something which gave them a common identity. The spiritual centre of Polish mountaineering was the headquarters of individual clubs, the aforementioned mountain hostel and mountaineering camp at Morskie Oko Lake. Participants of trips to the Alps, Caucasus and Hindu Kush gave lectures there, offering living proof that the Himalaya were open to Poles. The strength of this impulse was confirmed by Himalayan mountaineer Ludwik Wilczyński, who

wrote the following: ‘the atmosphere is boiling, one can feel how the energy of generations of climbers, suppressed for decades, has been transformed into a great Himalayan inspiration’ (Wilczyński). Polish mountaineers found a way to function within the socialist system: manoeuvring between obedience, collaboration and their own conscience. There is no doubt that the state security services kept a close watch on the mountaineering community and made attempts to secure their cooperation. There were many opportunities to do so, for instance, when mountaineers applied for passports. In the People’s Republic of Poland, a passport was issued for a specific trip after which it had to be immediately returned to the police. Polish mountaineers, unlike those from the other countries of the Eastern Bloc, openly refused to accept top-down, political control of mountain climbing. Even when they participated in expeditions organised in the Caucasus or in Pamir, they carried out their own climbing plans and broke away from the interference of the Soviet Party management of the camp. A trip to the Tatras, the Alps or other mountain ranges, although organised centrally by the Polish Mountaineering Association, did not have a political chaperone in the way that Soviet or Czechoslovak climbing expeditions had. For the latter expeditions, a political person not only decided the goals of their mountaineering activity, but also controlled the climbers’ actions, forbidding contacts with other climbers.

When Edward Gierek came to power in 1970, Poland opened up to the world somewhat. It was also noted that mountaineers had brought fame to Poland and were recognisable abroad. When in 1971 the Poles made the first ascent of Kunyang Chhish (the highest previously unclimbed mountain range in the world at that time), the new state authorities decorated them with gold medals for outstanding sporting achievements and gave them the annual Minister of Foreign Affairs award

for spreading the name of Poland in the world. Organised in 1974, the expedition to Lhotse resonated particularly strongly in wider Polish society. Although the summit was not reached, it was the first time in the history of mountaineering that an altitude of 8,000 metres was reached in winter: Andrzej Heinrich and Zawada had reached 8,250 metres. The death of the well-known filmmaker Stanisław Latałło caused by inhuman weather conditions was regarded as a national tragedy in Poland.<sup>6</sup>

In 1974, mountaineering came under the umbrella of the Polish Mountaineering Association, to which all mountaineering organisations were now subordinated.<sup>7</sup> New rules for financing sports were also introduced and overseen by the Main Committee of Physical Culture and Tourism (see Nyka: 9). The Polish Mountaineering Association was therefore a unique sports federation. Its authorities were recruited from outside Party circles and elected democratically, whereas the presidents of other Polish sports associations arrived inside briefcases, that is, they were imposed top-down by the Polish United Workers' Party. The top-down method of selecting the authorities of mountaineering organisations was in force in all the countries of so-called people's democracy. Attempts to introduce this rule were made in Polish mountaineering to tame an environment full of people who were rebellious in their thoughts and actions. These attempts failed: Paczkowski, a man with independent political views and oppositional leanings, and an underground activist during martial law times, was elected president.

The first eight-thousander conquered by Poles was the previously unclimbed Broad Peak Middle (8,016m). It was a success that came with tragedy: during the descent, three mountaineers lost their lives. In 1975, the first Polish women's Himalayan expedition was organised, whose participants, Halina Krüger-Syrokomska and Anna Okopińska,

**6** Stanisław Latałło was a film director and actor. He joined the expedition to film it for Polish television. The expedition unfolded in very difficult weather conditions: an icy, hurricane-force wind, snow storm and temperatures dropping to -46 degrees Celsius. On 17 December 1974, after waiting for the weather to break for two days in Camp III, Latałło, Piotrowski and Surdel opted to descend to Camp II while the storm continued. They descended separately without being tied together with a rope. Surdel reached Camp II, Piotrowski turned back to Camp III after an hour, whereas Latałło died at the fixed ropes between Camps II and III.

**7** Beside the High-Mountain Club, there existed numerous academic organisations associated with the Federation of Alpine Academic Clubs, as well as the Polish Mountain Club, which was affiliated with the Central Alliance of Trade Unions.

**8** Together with Sherpa Jangbu, Japanese climbers Mieko Mori, Naoko Nakaseko and Masako Uchida reached the top of an eight-thousander earlier, in 1973, when they scaled Manaslu. Everest was reached in May 1975 by Junko Tabei (from the south-east) and a Tibetan named Phantog (from the north).

**9** Among the achievements were the first climbs of Kangchenjunga Central and Southern, Peak 29, Ngadi Chuli, Yazghil Dome South, Distaghil Sar East, Masherbrum South-West, Meru North and Arjuna.

**10** The most important ones include the southern pillar of Everest (1980), the Zakopiański route on the south face of Annapurna (1981), a new solo route on the western face of Makalu (1981), the middle of the south-western face of Yalung Kang (1984), the south-eastern pillar of Nanga Parbat (1985) and the famous Magic Line and Polish Route on K2.

**11** In the fall of 1979, eight members of the Silesian expedition reached the summit of Lhotse, including the duo Andrzej Czok and Jerzy Kukuczka. They did this without supplemental oxygen. →

ascended Gasherbrum II (8,035m), equalling the Polish altitude record and establishing a new European women's altitude record.<sup>8</sup>

Regular, that is, annual Polish activity in the Himalaya and Karakoram began in 1978. Soon, Poles set a path for world Himalayan climbing for almost twenty years to come. Organised by both the Polish Mountaineering Association and the climbing (club) community, the aims of national (central) expeditions were the exploration of the highest unclimbed peaks<sup>9</sup> and the discovery of new routes on their unclimbed ridges and faces.<sup>10</sup> Polish expeditions were traditional, with large numbers of participants, and subordinated to the command of expedition leaders.

The most famous expedition leader was Zawada. His visionary spirit, stubbornness and ability to approach each situation in a flexible way allowed him to effectively mobilise each participant. He was good in establishing contacts and flexible in making decisions. The speed with which he acted inspired the community and attracted novices. Polish mountaineers appointed to national expeditions constituted the country's elite and were prepared to operate in extremely difficult conditions, in any terrain and with weak belaying. They were able to meet challenges posed by the highest mountains, even during the winter. There were some 4,000 climbers in Poland, which was not insignificant. The number of expeditions is also noteworthy: in the period from 1978 to 1989, more than 40 expeditions to eight-thousanders were organised, but also more than 40 to lower peaks. 75% of those were successful: 24 new routes were established, seven winter ascents were made (see Roszkowska: 1640). The Poles very quickly made up for lost time and narrowed the distance separating them from the world elite. They climbed without the help of high-altitude porters and bottled oxygen,<sup>11</sup> often solo and breaking time records; Krzysztof Wielicki

in particular was influential with his seventeen-hour climb of Broad Peak, which sparked a trend of fast climbing in the Himalaya, later continued mainly by climbers from the West (from Erhard Loretan to Ueli Steck).

In 1978, Wanda Rutkiewicz became globally recognised as the first Pole, the first woman in Europe and the third woman in the world to climb Everest. She did it on the same day that the Pole Karol Wojtyła was elected Pope. This coincidence led to an unexpected propaganda effort centred on Rutkiewicz. She found herself in the headlines of newspapers, on the radio and television, because Polish authorities took great care to publicise her Himalayan success. They wanted to divert attention away from the election of the Polish Pope. Perhaps this event caused Rutkiewicz to start concerning herself with self-promotion. In fact, she was the first person in Poland to promote herself and her mountaineering achievements. As a result, climbs which were more important than hers often went unnoticed, which in turn caused a lot of trouble for her. Yet she was ambitious, determined and unpredictable, and thanks to her, Polish women's Himalayan climbing developed,<sup>12</sup> and her main project, called the Caravan of Dreams, was well ahead of its time, although ultimately unrealistic (see Reinisch). Had it not been for her motivation, strength and commitment, Polish women's Himalayan climbing would probably never have advanced. After misunderstandings resulting from her intransigence and ambition, but also from the fact that she actually organised these expeditions, she decided to act independently and become the first female mountaineer to climb all 14 eight-thousanders and thus win the Crown of the Himalaya. Although she did not manage to complete the Caravan of Dreams, she became an icon of Polish and world Himalayan mountaineering and an inspiration for female climbers everywhere (see Gugglberger).

→ becoming, with Reinhold Messner and Peter Habeler, among the first Himalayan mountaineers to climb 8,000'ers "by fair means". Soon, the climbing of the highest peaks in the world without the aid of supplemental oxygen came to dominate Polish expeditions. The foundation of this concept, apart from the ability to acclimate, was economic considerations.

**12**  
She found Halina Krüger-Syrokomska, Anna Czerwińska, Krystyna Palmowska, Dobrosława Miódowicz-Wolf and other great female climbers to demonstrate that women can operate in the mountains as effectively as men.

The winter exploration of the Himalaya was the prime discipline for Poles, which they initiated by conquering Everest in 1980 (Wielicki and Leszek Cichy). So far, they have made 11 winter ascents of eight-thousanders (10 of them as the very first climbers). The manner in which Kukuczka and Heinrich climbed the south-eastern cliff of Cho Oyu in 1985, with four open-air bivouacs, was considered epic. In 1988, Voytek Kurtyka described the Polish version of Himalayan mountaineering, in particular the winter activity, as the art of suffering; this embodied typical Polish characteristics: a love of freedom, the independence of spirit, bravery, heroism, the ability to submit to a cause without reserve, a kind of snobbery in exposing and sacrificing oneself, and perseverance and patience in difficult situations (see Kurtyka 1988). Without these qualities there would be no golden age of Polish Himalayan climbing. Although Kurtyka treated climbing as an art form rather than a sport discipline, he was Poland's greatest advocate of the alpine style and sport climbing in the highest mountains. 'It became clear to me', he wrote in 1993, 'that alpine-style is a higher form of the mountaineering art, not only in its sporting aspect, but also in human terms, because though it you can experience the mountain world more intimately and deeply. Eliminating accidental partnerships makes for closer bonds.' (Kurtyka 1994: 202) While Kurtyka, the recipient of the Career Piolet d'Or in 2016, was and still is highly respected in the Western mountaineering community, his concept struggled to break through in communist Poland. It did not fit a system which promoted collectivism. This is why large expeditions which took months to reach the summit were more readily financed than small expeditions whose members climbed quickly and efficiently. Despite these obstacles, Polish climbers had completed several routes in alpine style by 1989, including the Shining Wall, that

is, the western wall of Gasherbrum IV (Kurtyka and Austrian climber Robert Schauer in 1985), which was recognised by *Climbing* magazine as the greatest and boldest route marked out in the Himalaya in the twentieth century.

The sporting aspect of Polish Himalayan climbing has been mostly associated with Jerzy Kukuczka, the most recognisable Polish Himalayan climber. Kukuczka's competitive approach to mountaineering is reflected not only in his achievements, which include 13 new routes on eight-thousanders, including one climbed solo, five in the alpine style and four in winter, but most of all in his highly mediatised race with Reinhold Messner for the Crown of the Himalaya. For him, Himalayan climbing was above all a sport, which is also what drew him to it. Perhaps this is why he accepted the silver medal of the Olympic Order, which he was awarded in 1988 at the Winter Olympics in Calgary (see Kukuczka 2015: 128).

As noted by Arthur Malé, 'the Poles opened the way to a practice that remained marginal and, in keeping with their culture, guided by the voluntarist slogan "a Pole can do it"' (Malé: 30). Unlike their colleagues from the other side of the Iron Curtain, Polish climbers felt the pressure to succeed and take extreme risks because they knew that they may not be given a second chance. This mobilised them even when their partner had died. They climbed for him, so that his participation in the expedition would not be in vain. They were aware of the real costs of participating in an expedition. No doubt economics was an important incentive to operate at the limit; this was a doubly complicated problem, as it was necessary to collect non-convertible zloties as well as so-called hard currency, the legal purchase and the export of which were limited (see Kalinowska). But above all, it was a question of mentality: the sacrifices and onerous obstacles with

uncertain results (struggling with the passport office, waiting for a visa, etc.), which they had to overcome to get on the list of expedition members.

The success of Polish Himalayan climbing in those years was a result of a combination of climbers' particular approach to life, their climbing activities and the political situation in the country. The aspiration for freedom, stubbornness, courage, solidarity, steadfastness, bravery – these were the character features which enabled them to achieve seemingly impossible things. These climbers did not appear from nothing and did not result from poverty or a feeling of inferiority in relation to mountaineers from the West, as Bernadette McDonald suggests (see McDonald); instead, they were conditioned by the cultural situation. It is noteworthy that the golden age of Polish Himalayan mountaineering came during difficult socio-political times. The crisis of 1980 and the imposition of martial law on 13 December 1981 restricted political freedoms and made it difficult to move about the country, let alone travel abroad. Many members of mountaineering clubs were arrested for sympathising with or being active in the opposition. Poland began to descend into chaos: inflation was rising and the Soviet Union imposed economic sanctions which caused a radical decline in living standards. This was compounded by Poland's international isolation and the economic collapse caused by being cut off from Western credit. The geopolitical position of Poland was such that, in their desire to preserve their national identity, Poles had to prove everywhere – including the mountains – that Poland was not a Soviet republic (Poland was effectively under Soviet control until 1989). Why were they predisposed to do so? Here is Kurtyka's answer:

*Centuries of suffering and danger have bred an appreciation for such qualities as fortitude and tenacity, have taught Poles to cope in desperate circumstances. Wars and continual political chaos have forged an individualism, an inclination towards insubordination, an irreverence for norms and regulations. Having their broad steppes over-run by Turks and Tartars fostered a sense of adventure and a fascination with space. (Kurtyka 1994: 198)*

**13**

It was very difficult to buy anything at the time, as the shelves were largely empty. Meanwhile, government warehouses were full of all kinds of delicacies.

At the same time, they were characterised by a deep sense of solidarity in fighting for a common goal, in this case Polish Himalayanism. This was eminently illustrated by emotions expressed after the winter conquest of Everest: ‘My colleagues were crying: they wept tears of joy, although they were not the ones who had reached the summit. This is what every expedition member wants – they all experienced the joy of victory.’ (Wielicki 1997: 16) On the other hand, going to the mountains was an escape to (a different) life, to an environment which was the antithesis of the everyday variety of those times. It was free ‘from ideological opportunism or imposed pseudo-Marxist doctrines’, or indeed top-down authority. The mountains were ‘the backdrop against which one’s truest life was fulfilled and realised’ (Kolbuszewski: 93). Perhaps that is why many Polish mountaineers spent from five to six months a year in the mountains or on climbing walls, all the while being employed full-time or studying at university. The successes of Poles in the Himalaya would not have been possible had they not persevered, scrounged official permits and special food rations for expeditions,<sup>13</sup> and taken advantage of the absurd socialist economy (see Sonelski: 58). They went on expeditions with government financial support, and during their periods in Poland demonstrated their dislike of the system in various ways: they printed and distributed leaflets

**14**

Around 2000, Janusz Gofab, Jacek Fluder and Stanisław Piecuch made up a group of superb young alpinists that achieved difficult climbs in the Alps, the mountains of Norway, Alaska and Greenland.

of underground press, published banned books, and were active in the national leadership of Solidarity and in the Flighting Solidarity. Many of them were imprisoned for their activities, interred, or hid from the Security Services.

The flourishing of Polish Himalayan mountaineering came to an abrupt end in 1989. The boundary was set by two processes in particular: the intergenerational break caused by the deaths of Eugeniusz Chrobak, Mirosław Dąsał, Mirosław Gardzielewski, Andrzej Heinrich and Waclaw Otręba on Everest and the demise of Jerzy Kukuczka on Lhotse; and the change of the political and economic system. For Polish mountaineering, the political and economic change had a double impact: it meant, on the one hand, individual freedom and a passport in the drawer, which guaranteed the possibility of going wherever and whenever you wanted, and, on the other hand, an inflation which was difficult to control and a readily available yet expensive convertible currency. Unemployment was growing together with the reluctance of private business owners to hire workers who would go off to the mountains for months on end. The free market replaced socialist economics, central planning and central distribution. Moreover, securing sponsors in the new capitalist system proved more difficult than winning state grants had been in the previous period. Polish Himalayan climbers, returning to the path of normality in everyday life, had to concern themselves with their jobs and careers. Some of them started to make a living from mountaineering, others went into business and politics or returned to academic work. Polish Himalayan mountaineering virtually disappeared, even as a formula for its development was sought and a Wonder Team<sup>14</sup> was active in alpine-type mountains. A generation gap resulting from the neglect of climbing activity in the Tatras and

the Alps was a regression that had to be reversed, and new objectives in the Himalaya had to be found.

The canonical status of the successes of the golden age, as well as the return of some of the survivors of that era to Himalayan climbing after many years, sparked new attempts to rebuild the significance of Poles in the highest mountains. In 2001, Wielicki produced a ‘winter manifesto’, ‘Manifest zimowy’, in which he called on Polish mountaineers to take up the fight and complete the Polish winter exploration of the Himalaya:

*Let the moniker ‘Ice Warriors’, given to us by the English, become a permanent part of Himalayan history. [...] We have conquered half of it. Now it is your turn: the young, angry and ambitious. We needed eight years, so we give you as much. Is that not fair? That would be something, can you imagine? All the eight-thousanders climbed for the first time in winter, all by Poles. There is an opportunity here. It is a game worthy of the time, strength and resources it demands. It is time to reach a decision. This is the challenge for the Polish Mountaineering Association: how to create conditions and interest ‘the youth’ in such an idea? From my generation’s part, you can expect help, experience, even active participation. (Wielicki 2001: 5)*

The call was taken up in 2005, with Piotr Morawski ascending Shishapangma (8,013m)<sup>15</sup> in winter together with Simone Moro. In the years that followed, however, there was not a whisper of Polish winter exploits in the Himalaya. Therefore, on the initiative of Kukućzka’s climbing partner Artur Hajzer, the Polish Winter Himalayan Programme was established; after Hajzer’s death in 2013 it was named in his honour and continued until the winter ascent of K2 in 2021,

**15** Additionally, Morawski’s summer achievements with Slovak climber Peter Hamer placed him among the very best Himalayan climbers. They summited Nanga Parbat in 2007, and Ama Dablam, Gasherbrum I and Gasherbrum II in 2008. Morawski died in 2009.

first under the leadership of Janusz Majer, then Piotr Tomala. The programme was aimed at climbers of the younger generation, who had to be trained in climbing at so-called unification camps and trips to various mountains, including the highest ones (see Hajzer). The long-awaited success came in March 2012. During an expedition led by Hajzer, Adam Bielecki and Janusz Gołąb ascended Gasherbrum I (8,068m), and a year later Bielecki, Artur Małek, Maciej Berbeka and Tomasz Kowalski ascended Broad Peak (8,047m), albeit at a tragic cost, as Berbeka and Kowalski died on the descent (see Czerwińska et al.) Women's Himalayan climbing was led by Ewa Panekjko-Pankiewicz and Danuta Wach. Taking part in 2008 in a research conference entitled 'The State and Prospects of Women's Sport in Poland', together with Marta Lewandowska, they presented a paper entitled 'Women's Himalayanism – Rebuilding a Leading Position in World Himalayanism'. Riding the momentum, they created an outline of their project of Polish Women's Himalayanism, which was completed on 1 March 2009 at the Meeting of Mountaineers and Himalayanists in Rzędkowice. As part of the project, which was led by female Himalayan mountaineers with expedition experience from the 1980s and '90s, training trips were organised to the Tatras, the Alps, as well as the world's highest mountains. In 2011, a twenty-five-year long hiatus was overcome by the first women's Polish expedition to the six-thousanders surrounding the Sosbun Glacier in the Karakoram. Despite these attempts, women's Himalayan climbing in Poland is virtually non-existent. Individual female Himalayan climbers have not brought any novelty to Himalayanism. They follow so-called old paths and complain about the lack of interest in their activities in Poland. Perhaps this will change in the near future, as the Parliament of the Republic of Poland has declared 2022 as the year of Wanda Rutkiewicz.

In Anna Czerwińska's view, continuing down the road established by the Ice Warriors without any new ideas would squander the opportunities of the youngest generation.<sup>16</sup> The situation in Polish Himalayanism has started to change in recent years, though. The activity of the Jerzy Kukuczka Polish Mountaineering Support Foundation, the Youth Group of the Polish Mountaineering Association and the Polish Himalayan Sports Project (previously advocated by Janusz Majer)<sup>17</sup> seems to have contributed most to that change. In the words of Wadim Jabłoński, the objective of the Polish Himalayan Sports Project is 'to explore activities on peaks lower than 8,000 metres, conducted in the alpine style, sport ascents of the highest peaks, repetitions of difficult and rarely attacked routes in the "siege style", attempts at new routes, or repetitions of easier routes in the alpine style'. According to Jabłoński, '[t]he main idea guiding us, however, is to create strong teams which, after the programme ends, will want to independently set goals at the level of passages nominated for the Piolet d'Or' (Jabłoński).

Jabłoński, Adam Bielecki, Marcin Rutkowski and Jarosław Gawrysiak are responsible for the organisation of the programme, while the programme board consists of Piotr Pustelnik, Janusz Majer and Miłosz Jodłowski. The programme is intended to reach out to young, talented climbers. Some of them have already had some success in the Alps, Cordillera Blanca or the Karakoram, where they have established new routes on six-thousanders. In 2021, new routes were established on the western face of the previously unclimbed peak Trident (6,150m), difficulty M6, W14+, V (Maciej Kimel, Michał Czech and Jabłoński); the northern face of Gunj-e Sar (6,300m), difficulty A15 (Gołąb and Bielecki); and the face of Uli Biaho Gallery in the Trango Valley, difficulty A3, M7 (Marcin Tomaszewski and Damian Bielecki).

**16**  
Conversation with Anna Czerwińska in Zakopane, 2 September 2018.

**17**  
In 2013, as the head of the wide-ranging programme called The Polish Himalaya, and apart from supporting the projects of Polish Wintertime Mountaineering and The Crown of the Himalaya of Kinga Baranowska, Majer advocated the exploration of unclimbed peaks and the establishment of 'a sporting route to 7,000- and 8,000-metre peaks on the level where Polish teams could become candidates for the "Piolet d'Or", which is awarded for outstanding achievements in mountaineering' (Wroński).

Therefore, we can only hope that today's Polish Himalayan mountaineers, drawing on the experiences of the golden-age generation, will find sporting challenges in the high mountains and make a name for themselves in the world of Himalayan mountaineering. Hopefully, they will discover a world beyond that which Marek Pacukiewicz has called the school of vertical promotion (see Pacukiewicz: 98–114), and in this way learn to understand themselves and adopt values without which a feeling of inner emptiness might persist. Finally, it is crucial that their paths do not become mere strings of triumphs and tragedies. ♡

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## Povzetek

Zgodovina poljskega himalajizma je – kakor poljska zgodovina nasploh – niz zmagoslavij in porazov, izhajajočih iz zapletenega spleta dogodkov, ki so pogosto protislovni. Spomladi 1939 je Himalajo obiskala prva poljska odprava, v okviru katere je naveza Jakuba Bujaka in Janusza Klarnerja opravila prvenstveni vzpon na vzhodni vrh gore Nanda Devi (7434m), kar je bil najtežji in šesti najvišji med tedaj osvojenimi vrhovi. Zaradi posledic druge svetovne vojne in sovjetizacije Poljske pa so se poljski alpinisti na najvišje gore sveta vrnili šele tedaj, ko je bilo vseh štirinajst osemtisočakov že osvojenih. Pot do Himalaje in Karakorum je Poljake v šestdesetih letih 20. stoletja vodila prek Hindukuša, ki je postal njihov poligon za pripravo na himalajske vzpone. V sedemdesetih letih pa so poljski alpinisti izkoristili politično liberalizacijo in se lotili dohitevanja razvoja himalajizma na Zahodu. Tega so kmalu celo preseгли, saj so bili v letih 1978–1989 tvorci t. i. zlatega obdobja poljskega himalajizma, ki je v veliki meri določil svetovne smernice v naslednjih dveh desetletjih. Po letu 1989 sta niz nesreč vidnih poljskih plezalcev (Jerzy Kukuczka na Lotseju /8516m/, Eugeniusz Chrobak, Mirosław Dąsal, Mirosław Gardzielewski, Andrzej Heinrich in Wacław Otręba na Mount Everestu /8848m/) in soočenje celotne alpinistične skupnosti z novim političnim in ekonomskim sistemom, ki himalajizma sicer ni več nadzoroval, a ga tudi ni več subvencioniral, povzročila zaton zlatega obdobja. Šele v prvih letih novega stoletja so se med preživeli tvorci zlatega obdobja našli vidni posamezniki (zlasti Krzysztof Wielicki in Artur Hajzer), ki so z izkušnjami in celo s sodelovanjem pri vzponih spodbudili vrnitev poljskega himalajizma v svetovni vrh, tokrat predvsem v okviru zimskih vzponov na osemtisočake, v katerih so Poljaki v zlatem obdobju izrazito prednjačili.

## **Ewa Roszkowska**

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# **Liminal Literature and the School of Vertical Promotion in Polish Mountaineering**

Literatura liminalna  
i szkoła awansu pionowego  
w polskim alpinizmie

The article proposes a synthetic model of Polish mountaineering literature in the context of the history of Polish mountaineering and of the general pattern of modern mountaineering. Mountaineering is approached here from the perspective of Martin Heidegger's fundamental ontology, as it provides a liminal experience which exposes the structure of cultural boundaries surrounding the mountaineer. In this model, the climbing route, as a kind of ridge between culture and nature, becomes the metaphor for a way of life governed by what could be called the school of vertical promotion. In this context, mountaineering literature mediates between the opposition upon which the idea of climbing is founded. The history of Polish mountaineering, with its diverse and rich literature, serves as an illustration of this general approach.

MOUNTAINEERING, MOUNTAINEERING  
LITERATURE, TRANSGRESSION,  
LIMINALITY, POLISH LITERATURE

Artykuł przedstawia syntetyczny model polskiej literatury alpinistycznej w kontekście historii polskiego alpinizmu oraz ogólnego wzoru kulturowego wykształconego przez nowoczesny alpinizm. Alpinizm rozumiany jest tutaj jako swego rodzaju Heideggerowska ontologia fundamentalna, ponieważ w tym przypadku liminalne doświadczenie ujawnia strukturę kulturowych granic wokół człowieka. W tym modelu droga wspinaczkowa – swego rodzaju grań łącząca kulturę i naturę – staje się metaforą swoistego stylu życia postrzeganego jako szkoła awansu pionowego. W tym kontekście literatura alpinistyczna spełnia funkcję mediatora pomiędzy skrajnymi opozycjami, na których ufundowana jest idea alpinizmu. To ogólne rozpoznanie potwierdza historia polskiego alpinizmu z jego bogatą i obszerną literaturą.

ALPINIZM, LITERATURA GÓRSKA,  
TRANSGRESJA, LIMINALNOŚĆ,  
LITERATURA POLSKA

**1**

I refer here to the definition of culture offered by Ralph Linton (21): 'A culture is the configuration of learned behaviour and results of behaviour whose component elements are shared and transmitted by the members of a particular society.'

**2**

Alfred Louis Kroeber (92–93) speaks of 'basic patterns' as relatively 'pervasive and permanent forms assumed by a specific mass of cultural content' which 'tend to spread from one society to others'. Basic patterns are 'nexuses of culture traits which have assumed a definite and coherent structure, which function successfully, and which acquire major historic weight and persistence'. These 'grand aggregations of culture' assume different forms, depending on the particular cultural tradition to which they belong.

**3**

My main point of reference here is the thesis about the cultural model of mountaineering which I developed in my book on mountaineering, which I partly based on my fieldwork and interviews within the community of Silesian mountaineers (see Pacukiewicz: 2012).

**THE STYLE OF CLIMBING**

If one tried to determine the substance and the form, the goals and the functions, the meaning and the essence of Polish mountaineering literature, one would do well to describe the cultural context in which it came into being. But rather than a simple description of a passive background, this should be an analysis of a broad set of networks whose elements are of both global and local provenience. With this aim in mind, I will attempt to present a synthetic model of Polish mountaineering literature with reference to both the history of Polish mountaineering and the general pattern of modern mountaineering.

Although mountaineering was developed in Europe, the prevalent model of mountaineering is perceived as having a global validity, as an international community takes part in a common discourse where the experience of mountaineering is seen as articulating the human condition. What tends to be shared is not only the history of mountain exploration but also such figures as George Leigh Mallory, Edmund Hillary, Tenzing Norgay, Jerzy Kukuczka and Reinhold Messner. Yet, every cultural phenomenon also takes on numerous local forms, depending on different cultural traditions and their diverse histories. This can account also for the undeniable differences between, say, the climbers mentioned above. They influence the gear the climbers use, the mountains they climb, and, first and foremost, the culture which has formed them. Culture is a universal mark of humanity, but there is no universal culture, only its local variations.<sup>1</sup> In this article, I will try to describe the uniqueness of Polish mountaineering against the backdrop of the universal pattern<sup>2</sup> of climbing.<sup>3</sup>

The basic pattern of mountaineering is organised around the mediation between the universality of nature and the particularity of culture.

Writing on ‘the ontology of the climbing route’ as the core of the phenomenon of mountaineering, Andrzej Matuszyk (134) argues that the climbing route is both part of nature and a text belonging to culture. In my view, the category of climbing can be further extrapolated to address the ‘ontology of life’. And I derive this thesis from the following proposition offered by Jacek Kolbuszewski (1991: 37):

*There is an obvious relationship between a style of climbing/mountaineering assumed in a given time (or a mode in which it is understood and fulfilled) and a style of that time. Either its philosophical tendencies or the trends dominating in the arts can be influential. The notion of the style of the epoch should also apply to hierarchies of values and life styles occurring in the general social culture of a given time. [...]*

*The relation between climbing and the style of an epoch (that is one dominating pattern of intellectual, artistic and moral culture) seems to be found on four levels. They are: ideology (i.e. climbers’ self-knowledge), climbing practice (or climbing style), organizational dispositions within climbing community, and creativity reflected in artistic productions on mountains and mountaineering, as well as expressed in local climbing traditions, e.g. songs, stories, dialects, etc.*

From this follows that, for a mountaineer, some of the domains of culture are structured by the idea and practice of the climbing route, as they influence the patterns of conduct and the values which form a personality. It can be said then that there is also a mountaineering culture built on a unique climbing experience in, for instance, the Polish tradition. One could speak of a historically constructed configuration which shapes the personal model of conduct – an ethos.

The ideal pattern of mountaineering would hence be a kind of ethical model of conduct. According to Ralph Linton (34), ideal patterns of culture ‘have been developed by the members of a society by themselves’, as ‘[t]hey represent the consensus of opinion on the part of the society’s members as to how people should behave in particular situations’; moreover, ‘[t]he extent to which such ideal patterns have been developed will vary greatly in different societies’. Historically, the ‘basic pattern’ of mountaineering emerged in the West in the late nineteenth century and has since become the keystone of modern mountaineering; ‘the model of mountaineering created during that time,’ writes Ewa Roszkowska (451), ‘did not go to waste, as it continues to offer the core framework to the contemporary climbing sport’.

In the early days of modern Polish mountaineering, Zygmunt Klemensiewicz, writing the first Polish-language mountaineering handbook, argued that the essence of modern mountaineering lies in a ‘variegated texture’ which only allows for the recognition of its ‘main threads’ (Klemensiewicz 1913: 12). According to Klemensiewicz (1976: 87), the problem of mountaineering is reminiscent of a hank of yarn which the public opinion throws up like a ball so that people can spool on it ever new ‘catchwords and poetical nonsense’ while ‘everyone also tries to spool on it something from the thread of their own thoughts’.

Indeed, the modern exploration of mountains was defined by a number of European discourses of the time, including scientific, political, economic, ecological, ethical and aesthetic discourses. The resulting spool of discourses formed a good example of what contemporary humanities call a nexus or network. However, whether it has been defined as a sport, a type of exploration or even an art form, mountaineering has always transgressed these discourses in the eyes of mountaineers

themselves: they have always seen in mountaineering a unique practice and experience which amounts to something more, as it were, and quite often to a way of life or a state of mind. Here, the concept of tactics as proposed by Michel de Certeau (xiv-xv) comes to mind, insofar as, be it in the mountains or in the sphere of culture, mountaineers employ specific tactics based on the experience of an ontological network of boundaries.

### **THE RIDGE OF CULTURE**

In 1923, George Leigh Mallory was asked by an American journalist why he wanted to climb Mount Everest. Mallory replied: ‘Because it’s there.’ (Cited in Gillman and Gillman: 221) This four-word retort is important to almost every mountaineer I have talked to. When it comes to their goals and reasons for climbing, sooner or later everyone says that Mallory’s justification is the best one. But his statement is not as obvious as it might seem. To begin with, it was not a creative paraphrase by an imaginative reporter, nor was it irony: Mallory really said it, and he really meant it. In the same interview he also admitted as follows: ‘Everest is the highest mountain in the world, and no man has reached its summit. Its existence is a challenge. The answer is instinctive, a part, I suppose, of man’s desire to conquer the universe.’ (Cited in Gillman and Gillman: 222) There are at least three clues here which can be used for my kind of investigation: a universal perspective, climbing as conquest and, finally, human existence. And there is the particular context of ‘Because it’s there’: that it is ‘there’ implies that Mallory refers to a real space; not points on any mountain, but points on Everest, whose summit he has to find and climb. Thus, a mountaineer’s goal is never abstract; it is a concrete being, an entity which exists here and now.

In this respect, Mallory's four-word reply is reminiscent of an idea developed by a philosopher and Mallory's contemporary, Martin Heidegger. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger defines his 'fundamental ontology' (10) by stating that '[t]he ontic distinction of Da-sein lies in the fact it is ontological' (ibid.: 11). To my mind, this means something very specific, namely that there is no entity in culture which exists outside an ontological structure. What is more, within the peculiar model of mountaineering every experience is always ontological, as it is more than a momentary impression or sensation. Hence, to a mountaineer, the summit is not the most important thing because the climbing route itself is the aim. To a mountaineer, the world is therefore the very structure of experience.

These two statements mark the modern shift in the perception of experience. Both Mallory and Heidegger emphasise the ontological experience as the core of human existence. According to Martin Jay, the problem of experience and the discussion of the very category of experience introduce a duality which is crucial to modernity and postmodernity alike:

*In trying to step back from experience as a lived reality and coolly examine its modal subtypes as cultural constructs, we immediately come across an apparent paradox: the word 'experience' has often been used to gesture toward precisely that which exceeds concepts and even language itself. It is frequently employed as a marker for what is so ineffable and individual (or specific to a particular group) that it cannot be rendered in conventionally communicative terms to those who lack it. (Jay: 5)*

This difference between *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung*, to use the terms of Heideggerian phenomenology, seems to be relevant to mountaineering, which has revived experience in a time when ‘the unlamented “demise of experience” became in some quarters almost conventional wisdom’ (ibid.: 3). What is crucial here is that mountaineers are persons of experience, and that the experience of the limit defines both the mountaineer and mountaineering. Mountaineers experience the limits of culture, of humanity and of civilisation. Hence the centrality of the unspeakable: ‘touch’ – as in *Touching the Void*, the title of Joe Simpson’s book – is at the core of mountaineering, not discourse. But mountaineers tend to display a particular attitude towards ultimate situations. For Karl Jaspers, who approached the Heideggerian fundamental ontology as a ‘situation’, the ultimate experience is a point of no return: ‘We call these fundamental situations of our existence ultimate situations. This is to say, they are situations which we cannot evade or change.’ (Jaspers: 20) In such situations, mountaineers do not surrender, but rather apply their tactics; in this respect, the existential character of the climbing route is not the Heideggerian being-towards-death.

Anna Zeidler-Janiszewska argues that the category of boundary in culture has obtained a rather negative meaning, as it has begun to stand for a mechanism of restriction. It has become that which human beings are supposed to fight by employing ever more advanced scientific and technological tools to overcome their physical and mental limitations, as if they belonged to the *homo transgressivus* (see Zeidler-Janiszewska). Needless to say, cultural anthropology has taught us that humans could not exist without culture and that every culture brings with it some kind of hierarchy, difference and boundary. And no human being can fully transgress all the limitations of his or her

body or mind, as Michel Foucault has shown in the following ironic remark on transgression:

*The limit and transgression depend on each other for whatever density of being they possess: a limit could not exist if it were absolutely uncrossable and, reciprocally, transgression would be pointless if it merely crossed a limit composed of illusions and shadows. [...] Transgression carries the limit right to the limit of its being; transgression forces the limit to face the fact of its imminent disappearance, to find itself in what it excludes (perhaps, to be more exact, to recognize itself for the first time), to experience its positive truth in its downward fall? (Foucault: 34)*

But the experience of mountaineering seems to be closer to what Victor Turner grasps with his concept of liminality. According to Turner, specific experiences create cultural models and patterns of life; he regards liminality as a conscious experiment in the field of culture and follows Brian Sutton-Smith's view of 'liminal and liminoid situations as the settings in which new models, symbols, paradigms, etc., arise – as the seedbeds of cultural creativity' (Turner 1982: 28). In this sense, the climbing route can become a model for a way of life. Mountaineers experience limitations of culture, of body and of mind, and they experience them as concrete boundaries rather than metaphorical limits. For mountaineers, transgression can mean death – their own death or the death of their climbing partners. This has led me to propose the concept of 'the ridge of culture', as one might translate the title of my 2012 book, *Grań kultury*. The ridge separates two valleys, but it also unites two climbing walls. For a climber, it is both a site of danger and a useful climbing route. The ridge of culture marks a boundary, but, as part

of a climbing route, it is not an isolated place. My thesis is that the world of culture is an example of a system of the kind of boundaries which are experienced by mountaineers. The most important of these boundaries is the nature–culture divide, which I view as the matrix of boundaries. But there are also borderlines between cultures and within cultures which mountaineers experience in the mountains. The ultimate route of Polish mountaineering can be said to lead through this kind of system of boundaries and borderlines.

### THE SCHOOL OF VERTICAL PROMOTION

As one of my interlocutors has put it, what makes a mountaineer is the ability to climb difficult routes from the base, a condition which demands of an aspiring mountaineer to become a trained and self-reliant person. The skills mountaineers possess broaden and deepen their experience with every step and every grip on their climbing route as well as on the path that is their way of life. Voytek Kurtyka, a guru of Polish mountaineering, develops the idea of the path of the mountain by taking a commonplace of Zen Buddhism and transplanting it into both the climbing activity and the mountaineer's attitude towards life. His manifesto is worth citing at some length:

*[T]here is a very intriguing resemblance between the Path of the Sword and mountaineering or to say it correctly the Path of the Mountain. To mention but a few of these common features such as confrontation with death, the requirement of courage, striving for psycho-physical perfection or the notion of style and sense of honour. [...] Climbing surpasses the circle of hackneyed and repetitive situations and escapes from the monotonous routines of reason and logic which usually don't allow*

*the busy man to notice the sky over his head. Therefore climbing stirs a lot of various and dormant spheres of sensitivity and it opens eyes. [...] The distinguishing feature is the extreme nature not only of the inner world of psychic sensations, but also of external situations arising during climbing, which a mountaineer inevitably has to face. [...] Mountaineering engages almost all kinds of human energy, moreover, because of the extremity of experiences and situations, it engages those energies to the highest degree. [...] The climbing community is considered rather smart and innovative. This is no surprise as the demanded scope of knowledge on different countries, customs, cultures and mentalities makes life an exciting puzzle. To say nothing of the tangle of administrative regulations, customs, etc. what calls for the special attention of intellectual effort is the enormous variety of problems in mountaineering. I hardly see any better chance to look into the intricate structure of the modern world than going on a Himalayan expedition. (Kurtyka 1988-1989: 38-42)*

In this tradition, the summit is not the real aim for a mountaineer, but a mere stage in a longer journey which one of my interlocutors has called the school of vertical promotion; in other words, mountaineers can only develop their skills step by step. In the case of Polish mountaineering, rock climbing is followed by climbing in the Polish Tatra Mountains (first in summer and then gradually in winter as well), which can then be followed by climbing in the Alps and the Dolomites (starting, again, with summer expeditions), which in turn can eventually lead beyond Europe, with climbs in the Caucasus, the Andes and, finally, the Himalaya and the Karakoram. In all these cases, climbing skills are paired with experience in expedition logistics, which makes Polish mountaineering a good example of what is meant by the model of vertical promotion.

As Wacław Sonelski has argued, Polish mountaineers have always tried to compete with the leading figures in mountaineering: ‘Consequently, we always strove to catch up with or master true mountaineering, the kind which everyone secretly dreamed about.’ (Sonelski: 47) In the late nineteenth century and up to around 1918, when Poland reached national independence, Polish mountaineering was limited to the Tatras. In his 1931 essay ‘Dlaczego Liljowe zamiast Everestu?’ (Why Liliowe Instead of Everest), Jerzy Golcz (4) recommended climbers to leave the Tatras and turn to the Alps as ‘a transitional sphere’ on their path to the highest mountains. Expeditions outside Europe took place only in the 1930s. In 1933, an expedition reached the summit of Aconcagua and Mercedario while exploring unknown terrain. In 1939, still largely unaccustomed to the Alps, Polish climbers nevertheless managed to climb Nanda Devi East in the Garhwal Himalaya, but the expedition took the lives of two Polish mountaineers, Adam Karpiński and Stefan Bernadzikiewicz. The loss of their colleagues did not dissuade Polish climbers from searching for new goals and challenges: the next summit to be climbed was K2, but the plans of the expedition were scuttled by the outbreak of the Second World War.

After the war, the geopolitical situation in Poland changed radically. Under communist rule, Poland was closed behind the Iron Curtain. There was no possibility of travelling abroad, and even climbing in the Tatras was difficult because of the proximity of the state border. Despite these harsh conditions, Polish climbers continued to look for the highest possible goals:

*The Afghan Hindu Kush was then our high mountaineering playground. The wall of Kazalnica, on the other hand, offered a lesson in advanced rockcraft and the big wall climbing techniques. The most exciting*

*regions of the Hindu Kush are very close to the Russian border and rail transport via the USSR was quite cheap in those years. Therefore, some wild and not even fully mapped high mountains of Central Asia, not to mention their virgin climbing potential, were within our reach and at full disposal. Thanks to these happy circumstances, we stood a chance of competing in the high mountains with alpinists from the rich West. Kazalnica, a really big wall of the Alpine and Dolomitic character, has always been attractive for the comfortable conditions it has: a large margin of safety, a short walk-up, an easy and quick descent. However, for the climbers of the 60s it was still a huge, dangerous, and fearsome rock wall – in fact, our only ‘big wall’. It is not improbable that had the Soviet frontier not skirted the Noshag massif and the Kazalnica wall been 300 meters further and beyond the Polish border, then 20 years later Poles would not have climbed so much and so well in Himalayas. (Sonelski: 52)*

There is no consensual view on the development of Polish climbing in the Himalaya. For some, that stage of Polish mountaineering was a heroic struggle because of lack of equipment and international exchange. For others, the socialist economic model, with its combination of ample leisure time and scarce career opportunities, enabled mountaineering to act as an alternative career path: Polish Himalayan climbers were *Freedom Climbers*, to use the title of Bernadette McDonald’s book on the subject. Obviously, Polish mountaineers had to be very conscious of the political, social and cultural context in which they pursued their goals; in the words of Ignacy Nendza, they had to have ‘a wonderful ability to adjust themselves to any circumstances’ (cited in Anonymous: 64). This also defines the existential model of life

in mountaineering as what I have called vertical promotion through the ridge of culture.

In 1966, Jerzy Warteresiewicz (78) posed the following suggestive question: ‘The Himalaya – with or without us?’ When Polish mountaineers returned to the Himalaya after the Second World War, all fourteen eight-thousanders had already been climbed. This brought about the idea to try to scale these summits above eight thousand metres in winter; the so-called Ice Warriors were born. Needless to say, some found this idea irrational; Kurtyka’s notion of ‘the art of suffering’ provided the best retort to that view (see Kurtyka 1988). Indeed, what Kurtyka called ‘the Polish syndrome’ (see Kurtyka 1993) was not based in reckless behaviour, as it was immersed in vertical promotion, with experience being gained step by step. After Noshag was climbed on 13 February 1973, there was a long step-by-step path leading to the first winter ascent in the Himalaya: on 17 February 1980, Leszek Cichy and Krzysztof Wielicki reached the top of Everest as the first people to climb an eight-thousander in winter. Only then it became clear that the Polish style of climbing and the so-called Polish character constitute a good basis for this kind of mountaineering. Andrzej Zawada, the leader of many Polish expeditions in the Himalaya and the father of the idea of winter Himalayanism, rejected the allegations that such a project was irrational and claimed: ‘When we exhort each other to conquer the Himalaya in winter this is because we are ready to reach this goal both in technical terms and in terms of sport.’ (Cited in Adamiecki: 13) Significantly, Jerzy Kukuczka, the second person in the world and the first Polish person to reach the so-called Crown of the Himalaya, that is, the summits of all 14 eight-thousanders, climbed all but one of these mountains either by going up a new route or in winter.

After this golden era of Polish Himalayanism, mountaineering all but collapsed in the new democratic and capitalist Poland. Symbolically, this was marked by the deaths of Kukuczka on the Lhotse South Face and of five other veteran Polish Himalayan climbers on the Lho La col, all in 1989, and by the death of Wanda Rutkiewicz on Kangchenjunga in 1992. In the so-called new Poland, great mountaineering goals were subjected to the new economic reality, where careerism became more important and more accessible, while climbing was reduced to an extreme sport which one partakes in for fun. Large national expeditions had no place in the new Poland.

In 2001, Wielicki, a conqueror of the Crown of the Himalaya like Kukuczka and a member of Kukuczka's generation, published his influential 'winter manifesto', 'Manifest zimowy', in which he expressed his belief that the tradition of Polish national expeditions should be resumed. He went as far as offering his help to newcomers who wished to reach new and ambitious goals (see Wielicki: 4). By 2010, the Polish Winter Himalayan Programme was initiated. Led by Wielicki and another representative of the old guard of Polish Himalayan climbing, Artur Hajzer, it was supported by the Government of Poland. It was successful, resulting in the first winter ascents of Gasherbrum I and Broad Peak, but also tragic, as it took the lives of Maciej Berbeka, Tomasz Kowalski and Hajzer himself. For many, the Polish Winter Himalayan Programme is an expression of the Polish ethos in mountaineering, but for some it is an artificially created pursuit of national mirage. On the one hand, the Programme belongs to the school of vertical promotion in which young adepts are trained following the steps represented by a series of expeditions; on the other hand, both within and beyond the climbing community there are those who think that the Programme had accumulated all the indispensable means except for human resources.

In any case, the fact that a Nepalese expedition summited K2 in January 2021 as the final eight-thousander to be scaled in winter may or may not change the course of the Polish school of vertical promotion.

### **CRACKED DISCOURSE**

The historical climbing route of Polish mountaineering is a long and beautiful one. It also continues to be a very important cultural phenomenon for the Polish people: the number of news articles, books, interviews and public discussions attests to the richness of this discourse. Despite the changing political context, mountaineering continues to be perceived as belonging to the national heritage. Both success and failure in mountaineering are often explained in terms of Polish national features, such as a sense of honour, bravery or rashness. Mountaineering as a window on the world is still regarded as a trait of Polishness as well as of the human condition as such. Polish mountaineers are expected to work towards the convergence of the ideal pattern of conduct with common behaviour. Even the notion of Polish climbers as Ice Warriors points at nobility of a moral kind. Thus, for instance, Wawrzyniec Żuławski's famous motto according to which one cannot leave one's climbing partner even when he or she is just a block of ice is still heard in discussions provoked by climbing accidents in the Himalaya, even though it was coined with regard to a very different style and milieu of climbing in the Tatras and the Alps. Therefore, Polish culture is marked by a tendency to describe mountaineering not only in the categories of experience but also with a reference to the notion of ethos, which is structured by the idea and the experience of the climbing route as well as of the national tradition. As a result, Polish mountaineers are frequently perceived either as heroes or as villains.

Writing on Polish mountaineering, Agata Rejkowska-Pasek introduced the notion of cracked discourse to discuss its binary nature, specifically its rootedness in such oppositions as route versus summit, spirit versus mind and community versus individuality (see Rejkowska-Pasek: 174–82). Insofar as this falls within the category of discontinuity in the Foucauldian theory of discourse, one can confront it once again with the concept of cultural tactics. So, when their discourse suffers fissures and cracks, mountaineers tend to fix it by employing their tactics of climbing and their ethos in a way which makes them important cultural mediators in contemporary Polish culture and probably beyond – hence the idea of the ridge of culture. Put differently, if there were no cracks or fissures on the face of a culture there would be no climbing route.

One parallel way of fixing the cracks in the mountaineering discourse is by writing mountaineering literature. Indeed, this has a very long and rich tradition in Poland: mountaineering books have been a staple of Polish culture since the late nineteenth century and remain very popular today. Following the work of Jacek Kolbuszewski (1978: 63–64), one can treat this literary tradition as belonging to and in many ways mirroring a changing national literature. As Kolbuszewski admits (1961: 23–24), literary scholars often view mountaineering literature as schematic and awkward, and even Polish mountaineers have posed the question, ‘Could Polish climbing literature be less bad?’ (to cite the title of an essay by Zbigniew Tumidajewicz). Nevertheless, more important than aesthetic nuances is ‘the mode of existence’ (to cite the title of an article by Kolbuszewski [1978: 55]). This is why I claim that the Heideggerian being is at the core of both mountaineering and its literature; as I argued elsewhere (see Pacukiewicz 2010: 218), transgression gives mountaineering literature its unique substance, but

it also forms it as an expression of an ambiguous kind of experience. Mountaineering literature mediates between opposing poles of binary oppositions both at the universal level of being and at the particular level of culture.

First, narration in mountaineering literature creates a kind of ridge between nature and culture, insofar as it is both extremely objectified by the environmental context and extremely subjectified by the climber's psyche (see *ibid.*). The transgression of the boundary between the culturally constructed self and the nature of the world is always unspoken and unnamed, yet it supplies narration with a strong ontological frame. The experience of mountaineering exposes an inaccessible background (see *ibid.*: 225), which is not a kind of Derridean *hors-text* authenticating narration but rather testimony to the struggle between nature and culture. This makes it possible to observe the tactics of the experience of mountaineering through mountaineering literature. Therefore, following Turner's suggestions about liminality (1974), one could speak of liminal literature alongside the liminal experience of mountaineering. In this regard, liminal literature would be the narrative representation of the 'social limbo' (Turner 1982: 24) in which individuals find themselves and which results in 'periodical reclassifications of reality and man's relationship to society, nature, and culture', that is, reclassifications which spur both thought and action (see Turner 1969: 128–29).

Second, in Polish mountaineering literature we can observe the tension between the public and the private. This tension results from the above confrontation between an ideal and transgressive modes of conduct. A particularly popular theme of Polish mountaineering literature is the confrontation between community and individuality during an expedition, which very often brings about a mixture of the

official, professional tone and very intimate and subtle observations. This confrontation often leads to a more or less conscious undermining of literary forms and narrative schemes and even to cases of ostentatious denial of given literary strategies (as, for instance, in the title of one of the classic texts by Ferdinand Goetel [102]: ‘Wycieczka – jak się o niej nie pisze’ [A Mountain Hike – How One Should Not Write About It]) and apprehension of literary banality (as in the following statement by Wiesław Stanisławski [278]: ‘Why on earth should I spoil the pleasure of a sixteen-hour struggle and describe my feelings or refer to my ideology?’). Furthermore, there is always the confrontation between a *we* (a group, a nation, human beings in general) and an *I* and the resulting search for the purpose and meaning within the confines of a given culture.

To sum up, a parallel between the climbing route and the liminal ridge of mountaineering literature can be observed in the meeting of a literary scheme and an unnamed experience. As such, mountaineering literature should be treated not as a purely aesthetic phenomenon but rather as ‘a kind of logical tool’ (to use Claude Lévi-Strauss’s description of the Oedipus myth [434]) which can fix the cracks in a discourse by testing new tactics. Having evoked the structuralist theory of culture, I want to conclude by suggesting that mountaineering literature is marked by myth-like narration where the main characters are heroes and tricksters and, more importantly, where the result is mediation. Within Polish culture, mountaineering literature gives us a history of vertical promotion. It confronts a form patterned on a rich cultural heritage with liminal experience and thereby adds a new perspective on it. ♡

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## Povzetek

Članek razvije model poljske alpinistične literature v okviru zgodovine poljskega alpinizma in splošnega vzorca modernega alpinizma. Alpinizem obravnava z gledišča heideggrovske fundamentalne ontologije, saj vidi v njem mejno izkustvo, v katerem se problematizira struktura kulturnih meja, ki obkrožajo alpinista. V tem modelu postane plezalna smer, ki je nekakšen greben med kulturo in naravo, prisposodba za življenje, kakršno si zamišlja t. i. šola vertikalnega napredovanja, ki poteka korak za korakom (od Alp in Tater prek Andov in Kavkaza do Himalaje in Karakoruma, pa tudi od spomladanskih do zimskih vzponov). Kolikor je greben ne le ločnica med dvema dolinama, ampak tudi stičišče dveh plezalnih smeri, je osnovni vzorec alpinizma vzorec mediacije med univerzalnostjo narave in partikularnostjo kulture.

Kot zgled nam lahko velja zgodovina poljskega alpinizma in njegove bogate literarne tradicije. Poljski alpinizem se je že v tridesetih letih 20. stoletja preizkusil v Himalaji, kamor se je v povojnem času opazneje vrnil šele v sedemdesetih letih, ko je z izjemnim nizom prvenstvenih in zimskih vzponov na osem tisočake začel svoj pohod na vrh svetovnega himalajizma. Za zgodovino poljskega alpinizma je značilna dvojnost med eleganco plezalne smeri in diktatom vrha, med voljo duha in preudarnostjo uma, med centripetalnostjo skupnosti in centrifugalnostjo individualizma. Prav te razčlembе na obrazu kulture pa kažejo pot: zgodovina plezanja ni nič drugega kakor zgodovina izkoriščanja teh in sorodnih razčlemb.

Vzporeden način spoprijemanja z razpokami v alpinističnem diskurzu pa je pisanje alpinistične literature. Alpinistične knjige so stalnica poljske kulture vse od konca 19. stoletja naprej, ko je bil moderni alpinizem še v povojih. Alpinistična literatura je mediacija

med poli binarnih opozicij alpinizma tako na univerzalni ravni biti kakor na partikularni ravni kulture. Prvič, literarna pripoved vzpostavi nekakšen greben med naravo in kulturo, s tem ko je istočasno izjemno objektivirana zaradi svojega kronotopa in skrajno subjektivirana zaradi svoje avtobiografskosti. Drugič, poljsko alpinistično književnost prežema napetost med javno in zasebno perspektivo. Od tod priljubljena tematika trka skupnostnega in individualističnega načela med odpravo in s tem povezana zmes uradniškega, poklicnega stila in intimističnih pasusov. Liminalnemu izkustvu alpinizma tako ustreza liminalni diskurz alpinistične literature.

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# **On Polish Himalayan Literature, Then and Now**

Uwagi o polskiej literaturze  
himalajskiej. Historia  
i współczesność

The history of Polish Himalaya-themed mountaineering literature can be said to lead from writings based in expedition logbooks to road narratives inspired by climbing. Its transformations are closely related to the history of Polish mountaineering. The article begins with a discussion of the two Polish-language accounts of a Himalayan expedition which were written in 1939. Subsequently, the analysis focuses on the first accounts which transcended the model of the expedition logbook, namely the post-war narratives of the Swiss expeditions to Dhaulagiri in which Poles took part. The key section of the article concentrates on Wojciech Kurtyka, a world-renowned pioneer of the alpine style in Himalayan climbing and an acknowledged journalist and writer who broke the paradigms of both non-fiction and fictional mountain literature. The article closes with the writings of Marek Raganowicz, whose texts introduce a new perspective to contemporary Polish mountaineering literature.

HISTORY OF ALPINISM, MOUNTAIN  
JOURNALISM, MOUNTAINEERING  
LITERATURE, HIMALAYA, KARAKORAM

Celem artykułu jest zarysowanie historii polskiej literatury himalajskiej w perspektywie jej ewolucyjnych przemian gatunkowych od klasycznego dziennika wyprawowego do inspirowanego wspinaczką opowiadania i powieści drogi. W artykule omówiono początki polskiej literatury himalajskiej sięgające czasów przedwojennych i okresu II wojny światowej oraz przedstawiono sylwetki dwóch jej prekursorów. Następnie zwrócono uwagę, na pierwsze przełamujące klasyczny model dziennika wyprawowego powojenne relacje ze szwajcarskich wypraw na Dhaulagiri z udziałem Polaków. Kluczowa część wyводу została skoncentrowana wokół fenomenu sportowego i pisarskiego jednego z najwybitniejszych polskich wspinaczy XX w. Wojciecha Kurtyki – twórcy założeń stylu alpejskiego w himalaizmie zdobywczo-sportowym i znakomitego publicysty oraz pisarza przełamującego utrwalone schematy w obrębie szeroko pojętej literatury górskiej zarówno typu *non-fiction*, jak i fikcjonalnej. W dalszym toku wyводу scharakteryzowano krótko twórczość współczesnego wybitnego wspinacza wielkościanowego Marka Raganowicza, który swoim pisarstwem do współczesnej polskiej literatury górskiej wprowadza zupełnie nową jakość.

HISTORIA ALPINIZMU, PUBLICYSTYKA  
GÓRSKA, PIŚMIENNICTWO GÓRSKIE,  
HIMALAJE, KARAKORUM

**1**  
The expedition started in November 1933 and ended in May 1934 and was the first Polish expedition into exotic mountains. The Poles ascended, among others, Cerro Mercedario (6,720m) in the Central Andes.

The beginnings of Polish Himalaya-themed mountaineering literature date back to the inception of Polish Himalayan mountaineering in the period leading to the Second World War. The first successful Polish expedition to the Himalaya which ended with the ascent of the previously unclimbed Nanda Devi East (7,434m) in the Garhwal Himalaya took place in the spring and summer of 1939. The expedition was led by Adam Karpiński (pseudonym Akar), an outstanding Polish climber, pilot and aircraft constructor who had participated in an earlier historic expedition to the Andes.<sup>1</sup> Four Poles participated in the expedition: Karpiński, Stefan Bernadzikiewicz (pseudonym Sam), Jakub Bujak (pseudonym Kuba) and Janusz Klarner. Bujak and Klarner reached the summit on 2 July 1939, breaking the Polish altitude record in mountain climbing. The ascent was documented through a series of photographs taken on the top and a note placed in a can left 20 metres below among rocks protruding from the snow (see Kurczab et al.: 31). Unfortunately, the expedition turned out to be tragic for two of its members: Bernadzikiewicz and Karpiński died during their attempt to ascend another seven-thousander in an avalanche which submerged camp three. As the historians of the expedition put it:

*After some rest, the expedition relocated to Glacier Milam and established base camp at the altitude of 4,250 metres on July 11. The next goal were the unclimbed peaks over the glacier's upper cirque, Hardeol (7,151m) and Tirsuli (7,074m). [...] During the attempt to ascend Tirsuli (7,074m) on the night of 18 to 19 July, Bernadzikiewicz and Karpiński died in an avalanche which buried camp three (6,150m). Their bodies were never found. (Ibid.: 32)*

The pre-war Polish expedition to the Himalaya was not only crowned with the ascent of Nanda Devi East by two of its members, but also

paved the way for the first Polish literary accounts of high-mountain exploration. The first one was authored by Klarner and completed after his return to Poland, in the oppressive atmosphere of the German occupation of Warsaw; the book marks the beginning of Polish Himalayan mountaineering literature. So far, three editions of the book have been released: the first, incomplete one came out after the war, in 1948, under the title *W śniegach Himalajów* (In the Snows of the Himalaya), with preliminary accounts of the expedition having appeared already in 1941–42 in the conspiratorial Polish mountain periodical *Taternik*; the second edition was entitled *Nanda Devi* and published in 1956 after Klarner went missing;<sup>2</sup> the latest edition of this historical account by one of the first Polish Himalayan mountaineers was published in 2011 (see Klarner 2011 for this edition).

Klarner's account of the expedition to the Garhwal Himalaya, and the ascent of the previously unclimbed seven-thousander, alludes structurally and compositionally to the travel journal, a genre which was popular in the nineteenth century. Apart from some literary value, its merit lies primarily in its documentary character. For instance, Klarner's book depicts the circumstances of the deaths of Bernadzikiewicz and Karpiński on Tirsuli. Klarner does not refrain from expressing emotions in key moments of a narrative which overall strives to present facts objectively. The concluding expressive excerpts of the journal are a testimony to the traumatic experience of the deaths of two fellow climbers:

*The awareness of our friends' deaths continues to elude us. The conversations we had yesterday and the daring plans we made seem too real for us to accept the fact that they are gone. We still cling to the hope – improbable at the moment – that the avalanche might have descended*

**2** The exact date of Klarner's death is unknown. He left home on 17 September 1949 and went missing, probably falling victim to the communist regime.

*today before noon, when the camp was empty. Above the release we notice a dark spot – it may be a cargo sack. A sharp contour is visible on the snow above. Maybe it's the top of the tent. We leave our cargo below the ice wall. [...]*

*A huge crack 20 metres wide crosses the dome we are on in the direction below the assumed location of the camp. Kuba and the Sherpas maintain it wasn't there before. We are approaching it. At the other rim of the crack we see a boot buried deep in the snow. This inanimate object is a final proof. It happened. Akar and Siam are dead. We feel cold inside. We feel spasms in our throats. (Cited in Kurczab et al.: 32–33)*

Jakub Bujak likewise wrote a journal during this first Polish expedition to the Himalaya. His extraordinary literary account of the historic expedition, a valuable supplement to Klarner's well-known text, was published as a whole only several years ago, in 2015, thanks to the efforts of Bujak's daughter, Magdalena Bujak-Lenczowska (see Bujak-Lenczowska). Both Klarner's account and Bujak's journal constitute historical artefacts marking the beginnings of the Polish non-fictional Himalayan literature as part of a broader strand of expedition literature (see Kolbuszewski 2020). In his article on the history of Polish mountaineering literature, Jacek Kolbuszewski argues that for the first generations of alpine climbers

*expedition to the high mountains, the Andes, the Himalaya, the Caucasus Mountains, even the Alps, tended to be a unique, one-time event which played an enormous role in their lives, not only as regards the mountains but in general. [...] As an extraordinary event which happens once in a lifetime, such an expedition typically resulted in a book:*

*an account of the expedition, formally an heir to the traditions of nineteenth-century travel literature. (Kolbuszewski 1993: 387–88)*

In the early post-war period, between 1947 and 1955 (with Stalin's death in 1953 as a vital historical caesura generating a wave of political transformations), Polish mountaineers found it increasingly difficult to leave the country and hence concentrated their efforts on the exploration of the Tatra Mountains. As a result, winter mountaineering in the Tatras flourished, forming the foundation for the later development of winter Alpine and Himalayan mountaineering, which was to become a Polish specialty in the years to come. As an attempt to break free of the impasse, Alpine Games were organised in March 1954, described by Ryszard Wiktor Schramm in the following way:

*1954 brings some relaxation in the confined and uncomfortable situation of Polish mountaineering and a slight possibility of further development. In the second half of March, great manoeuvres of the leading climbers in the Tatras are organised to show their organisational, technical and tactical competence in the organisation of multi-day expeditions in the difficult conditions of high mountains. This event, called the First Polish Alpiniada, brought together 47 climbers from all over the country. (Schramm: 20)*

At that time, such activities – modelled on Soviet mountaineering – were the only substitute for high-altitude climbing available to Poles. More opportunities came in the wake of the political breakthrough of October 1956,<sup>3</sup> when Polish climbers started to explore the Alps and had their first climbing successes there. Having marked their presence in the Alps, they started to consider extending their activity to the

**3** Polish October 1956, termed also the October thaw or Gomułka's thaw, was a period of the liberalisation of the political system which set a limit to the communist terror in Poland. Since 1957, however, there was a slow retreat from the reforms of October 1956.

highest mountains. In 1966, Jerzy Warteresiewicz sketched the program of expanding Polish expeditions, indicating peaks in the Karakoram which were worthy of ascent, such as Kunyang Chhish (7,852m), which was ultimately ascended in 1971 by an expedition directed by Andrzej Zawada (see Warteresiewicz). The collective volume *Ostatni atak na Kunyang Chhish* (Final Approach to Kunyang Chhish) was a literary fruit of this undertaking (see Paczkowski et al.). The book constituted a detailed chronicle of the expedition, including descriptions of the preparation and the journey, and followed the classical model of expedition narrative.

Undoubtedly, Warteresiewicz construed his program of the exploration of the Himalaya and the Karakoram on the basis of the Himalayan experiences of two other Poles – Jerzy Hajdukiewicz and Adam Skoczylas – who had participated in the Swiss expeditions to Dhaulagiri (8,167m) in 1958 and 1960. In light of this, the history of post-war Polish Himalayan literature is also – or perhaps primarily – linked to their activity and exploration of the Himalaya as part of the Swiss expeditions with international teams. Hajdukiewicz was the first to take part in such an expedition: he participated in Werner Stäuble’s fifth attempt to ascend Dhaulagiri in 1958. The expedition was not successful, yet Hajdukiewicz wrote an account of it in a book entitled *Himal Cu-Cu-Ra: Dhaulagiri 1958*. In a preface to the book, Jan Kazimierz Dorawski claims that despite the expedition’s lack of success and the fact that only one Pole took part in it, it had a tremendous influence on the development of Polish mountaineering. In his review of the book, Kolbuszewski refers to Dorawski’s assessment, adding that ‘Hajdukiewicz’s book was released at the moment when Polish alpinism set off to conquer the mountains of the world for the second time, and because of that it needed [...] to be popularised’. Hajdukiewicz’s book fulfils this task,

according to Kolbuszewski, ‘even if it is not very well written: it has too many stylistic flaws, too much pompousness, too much pathos in descriptions’ (Kolbuszewski 1961).

Another Swiss expedition to Dhaulagiri with Polish participants was organised two years later, in 1960. Initially, it was supposed to be a joint Polish–Swiss undertaking, but ultimately this turned to be impossible for political reasons. The expedition had an international character, and the two Poles who participated in it – Hajdukiewicz and Skoczylas – did so as individuals and not representatives of the state. Skoczylas’s book *Biała Góra* (White Mountain), first published in 1965, is an expedition account written on the basis of the author’s journal, but thanks to its refined form and literary narration it transcends the conventional model of expedition account. In his preface to the book, Janusz Kurczab comments on the Poles’ participation and the significance of the expedition:

*Ultimately, the expedition was carried out under Swiss auspices, but it was of an international character. Apart from the six Swiss members, the team comprised two Poles, one Austrian, one German, one American, and a few Nepalese Sherpas. [...] The expedition was successful. Eight climbers of four nationalities reached the summit, however, neither of the Poles did so. Still, apart from their many experiences, the Poles also benefited from the expedition in a different way: both Adam Skoczylas and Jerzy Hajdukiewicz wrote books about it, and Biała Góra was favourably received by Polish mountaineers and literary critics alike. It was emphasised that, due to its literary merit, the book stands out among others of its type, many of which were published in the 1960s. While the documentary character of the book was not ignored, its strictly literary value was also noted. The fact that the account of the*

*expedition is carried out on two levels was particularly commended. On the one hand, the book chronicles subsequent attempts to ascend the peak. On the other, it contains an important parallel story of the author's own experiences as he was involved in another crucial albeit less conspicuous aspect of the expedition. (Kurczab: 6–7)*

In light of this, Kolbuszewski wrote that ‘the effectiveness of the book’s mood is enhanced by its containment in the two layers, as a result of which *Biała Góra* – a story of human victory – should ultimately be defined as [...] a story of one’s own failure’ (Kolbuszewski 1966: 77).

When he published his book, Skoczylas was already the author of a short story entitled ‘Stefano przyjdziemy jutro’ (Stefano We Shall Come Tomorrow); the story narrates a rescue mission on the north face of Eiger in which he himself had participated in 1957. It was published in 1958 in the collective volume *Burza nad Alpami* (Storm Over the Alps); in 1962, it was included in Skoczylas’s well-known collection of short stories, *Cztery dni słońca* (Four Days of Sun). In the wake of Skoczylas’s premature death due to terminal illness, another book on Dhaulagiri was released in 1966, entitled *Tam gdzie góry sięgają nieba* (Where the Mountains Reach the Sky). In light of the popularity and acclaim of Skoczylas’s Alpine and Himalayan prose, one can suggest that his mountain fiction played a similar role in Poland as Maurice Herzog’s memorable *Annapurna* (1951) did in Western Europe, while Skoczylas’s collection of short stories is sometimes compared to Victor Saunders’s famous 1990 book, *Elusive Summits* (see Witt).

Polish participation in the Swiss expeditions was significant both as an experience of exploring high mountains and as a factor in the evolution of Polish expedition literature, yet it did not exert substantial influence on the history of Polish mountaineering. The breakthrough

occurred in 1975 with the first winter ascent of Noshaq in the Hindu Kush mountains (7,492m) by a Polish team. As Katarzyna Kastrau stresses, it was the first winter ascent in the world: 'In this way, the Poles defied the claim made by Edmund Hillary that no form of life can survive in winter above the altitude of 7,000 metres. Subsequently, bigger expeditions were organised in the Karakoram and the Himalaya. The ensuing world-wide success was the winter ascent of 8,000 metres.' (Kastrau: 426) In 1975, the Poles ascended Broad Peak Middle (8,011m), Gasherbrum III (7,952m) and Gasherbrum II (8,035m). In subsequent years, Wojciech Kurtyka initiated a new type of climbing in small teams and setting advanced camps. The apex of Polish high-mountain achievements at that time was Wanda Rutkiewicz's ascent of Everest (8,848m) on 16 October 1978 as the first European woman and the third woman in the world.

In the mid-1970s, the period preceding the so-called golden age of Polish Himalayan mountaineering, Kurtyka started making a name for himself on account of his innovative style of climbing; one of his most interesting youthful achievements was the first winter ascent of Trollveggen's northern wall (the Trall Wall) in the Norwegian mountains. Forming part of a small team, together with Marek Kęsicki, Ryszard Kowalewski and Tadeusz Piotrowski, he ascended the wall between 7 and 19 March 1974, following the French Route (6+, A4, 1,100m). In the '70s, Kurtyka also participated in two spectacular Polish expeditions to the Himalaya and the Karakoram led by Andrzej Zawada: to Lhotse and K2 (see McDonald: 71). On 18 May 1980, together with Alex MacIntyre, René Ghiline and Ludwik Wilczyński, he managed the first winter ascent of the east face of Dhaulagiri (8,167m). The list of his astonishing achievements is long. It should be noted here that Kurtyka is the first Pole to be awarded the Career Piolet d'Or in 2016 for his

overall achievements in the exploration of high mountains; Krzysztof Wielicki is the other Pole to have received this prestigious award.

The 1980s, the so-called golden age of Polish Himalayan mountaineering, witnessed a series of Polish successes in the Himalaya and the Karakoram. The most distinguished mountaineers included Kurtyka, Wielicki, Jerzy Kukuczka, Leszek Cichy and Andrzej Czok. They were all pioneers of winter expeditions, while Kurtyka was ahead of his time also with his engagement in and promotion of Himalayan climbing in small, two- or three-person teams in the alpine style. Kurtyka's biographer Bernadette McDonald writes that '[t]he Lhotse and K2 expeditions made it clear to Voytek that alpine-style climbing was a higher form of alpinism, not only from an athletic perspective, but also in human terms. With an alpine-style approach, Voytek knew he could choose his partners with care and, as a result, the experience on the mountain would be much more intimate' (McDonald: 74).

Kurtyka made the annals of world Himalayan climbing a number of times, including in the week from 13 to 20 July 1985, when he climbed the 2.5-kilometre long western wall of Gasherbrum IV (The Shining Wall) in a two-member Austrian-Polish team. British, Japanese and American teams had earlier attempted the ascent. Even though Kurtyka and his climbing partner Robert Schauer did not reach the summit, their feat was considered a model of alpine-style mountaineering in the Himalaya. The prestigious *Climbing* magazine promoted it as the greatest mountaineering achievement of the twentieth century (see Kastrau: 426-27). Swiss climber Erhard Loretan, Kurtyka's partner on Trango Tower in 1988, said in turn that, '[w]hen he descended from Gasherbrum IV, Voytek had become a living legend', the status, according to Loretan, 'that mortals reserve for those who have cheated death' (cited in McDonald: 180).

Apart from climbing, mountain and mountaineering journalism and literature was for Kurtyka another important form of expression of himself and his view of climbing, which for him was always a thoughtful dialogue between humans and nature. During his long climbing career, Kurtyka published numerous articles and climbing accounts, both in specialist mountain periodicals (*Alpinist*, *American Alpine Journal*, *Der Bergsteiger*, *Bularz*, *Góry*, *Optymista*, *Taterniczek*, *Taternik*, etc.) and in regular press. His writings drew the readers' attention not only on account of his original perception of and commentary on alpinist achievements but also due to their language and literary merit. Kurtyka may have inherited his literary talent from his father, a well-known Polish writer using the penname Henryk Worcell.

In 1985, Kurtyka published his account of climbing the western wall of Gasherbrum IV. Apart from a meticulous description of the dangers which a climber faces on the wall as well as the drastic change of weather conditions during the final stage of ascent which precluded the two climbers' attempt to summit, he at the same time strongly emphasised the alpine style in which he and Schauer managed the climb. He wrote:

*We did the ascent in the purest alpine-style after an acclimatization climb to 7100 meters on the north ridge, where we left a food cache. Dramatic circumstances in the last stages of the ascent, after we had completed climbing the face proper, prevented our reaching the exact summit. Appalling weather and conditions on the face delayed us and dangerously prolonged the ascent, making us suffer from hunger and thirst. On July 20, after emerging exhausted from the wall onto the summit ridge, we abandoned the apparently easy horizontal traverse to the summit and immediately started the abseils down the north ridge.*

*The mountain seemed to be ruled by an unfriendly spirit which opposed the germ of every effort and even of every intention. Surprisingly, it ceased to harass our faltering minds when we abandoned the last meters to the summit. However, we got off the face alive; the climb was perfect and very instructive of all possible traps and hazards of alpine-style climbing in the high mountains. (Kurtyka 1986: 1–2)*

In further sections of the account, not devoid of literary charm, Kurtyka depicts the experience of hallucinations and other uncomfortable sensations resulting from the prolonged state of hunger, cold and sleep deprivation. He also expresses his dissatisfaction with the failure to reach the summit and the need to start the descent earlier than planned; at the same time he admits that ‘it was the most beautiful and mysterious climb’ he has ever done (ibid.: 5).

This achievement on The Shining Wall is considered a paragon of alpine-style mountaineering; an unquestionable sporting feat, it proved simultaneously to be a liminal experience for the climbers which left its indelible mark on their psyche. In this context, McDonald cites Slovenian alpinist Andrej Štremfelj’s comment on Kurtyka and Schauer’s achievement:

*A consistent characteristic of daring alpine-style ascents is an intense psychological pressure that exhausts the climber completely. After such an ascent, climbers are often not capable of performing an ascent of that difficulty again for several years, or perhaps ever. The most beautiful example of such a daring ascent is that of Robert Schauer and Voytek Kurtyka on the west face of Gasherbrum IV in 1985. This jewel among alpine-style ascents was carried out ahead of its time [...]. To contemporary climbers, such a demanding ascent represents an obstacle rather*

*than encouragement, as there is little chance of anybody exceeding it.*  
 (Cited in McDonald: 179)

Another important literary account of Kurtyka's high-mountain activity – transcending in a way the form and style of this type of narratives – is his description of climbing Trango Tower (6,239m) in a form of a short story released in 1990 as a book entitled *Trango Tower* (see Kurtyka 1990). It was published in Warsaw by the publishing house TEXT, interestingly without the ISBN number. The text pertains to the second, successful climb executed in 1988 with Loretan. One may add here that the first and only edition of *Trango Tower* has the status of a rare book and is practically impossible to find in Poland.

The narrative begins in Kathmandu in a small cafe where the author – reminiscing about the unsuccessful attempt at ascending Trango Tower in 1986 with Japanese climbers – meets two Swiss climbers, Loretan and Jean Troillet. Loretan was returning from an unsuccessful approach to the Cho Oyu wall, which ended with a tragic death of his climber partner, while Troillet came to Kathmandu to offer him mental support. From the start, Kurtyka and the two Swiss men share a similar anti-commercial attitude to climbing and a proclivity for alpine-style mountaineering (see Kurtyka 1990: 3). Influenced by his colleagues' accounts of high-mountain experiences and adventures as well as by litres of Tibetan beer consumed together, Kurtyka concludes: 'In the dark it is impossible to distinguish between man and mountain. What a strange path? Where does it lead to? For a moment it eerily seemed to me that we do not climb because the mountains exists – as old Mallory claimed at one point – but, on the contrary, because the mountains constantly elude us and we cannot reach or touch them. But doesn't it really amount to the same thing? I felt I had drunk too much Tongba.' (Ibid.)

Kurtyka's narration permanently oscillates between seriousness and grotesque; the author avoids excessive pathos by donning a mask of irony, which he uses also while presenting philosophical aspects of climbing and high-altitude climbing. He resorts to irony even when he touches upon issues such as death in the mountains. Referring to the members of the Japanese expedition to K2 who found the body of the Polish climber Dobrosława Miodowicz-Wolf, Kurtyka writes: 'It is amazing how gently death comes at high altitudes. The moment of falling asleep – which I have also felt coming – is cosy and warm, while returning to life – strength permitting – is a misery. Alpinism is really an art of suffering.' (Ibid.: 6) He questions the idea of climbing articulated by the then already famous Jerzy Kukuczka: 'Jurek had a completely different attitude to alpinism. He openly claimed that alpinism is a sport and thus a space for competition. On my part, I just hated competitiveness in the mountains.' (Ibid.: 7)

In the subsequent parts of the story, Kurtyka briefly describes his two-year period of preparation for the Trango Tower expedition in which he finally participated together with Loretan, whom he had met earlier in Kathmandu, and the struggle to obtain a permit for a two-person team, as local Pakistani authorities required at least a four-person team. The key passages of the story, devoted to the climb up The Trango Tower itself, contain a quite traditional, albeit colourful description of the rocky ascent and camping on rock ledges. The text contains suggestive and psychologically convincing depictions of emotions and sensations during Kurtyka's two falls off the wall during the ascent:

*The day when we reached the Great Corner was of particular significance to me. On this day, for the first time in my life, after 21 years of climbing, I fell off the wall while climbing high mountains. To make*

*matters worse, it happened not once, but twice. Until then, I had taken silent pride in the fact, but it was also a source of embarrassment, especially when I asked Todd Skinner a few months later how many falls the classic climb of Salathe Wall took them. Todd whistled and replied: 'Ho, ho, maybe 150!'*

*Ashamed, I thought what a mediocre climber I must be. Still, these two trivial three- or four-metre falls were very painful, resulting in a badly bruised elbow, strained thumb, and completely skinless knuckles. Writhing in pain, I clung to the wall. Far below I saw a cloud shadow pass over the Dunge Glacier [...] I heard Erhard's muffled voice from the roof – Voy, are you alright? Acute pain subsided slowly, but my feeling of despair increased. The Great Corner rose to the sky like the cornice of a daunting building. In the face of this pain and fear, assurances of bravery made in the lowlands seemed very feeble. (Ibid.: 16)*

This passage, stylised as a personal testimony, testifies to Kurtyka's need to express extreme emotions but also to his careful self-analysis which leads to a redefinition of his perception of his own physical and psychological condition from the lowlands. An important aspect of falling off the wall and the related experience of fear and physical pain is the sense of a brotherhood connecting climbing partners, accentuated also in Kurtyka's journalistic pieces. This is well illustrated by a passage on Loretan's support at this difficult moment, which is devoid of any trace of irony:

*To my joy, a mysterious smudge turned out to be the beginning of a crack hidden in a rock bend which soon led me to the Great Corner. In the evening, already there, when I unexpectedly fell off the wall again*

*in an easy spot, we decided we were done. We quickly rappelled to the Great Ledge to the comfort of the bivy sack. I sat down in a cosy corner and placed my injured fingers on my knees. Erhard caringly put the headphones on my ears and played me some Dire Straits. Gradually I forgot about my pulsating and swollen fingers. (Ibid.: 17)*

The experience of brotherhood described here on the basis of Kurtyka's own experiences constitutes an antithesis of sorts to his frequent critical charges against climbers who empathy, which he wrote about in his famous essay, 'The Art of Suffering':

*Only a few appreciated the psychological costs, yet it is true that inner strength is sometimes mirrored by an outward callousness. Physical dangers and the distress of partners may be blotted out. Hard work and suppressed fear, when combined with competitive determination, tend to narrow the field of vision. I am sadly convinced that egocentricity and a kind of inner deafness are common personality blemishes in our climbing community, more so than many care to admit. [...]*

*This attitude is not an inevitable consequence of Himalayan climbing. Choice of partner in the Himalaya is increasingly important to the successful lightweight group. If there is a strong bond, stronger than just companionship, an individual is less likely to miss possible fatal signs of distress in a partner. (Kurtyka 1988: 32–33)*

The culmination of the ascent of Trango Tower itself is presented by Kurtyka in a very dynamic way:

*On the fourth day of our climb to the summit, after the last pendulum I reached the Hidden Corner, which turned out to be the last technically challenging part and one of the few in which we had to use pitons. Normally, good cracks enabled us to use almost exclusively stoppers and cams. The Hidden Corner led us underneath the water-sodden Wet Plate. The next day was July 13. Erhard quickly managed the Wet Plate and we wondered which route to choose one last time. Ultimately, we chose a cracked chimney which went diagonally to the right and was clogged with great snowy mushrooms. We called it Mushroom Chimney. An easier snow-ice ridge was visible above the chimney and we decided to leave most of our climbing gear behind. All of a sudden, a final 20-metre vertical rock fault rose before us. Erhard thought for a long time before he decided to climb it with only three pitons. Around 3pm he happily shouted to me – I'm on the top! After two years of mishaps, it was a particularly happy moment for us. Deep down I asked myself – what changed really, where does the change lie? And I thought of my failures with pride and nostalgia. Perhaps I have discovered how to draw strength from failure? (Kurtyka 1990: 21)*

The narration in *Trango Tower* stands out in its genre due to its literariness and a kind of emotionalism which testifies to the author's artistic sensibility. Interestingly, McDonald argues that Kurtyka chose to climb Trango Tower – a souring granite spike north of Baltoro Glacier in the Karakoram – mostly for aesthetic reasons (see McDonald 195). The fact that his biographer points to the aesthetic criterion in Kurtyka's selection of expedition destination suggests his extraordinary individualism and unconventional approach to climbing. As a writer who understands mountains and mountaineering in terms of art, Kurtyka works with literary devices which enable a multi-faceted

expression of an individual's encounter with nature and the boundaries it establishes, be they somatic, sensual, psychic or extrasensory. It is noteworthy how Kurtyka names and chronicles vital topographical details: he gives key places individual names which he capitalises, such as the Fantastic Crevice, Mushroom Chimney and the Wet Plate. This seems to be a significant choice which underscores the exploratory and pioneering character of his climb. Establishing a new route is analogous to discovering new land. Additionally, naming is related to a need to familiarise the landscape which during the climb is temporarily transformed from an alien space into a quasi-domestic one. Another vital feature of Kurtyka's narration is a tendency to analyse his own emotions and sensations, particularly those of a transgressive nature. His final conclusion on drawing strength and experience from past failures brings to mind the philosophy of stoicism or even the anthropological conceptions of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *Citadelle* (1948).

Kurtyka's 2013 book *Chiński Maharadża* (The Chinese Maharaja) constitutes the apex of his journalistic and literary activity as well as an attempt to freely express his transgressive individualistic approach to creativity (see Kurtyka 2013: 131). It would be difficult to categorise the text as Himalayan mountaineering prose as such. The blurb advertises the book as 'a psychological mountain thriller unlike anything you have read so far' (ibid.). Kurtyka himself claimed, however, that qualifying the book as a mountain thriller was merely a marketing choice, while the text itself is closer to the picaresque (see Stępień). The main motif of the book – still very popular among young Polish aficionados of alpinism – is rock climbing. The protagonist – the author's alter ego – is passionate about climbing; at a time when, in his own words, he has 'already completed a number of superb routes in the Himalaya' (Kurtyka 2013: 21), he establishes a new goal for himself, namely

climbing a spectacularly challenging rock in the vicinity of Krakow, on the climbing route known as the Chinese Maharaja. In this semi-autobiographical story, struggling with a rock climbing route is a form of obsession which symbolises another, superior form of obsession, namely the necessity to be creative. On the margins of a grotesque and sometimes ironic narrative about an experienced alpinist overwhelmed with problems of everyday life, Kurtyka formulates theses which are important for his own philosophy of climbing and which form the core of his individualistic programme:

*My heart howled out of longing to be somewhere high in the mountains. The desire was so strong that the glass of wine froze in my hand. I listened in fascination to this inner hunger. What on earth was it? It was definitely more than mere sensual desire. It had nothing to do with bodily hunger. I felt it somewhere deeper. It contained a longing for complete freedom, a desire to be free of human limitations, a wish to taunt the fear of death. All of this is what drove me to the edge. [...]*

*Climbing is more than spatial ascent. It is essentially a difficult attempt to ascend above oneself. It is a reaching out towards freedom. (Ibid.: 25)*

Over the years, Kurtyka's book became a source of inspiration for Polish climbers who sought new forms within mountaineering literature. Marek Raganowicz can be considered Kurtyka's successor both in terms of his climbing style and his desire to break the established paradigms and conventions in mountaineering writing. Raganowicz is an outstanding Polish alpinist and author of two mountaineering books in which he flirts with the genre of road novel. The first of these, the autobiographical book *Zapisany w kręgach* (Written in Circles),

received the Grand Prix Award in the competition for the best mountaineering book of the year at the Andrzej Zawada Mountain Festival in 2017. It was favourably reviewed by Kurtyka, who wrote the following in the form of a blurb: ‘It has been a long time since I read such refreshing literature. No other book has brought me so poignantly close to the complex and difficult truth of a climber’s fate. No other book has made me feel so pleasantly proud of belonging to this brave and disinterested tribe.’ (Raganowicz 2017)

Raganowicz’s multi-plot autobiographical narrative is composed of numerous vignettes about his studies, lovers, ways of earning a living, as well as the birth of his fascination with climbing and the mountains, including the Tatras, the Alps and the world’s highest mountains. The author also addresses the issue of choosing one’s own path in climbing, rejecting the model of expedition Himalayanism in the name of the alpine style and ultimately specialising in big-wall climbing. Reflecting on the development of his fascination with the mountains, Raganowicz offers insights which one would seek in vain in the writings of his predecessors. For instance, where Kurtyka saw an exciting metaphysical realm of freedom, Raganowicz sees a kind of trap. One of the most interesting and novel motifs in his prose is the search of ‘freedom from the mountains’, which the author finds in the act of writing:

*Once I disagreed with Ania when she said that there was nothing else I was able to do except go to the mountains. Now I thought more and more often that she was right and that it was worthwhile opening myself up to new things, at least so that I could feel free from the mountains. I had an impression that the cult of climbing can be detrimental,*

*that sometimes one should try to rebel against it, to pick the apple just as Eve did, which is something a highlander mentioned on a bus. Eve opened wide the door leading from the paradise to the world of freedom, while I needed to feel that climbing is what I really chose to do out of my own will.*

*I decided to focus on writing. (Raganowicz 2017: 189–90)*

Raganowicz's critical approach to climbing as a kind of double-edged sword – a liberating activity which is also addictive and enslaving – is clearly an innovation, as it introduces a new quality to conventional and at times pompous mountaineering literature. Still, climbing is a constant source of inspiration, including literary inspiration, while both activities enable self-expression, albeit in their own distinctive ways. What is equally significant, Raganowicz strives to free his writings from the label of mountaineering literature. The best example of this is his latest novel, *Znikając. Opowieść drogi* (Disappearing: A Road Narrative), which breaks with the patterns of mountaineering literature to an even greater extent than its predecessor (see Raganowicz 2021). In this novel, autobiographical and fictional motifs are intertwined, and one can sense the author's inspiration both with American road novels and with the writings of the Japanese writer Haruki Murakami. It will not be an exaggeration to say that it is not only a narrative of climbing but also a philosophical treatise on life, both in its physical and metaphysical dimensions.

To conclude, contemporary Polish mountaineering literature – including but not only expedition literature – is undergoing a period of intense development and exists in various generic forms. On the one hand, there are literary experiments such as the ones attempted

by Kurtyka and Raganowicz, while on the other hand classical genres are still popular, including biographies of famous climbers (often written by non-climbers), autobiographies (frequently produced in cooperation with ghost writers), as well as conventional expedition accounts. In the latter case, new forms of expression are sought only in such exceptional writings as those of Rafał Fronia, who participated in a failed winter expedition to K2 in 2017–2018. Fronia’s account of this expedition was produced during the expedition in the form of an online journal, which enabled him to engage in direct dialog with those who observed the progress of the expedition. The form, already known from the work of other European alpinists, had more supporters than opponents in Poland and ultimately resulted in the publication of Fronia’s book *Anatomia góry. Osiem tysięcy metrów ponad marzeniami* (The Anatomy of the Mountain: Eight Thousand Metres Above Dreams, 2018).

On the basis of the above analysis of both older and newer forms of Polish mountaineering literature it is difficult to determine the directions in which it is likely to evolve in the coming years and decades. It falls beyond doubt, however, that the most interesting writers who are at the same time acknowledged climbers, such as Skoczylas, Kurtyka and Raganowicz, have a bearing on the condition of this genre – and, by inference, of mountain sports – in contemporary Poland. What seems most important, due to their talent and creative imagination they gradually wrestle the niche of Himalayan mountaineering literature – and expedition literature in general – from the category of second-rate literature, sometimes even succeeding in transforming it into high-brow writing. ♡

*Translated by Izabella Kimak*

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## Povzetek

Članek oriše zgodovino poljske himalajistične literature, pri tem pa se osredotoča na postopno umikanje žanra klasičnega dnevnika odprave pripovedi, izhajajoči iz romana ceste in navdihnjeni s piščevimi alpinističnimi doživetji. Več kot osemdesetletna zgodovina evolucije himalajistične literature je prikazana na ozadju zgodovine poljskega odpravarskega alpinizma. Članek se najprej posveti poljskima knjižnima opisoma uspešne poljske himalajske odprave iz leta 1939, ki sta ju pripevala Jakub Bujak in Janusz Klarner. Nato se osredotoči na Jerzyja Hajdukiewicza in Adama Skoczylasa, poljska udeleženca švicarskih odprav na Daulagiri iz let 1958 in 1960, ki sta s svojima knjigama o teh odpravah presegla žanr dnevnika odprave. Osrednjo pozornost članek namenja športnim in literarnim dosežkom Wojciecha Kurtyke, ki je eden izmed najpomembnejših poljskih in svetovnih himalajskih alpinistov 20. stoletja. Kurtyka je bil ključen pri vpeljevanju alpskega sloga v plezanje v Himalaji in Karakorumu, velja pa tudi za vrhunskega potopisca, ki je v marsikaterem oziru posodobil alpinistično literaturo, in sicer tako nefikcijsko kakor fikcijsko. Na koncu se članek ustavi še pri dvojici sodobnih avtorjev, in sicer pri Mareku Raganowiczu, čigar spisi alpinistično literaturo približujejo romanu ceste, in Rafału Fronii, ki je izdal knjigo na podlagi interaktivnega spletnega dnevnika, ki ga je pisal med odpravo.

Tovrstna analiza tako starejših kakor sodobnejših form poljske odpravarske alpinistične literature sicer ne more nakazati prihodnje evolucije tega žanra. Lahko pa pokaže, da so nanj najbolj vplivale prav tiste osebnosti, ki nam lahko veljajo za najzanimivejše pisce in ki so bili nedvomno tudi vrhunski alpinisti; v tem pogledu ni mogoče zanikati vpliva Skoczylasa, Kurtyke ali Raganowicza. Ti in podobni pisci

so največ prispevali k približevanju alpinistične literature literarnemu kanonu, v središču katerega je tradicionalno sicer leposlovje.

## **Ewa Grzęda**

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**The Vertical World and the  
Mountains Upside Down, or,  
a Four-handed Himalayan  
Climbing Autobiography  
by Olga Morawska and  
Piotr Morawski**

Pionowy świat i góry na opak,  
czyli autobiografia na cztery  
ręce Olgi i Piotra Morawskich

The article presents an interpretation of *Od początku do końca* (From Beginning to End), a book written by Olga Morawska and Piotr Morawski. The work contains a Himalayan climber's 2001–2009 diary covering, among others, expeditions to K2, Annapurna and Dhaulagiri, as well as his wife's memoir written after his death. A combination of two perspectives and two narratives, of the climber and his life companion, makes the book stand out from the genre of Himalayan climbing accounts – for literary reasons and owing to its focus on human relationships (intersubjectivity). Nevertheless, a focus on space, a staple of the genre, is strong in this book as well. Consequently, the analysis of the climber's notes points to a sensual topography: a record of direct experience of mountains. Morawska's memoir, in turn, is permeated with spatial metaphors (of life as a journey) and brings grief to the fore.

MOUNTAINEERING LITERATURE,  
ALPINISM, AUTOBIOGRAPHY,  
OLGA MORAWSKA, PIOTR MORAWSKI

Artykuł przedstawia interpretację książki Olgi i Piotra Morawskich *Od początku do końca*. Publikacja zawiera dziennik himalaisty z wypraw m.in. na K2, Annapurnę i Dhaulagiri, prowadzony w latach 2001–2009, oraz wspomnienia żony spisane po jego śmierci. Ścisłe połączenie dwóch perspektyw i narracji – wspinacza i bliskiej mu osoby – sprawia, że książka wyróżnia się w piśmiennictwie himalaistycznym ze względów literackich i poprzez szczególne wyeksponowanie relacji międzyludzkich (intersubiektywność). Podobnie jak w innych tego typu utworach ważną rolę odgrywa w niej przestrzeń. W analizie dziennika wspinacza podkreślono więc topografię sensualną – zapis bezpośrednich doświadczeń związanych z przestrzenią górską. We wspomnieniach żony istotną rolę odgrywa metaforyka przestrzenna (życie jako podróż), a na pierwszy plan wysuwają się emocje i praca żałoby.

LITERATURA GÓRSKA, ALPINIZM,  
AUTOBIOGRAFIA,  
OLGA MORAWSKA, PIOTR MORAWSKI

**HIMALAYAN CLIMBERS AND ‘THE END OF THE WORLD’**

‘Climbers are household names there, like Michael Jordan or Tiger Woods are in the American consciousness’, writes Margret Grebowicz of European Himalayan climbers in her book *Mountains and Desire: Climbing vs. the End of the World* (4). The names of these world-famous sportsmen reflect the high yet ambivalent status enjoyed by high-altitude climbers in contemporary culture. The comparison is spectacular and moving alike. The history of mountaineering has consolidated the image of climbers as discoverers of the unknown, but nowadays adventurers with scientific or artistic aspirations are often replaced by mountain sport enthusiasts and celebrities. Climbers have fan clubs, appear on television, and publish books (ibid.). The degree of public interest in this area varies between countries and is more or less proportional to the presence of a nation’s representatives on the world’s highest peaks. Grebowicz repeatedly mentions the specific Polish case in this regard, which can be observed even at the level of language:

*My own native country, Poland, treats its high-altitude climbers like national heroes. When one dies in a climbing accident, the nation collectively mourns. Polish even has a word that refers to Himalayan climbing (‘himalaizm’) to distinguish it from the more popularly used ‘alpinizm,’ or ‘alpinism,’ which other European languages use to talk about all climbing, not just in the Alps. (Ibid.)*

The achievements of Polish climbers are the nation’s pride, their fate is recorded in the collective memory, and their mountaineering victories are far from private – they are seen as figures of progress and modernity (ibid.: 62). Grebowicz makes the specificity of the Polish

Himalayan climbing her point of reference for a broader investigation. Comparing climbers to icons of popular culture, she sheds new light on the human attitude towards mountains but also ecology and politics. The author of *Mountains and Desire* looks a hundred years back and dwells on George Mallory's famous reply to the question of why he wanted to climb the highest mountain in the world, namely his quip: 'Because it's there.' (Cited in Grebowicz: 3) Since then, the desire to discover the unknown and achieve the impossible has been veiled by economy, entertainment and mass mountain tourism. In addition, environmental degradation has literally changed the mountains. The way we think about them, as well as our culture and our very notion of the human, are also different today. For Grebowicz, the many meanings and dimensions of climbing make it a stage which exposes the problems which fuel the feeling that the current vision of the world, humanity and culture are coming to an end. Hence, the stories of people who conquer the highest peaks ought to be reinterpreted in the context of the climate crisis, the anthropocene and the COVID-19 pandemic.

I began with Grebowicz's take on Polish Himalayan climbing in order to provide an entry into my interpretation of *Od początku do końca* (From Beginning to End), a book co-authored by and focusing on a Polish Himalayan climber, Piotr Morawski. I found the book to reflect some of the problems considered by Grebowicz, but in what follows I wish to focus on the differences. Although *Od początku do końca* describes a climber's career, showing his transformation from an amateur to a professional, it is not to be found among the best-selling books which Grebowicz mentions. While the book tells a story of a life bound to the world's highest peaks, which is quite characteristic of this type of book, it stands out in a number of aspects. Both Morawski's story and Grebowicz's research monograph juxtapose mountains and desires

with the end of the world, but *Od początku do końca* concerns first and foremost the end of a private world.

Piotr Morawski (1976–2009) was a unique person in the Polish mountaineering circles. Despite his young age, he received numerous awards for his climbing achievements and became Deputy Chair of the Polish Mountaineering Association. He participated in expeditions which featured the most eminent Himalayan climbers from Poland (Krzysztof Wielicki, Piotr Pustelnik) and elsewhere (Simone Moro, Peter Hamor). Owing to his vast climbing experience, Morawski was considered a continuator of the Polish Himalayan mountaineering tradition. Grebowicz mentions him as well: ‘Until 2005, exclusively Polish teams had made every winter ascent of an eight-thousander. *National Geographic* had nicknamed them “Ice Warriors.” Even the international team that broke this long run had a Pole in it (Piotr Morawski, climbing with Simone Moro).’ (Grebowicz: 89)

A conqueror of six eight-thousanders, Morawski died on the slopes of Dhaulagiri in 2009. *Od początku do końca* was published a year later. It consists of the climber’s diary notes and his wife’s memoir. I will attempt to prove that this unconventional narrative has brought something new to Polish mountaineering literature. I believe that the significance of Olga Morawska and Piotr Morawski’s joint work rests in a close combination of two perspectives – the climber’s and his life companion’s. The juxtaposition of climbing and private threads, of professionalism and intimacy, results in a dialogic and hybrid nature of *Od początku do końca* which situates the book in the context of Himalayan mountaineering narratives and autobiographical literature. The collective authorship and the hybrid narrative ask questions about what it means to be aware of the other person, to exchange experience, and to communicate. All this is best summed up by one word: intersubjectivity.

However, contrary to Grebowicz's book, *Od początku do końca* focuses on intimate human relationships rather than the media or the public sphere in general. In *Od początku do końca*, space – the mountains – is more than just a background for those relationships. Therefore, I will rely in my analysis on the tools provided by spatial literary studies (see Tally 2021), particularly geopoetics (see Rybicka: 61–122).

### **FROM BEGINNING TO END**

Researchers have discussed the essence of mountaineering literature for years, including the question whether it is justified to single it out as a separate type of literature (see Pacukiewicz 2010). Their positions vary, but it has become clear that literature concerning the mountains evokes an increasing interest in readers and researchers alike. Not unlike Grebowicz, Przemysław Kaliszuk links the popularity of narratives written by Himalayan climbers to their presence in the public sphere. While high-mountain climbers of the twentieth century evoked interest mainly due to their achievements, those of the second decade of the twenty-first century seem to feel at home 'in a world dominated by fleeting events and celebrities who broadcast their privacy as a spectacle' (Kaliszuk: 51). According to Kaliszuk, however, Himalayan climbers' narratives pose an interpretative challenge as they provoke questions about relevant analytical tools and procedures as well as about the contexts in which they can best be placed. The most frequently indicated points of reference are travel writing, documentary literature, reportage and autobiography. Consequently, Himalayan climbers' narratives are both documentary texts and texts with distinct features of aesthetic literature (see Kaliszuk: 51). Concluding his article, Kaliszuk writes: '[C]limbers' narratives are both

sophisticated (demonstrating an expert knowledge of climbing and mountain terrain) and amateur (in terms of their literary strategies). They demonstrate a borderline position, for they do not fully conform to literature or pragmatic or non-fiction writing.' (Kaliszuk: 62)

The book by Morawska and Morawski is also peculiar for the reasons listed by Kaliszuk. Given its focus on the Himalaya and other mountains, but also its publisher (National Geographic), its closest context seems to be travel literature. The combination of a climber's diary with his wife's memoir makes autobiographies and family studies significant points of reference as well. Numerous photographs and scans as well as details about the peaks, including topographical overviews and lists of ascents on a given peak, give the book a documentary character and situate it within mountaineering literature. And even though the book demonstrates certain features of expedition books, particularly descriptions of preparations and of the course of subsequent high-mountain expeditions, it does not fully fit in this category.

The plot is a hybrid narrative in terms of style, composition and authorship. Its core is the Himalayan climber's diary. Morawska writes in the introduction that she found the file containing her husband's diary on his computer after his death. The climber had drafted the text of a book he had wished to entitle *Od początku do końca czyli jak to w Himalajach i Karakorum bywało* (From Beginning to End, or, What Happened in the Himalaya and the Karakoram). The introduction does not say much about the editing process; Morawska only mentions that her husband's diary is presented in an abridged form due to its considerable length (see Morawscy: 6). It was probably she who gave the book its final shape. Morawska suggests that the two parts of the book were produced independently of each other, as she wrote her part before familiarising herself thoroughly with her husband's text (ibid.: 5–6).

The change in the title is puzzling, though. As the second part of the title suggested by Morawski was eventually removed, the title *Od początku do końca* may suggest that the book is not only a story of ‘what happened in the Himalaya and the Karakoram’, but also of the ‘lowland part of life’ of the climber and his family (ibid.: 5). Indeed, the combination of two narratives allows the reader to read the story from two perspectives, the mountaineer’s and his life companion’s. Reading the climber’s diary, one learns about the expeditions ‘from beginning to end’ and follows the development of a climbing passion and career. The wife’s memoir, in turn, reveals the story of their relationship ‘from beginning to end’ – a story of a decade spent together in the shadow of high mountains.

The fragments written by the climber and his wife illuminate and complement each other. However, the book does not consist of two autonomous works arranged in a sequence and simply published together. It is a composition where the diary and the memoir intermingle. This arrangement exposes the relationship between the two co-authors and can be viewed as an attempt to present their experiences as if they were all shared between them. This poses questions about intersubjectivity, specifically the possibility of exchanging experiences and communicating with another person. The alternating narrative brings the dialog between the two people to the fore, but it also reveals tensions and discrepancies. The thought-provoking composition makes *Od początku do końca* stand out from its genre as a text with an undeniable literary character.

### **THE VERTICAL WORLD**

Morawski’s diary covers the period from 2001–2009. The climber writes about his expeditions to the Pobeda Peak, Shishapangma, Annapurna, Cho Oyu, Broad Peak, Nanga Parbat, K2, Ama Dablam and

**1**  
 'Literary sensual topographies can be organised using individual senses (hearing, taste, smell, sight and touch), but this most obvious type of conceptualisation must be supplemented with polysensory phenomena and synesthesia. We do not experience places with a single sense – the human sensorium is activated as a whole, even if perceptive stimuli of one type dominate in a given location or landscape, or its literary representation, up to determining the author's characteristic style.' (Rybicka: 249)

the Gasherbrums. The last note was written on 7 April 2009. The next day Morawski died on the slopes of Dhaulagiri.

The diary initially took the form of short notes which ordered the experiences and helped the author catalogue photographs. It truly unfurled with the first long and serious journey – the Tien Shan expedition. At that moment, the diary notes transformed into letters to the wife. The mountaineer wished to familiarise her with his experiences by introducing the mountains, the atmosphere in the camp and the hardships of climbing. The notes from the later period more closely resemble a regularly kept expedition log where intersubjectivity seems less important than self-reflection.

Climbers' stories are usually distinguished from travel literature by a vertical spatial pattern. This is a trope of vertical movement which determines a different mode of narration which entails seeking ways to express and conceptualise the subject's spatial and textual location without reproducing horizontal narrative patterns (see Kaliszuk: 52). The vertical spatial pattern in Morawski's diary manifests itself not only in descriptions of climbing, but, first and foremost, in the clear sensual topography of the described places.<sup>1</sup>

In Morawski's diary, the most important role is given to the sense of sight. Working in geopoetics, Elżbieta Rybicka has noted that visual geography covers not only visual experiences or the act of looking alone, but also visual tools such as maps or photographs (see Rybicka: 257). Morawski mentions preparations for the expeditions which included studying of maps and familiarising oneself with the topography of routes and peaks. Then, he compares his own impressions with the previously viewed images:

*The sanctuary is now completely white. It is entirely different than what I saw in photos and movies, which showed black mountain faces rising around a grassy valley, with only their higher parts covered with snow. The view is incredible. The clouds are already gathering and rolling over the surrounding peaks. The whiteness is blinding and the sun is warming me up. The south face of Annapurna is a beautiful precipice over two kilometres long. Bonington's route is clear and logical, and looks like a big challenge. It is sheer and steep. It is going to be a good bit of climbing. Annapurna South, which towers over the Advanced Base Camp looks really mysterious, enveloped in clouds, with some rocks showing through the fog and snow. I am standing here enchanted.*  
(Morawscy: 150)

This plastic description shows its author's sensual sensitivity and attention to the surroundings. To a Himalayan mountaineer, observation is an indispensable part of climbing (ibid.: 85). Morawski does not hide his euphoria, offering the reader a slightly pompous description of the beauty, dread and majesty of the mountains (ibid.: 85–86). Approaching the peak makes it seem to be 'within arm's reach and terribly achievable' (ibid.: 99). However, the dreams of 'touching' the peak or coming close to it do not always come true: 'The mountain rejected us haughtily. When we were almost certain that it would surrender, it blew snow, unleashed wind and hid behind a white, thick, frosty veil for many days.' (Ibid.: 109) Since K2 is not 'touched' as expected, visual impressions play the key role in the climber's notes again, which is evidenced by the recurring metaphor of a fog plume and a white veil covering the mountain (ibid.: 104). Other fragments mention a fatigue which hinders visual perception: 'I did not even have the strength to admire the miraculous views or the sunset.' (Ibid.: 96)

Hearing also plays an important role in Morawski's diary. During the Cho Oyu ascent in 2006, the climber especially experienced silence, which is traditionally associated with the mountain space and temples (see Rybicka: 251): 'The wind seems to have faded. I am surrounded by a white desert, mountains piercing through clouds and calmness.' (Morawscy: 167) Wind-related sounds are particularly meaningful. The climber mentions 'the howling of the wind' and 'the groan of the wind-racked mountain' – the sounds he still heard after returning home (ibid.: 109). The sensations related to the wind and the piercing cold (ibid.: 85, 87) recur in notes from nearly every expedition, becoming an indicator of sensual topography of high mountains: 'We reached a moraine where the wind showed its power. Every strong gust threw us all around and the temperature was such that every uncovered part of the body, especially the face, froze within seconds.' (Ibid.: 134)

Morawski writes that food at high altitudes is 'tasteless'. Climbers eat instant foods and often have gastric problems. To him, the taste inextricable from expeditions is that of sweet, dishwater-like tea (ibid.: 223).

Intense, polysensory experience of high mountains sets the climber's notes apart from their genre and is a catalyst of identity processes. Morawski's story of subsequent expeditions and conquered or inaccessible peaks is simultaneously a story of a shaping of the self. Like many other climbers, Morawski goes through the 'vertical promotion school' (Pacukiewicz 2012b: 189). His progress entails completing the subsequent stages of mountain initiation, from the Polish Jurassic Highland, through the Tatra Mountains and the Alps, to the Himalaya. 'Thus, the road is the measure of aspirations, achievements and states of consciousness.' (Ibid.) The experience gained in increasingly high mountains shapes a conscious Himalayan climber (see

Pacukiewicz 2012a: 98–114). However, when answering the question of why he climbs, Morawski points to an even earlier stage of his development: ‘One must reach back to the roots of my fascination with the mountains – or, better said, with the human struggle with the cold, ice, rock and unfriendly environment. Since my childhood I have been fascinated with stories of attempts to reach the poles, the first Himalayan expeditions and brave journeys.’ (Morawscy: 71)

Notes from the first expeditions contain few descriptions of space, as if Morawski had hardly seen the mountains despite being surrounded by them – so much was he preoccupied with the thoughts of what he had left in the lowlands. It was only during the breakthrough K2 expedition that the mountain space began to play a more important role in his diary. Remarks about his own feelings and sensations at high altitudes became more frequent, while the comments on his Warsaw life were increasingly scarce. Nevertheless, along with the process of discovering the mountaineer within himself came the first dilemmas: ‘I will probably never become a serious climber’ (ibid.: 60); ‘As soon as I come home, I begin to miss new adventures. Like my friend once said, your life initially goes on as usual and you sometimes break it off with expeditions; then your expeditions go on as usual and you sometimes break them off with life’ (ibid.: 71).

During the K2 expedition, even though the peak was not conquered, Morawski felt that the mountains were his real home: ‘A part of me, of my heart and my soul, will remain on those icy, rocky slopes.’ (Ibid.: 109) He now feels free in the mountains and realises that they are the place where he belongs (ibid.: 148). Referring to the title of Jerzy Kukuczka’s book, one could say that Morawski discovers his ‘vertical world’ (Kukuczka). The sense of being torn between the mountain life and the family life seems to be fading and ‘home acclimatisation’ turns

## 2

Natural atopias are discussed by Robert T. Tally Jr., who lists the North Pole, the middle of an ocean and desert as examples: ‘whether these atopias are viewed as spaces that either liberate or threaten the individual subject, they have become increasingly useful in “orientating ourselves to the sublime space of the planet and the human networks that span its surface”’ (Tally 2018: 20–21).

out to be harder than the actual acclimatisation to high altitude (ibid.: 224). The breakthrough moment is the winter ascent of Morawski’s first eight-thousander, Shishapangma. The climber remarks that he ‘got promoted deep within’ (Morawscy: 140) and considers devoting himself to his passion entirely. He describes his fulfilled dreams with solemnity: ‘I am walking in the clouds, treading on the world’s highest corners. I absorb, search, desire, and miss. And I know I will keep searching. This is what happens if you taste the unknown.’ (Ibid.: 175)

The climber, however, still feels the longing (ibid.: 120) and his doubts return. The conviction that he belongs to the mountains clashes with the thought that he is addicted to them: ‘You cannot reconcile one with the other – at home you miss the mountains, and vice versa. You have to cope with that somehow, but there will always be something missing, preventing you from felling fully happy.’ (Ibid.: 174) The mountains turn out to be a natural atopia<sup>2</sup> which evokes the feeling of freedom while also increasing doubts and provoking self-reflection. Morawski’s last notes from the Dhaulagiri expedition are dramatic:

*A question suddenly appears in my head: what do I do all this for? I used to have fun exhausting my mind and body. I examined my limits and reaching the limit was always a challenge. [...] I kept proving to myself for so many years that dreams could be realised without money and that the so-called system would not stop me. And it did not. I am 33 years old and I will probably not return to work at the university. I do not know how I will maintain my family and myself. I have problems with concentration. I wait for expeditions because in the mountains I can lie down and do nothing. I pack up, conquer a peak, go back home, feel unique again and make plans for the next expedition. Is this really me? And if not, where have I gone? (Morawscy: 289)*

Morawski's diary is not only a Himalayan climbing narrative, but also a collection of notes by a lost man who confronts the legend of the mountains as known from literature, searching for himself and his place in life. Beside professional information and facts on expeditions, the story contains fragments of considerable emotionality and self-reflection. The constantly recurring feeling of being torn between here and there and the subject's astonishment at his own attitude toward the mountains make it justified to recall Robert T. Tally's concept of *topophrenia* – a term Tally has coined to denote the types of narratives in which the subject's relationships with space must be taken into account at all times. However, it concerns deepened existential reflection characterised by place-mindedness<sup>3</sup> rather than simple relations. In the climber's notes, the mountains become a state of mind (see Macfarlane).

### **MOUNTAINS UPSIDE DOWN**

'My husband, Piotr Morawski, was a Himalayan climber and a great hope for the new era of Polish Himalayan mountaineering', reads the first sentence of Morawska's memoir – and the first sentence of their book. Given the title of the work as a whole, we should pay attention to its beginning. Morawska starts with a concise yet relatively detailed characterisation of her husband, listing what was most important to him: the mountains, photography, research work, his sons and marriage. The climber's wife suggests that he is the main hero of their mutual narrative. She initially aims to supplement his climbing self-portrait with details of his life in Poland in order to paint a complete picture of her husband. However, her memoir, divided into fragments with separate titles, turns out to be more than a mere addition to his diary.

**3** '[O]ne might propose *topophrenia* as a provisional label for that condition of narrative, one that is necessary to any reading or writing of a text, in which the persistence of place and of the subject's relation to it must be constantly taken into account.' (Tally 2018: 22–23)

Morawska writes about the beginning – their first meeting and the time before the wedding. She recalls their fascinations, plans and dreams at the outset of their life together. Morawski’s climbing passion made him more attractive to the enamoured woman. Nevertheless, it quickly became clear that the mountains separated the couple rather than uniting it. Morawski went on the first expedition to Tien Shan only three weeks after the wedding. Morawska looks back on the climber’s development from an amateur with random equipment to an upcoming star of Polish Himalayan climbing. As she reflects upon the professionalisation of his passion, she makes remarks on sponsors, contacts with the media, the website, the media coverage of the expeditions and mountain festivals (see Morawscy: 111, 129, 142–43). Those pieces of information do not, however, justify comparing *Od początku do końca* with books ghost-written by celebrities, the phenomenon tackled by Grebowicz and Kaliszuk. Morawski did not have enough time to enter that world; besides, he seemed too attached to the literary legend of the mountains as an arena of struggling with the cold, ice, rock and oneself (ibid.: 71).

Morawska initially assumes the role of a wife who supports her husband and persuades him to go on subsequent expeditions because she believes this to be the way to fulfilling her own dreams of high mountains and traveling (ibid.: 75). She not only takes over subsequent household chores, but also deals with expedition logistics. As Morawski’s Himalayan activity intensifies, his wife’s memoir becomes increasingly permeated with fatigue. The exhaustion reaches its peak with the births of the couple’s children, as it turns out that a Himalayan climber’s wife is virtually a single mother (ibid.: 163). The anxiety about the beloved person becomes particularly acute, especially after ‘the mountains revealed their true, menacing colours’

(*ibid.*: 143). Life subdued to two modes, the expedition one and the regular one, also becomes increasingly difficult. At that moment Morawska's story transforms from a set of additions to the portrait of her husband into a narrative with herself as the protagonist. The transformation is indicated by metatextual remarks: 'I want to write about love, but I always end up writing about suffering.' (*ibid.*: 72); 'I do not know how to describe this. Our two paths were probably parallel – we thought that they were merged, but it seems to me now that it was a story of a Himalayan climber and of an Olga who waited for him' (*ibid.*: 161). The 'story of an Olga' is a self-reflection and a record of feeling depressed and lost due to a life 'next to each other' where 'loneliness was normal' (*ibid.*: 160, 170). The additions to the climber's portrait become a personal reflection and confession of a lost woman:

*I felt very bad mentally at that time. I think that life on the edge proved to be beyond my strength, as did being a mother and making superhuman attempts at creating a normal family. I also reckon that, as a perfectionist, I might have suffered from postpartum depression. Or maybe it was depression due to being a mother – my misunderstanding of the new role and failing to pull myself together. (Morawscy: 188)*

Emotions come to the fore. The memoir is now full not only of love, but also of anger, the feeling of being underestimated and of missing gratitude: 'I do not travel to the Himalaya – Piotrek does. I support him – this much or this little.' (*Ibid.*: 270) Especially the final fragments are self-therapeutic in nature. Morawska mentions 'working on herself' and 'searching for herself' (*ibid.*: 235, 271). After her husband's death, she also deals with grief. In her last passages, she writes about the

difficulty of putting up with her fate. She wishes to symbolically close one chapter of her life and open another one.

In terms of composition, the climber's wife's story is framed with a journey. Her memoir of their life together is preceded by a note from 29 April 2009 entitled 'Flying to Kathmandu'. A dozen days after the tragedy on Dhaulagiri, Morawska describes the preparations to a trip supposed to be a funeral ceremony and her goodbye to the beloved one. The aim is to place a commemorative plate on a symbolic grave near the mountain on which Morawski died. This, however, is not accomplished in the first attempt. Only a few months later, during another expedition, can it be carried out. *Od początku do końca* ends with an account of both trips and their summary. Therefore, while Morawski's diary notes are subordinated to the peaks which, once conquered by the climber, constitute his vertical world, his wife's memoir brings to mind the metaphor of life as a journey. She goes to Nepal as a grieving wife and a lost woman. However, she returns to Warsaw as a person who has calmed down, embraced her fate, and become stronger, and is determined to go her own way. The transformation is preceded by a painful mental *sati* ritual. Morawska describes her grief by referring to the currently prohibited Hindu practice of burning the wife on her husband's funeral pyre together with his dead body. Her dream of going to Nepal finally comes true, but it causes enormous pain and suffering instead of joy. Nevertheless, upon the direct experience of the mountains, a slow process of 'departing from *sati*' begins:

*In the morning we went to Tengboche. The place features a monastery and a view which appears suddenly after several hours of climbing.*

*I walked up to the monastery gates and suddenly saw Everest, Lhotse and Ama Dablam – the world’s most beautiful view. As I stood there and looked, I understood that the world was beautiful. And since the world was beautiful, I thought, then so was life. And so, even though I was to go through an ordeal, the beauty of the world convinced me to try to live. (Morawscy: 301)*

In her memoir, Morawska undertakes a symbolic journey of emancipation. The route departs from the mountains and goes through the mountains upside down. The starting point is the dream space which became her husband’s home and grave. The destination is the mountains – not necessarily conquered, but symbolically determining her own aspirations and goals. I use the phrase ‘mountains upside down’ because this is the meaning of the Polish phrase *góry na opak* which Morawska chose as the title of her other book – a collection of her conversations with family members of Himalayan climbers who either died in the mountains or keep traveling there, risking their own lives (see Morawska). The project expanded so much that, several years later, Morawska (by then Olga Puncewicz) published the second volume containing new interviews with people who stay at home while their dearest ones conquer peaks (see Puncewicz). The number of similar publications – conversations with family members of Himalayan climbers and stories of their families – has been increasing (see Sabąła-Zielińska; Skrzydłowska-Kalukin and Sokolińska; Zdanowicz). The psychological price of Himalayan mountaineering is also increasingly often exposed in biographies and pieces of literary reportage about climbers both male and female (see Kamińska 2017; Kamińska 2019; Sepioło). It seems that, together with the volumes of the conversations held by Morawska, *Od początku do końca*

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'Most mountain writing talks about something like an exchange between human and mountains, one in which humans are altered by the encounter.' (Grebowicz: 10)

has significantly contributed to the development of this tendency in the Polish Himalayan mountaineering literature. This tendency – we could call it mountains upside down – has become so distinct that one can even speak of a convention.

#### **CONCLUSION: A FOUR-HANDED AUTOBIOGRAPHY**

Margret Grebowicz writes about interaction between humans and space in mountaineering literature. This encounter transforms not only the humans but also the mountains, even though the latter direction is rarely noticed, much less described.<sup>4</sup> This observation is confirmed by the above analysis of *Od początku do końca*. Although the ecology and the effects of the anthropocene which Grebowicz indicates are not present in *Od początku do końca*, the transformation stemming from the encounter with the mountains is visible both in the climber's diary and in his wife's memoir. The climber's identity is shaped with reference to the mountain space. As Morawski climbs at increasingly higher altitudes, he discovers his vertical world. His wife, however, sees the mountains from a different viewpoint. To her, the world's most attractive peaks are not a direct sensual experience. She sees them from the distance and they are initially connected with dreams, but later turn into an obstacle which separates her from happiness. In time, however, she changes and undergoes an identity-shaping process influenced by the mountains, even though they are turned upside down for her. The subject's spatial location and the metaphors of place are important in both stories. Morawski conquers peaks – he attains goals. Morawska travels along the way – her life is a journey divided into various stages. The climber's wife is not only the co-author but also the heroine of the story. *Od początku*

*do końca* becomes a double autobiography, of the climber and his wife  
– a four-handed autobiography. ♡

*Translated by Eleonora Jozsko*

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## Povzetek

Piotr Morawski je bil eden najuglednejših poljskih himalajskih plezalcev z začetka 21. stoletja. Kot osvajalec šestih osemtisočakov je veljal za naslednika Jerzyja Kukuczke. Toda leta 2009 je nepričakovano umrl. Leto dni po njegovi smrti je izšla knjiga *Od początku do końca* (Od začetka do konca), ki prinaša njegov dnevnik in spomine njegove žene Olge Morawske. Sopostavitev dveh gledišč – alpinistovega in ženinega – je izjema v žanru himalajističnih gorniških knjig. Vpelje namreč nekakšno štiriročno avtobiografijo, v kateri se prepletajo različne zgodbe in pripovedni postopki.

Dnevniške zapiske, narejene med samimi alpinističnimi odpravami, zaznamujeta strast in osredotočenost, ki ju zahteva to, čemur antropolog alpinizma Marek Pacukiewicz pravi šola vertikalne promocije. Spomine pa je Olga Morawska napisala kmalu po moževi smrti, da bi povzela desetletje njunega skupnega življenja. Njen del knjige se osredotoča na življenje z možem in s tem povezana občutja, na ta način pa ponuja ganljivo pričevanje o žalovanju. Gore prikaže obrnjene na glavo, se pravi, z gledišča osebe, ki sicer ne sodeluje v alpinističnih odpravah, a je vertikalni svet vseeno vstopil v njeno življenje.

V tem članku je knjiga *Od początku do końca* interpretirana s pomočjo konceptov prostorske literarne vede oziroma geopoetike. V ospredju je čutna topografija – zapisovanje neposrednega vizualnega, olfaktoričnega in akustičnega doživljanja, ki intenzivira procese formiranja identitete –, kakor učinkuje v alpinistovih dnevniških zapiskih. V spominih alpinistove žene prevladuje metafora življenja kot potovanja. Analiza tega dela knjige se tako osredotoča na simbolne pomene prostora, ki se izkažejo za figurativne reprezentacije občutij in notranje preobrazbe.

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**Climbing the Already  
Climbed: Tadeusz  
Piotrowski's Account  
of the Polish-Yugoslav  
Expedition to Tirich Mir**  
Zdobyć zdobyte. Polsko-  
jugosłowiańska wyprawa  
na Tiricz Mir w relacji  
Tadeusza Piotrowskiego

The article is devoted to Tadeusz Piotrowski's 1988 book *Słońce nad Tiricz Mirem* (The Sun Over Tirich Mir), which tells the story of the 1978 Polish–Yugoslav expedition to Hindu Kush. The focus is on the text's narrative construction in the context of the paradigm of a mountaineering expedition narrative. It is shown that the literariness of the narrative enables Piotrowski to modify the documentary character of the story without having to sacrifice its authenticity. The article also analyses the ways in which a coherent narrative identity is constructed through the ideological and aesthetic conception of the haptic sublime, which is a typical feature of modern mountaineering literature as such.

MOUNTAINEERING LITERATURE,  
ALPINISM, THE SUBLIME, HINDU  
KUSH, TADEUSZ PIOTROWSKI

Artykuł jest poświęcony książce *Słońce nad Tiricz Mirem* Tadeusza Piotrowskiego, dotyczącej polsko-jugosłowiańskiej wyprawy w Hindukusz w 1978 roku. Autor opisuje konstrukcję narracyjną w kontekście schematu alpinistycznej książki wyprawowej. Zwraca przy tym uwagę na literackość narracji, która pozwoliła Piotrowskiemu zmodyfikować dokumentalny charakter opowieści i zarazem zachować jej autentyczność. Analizuje także sposoby budowania spójnej tożsamości narracyjnej poprzez ideologiczno-estetyczną koncepcję cielesnej wzniosłości (haptic sublime), charakterystyczną dla nowoczesnej literatury alpinistycznej.

LITERATURA GÓRSKA, ALPINIZM,  
WZNIOSŁOŚĆ, HINDUKUSZ,  
TADEUSZ PIOTROWSKI

**INTRODUCTION: THE RECORD OF THE EXPEDITION**

In his 1988 book *Słońce nad Tiricz Mirem* (The Sun Over Tirich Mir), Tadeusz Piotrowski tells the story of the Polish–Yugoslav mountaineering expedition to Hindu Kush in 1978. Led by Stanisław Rudziński, the team was composed of the following Polish members: Eugeniusz Kołodziejczyk (doctor), Anna Teresa Pietraszek (filmmaker), Jan Janowski, Bernard Koisar, Jerzy Kukuczka (sports director), Jan Majchrowicz, Jerzy Ożóg, Paweł Pallus, Piotrowski, Michał Wroczyński; Slav Šikonja led the Yugoslav team composed of Gene Berčič, Miro Štebe, Janez Šušteršič and Matjaž Veselko. The mountaineers intended to climb Tirich Mir East. Since the summit itself and the massif as a whole had been relatively well explored, an exploration understood in terms of a rush towards a discovery of the unknown was less important than determining whether there were other possible ways of moving around that area, traversing the ridge to Tirich Mir. Conceived of in that way, the innovation was a result of the conviction that the topography of the mountain is essentially a multi-variant score of the vertical mobility composed by the climber (see Matuszyk: 127–40). Hence, notwithstanding the first ascent, other ways of climbing a mountain are equally interesting.

A repetition of an achievement understood in such a way is directly linked to innovation as it broadens the existing repertoire of mountaineering feats and constitutes a point of reference for possible followers. The repeated ascents of Tirich Mir are obviously part of mountaineering training and are supposed to make the less experienced team members feel comfortable with climbing at extreme altitudes. At the same time, it provides an incentive to accomplish an innovative goal for those who are equipped with adequate skills and experience and, most of all, dare to extend the limits of possibilities. It is neither an adjustment nor

a re-enactment, but an action occurring in between the two: presenting a new possibility (designating and traversing a new climbing route) in the relatively well explored Hindu Kush region. To begin to contextualise this, let us not at the outset that mountaineering as a set of practices has been legitimised by modern-day reality (see Klein; Anderson) and that the genre of mountaineering literature has developed and continues to reproduce itself under the influence of certain strands of modernist writing (see Kolbuszewski 2020: 239–64; Dhar; Pacukiewicz 2010).

In the case of Tirich Mir East, the idea of innovative repetition defined the realm of mountaineering and shaped Piotrowski's text in two ways. The text is an account of a particular mountaineering expedition in Hindu Kush and a result of a creative (and in certain aspects innovative) adoption and transformation of the tradition of the mountaineering expedition narrative. *Słońce nad Tiricz Mirem* is a book written by an author boasting significant mountaineering achievements (with his first winter expedition to Noshaq along with Andrzej Zawada, Piotrowski is one of the initiators of Himalayan winter climbing) as well as literary achievements in the form of mountaineering short stories and narratives of expeditions to the Tatra Mountains, Hindu Kush, the Alps and Norwegian mountains (in the Romsdal Valley region). His text may be interpreted as a deliberate structure, serving as another stage in the shaping of his own writing style.

The whole of Piotrowski's literary output is characterised by dialectical tensions between, first, an autobiography and an account of vertical movement in a mountainous area; second, bodily-spiritual concreteness mediated by figurative linguistic representation; third, literariness, evident in the use of narrative and stylistic devices as well as an ostensibly austere documentary form; and fourth, subjectivity of perspective as well as a tendency to objectify (see Okupnik: 149–58).

In *Słońce nad Tiricz Mirem*, the mountaineer avoids using an impersonal style of reportage and regularly implies that his narrative is based on authentic experiences. He tells the story in a way that makes it comprehensible to both experts and amateurs, but also makes the narrative interesting both stylistically and in terms of plot. It is worth mentioning that, unlike in his previous books, Piotrowski decides not to include those narrative elements which could be described as a kind of mountaineering manual, such as a glossary of terms, definitions interwoven into the narrative, or explanation of activities which constitute the process of climbing a particular route.

Piotrowski's approach to mountaineering prose is not merely pragmatic, not solely about completing and sorting out his climbing experiences or providing a visual description and an account of a climbing route. He also takes an aesthetic approach to writing: the text should preserve the unique experience of the writer in a way which evokes the idiomatic while avoiding a hermetic style addressed only to the climbing community. It entails using literary devices which embellish, as it were, the originally austere record, including time inversions, dialogues, indirect speech and free indirect speech, distortion of the cause-effect relationships, juxtaposition, associations, visual descriptions packed with metaphorical comparisons. As such, Piotrowski's stories are reminiscent of fictional literature while at the same time retaining their documentary provenance (see Okupnik: 27). The author makes the autobiographical pact but he also regales his readers with documentary or para-documentary writing. He weaves a story line which is intended to be evolving because of the authenticity of experiences on which it is based, as well as its aesthetic values; it is not supposed to be an 'excruciatingly boring logbook' (Kaszlikowski: 205), which schematically enumerates and catalogues the subsequent stages of the mountaineering expedition.

In *Słońce nad Tiricz Mirem*, Piotrowski constructs a narrative persona which is supposed to perform three mutually conditional functions: that of a guide to the realm of mountaineering; a chronicler and polymath momentarily surprised and fascinated with the alterity of Pakistan; and an active mountaineer who somehow performs a mountaineering spectacle in front of the readers. This tangle of functions enables Piotrowski to create a self which allows him to gain an insight into his own intimate sphere and objectivise events in which he takes part. A story told by such a narrator-protagonist has a clearly autobiographical character, appearing to be honest and authentic.

Piotrowski, as a climber and writer, acts like a do-it-yourself enthusiast, a bricoleur who selects measures and tools guided by the principle of effectiveness with respect to the objective pursued (for which see Barratt). This is reflected by the structure of individual chapters, which present specific aspects of the expedition and at the same time effectively mediate between the tradition of the mountaineering expedition narrative and the desire for self-expression. The mountaineer is aware that radical changes in the thematic and plot structure of the expedition narrative entail too much risk and a possibility of misunderstanding. At the same time, strict adherence to the compositional pattern of an expedition journal would make his text just another variation on a well-known theme, and would thus miss the aspect which is particularly important to Piotrowski, namely the subjective dimension of mountaineering.

### **THE JOURNEY, THE CLIMB AND THE NARRATIVE**

*Słońce nad Tiricz Mirem* has a fairly clear structure. The first four chapters of the book (including the introduction) gradually (though in a fluid dynamic) immerse the reader in the circumstances surrounding the

expedition, and serve as a kind of an exposition aimed at intriguing readers, igniting their imaginations, and enriching their knowledge. The four subsequent chapters provide that which could be described as the real action of the story – an immersive and affective account of a mountaineering adventure in the high mountains, in which the unique experience of a person moving through mountainous areas is fully manifested. The first part, the travel narrative, plays a preparatory role (see Moroz 2010), whereas the second part, the mountaineering narrative (for which see Hołata), is meant to reveal the quintessence and intensity of the Hindu Kush expedition.

An innovative element of the story which binds the travel and mountaineering narratives is the portrayal of the expedition as an exceptional event, a male micro-society which has its own dynamic (for which see Robinson) as it experiences a collision with an exotic, non-European culture.

Piotrowski shows specific dependencies between the Poles and the Yugoslavs, resulting from seemingly petty differences. The leader of the expedition is justifiably concerned about the possibility of rivalry. Yugoslav mountaineers, making their debut in such high mountains, do not wish to be reduced to the role of assistants helping the more experienced Poles, mainly Kukuczka and Piotrowski, who built the strongest and most competent team. Both teams have different mountaineering experiences and different abilities to climb high mountains. Eventually, the Poles and the Yugoslavs reach the summit (a Polish team, a Yugoslav team, and a mixed team), although their joint action was put to test on several occasions. Tensions among expedition members also relate to the wider issue of cultural alterity. Regardless of their nationality, they come into contact with otherness, which shapes their identity in contraposition to their self-definition.

The Pakistanis consider all the mountaineers as representatives of the West. The author finds out that, in the context of ethnic and cultural otherness of Pakistani people, and particularly inhabitants of Hindu Kush, he defines himself in terms of the Western worldview shaped by modernity. The collision resulting from the mountaineers' attitude towards the mountains, which does not fit the worldview of pragmatically oriented local people, is particularly distinct. As a result, the local inhabitants regard the climbing expedition as an extravagance of rich eccentric people and, as bearers, they want to benefit from the assumed wealth of the mountaineers. The author places himself and his fellow climbers in opposition to the European and Japanese expeditions which were carried out in that region at the time, and he does so because of the economic issues resulting from his expedition's association with the communist bloc (see Sonelski). However, contact with otherness allows him to experience a clear affiliation with modern western culture despite economic differences. He is able to see himself through other people's eyes even if the Other is sometimes described in accordance with certain colonial clichés characteristic of British and American travel accounts (see Bayers), portraying the Other as a figure of the uncivilised man, a wild or primitive person. For instance, Abdul, a bearer treated by the expedition doctor, initially refused to take European medicine and relied on a local folk healer's cure, but finally decided to undergo treatment at the hands of the Polish doctor.

The narrator and protagonist shows the reader around Hindu Kush like a guide who, just like the reader, experiences cultural alterity and foreign topography. In the opening chapters, which do not contain climbing activities per se, the narrative persona is being passively carried along by events. The narrator counteracts this passivity by inserting encyclopaedic interludes based on the history of mountaineering,

which serve as a discursive counterpart of climbing and also as a flashback enabling a better understanding of the events. On the other hand, in the second part of the book, when Piotrowski and Kukuczka ponder and test a new climbing route to the summit, the narrative persona becomes an active participant and co-creator of the events. An unknown topography (vertical space) is rather common, expected and necessary for mountaineers and their *modus operandi*, and thus a familiar constitutive element of climbing. From that moment on, the rhythm of the narrative becomes more regular and coherent because the narrator gives an account of reality which he considers a part of his identity.

The background of the expedition is described in the 'Introduction'. It consists of geographical and historical facts about Hindu Kush as well as information regarding previous mountaineering activities in that part of the world. The author cites various sources and finally outlines the circumstances of the Polish–Yugoslav mountaineering expedition to Tirich Mir. The roles Piotrowski plays are clearly demarcated. Whereas the encyclopaedic part of the 'Introduction' has the form of impersonal assessment, the final paragraphs reveal the author as he drops the mask of a polymath and recounts his participation in the expedition. Then the text transforms into a personal confession:

*The expedition was different from the other ones I had participated in. It was summer and the weather was favourable. No tragedy occurred, no dramatic tension appeared among team members [...]. It was a difficult climb, requiring a great deal of effort and extensive experience. [...] [I]n the pages of this story the reader will find a serene image of the mountains, devoid of heroic struggles, tragedies or dramas. It might even seem that it is a story of a trip to the high mountains taken by some nature lovers. That, however, would be a fundamentally*

*false conclusion. Such a course of the expedition was primarily affected by wonderful weather conditions in the Hindu Kush region. [...] [T]he bright sun rose high above the mountains. (Piotrowski: 9)*

The author makes what Philippe Lejeune would call the autobiographical pact (see Lejeune) and confirms his competence in telling the story of climbing Tirich Mir. He possesses both extensive knowledge of climbing and a participant's direct experience. He concludes the section with meta-literary comments which reveal a conscious structuring of his narrative. He draws attention to the stylistic and plot-centred paradigm characteristic of mountaineering narratives and designed to glorify climbing. In his case, this interferes with true events which seem to oblige the author to address the distinct incompatibility of his writing with the dominant pattern of mountaineering adventures. There is also an insight concealed in this, related to the relationship between tragic heroism and the sublimity of mountain climbing as an exemplary, though probably misconceived, concept of expressing emotions and experiences rooted in physical suffering (see Reidy: 170–71).

The chapters included in the exposition ('The Beginning of the Road', 'From Ziarat to Chitral' and 'Scraps of History') are ordered in accordance with the principles of parallelism and simultaneity: Piotrowski alters the chronological order of events and widens the spectrum of themes addressed in the text, thus providing an outline of the background of the main events. The description of the journey is intertwined with information which allows the reader to understand not only the spatio-temporal context but also the character of the expedition. A non-chronological approach to reconstructing that stage of the expedition provides the narrative dynamic. The narrative persona

simultaneously leads the reader through quite static factual material and the expedition's logistics as well as an intriguing cultural space and topography of Hindu Kush, in which he finds himself.

In 'The Beginning of the Road', Piotrowski uses the simple device of temporal inversion. He begins by immersing the reader in an unidentified reality, thus emphasising his excitement: 'The Lawarai Pass [...]. I've finally been in the mountains.' (Piotrowski: 10) Subsequently, he stops the narrative action and recalls previous events which have led to that very moment when the author, along with his fellow climbers, is traveling across the remote mountain region of Pakistan. This narrative device allows Piotrowski not only to avoid an obvious solution in the form of chronological presentation of the course of the expedition, but also to underline the intimate dimension of his travel experience. This state of affective agitation creates a sense of intimacy and authenticity.

The chapter 'From Ziarat to Chitral' describes a further journey towards Tirich Mir and introduces the members of the expedition. Piotrowski also reveals the expedition's goals, an ambitious plan in terms of sporting achievement, namely to traverse the east ridge. Before that, an important event happens within the flow of the narrative, an event which is of high importance for the dramatic tension of Piotrowski's story: the first encounter with Tirich Mir. Although it is an event of short duration and has merely a visual aspect, it also has a strong impact upon the narrative persona. The narrator tells the story in accordance with the sensibility of a mountaineer who is focused on a soaring element of the landscape:

*I immediately lost interest in the idyllic image of the fields and stared at the snowy apparition rising against the blue sky from a ragged line*

*on the horizon. Surrounded by clouds, it looked like a white curtain shielding the mouth of the valley. [...]*

*Eventually, Tirich Mir was no longer a vague image from climbing magazines or photo albums. It materialised in a concrete form, for one short moment I could see its real shape. No longer a far-fetched dream, it became a reality. I felt a shiver go through my body. [...] It always happens in front of each wall, each mountain. Tranquility and reassurance come later when the original idea is realised, when the hand touches the rough surface of a rock or grips the cold steel ice axe. (Piotrowski: 25–26)*

The view of Tirich Mir evokes somatic reactions, animates, and almost causes a state of excitement which always appears under similar circumstances and fades at the very moment of coming into direct contact with the mountain. The view led Piotrowski to reflect upon the ontology of climbing, defined by a dialectic relationship between elusive abstraction and material, physical concreteness of the rock and the climber. It is an important passage because it reveals for the first time the concept of the haptic sublime, a staple of mountaineering literature which serves as a kind of conceptualisation of mountaineering experience, essentially incommunicable by other means, and at the same time as aesthetic ideology shaping the style of writing (see McNee 2014). That momentary, and therefore unsatisfactory, experience of gazing at the mountain peak from a distance provokes the author to reconstruct the history of the subject of his fascination in the subsequent chapter of his book.

Indeed, the chapter ‘Scraps of History’ is an encyclopaedic essay on the history of mountaineering activities in the Tirich Mir massif. Writing in 1988, Piotrowski treats this issue broadly and includes the

expeditions which took place after 1978. In particular, he writes extensively about the struggles of Polish mountaineers who have attempted to reach the summit. He distances himself from his own expedition, which gives the chapter a particular position within the structure of the book, since the author is transformed from a participant into a kind of curator who shows the reader around the museum of mountaineering achievements and failures. He takes into account all the details and does that with impressive fastidiousness, which suggests that the collection is in fact a discursive form of manifestation of Tirich Mir which emotionally enthrals Piotrowski. At the same time, this reversal of roles indicates the problem of the relation between the expedition as a constellation of various events and the time involved in transforming it into a coherent story. Piotrowski as a chronicler who skilfully navigates the intricacies of the history of mountaineering in Hindu Kush excludes himself from the Polish-Yugoslav expedition to return to this theme in the next chapter, which is supposed to effectively immerse the reader in the experiences of 1978. Piotrowski's narrative in 'Scraps of History' lays bare its hidden status of aporetic writing *in statu nascendi* while being *ex post* at the same time. It shows quite clearly a fundamental paradox of mountaineering literature as, on the one hand, a derivative from the experience of a climber's vertical bodily movement and, on the other, a discursive and conceptual tool necessary to express the unique affects of the mountaineering experience.

This encyclopaedic compound closes the exposition, clearly indicating the changes in the dynamic of the Polish-Yugoslav expedition which will occur in the next chapter. Although the part of the book which narrates the journey seems less important than climbing itself, the compositional solution implemented by Piotrowski effectively reinvigorates the narrative of the initial stage of the expedition and

confirms his competence as a writer. The technique of collage plays a vital role in the structure of the chapter ‘Scraps of History’, where the author describes the tragic events of the Polish expedition of 1975. He quotes an extract from the report prepared by the Polish Alpine Association after the death of one of Polish climbers, an excerpt from the article published in the *Taternik* magazine with regard to the event, as well as an account of the occurrence delivered by one of the participants (Piotrowski: 38–40). In a later chapter entitled ‘Icefalls’, which belongs to the part of *Słońce nad Tiricz Mirem* dedicated to the climb, the author includes in his narrative an extract from a book by Jan K. Dorawski which deals with one of the symptoms of hypoxia, namely Cheyne–Stokes respiration (see Piotrowski: 67), whereas in another place he recalls his own jottings from a journal written during the 1978 expedition (Piotrowski: 72). The author aborts this device in the last two chapters of the book, ‘At the Ridge’ and ‘The Sun over the Mountains’, which are dedicated to the climb. Owing to the collage technique in a broad sense of the term – including temporal inversions, insertion of essayistic elements into fictional chapters, changes in focalisation – the part of the book which deals with the journey, far from being a dreary prelude, is to some extent a simulation of the state of anticipation and tension experienced by the narrative persona. The narrator is capable of leading the reader through quite static factual material and relatively bleak logistical details of the expedition as well as the intriguing and unusual cultural space and topography of Hindu Kush.

The subsequent part of the book is entirely dedicated to the climb. The chapters ‘Road to the Base Camp’, ‘Icefalls’, ‘At the Ridge’ and ‘The Sun Over the Mountains’ form the substance of the expedition narrative and depict the process of climbing Tirich Mir East. The change in the dynamic mentioned above – from the end of the journey to the

beginning of the climbing process – is depicted in ‘Road to the Base Camp’. It is a condensed account of moving to the region of Tirich Mir, where the mountaineers plan to carry out high-altitude climbing. Whereas previously the very moment of seeing the mountain from a distance bore significance to the narrative, now importance shifts to the matter of how to start the climb and come into close contact with the mountain. A direct confrontation with Tirich Mir defines the boundary between a travel story (from the previous chapters) and the mountaineering account (in the current and subsequent chapters). When in the final part of ‘Road to the Base Camp’ Piotrowski, accompanied by Kukuczka, is observing the mountain walls and an iceberg through binoculars, it becomes clear that the horizontal journey is being replaced by vertical movement. A characteristic feature of this part is the mountaineers’ perceptions of the mountainous area, which pushes into the background the aesthetic contemplation and gives priority to finding the possibility of moving in the rocky mountainous area, perceived as a climbing route: ‘I put the binoculars to my eyes. The cascades of ice were magnified; the chaos of cracks, shattered seracs and mounds of ice blocks became clearly visible. [...] I had a thorough look at the whole icefall – no single weak point which would hold promise of opening a way to the top of the mountain.’ (Piotrowski: 59)

From that moment on, the climbers’ actions gain momentum, which is reflected in the change of the method of locating events in time. Up until that moment, time was almost a homogenous mass, rather perfunctorily divided. Now it starts to be measured quite accurately due to a significant intensification of the expedition’s activities. On the one hand, the author freely depicts time realities of the journey, which allows him to express the monotony of the movement and supplement the story with retrospective and historical elements. On the other hand,

he is precise only if this results from the pragmatics of the climb: reporting dates daily allows the reader to follow a particular process (and simultaneously to verify the honesty of the author and the authenticity of the story itself). Dating is also linked to the information about weather conditions. When the action speeds up and the chances of scaling Tirich Mir are more and more realistic, or when the climbing teams overcome consecutive difficulties on a glacier or a rock surface, then the daily information including dates and short weather reports, usually placed at the beginning of a paragraph, becomes a permanent element and imposes a certain rhythm upon the narrative up until the end of the expedition, most explicitly in the chapters ‘At the Ridge’ and ‘The Sun over the Mountains’.

In the part of the text devoted to the climb, Piotrowski makes use of the basic elements of the plot of an expedition narrative (for which see Hołata). He takes into account the following: setting up the base camp, searching for a possible route to the summit, establishing new camps, reaching the summit, and closing down the base camp (see Tumidajewicz). The author follows the chronological order of events, but he also tries to avoid composing the plot by enumerating consecutive events. This would resemble too closely the official report published in *Taternik* (for which see Pietraszek and Rudziński). He presents the events through the filter of his own experiences and describes those in which he was directly involved. The narrator registers occurrences and provides insight into the expedition as one of its participants. This inside peek of the events, which is characteristic of mountaineering literature (see Dhar: 356), is supposed to transform the readers into active participants of the mountaineering adventures in Hindu Kush. Narration usually begins with a visual introduction in *medias res*, and the narrator either adopts the points of view of the team (using plural

forms), or focuses on his own subjectivity and condition (exposing his own self). Such introductions are supposed to eliminate the danger of an excessively documentary character of the narrative by applying to it some characteristic features of a novel (for which see Głowiński: 125–42) and at the same time maintaining the authentic perspective of a participant.

### **SUBJECTIVITY, SPACE AND SUBLIMITY**

While presenting the subsequent stages of climbing Tirich Mir, Piotrowski reveals his own subjectivity (to use a term James Lester adapted for the psychological study of mountaineering [see Lester]). He talks about his experiences, emotions and impressions as they are caused by movement occurring in the vertical space and by bodily contact with the rock. At the same time, he devotes a great deal of attention to descriptions of minor activities undertaken in the specific conditions of a mountain whose peak is almost eight thousand metres high. Often, these are descriptions of daily activities, such as cooking or eating, or physical conditions and physiological processes. The focus on a pragmatic and particular dimension of the relationship to the mountain might suggest that Piotrowski remains unmoved by what goes beyond such technical descriptions, and clearly transcends the material reality of climbing. In fact, this concern to be scrupulous in recording everything which constitutes the arduous process of climbing in Hindu Kush is intended to solve an important issue of mountaineering narratives which authors have been struggling with since the inception of this type of narrative in the early stages of the modern era (see McNee 2016: 59–72), especially in Poland (see Kolbuszewski 1976). Piotrowski is aware of the difficulties in expressing the unique

experience of mountain climbing. Therefore, he acts in accordance with the principles of mountaineering pragmatics, focusing his attention on things which are necessary and essential from a climber's point of view: equipment, topography and movement contribute to the narrative design (see Nettlefold and Stratford). Descriptions devoted to the ways of climbing and difficulties encountered while moving on the rocks and glaciers, the equipment used by climbers, and the security measures they follow are of greater importance than picturesque landscapes. The mountains do not encourage the narrative persona to make any aesthetic or philosophical reflection, as they belong to the realm of concrete and somatic praxis in which the narrative persona recognises himself, constitutes his identity, and becomes the subject of physical and (*post factum*) cultural transgression.

In one passage, the narrator clearly defines the teleology of his actions: 'We did not come here to relax or admire the majesty of the mountains. We were aware of the difficulties and the arduous route which awaited us. That meant hard work for us. So we moved forward, weaving between rocks, searching for the most convenient passages.' (Piotrowski: 95) The fragment clearly shows the connection between the mountain and human subjectivity. In order to resist the temptation to immerse himself in passive contemplation, the narrator undertakes practical action, aimed at the efficacy of movement. The mountainous area manifests itself as a climbing route in which the climbers are utterly engaged, and at the same time it radically limits engagement in more intellectual pursuits during the course of the climb as well as stimulates the narrative persona to undertake meditation work *ex post*, as is demonstrated by the above passage.

The narrative persona defines himself by his existence in the mountainous area, which spurs his self-reflection. This finds an outlet

in reflections on the nature of climbing, interwoven in the main part of the narrative, articulated somehow involuntarily, at the margin of the essential part of the account of the climb. Interestingly, the narrative persona makes such remarks whenever he feels tired. In one such case, Piotrowski writes down an important observation which makes it possible to understand the character of the textual identity construction as well as the crux of the mountaineering discourse:

*A few moments to relish the beauty of pristine wild nature, a few minutes for the perception of aesthetic impressions. After that, toil and sweat pour once again into your eyes, breath becomes rapid from exhaustion, shoulders ache from the excessive weight. Through blurred eyes one cannot see the wonderful texture of the snow, its unusual shapes and its colour changing under the influence of light. The perception becomes flattened, narrowed down to just a few feet [...]. The only sensation which remains is the feeling of increasing tiredness and the overwhelming desire to collapse onto the snow and remain there motionless[.] (Piotrowski: 96)*

The passage reveals the dissonance between the natural sensual perception of the high-altitude area and the deceptiveness of its excessively aestheticising descriptions, which distort the material and spatial dimension of the climb. Seemingly, Piotrowski talks only about fatigue, which is an inseparable element of vertical movement, and therefore he drives out of sight all the aesthetic and spiritual reflections, leaving only the rough matter-of-factness of the physical matter of the rock and the human body. However, the issue is more complex, since Piotrowski touches on the factors which determine the exceptional mountaineering experience. The climber's body, sensually anchored

to the mountainous environment, skilfully moving through dangerous areas, serves as a tool of visual perception while also determining contact with space and unique sensations which are unavailable in other athletic endeavours, spatial activities or daily routines (see Lewis). In this context, it becomes clear why Piotrowski so often pays attention to the relationship between movement, body, space and his own unique experience. In the tradition of modern mountaineering literature, he understands that he needs to present this dialectic weave if he wants to approximate an expression of the otherwise elusive reality.

Here is another passage where the narrator, having climbed an extremely exhausting and challenging section of a demanding vertical route, admits to his disappointment and impatience:

*I was standing in front of a high serac, above which there was only the dark-blue sky. Despite great fatigue, I didn't stop for a moment. [...] I climbed over the edge. Sweat was pouring into my eyes, spasmodic breath inflated my lungs. [...] I took the heavy rucksack off my back. I sat down. At the first moment I couldn't understand why this happened, where the icy gorge came from, and why we had to take further risk. After all, it was supposed to be the easy part, hassle-free, a mere walk across an icy plain. (Piotrowski: 76)*

This confession begins with a brief description of the location: the narrator depicts the place where he currently is, what he can see there, but almost immediately moves into action. He abandons the looming possibility of passive contemplation. It seems honest and somehow natural, precisely because of an unveiling of weakness and the related doubt about the chances of a successful climb. The narrator focuses on the physical aspect of his experiences but also shares his intimate

feelings. An important issue here is resisting the temptation of a certain kind of self-glorification, which might falsely idealise the situation and imprison the narrative persona in some costume of artificiality.

A particularly strenuous climbing experience occurs in the time interval leading up to reaching the summit. It plays a major role in the context of the identity-building process. It is a case of an out-of-body experience occurring within a spatial description. The stylistic devices and the method of conceptualisation indirectly reveal the mountaineering sensibility of the narrative persona. Before Piotrowski, Kukuczka and Wroczyński reach the top of Tirich Mir East, the narrator records:

*The summit ridge. Hard ice surface, smoothed under the influence of wind. The shimmering glow of the sunbeams. And there is no more wind or storm attacking fiercely, insidiously, incessantly. Freezing cold spreads throughout the entire body. The feet become numb, losing the rest of the heat. Icicles hanging from the moustache and sticking to the beard. Spasmodic breathing with the mouth open to catch breath in the rarified air, icy wind whipping the faces. (Piotrowski: 114)*

The narrator focuses on his suffering as it is caused by the high-altitude and atmospheric conditions. Between the lines of this passage there emerges a fragmented image of a mountaineer immersed in a dangerous mountainous reality. Short staccato sentences or, to be more precise, gerund clauses form a linguistic equivalent of sensory experience as so many juxtapositions of images which vividly describe small sections of the ridges and parts of the climber's body, whipped by the wind and snow. The summit area is dangerous, hostile and inimical; it causes damage to the climber's body. Initially, it discourages Piotrowski from taking any photographs documenting the act of reaching the summit.

Photography is of great importance in twentieth-century mountaineering narratives, particularly in the accounts of expeditions aimed at reaching yet unreached summits or marking out new routes (see Brown). It serves the purpose of documenting climbing achievements and confirming the authenticity of the narrative. It partially saves the author the trouble of expressing the experience of reaching the summit: the insufficiency of language is replaced by the visual directness of photography. Piotrowski admits that he had no intention of taking photographs of the act of reaching the summit. Only when Wroczyński, who intuitively understands the importance of photography, urges him ('We need to have some photographs of the summit' [Piotrowski: 115]) does Piotrowski take out his camera and immortalise the Polish achievement. This reluctance is connected not only with extreme physical discomfort – cold – but also with the awareness that the climbers will fail to realise their original plan. Kukuczka, Piotrowski and Wroczyński are aware that their intention to climb the traverse is doomed to failure because of the weather conditions, so they abandon it. Creating an image of a cold and dangerous area, the narrator records: 'I left Tirich Mir behind me. A shower of ice picks spouted all over my face. I moved sluggishly down the ridge, right into the shimmering glow of the sunbeams reflected in icy mirrors. The cold sun burned high above the mountains.' (Ibid.: 116)

The experience was reversed by scaling the previously unclimbed summit of Bindu Ghul Zom, which triggered a feeling of satisfaction: 'The summit. Nobody has been here before us. Our response to this event was a handshake. We sat on the rocks covering the summit. Eyes involuntarily went over the mountain pass towards the snowy ridge, blurred in the fog enveloping Tirich Mir. Just yesterday, we were up there, today we went down a bit lower, and now it is one of the many

roads I have travelled in my life.’ (Ibid.: 120). Mountaineers are often modest conquerors who do not show their emotions. This emotional shamefacedness, which stems from modernist and avant-garde movements in Polish literature (for which see Dauksza: 37–70; Sławiński), seems to be an efficient stylistic device which saves the author the trouble of an adequate expression of joy for reasons incomprehensible to amateurs. The climbers briefly admire Tirich Mir, which triggers a laconic existential reflection. Piotrowski and Kukuczka are not capable of shaking the memory of their partial success, and even the pioneering expedition to Bindu Ghul Zom cannot weaken this bitter feeling. The joy is then streaked with an undertone of melancholy.

In the last paragraph of his book, Piotrowski refers to the remarks formulated in the ‘Introduction’ as well as observations made in the course of the route to the top of Tirich Mir East. The imagery of the sun over the mountains recurs. The whole narrative is summed up by a sublime image of a human being in front of the majesty of the mountains, which also pose a challenge and are the realm which constitutes human subjectivity: ‘Above a wild rose-bush, on which some delayed buds were turning pink, majestic Tirich Mir rose against the sky like a white pyramid. I involuntarily stopped upon my walk. I was bidding a last farewell to the mountain which was preserved in my memory as a happy summit. The sun always shines brightly over Tirich Mir.’ (Piotrowski: 128)

Intense climbing experiences, descriptions of the climb and the mountainous area or the climber himself share a common feature, namely the way in which one’s own experience, otherwise difficult to express, is conceptualised in the form of a sublime state or sensation. The above extracts from chapters devoted to climbing activities seem to place *Słońce nad Tiricz Mirem* within the aesthetic of the haptic

sublime, which, as shown by Alan NcNee, is a typical feature of modern mountaineering literature. Piotrowski's story constantly revolves around the issue of representing the mountaineering experience and its role in constituting the identity of the narrative persona. As Piotrowski demonstrates, the core of the experience is defined by movement through which the self comes into a direct contact with the mountain. Aesthetic contemplation or a passive perception of majestic views are in fact a negation of the climb, or alternatively complement it, and hence Piotrowski often points to the physical character of the climb. The narrator talks about his mood, condition and exhaustion. He recalls the moments of extreme discomfort and places the experiences in the main frame of the precise description of the gradual climb to the top of the mountain, of constant vertical movement towards the summit. The body and vertical space are intrinsically inseparable in Piotrowski's narrative. The body of the climber, who overcomes the difficulties of rock climbing, struggles with the atmospheric conditions and moves in a dangerous albeit exciting area, causes a unique experience consisting of the specific aura of transgression and a certain kind of inexpressible transcendence reserved to climbing (see Pacukiewicz 2012). While reading Piotrowski's narrative, one might come to the conclusion that extreme fatigue is an essential element of a mountaineer's identity.

## **CONCLUSION**

Piotrowski combines the willingness to narrate his personal experiences of climbing Tirich Mir, and how it shaped his mountaineering and spiritual biography as a coherent identity (for which see Davidson), with the need to present the complex *modus operandi* of a high-altitude

mountaineering expedition, which is made even more interesting by the fact that it was comprised of members of two nations. *Słońce nad Tiricz Mirem* follows the pattern of a mountaineering expedition narrative, well known in mountaineering literature, but at the same time it breaks this pattern (though not entirely successfully).

Piotrowski produced a book whose character is a hybrid one both in formal and conceptual terms. At first glance, it seems to be just another story of a mountaineering expedition, yet after careful reading it can be interpreted as a record of struggles with this type of narrative within the framework of mountaineering literature. Due to its innovative potential, *Słońce nad Tiricz Mirem*, and Piotrowski's prose as a whole, indicate that the Polish mountaineering literature of the second half of the twentieth century witnessed an occurrence of generic stability and even fossilisation of discourse faced with two alternative options: to search for new forms of narration and open itself to literariness, or to use well-known and tested narrative devices and methods of conceptualisation of the climbing praxis. Piotrowski seems to be poised between these two alternatives. ♡

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## Povzetek

Članek obravnava knjigo Tadeusza Piotrowskega *Śłońce nad Tircz Mirem* (Sonce nad Tirič Mirom), ki govori o poljsko-jugoslovanski odpravi v Hindukuš iz leta 1978. Pripravljenost na pripovedovanje o osebnem doživljanju plezanja na skoraj osem tisoč metrov visoki Tirič Mir (in o tem, kako je to plezanje izoblikovalo njegovo gorniško in duhovno biografijo v celovito identiteto) Piotrowski poveže s potrebo po prikazu kompleksnega delovanja alpinistične odprave (katere moštvo sestavljajo pripadniki kar dveh narodov). Kar je na prvi pogled le ena v nizu zgodb o gornjskih odpravah, se ob pozornem branju izkaže za popis boja s tem tipom pripovedi v okviru alpinistične literature.

*Śłońce nad Tircz Mirem* se ravna po obrazcu odpravarske gorniške pripovedi, a obenem poskuša s tem obrazcem prelomiti. Ponavljanje obrazca v tem primeru spremljajo določene tematske in strukturne modifikacije, in sicer zlasti avtorjevo poglobljanje v tujo, v poljskem kontekstu razmeroma zanimivo kulturo in uporaba tehnike kolaža v kompoziciji knjige. Tekst natančno sledi literarni formi popotnega dnevnika, se dosledno izogiba formi uradnega poročila o odpravi in posega po tehnikah reportaže. Prvoosebni pripovedovalec osvetljuje le tiste ljudi in reči, s katerimi se tako ali drugače sooči. Pomenljivo je, da hkrati z intenzivnostjo plezanja narašča tudi pripovedovalčevo izkustvo sublimnega: sublimno prvič vznikne ob uzrtju gore (najprej skozi daljnogled in nato z lastnimi očmi), kulminira pa v zadnjem poglavju, ki je posvečeno preboju na vrh gore.

*Śłońce nad Tircz Mirem* in proza Piotrowskega nasploh nakazujeta, da je poljska alpinistična literatura druge polovice 20. stoletja dosegla določeno žanrsko stabilnost in celo fosilizacijo diskurza, soočenega z alternativno med iskanjem novih pripovednih form v prid literarnosti

ter naslanjanjem na preverjene in obrabljene pripovedne postopke in načine osmišljanja plezanja. Piotrowskega lahko umestimo v presek med tema potema.

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# **The Mountains that Wrote Them: Slovenians Climbing and Writing about Eight- Thousand-Metre Peaks**

Góry, które ich napisały.  
Słoweńcy wspinający się  
na i piszący o ośmiotysięcznikach

Today, Slovenian Himalayan climbers are ranked among the best in the world. This metaphorical climb to the top began with successful ascents of Makalu in 1975 and Everest in 1979. By 1995, Slovenians scaled all 14 peaks higher than eight thousand metres. So far, 249 Slovenians have taken part in 126 expeditions to eight-thousanders; 82 of them summited an eight-thousander, some more than once, as there were 149 ascents in total. 27 of them (co-)wrote at least one book detailing the expedition; there are 56 such books in total. The article gives a chronology of Slovenian Himalayan expeditions with an overview of the first Slovenian ascents of eight-thousanders. Featured are also a list of expedition members who (co-)wrote books about expeditions to eight-thousanders, a graph showing the frequency of book publications, and a list of Slovenian climbers and their eight-thousanders.

SLOVENIAN MOUNTAINEERING,  
HIMALAYA, MOUNTAINEERING  
LITERATURE, ALEŠ  
KUNAVER, TONE ŠKARJA

Słoweńscy himalaiści są współcześnie uznawani za jednych z najlepszych na świecie. Ta metaforyczna wspinaczka na szczyt rozpoczęła się wraz ze zdobyciem Makalu w roku 1975 oraz Mount Everest w roku 1979. Do roku 1995 słoweńscy wspinacze wspięli się na wszystkie 14 ośmiotysięczniki. Do chwili obecnej, 249 Słoweńców wzięło udział w 126 wyprawach na ośmiotysięczniki: 82 dotarło na szczyt, niektórzy więcej niż jeden raz, tak że ogólna liczba wejść liczy 149. 27 himalaistów napisało co najmniej jedną książkę wyprawową (niektórzy we współautorstwie); w sumie można naliczyć 56 takich książek. Niniejszy artykuł prezentuje chronologię słoweńskich wypraw w Himalaje, podając pierwsze wejścia słoweńskich wspinaczy na ośmiotysięczniki. Zawiera również listę wspinaczy-autorów książek górskich, wykres ukazujący częstotliwość publikacji książkowych, oraz listę słoweńskich wspinaczy wraz ze zdobytymi przez nich szczytami.

ALPINIZM SŁOWEŃSKI, HIMALAJE,  
LITERATURA GÓRSKA, ALEŠ  
KUNAVER, TONE ŠKARJA

**1**

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**INTRODUCTION**

Slovenian high-altitude climbers have been ranked among the best in the world for more than 40 years.<sup>1</sup> Ever since the successful Yugoslav Himalayan expeditions to the south face of Makalu in 1975 and the western ridge of Everest four years later, Slovenian climbers have been recognised internationally as equals to the most successful Himalayan climbers from much larger and wealthier alpinist nations.

Very few sporting activities in Slovenia can boast a richer history than alpinism. This is not surprising given that alpinism has been a powerful connecting element for the Slovenian nation ever since the early twentieth century. Nevertheless, the first wave of conquering the highest peaks of the world passed Slovenians by. In the years following the Second World War, Slovenia, and Yugoslavia as a whole, missed the pioneering period of first ascents in the Himalaya and Karakoram, mainly due to their relative political isolation and lack of resources and experience compared to the most successful countries in the field of high-altitude mountaineering. By the 1960s, however, the Yugoslav government began to support expeditions to mountain ranges outside the country. At first, these were carried out in the former Soviet Union, mainly in the Caucasus and Pamir; a few years later, Hindu Kush, the Himalaya and Karakoram become attainable as well.

Initially, the expeditions were organised in a way which ensured that all six Yugoslav republics had their representatives in expedition teams. Eventually, Slovenians took over the leading role; led by two excellent expedition planners, Aleš Kunaver and Tone Škarja, they soon made up for lost time with several first ascents of some of the most difficult faces on eight-thousanders. In the late 1970s and early

'80s, Slovenian alpinists were among the founders of climbing Himalayan mountains via their most difficult faces, often in a style which had only been practiced in the Alps until then. This was their strategy to compensate for having missed the initial post-war conquest of the summits of eight-thousanders.

So far, Slovenian alpinists have received as many as nine Piolet d'Or awards for their climbs, including a life achievement award for Andrej Štremfelj. They would most likely have won more of these prestigious international awards if these had existed before 1992.

### **SLOVENIAN PATH TO THE HIMALAYA**

Conquering the world's highest mountains was a matter of national prestige at the time and the Himalaya soon became an important goal in Yugoslav alpinist circles, as well as a motive for climbers to work even harder. Climbers and politicians began to talk about an expedition of Slovenian alpinists to the Himalaya. For the first post-war generation of Slovenian mountaineers, Himalayan mountains were a beacon which guided their actions and encouraged them to make increasingly difficult winter ascents and climbs in the Western Alps (see Škarja: 247).

Two unclimbed eight-thousanders became potential destinations, namely Shishapangma and Manaslu. In 1955, the Steering Committee for the Alpinist Expedition to the Himalaya was established by the Alpine Association of Slovenia (see Keršič et al.: 5). Together with the Himalayan Committee, which was founded in the same year by the Alpine Association of Yugoslavia, they drafted a plan for a Yugoslav expedition which would leave for the Himalaya in the autumn of 1956.<sup>2</sup> The

**2** I should mention two post-war Slovenian emigrants to Argentina who attended Argentinian expeditions to eight-thousanders. In 1954, Dinko Bertonec] reached the altitude of 7,600 metres on Dhaulagiri; in 1971, Jure Skvarča withdrew just under 8,000 metres on Everest. Neither expedition was successful.

destination they chose was the eight-thousander Manaslu (see Mikša and Golob: 64).

The plan to visit the Himalaya had fallen through even before the expedition began (see Kunaver 2007: 12). The main reason behind the cancellation of the expedition was the reduced government support, as a rationalised supply for the population was in force due to the difficult economic circumstances of the mid-1950s. The organisers of the expedition also faced various other problems, as they had virtually no experience with such endeavours, to say nothing of the limitations which the political system in Yugoslavia had put on contacts with organisers of other European expeditions. All the preparations and joint trainings in the Western Alps were in vain; some of the best alpinists were so disappointed that they quit climbing altogether (see Mikša and Ajlec: 95).

Despite the major disappointment after the cancellation of the Manaslu expedition, the climbers' desire to visit the Himalaya remained a recurring topic at the general assemblies of alpine clubs. This led to the establishment of a new Himalayan Committee of the Alpine Association of Slovenia on 28 October 1959. This committee realised years of anticipation – in the following year, the time came for a Yugoslav expedition to the Himalaya (see Mikša and Golob: 84).

In 1960, the First Yugoslav Alpinist Himalayan Expedition or the First JAHO (Jugoslovanska alpinistična himalajska odprava) was destined for the Indian peak of Trisul (7,120m). It was the longest Slovenian expedition: as its members travelled there and back by ship, it took no less than five months (see Mikša and Ajlec: 96). Their initial goal was to conquer the second highest mountain of India, Nanda Devi (7,816m), but the Indian government did not give them permission to ascend it. It did, however, allow them to ascend Trisul. They failed to reach the

top of the highest peak of Trisul, but they did summit the neighbouring peaks Trisul II (6,690m) and Trisul III (6,270m). Despite their failure to traverse to the main peak, the expedition was rated a success, especially in terms of gaining climbing and organisational experience in the Himalaya (see Anonymous 1960).

With the ascents to the peaks of all 14 eight-thousanders in 1964, when the last previously unclimbed eight-thousander was scaled, the focus of Himalayan climbers slowly shifted in a new direction, namely from the easiest routes on eight-thousanders to routes across individual high faces of Himalayan mountains. This new direction in Himalayan mountaineering was indicated by the British in 1970, when they ascended the south face of Annapurna. Only two years after this influential exploit, an eight-thousander was tackled in this new way by the Fourth JAHÖ.<sup>3</sup> The team first wanted to settle the score with Kangbachen (7,902m), which the Second JAHÖ had failed to summit. However, the Nepalese closed off the area around the mountain for a few years, so they were forced to find a new destination. They decided on the fifth highest peak in the world, the eight-thousander Makalu, and its unclimbed south face. Due to the extremely difficult exploit, their inexperience, tough weather conditions and problems with high-altitude porters, the expedition was only partly successful, as the climbers failed to reach the top; nevertheless, they were the first to climb the face and the first Slovenians to make it past the magical altitude of 8,000 metres.

### **THE FIRST TIME AT EIGHT-THOUSAND METRES: SUCCESS ON MAKALU**

In 1975, Slovenian alpinists returned to the south face of Makalu in the framework of the Sixth JAHÖ, this time with a bigger and perhaps

**3** Between the First and Fourth JAHÖs, the Second JAHÖ (1965) aimed to achieve the first ascent of Kangbachen. Pavle Dimitrov and Tone Sazonov had to withdraw at the altitude of 7,800 metres. West Kangbachen or Yalung Ri (7,538 m) was climbed, though, as the second highest peak to be summited first by Yugoslavs. The Third JAHÖ (1969) achieved the second-ever ascent of Annapurna II (7,937m) and the third-ever ascent of Annapurna IV (7,540m); that autumn, this was the most successful expedition in the Nepalese Himalaya (see Kunaver 1971).

**4** Aleš Kunaver (1935–1984) is considered the main actor behind the success of Slovenian Himalayan alpinism. He is known for saying that Slovenians had to outrun the train to catch up to the level of climbing in the Himalaya. Kunaver's first visit to the Himalaya was in 1960 as a member of the First JAHO, during which he made the first ascents of Trisul II and Trisul III. From 1968–1984, he led the expedition to Hindu Kush (1968); the Third JAHO, during which he ascended Annapurna IV; the Fourth and the Sixth JAHOs, both to Makalu; the expedition to the south face of Lhotse (1981); and the Croatian–Slovenian expedition to Manaslu in 1984 (see Mikša and Golob: 78).

**5** Together with Kunaver, Tone Škarja (1937–2020) is the main author of the Slovenian Himalayan story. From 1979–2013, he headed the Commission for Expeditions to Foreign Mountain Ranges (Komisija za odprave v tuja gorstva) at the Alpine Association of Slovenia. He attended five Himalayan expeditions as a climber and 13 as the leader. His stints as the leader include the 1979 expedition to Everest, which is still arguably the greatest logistical feat in the history →

better team (see Škarja: 268). The leader was once again Kunaver.<sup>4</sup> The goal was to finish the route across the south face and reach the top of the first Slovenian (and Yugoslav) eight-thousander. On 6 October 1975 (Table 1), Stane Belak and Marjan Manfreda stood on top of an eight-thousander as the first Slovenians (and Yugoslavs) to do so (see Kunaver 2006: 133–46). Manfreda even ascended to the top without the help of supplemental oxygen, which was the world altitude record at the time (see Manfreda 1976: 161). The Yugoslav success in the Himalaya was regarded as the greatest alpinist act of 1975, as it was the most difficult large Himalayan face to be climbed (see Kunaver 2006: 161). Thus, Yugoslav alpinists joined the pioneers of modern Himalayan climbing in a time when the practice of climbing Himalayan mountains via faces had barely begun.

The success on the south face of Makalu along a new route triggered a substantial leap in the mentality of Slovenian alpinists, charting the course of Slovenian alpinism in the following decades. During the next Himalayan expedition in 1977, Andrej Štremfelj and Nejc Zaplotnik (Table 1) made the first ascent along the southwestern ridge of Gasherbrum I, thus scaling the second Slovenian eight-thousander (see Škarja: 268–69). An idea which would have seemed utopian, presumptuous or impossible a few years earlier – namely to summit an eight-thousander via a new route – was realised in the first attempt.

## TO THE TOP OF THE WORLD: EVEREST '79

In 1979, the Seventh JAHO departed for the Himalaya under the leadership of Tone Škarja,<sup>5</sup> the most important architect of Slovenian Himalayan climbing besides Aleš Kunaver; the expedition reached the top of the world along a new, Yugoslav route, representing the climax

of Yugoslav alpinism (see Štremfelj 1992b). The route along the western ridge of Everest was the fourth route to the highest peak in the world and it arguably remains the most difficult one to this day, when there are seventeen routes leading to the summit. Its difficulty comes from its great length, exposure to wind and substantial technical obstacles, especially in the top part of the mountain. Despite numerous attempts over the last forty years, only two expeditions have succeeded in repeating this difficult – and attractive – route.

The expedition lasted just over three months. It took the climbers three weeks to reach the base camp. 750 high-altitude porters carried almost 22 tons of equipment and food to the Khumbu Glacier at the altitude of 5,350 metres (see Štremfelj 2010: 9). The expedition was organised in the classic Himalayan style with a base camp and several high-altitude camps, five in total. On 13 May at 13:51 Nepal Time (Table 1), after a month of climbing, Nejc Zaplotnik and Andrej Štremfelj became the first Slovenians (and Yugoslavs) to reach the roof of the world (see Anonymous 1979). This is how Štremfelj remembered it in 1992: ‘We hugged and patted each other on the back, then Nejc switched on his radio and spoke the words all Slovenian alpinists know well: “Tone, we’re at the top! We’re sitting next to the Chinese pyramid and we don’t know what to do.”’ (Štremfelj 1992a)

→ of Slovenian Himalayan climbing. He also wrote five books about his Himalayan expeditions.

### **ASCENTS OF EIGHT-THOUSANDERS, 1979–2021**

In May 1981, in the framework of the last classically organised major expedition, the Eighth JAHO, the south face of Lhotse was climbed on the Yugoslav route. In the 1970s, this face, 3,300 metres high, was considered a problem for the next millennium (see Matijevc). It took Slovenians two months to climb the face. The climbers did not reach

## 6

Unlike classic expeditions, the alpine style is characterised by a decrease in the use of gear, the absence of fixed ropes and camps pitched in advance, and the refusal of bottled oxygen. Alpinists carry all their gear and food with them. The climbing team is significantly smaller as well. Reinhold Messner and Peter Habeler pioneered the alpine style with their ascent of Gasherbrum I along the north face (see Golob 1997).

the top of the mountain, but the expedition was nevertheless very influential throughout the international mountaineering community.

If the expedition to Lhotse was made up of the best Yugoslav climbers, most of the members of the autumn expedition to the south face of Dhaulagiri lacked real Himalayan experience. One exception was the expedition leader, Belak, who had chosen five young alpinists to accompany him (see Škarja: 270–71). This small expedition, a trendsetter for expeditions to high mountain ranges, tackled the mighty Himalayan face in the alpine style.<sup>6</sup> After pitching nine bivouacs in the rock wall, the team managed to climb the new route in the alpine style up to 7,800 metres, which was the end of technically difficult passages; however, due to exhaustion and strong winds, they did not reach the top. Their descent could not follow the route of the ascent, so they descended on the northeast side. The ascent and descent took as many as 14 days, while the entire expedition lasted 18 days (see Belak). Arguably the most difficult alpine-style climb in the Himalaya at the time, the expedition was an exceptional promotion of climbing Himalayan faces in the alpine style (see Mikša and Golob: 150).

In 1983, a Croatian Himalayan expedition was organised to a new eight-thousander and it was also attended by Slovenians Viki Grošelj and Nejc Zaplotnik. The goal was Manaslu (8,163m) from the southwest side, but the climb ended tragically on 24 April when a serac collapse buried Ante Bučan and Zaplotnik.

This was a great shock for Yugoslav alpinism, which lost its best alpinist in Zaplotnik. The expedition was terminated instantly. In the following year, Croatians Stipe Božić and Edo Retelj and Slovenians Grošelj and Kunaver returned to the mountain; Kunaver also led the expedition. Grošelj and Božić reached the top on 4 May 1984 (Table 1). This was the last expedition led by the legendary Aleš Kunaver: a few

	Date	Peak	Altitude	Climbers
1.	6/10/1975	Makalu	8,463m	Stane Belak, Marjan Manfreda
2.	8/7/1977	Gasherbrum I	8,068m	Andrej Štremfelj, Nejc Zaplotnik
3.	13/5/1979	Everest	8,848m	Andrej Štremfelj, Nejc Zaplotnik
4.	4/5/1984	Manaslu	8,163m	Viki Grošelj
5.	28/7/1986	Broad Peak	8,047m	Bogdan Biščak, Viki Grošelj
6.	4/8/1986	Gasherbrum II	8,035m	Bogdan Biščak, Viki Grošelj, Pavle Kozjek, Andrej Štremfelj
7.	4/12/1987	Dhaulagiri	8,167m	Marjan Kregar, Iztok Tomazin
8.	2/11/1988	Cho Oyu	8,201m	Iztok Tomazin
9.	30/4/1989	Lhotse	8,516m	Viki Grošelj
10.	19/10/1989	Shishapangma	8,027m	Pavle Kozjek, Andrej Štremfelj
11.	31/7/1990	Nanga Parbat	8,126m	Marija Frantar, Jože Rozman
12.	1/5/1991	Kangchenjunga	8,586m	Viki Grošelj
13.	13/6/1993	K2	8,611m	Viki Grošelj, Zvonko Požgaj
14.	29/4/1995	Annapurna	8,091m	Davo Karničar, Drejc Karničar

← **TABLE 1**  
The first Slovenians  
on eight-thousanders

months after returning to his homeland, he had a fatal helicopter accident in the Slovenian mountains.

In the summer of 1986, an expedition to Pakistan achieved a number of feats. First, almost all the expedition members ascended the fifth Slovenian eight-thousander, Broad Peak, in the classic style; among them was Marija Štremfelj, the first Slovenian female alpinist to conquer an eight-thousander (Table 1). Of the 12 alpinists who summited Broad Peak, Bogdan Biščak, Grošelj, Pavle Kozjek and Štremfelj (Table 1) went on to scale Gasherbrum II.

The year 1987 brought success on the seventh Slovenian eight-thousander, when Belak led his fourth expedition to Dhaulagiri. He was joined by Marjan Kregar, Kozjek and Iztok Tomazin. In early December,

Kregar and Tomazin ascended to the top of the seventh Slovenian eight-thousander (see Mikša and Golob: 151). Dhaulagiri became the first and so far the only Slovenian eight-thousander (Table 1) to be conquered in the winter conditions (*ibid.*: 152).

In the following year, the Alpine Association of Slovenia organised an expedition of highly capable alpinists to Cho Oyu. The goal of the expedition was the unclimbed north face of the mountain. On 2 November 1988, Tomazin became the first Slovenian to reach the top of Cho Oyu (Table 1) (see Tomazin 1993).

The spring of 1989 finally brought success on Lhotse, which had been a great desire of Slovenian climbers ever since the expedition of 1981. That year, Grošelj and his usual co-climber, Božić, joined the Macedonian expedition to Everest. Grošelj and Božić also paid for permits to climb Lhotse, which Grošelj successfully ascended on his own (Table 1) after having ascended Everest, thus contributing the ninth peak to the list of Slovenian eight-thousanders (see Škarja: 274–75; Grošelj 1991).

The autumn expedition to the south face of Shishapangma was another milestone, contributing the tenth eight-thousander (Table 1). For the first time, the Slovenian expedition was designed as a set of more or less independent rope teams with separate goals; the shared base camp provided the alpinists with better logistics. The expedition was a great success because of the first ascent over the south pillar, which was climbed by Štremfelj and Kozjek, and because of the new variant of the British Descent Route climbed by Filip Bence and Grošelj (see Mikša and Golob: 157).

In 1990, several alpine clubs joined forces with the Alpine Association of Slovenia to organise an expedition to Nanga Parbat; the main goal was to reach the top as part of the Slovenian project of climbing all

14 eight-thousanders. On 31 July, Marija Frantar and Jože Rozman stood on the summit (Table 1). Marija, called Mariča by her fellow climbers, was the first woman to climb the famous Rupal Face of Nanga Parbat while ascending to the top; with its 4,500 metres, this is the highest face in the world.<sup>7</sup>

However, the next, twelfth Slovenian eight-thousander, the mighty Kangchenjunga, which Slovenians successfully ascended in 1991, proved fatal for Mariča. This expedition had very high goals. Slovenians wanted to conquer the remaining three peaks of Kangchenjunga,<sup>8</sup> which they had not yet climbed. They successfully ascended Kangchenjunga Main, Kangchenjunga Central and Kangchenjunga South (Table 1). Despite its successes, the expedition was considered tragic because Frantar and Rozman were left stranded on the mountain while attempting to ascend to the top (see Štěrbová: 357–58).

In 1993, K2 was scaled by Grošelj and Zvonko Požgaj as the thirteenth Slovenian eight-thousander (Table 1). This expedition is considered tragic as well, as Boštjan Kekec remained on the mountain due to acute high-altitude sickness (see Golob 1999).

That left just one eight-thousander on which no Slovenian had ever stood, namely Annapurna. After several failed attempts, the Alpine Association of Slovenia organised a successful expedition in the spring of 1995. During the first Slovenian ascent of this peak (Table 1), brothers Davo and Drejc Karničar also made the first ski descent from this extremely deadly eight-thousander (see Mikša and Ajlec: 133).

The year 1995 was therefore a landmark year, but it did not mark the end of expeditions. From 1995–2021, Slovenians attended 75 further expeditions to eight-thousanders (the total number of all expeditions is shown in Table 2). So far, 82 Slovenian alpinists have stood on top of eight-thousanders (Table 4); the total number of ascents is 149.

**7** By doing so, Frantar set the Slovenian women's altitude record; however, in the autumn of that year, Marija Štremfelj ascended to the top of Everest with her husband Andrej, thus beating her record. Moreover, the Štremfeljs became the first married couple to summit Everest.

**8** In 1985, Tomo Česen and Borut Bergant scaled the west peak, Yalung Kang.

## **SLOVENIAN HIMALAYAN CLIMBERS AND MOUNTAINEERING LITERATURE**

If we enter a decent Slovenian bookshop, we quickly discover that many books are devoted to mountains. They include fiction; mythological tales; guidebooks for children, families, hikers, ski tourers and alpinists; coffee table books; and so on. If we dwell for a moment on alpinism as a sporting discipline we can say that there are more books about alpinism and alpinism-related exploits than about any other sport. In light of the successes achieved in other sports, the situation could be different, though (see Mikša et al.: 24). If we look back on the Slovenian Himalayan expeditions from the first explorations of the Himalaya in the 1960s onwards, we see that the books about these expeditions are a genuine heritage of the history of Slovenian Himalayan climbing. That is why books about the Himalaya are also of documentary importance.

This type of publications began with a book entitled *Himalaja in človek* (The Himalaya and Man). It was written in 1957 by Igor Levstek and Janko Blaže, two versatile alpinists from the first post-war generation of mountaineers; they wrote a review of mountaineering achievements in the Himalaya based on available written sources from all around the world. In 1962, this was followed by the first Slovenian original book on the Himalaya, *Noči in viharji* (Nights and Storms), which combined the diary entries of three participants in the First JAHO, namely Marjan Keršič, Ciril Debeljak and Ante Mahkota (see Strojín: 251). Today, COBISS, the Slovenian library information system, offers over 160 hits under the keyword *Himalaya*. This includes books, e-books and BA and MA theses in Slovenian and other languages. Based on the chronology of conquering the most iconic peaks, one would

Mountain	All expeditions	Successful expeditions	Slovenian summiters
Cho Oyu	15	13	34
Broad Peak	6	5	18
Everest	16	9	18
Dhaulagiri	10	4	15
Shishapangma	13	5	13
Gasherbrum II	4	3	9
Makalu	9	2	8
Kangchenjunga	5	4	8
Lhotse	5	4	5
Gasherbrum I	6	4	5
Annapurna	11	3	4
K2	11	4	4
Manaslu	7	3	3
Nanga Parbat	8	2	3

← **TABLE 2**  
Slovenian expeditions  
to eight-thousanders

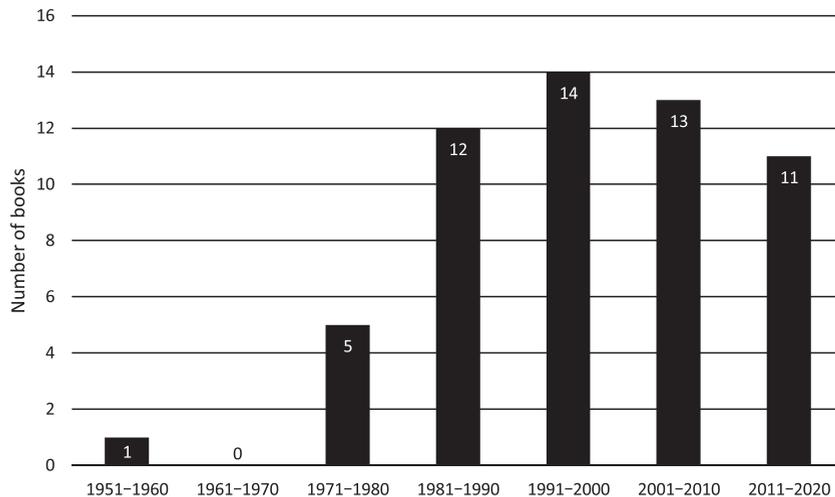
think that most of the books describe the expeditions from the 1970s and '80s, but that is not the case. The majority of books were written in the 1990s and 2000s (Graph 1). Today, there are 56 books on the Slovenian expeditions to eight-thousanders, written by 27 authors (either individually or as co-authors). 19 of them have stood on top of an eight-thousander.

The review of the published books shows that the major Himalayan expeditions until Everest 1979 or Lhotse 1981 are carefully documented; afterwards, the eagerness for such large-scale descriptions of expeditions wore off. The most persistent chronicler to date is Grošelj (Table 3), while the main achievements of the past decade are yet to be discussed in mountaineering books. ♡

**TABLE 3 ▶**

Number of book accounts of expeditions to eight-thousanders written by expedition members

Writer	Number of book accounts
Viki Grošelj	16
Tone Škarja	5
Iztok Tomazin	4
Aleš Kunaver	3
Danilo Cedilnik	2
Dušan Jelinčič	2
Ivan Kotnik	2
Milan Romih	2
Igor Škamperle	2
Jože Andlovic et al.	1
Stane Belak	1
Dinko Bertoncej	1
Bogdan Biščak	1
Tomo Česen	1
Urban Golob	1
Andrej Gradišnik	1
Tomaž Humar	1
Davo Karničar	1
Davo Karničar, Tadej Golob Tadej, Urban Golob	1
Silvo Karo	1
Stane Klemenc	1
Franček Knez	1
Pavle Kozjek	1
Marjan Manfreda	1
Miha Marenče	1
Marija Štremfelj, Andrej Štremfelj	1
Nejc Zaplotnik	1
Jože Zupan	1



◀ **GRAPH 1**  
Books detailing expeditions to eight-thousanders by decades

	Climber	Peaks	Number
1.	Roman Benet	All eight-thousanders	14
2.	Viki Grošelj	Makalu, Manaslu, Broad Peak, Gasherbrum II, Cho Oyu, Lhotse, Everest, Shishapangma, Kangchenjunga, K2	10
3.	Andrej Štremfelj	Gasherbrum I, Everest, Broad Peak, Gasherbrum II, Shishapangma, Kangchenjunga, Cho Oyu, Dhaulagiri	8
4.	Pavle Kozjek	Broad Peak, Gasherbrum II, Shishapangma, Everest, Cho Oyu	5
5.	Iztok Tomazin	Dhaulagiri, Cho Oyu, Shishapangma, Gasherbrum I, Gasherbrum II	5
6.	Franc Pepevnik	Cho Oyu, Everest, Lhotse, Shishapangma	4
7.	Marija Štremfelj	Broad Peak, Everest, Cho Oyu, Dhaulagiri	4
8.	Tomo Česen	Broad Peak, Lhotse, Kangchenjunga	3
9.	Milan Romih	Lhotse, Shishapangma, Cho Oyu	3
10.	Nejc Zaplotnik	Makalu, Gasherbrum I, Everest	3
11.	Tomaž Rotar	Everest, K2, Kangchenjunga	3
12.	Marko Prezelj	Cho Oyu, Kangchenjunga	2
13.	Jože Rozman	Cho Oyu, Nanga Parbat	2

◀ **TABLE 4**  
Slovenians on eight-thousanders

	<b>Climber</b>	<b>Peaks</b>	<b>Number</b>
14.	Davo Karničar	Annapurna, Everest	2
15.	Tomaž Humar	Annapurna, Shishapangma	2
16.	Bogdan Biščak	Broad Peak, Gasherbrum II	2
17.	Stojan Burnik	Cho Oyu, Gasherbrum II	2
18.	Grega Lačen	Dhaulagiri, Everest	2
19.	Tomaž Jakofčič	Dhaulagiri, Everest	2
20.	Tadej Golob	Dhaulagiri, Everest	2
21.	Franc Oderlap	Cho Oyu, Everest	2
22.	Stane Belak	Makalu, Everest	2
23.	Marjan Manfreda	Makalu, Dhaulagiri	2
24.	Matej Flis	Everest, Broad Peak	2
25.	Dušan Jelinčič	Broad Peak, Gasherbrum II	2
26.	Dušan Debelak	Cho Oyu, Shishapangma	2
27.	Borut Bergant	Kangchenjunga	1
28.	Irena Mrak	Gasherbrum II	1
29.	Silvo Karo	Broad Peak	1
30.	Matevž Lenarčič	Broad Peak	1
31.	Janez Dovžan	Makalu	1
32.	Mojmir Štangelj	Broad Peak	1
33.	Marjan Kregar	Dhaulagiri	1
34.	Rado Nadveršnik	Cho Oyu	1
35.	Blaž Jereb	Cho Oyu	1
36.	Roman Robas	Cho Oyu	1
37.	Filip Bence	Shishapangma	1
38.	Marija Frantar	Nanga Parbat	1
39.	Janez Jeglič	Everest	1
40.	Uroš Rupar	Kangchenjunga	1
41.	Aleš Cvahte	Cho Oyu	1
42.	Marjan Gregorčič	Cho Oyu	1
43.	Marjan Urh	Cho Oyu	1
44.	Matija Urh	Cho Oyu	1

	<b>Climber</b>	<b>Peaks</b>	<b>Number</b>
45.	Zvonko Požgaj	K2	1
46.	Matej Kranjc	Shishapangma	1
47.	Drejc Karničar	Annapurna	1
48.	Marko Čar	Gasherbrum I	1
49.	Miha Marenče	Dhaulagiri	1
50.	Peter Mežnar	Dhaulagiri	1
51.	Janko Meglič	Dhaulagiri	1
52.	Dušan Polenik	Dhaulagiri	1
53.	Primož Štular	Cho Oyu	1
54.	Primož Pišek	Cho Oyu	1
55.	Roman Dobrajc	Cho Oyu	1
56.	Matija Klanjšček	Dhaulagiri	1
57.	Miha Habjan	Dhaulagiri	1
58.	Andrej Terčelj	Gasherbrum II	1
59.	Tomi Aurednik	Shishapangma	1
60.	Viktor Mlinar	Everest	1
61.	Marko Lihteneker	Everest	1
62.	Uroš Samec	Cho Oyu	1
63.	Aljaž Tratnik	Cho Oyu	1
64.	Emil Tratnik	Cho Oyu	1
65.	Marjan Kovač	Cho Oyu	1
66.	Cene Berčič	Cho Oyu	1
67.	Janez Levec	Cho Oyu	1
68.	Aleš Koželj	Cho Oyu	1
69.	Damjan Karničnik	Cho Oyu	1
70.	Dušan Rauter	Cho Oyu	1
71.	Simona Pogač	Manaslu	1
72.	Miha Valič	Cho Oyu	1
73.	Tone Perhaj	Cho Oyu	1
74.	Janko Ažman	Makalu	1
75.	Ludvik Golob	Broad Peak	1

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	<b>Climber</b>	<b>Peaks</b>	<b>Number</b>
76.	Andrej Gradišnik	Broad Peak	1
77.	Jurij Gorjanc	Broad Peak	1
78.	Tadej Zorman	Broad Peak	1
79.	Tomaž Žerovnik	Shishapangma	1
80.	Zoran Mislej	Shishapangma	1
81.	Aleš Česen	Broad Peak	1
82.	Luka Lindič	Broad Peak	1

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## Povzetek

Alpinizem je v Sloveniji precej razširjena dejavnost z bogato zgodovino, ki sega v konec 18. stoletja, ko so t. i. štirje srčni možje prvič pristopili na Triglav, najvišjo slovensko goro. Gore so predstavljale Slovencem boljše proti potujčevanju. T. i. boju za gore, v največji meri med Slovenci in Nemci, lahko sledimo vse od konca 19. stoletja naprej. Po 1. svetovni vojni se boj za gore med istimi akterji spremeni v boj za stene. Takrat, v desetletjih pred 2. svetovno vojno, je bil alpinizem pomemben element zamišljanja slovenske nacionalne identitete. Kljub temu pa je v petdesetih letih 20. stoletja Slovence prvo osvajanje najvišjih vrhov na svetu obšlo. Pobude o odhodu v Himalajo so v Sloveniji sicer pojavile že kmalu po 2. svetovni vojni. Leta 1951 je bil ustanovljen inozemski odsek Planiške zveze Slovenije, ki pa s svojimi pripravami ni bil uspešen. Leta 1959 ga je nadomestil himalajski odbor pri zvezi, ki je že naslednje leto organiziral prvo odpravo v Himalajo. Prva jugoslovanska alpinistična himalajska odprava (I. JAHO) je bila namenjena na sedemtisočak Trisul v Indiji. Odprava je bila zelo uspešna, čeprav alpinisti glavnega vrha niso dosegli. Do uspešnega vzpona na osemtisočak Makalu 15 let kasneje so bile izvedene še štiri alpinistične odprave, na katerih so plezalci, vodje odprav in organizatorji pridobivali izkušnje za uspehe v naslednjih desetletjih. Za pristop na vseh 14 osemtisočakov so Slovenci potrebovali 20 let – prvi je bil leta 1975 Makalu, zadnja pa leta 1995 Anapurna. Posebnost vzponov je bila, da so bili pristopi večinoma opravljeni v modernem, alpskem slogu, pogosto po prvenstvenih smereh, brez velike pomoči višinskih nosačev in vmesnih višinskih taborov. Vrhunec je vsekakor nastopil leta 1979 z vzponom na Everest, najvišji vrh sveta, in sicer po prvenstveni smeri, ki še danes velja za najtežjo. O odpravah, vzponih in doživetjih med gorami so udeleženci odprav

napisali kar nekaj knjig. Pregled odprav, pristopov na osemtisočake in piscev, ki so o teh vzponih pisalih, pa prinaša pričujoči članek.

## **Peter Mikša**

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# **Towards a Bi-polar Typology of Slovenian Mountaineering Literature**

W kierunku dwubiegunowej  
typologii literatury  
górskiej autorstwa  
słoweńskich wspinaczy

The article proposes a typology of mountaineering literature written by Slovenian mountaineers. It differentiates between two poles: the heroic and the contemplative, or, in more generic terms, the epic and the poetic. A sketch of the origin of this typology in mountaineering texts themselves is followed by an elaboration of the two constituent types with reference to two exemplary cases, namely Klement Jug and Nejc Zaplotnik. Writing in the early 1920s, Jug emphasised the heroic side of alpinism where both celebration one's own feats and critique of one's colleagues' failures are supposed to serve the nation and humanity. Writing in the early 1980s, Zaplotnik saw in climbing an aim in itself where both accomplishments and failures primarily serve one's own inner journey. The article concludes with the assessment that Zaplotnik's writings have since become more typical than Jug's, not least because of their proximity to a specifically Slovenian version of the *Bildungsroman*.

MOUNTAINEERING LITERATURE,  
SLOVENIAN MOUNTAINEERING,  
SLOVENIAN NOVEL, NEJC  
ZAPLOTNIK, KLEMENT JUG

Niniejszy artykuł stanowi próbę zaproponowania typologii literatury górskiej autorstwa słoweńskich wspinaczy. Teksty te oscylują między dwoma biegunami: literaturą heroiczną i kontemplacyjną, lub też – używając terminów gatunkowych – między epiką a liryką. Omówienie zakorzenienia tej typologii w samych tekstach górskich poprzedza analizę obu typów poprzez odniesienia do dwóch modelowych przykładów, mianowicie Klementa Juga oraz Nejca Zaplotnika. Tworząc na początku lat 20-tych poprzedniego stulecia, Jug kładł nacisk na heroiczny aspekt alpinizmu, w którym zarówno celebrowanie własnych osiągnięć jak i krytyka porażek innych wspinaczy miały na celu służyć narodowi i ludzkości. Piszący we wczesnych latach 80-tych XX w. Zaplotnik widział wspinaczkę jako cel sam w sobie, gdzie zarówno osiągnięcia jak i porażki służyły przede wszystkim wewnętrznemu rozwojowi jednostki. Artykuł konkluduje, że pisarstwo Zaplotnika stało się bardziej typowe niż Juga, również dlatego, że bliższe jest typowo słoweńskiej wersji gatunku *Bildungsroman*.

LITERATURA GÓRSKA, ALPINIZM  
SŁOWEŃSKI, POWIEŚĆ SŁOWEŃSKA,  
NEJC ZAPLOTNIK, KLEMENT JUG

**1**  
This article was written at the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, in the framework of the research project *Mountaineering Literature: Slovenia and Beyond* (J6-1808), which was funded by the Slovenian Research Agency.

**2**  
Miha Potočnik discusses Julius Kugy and Henrik Tuma in order to associate these two types with two typical views of mountaineering as well as with two characteristic themes of mountaineering literature: the experience, on one side, and the athletic achievement, on the other (see Potočnik: 232). Indeed, Tuma, who in many ways was similar to Klement Jug, put a clear emphasis on his own sport-based approach to mountaineering, which he related to nationalism in a quite interesting and original way: 'Since alpinism as a sport has the psychological element of competition, that is, the sense of victory in the human conquest of nature, it often combines and intersects, in an almost natural development, with nationalism.' (Tuma: 59)

When trying to outline mountaineering literature (particularly prose) within the broader field of mountain-related literature it might appear that we are dealing with a relatively homogenous notion.<sup>1</sup> For these are mostly writings that narrate either an individual (usually outstanding) mountaineering expedition or an entire career of an individual (again, usually outstanding or at least noteworthy) mountaineer. This homogeneity, however, is quickly complicated by a great typological and generic diversity. Some works resemble the documentary genre, others read like literary autobiographies, while many take the form of the picaresque novel, the adventure novel or the *Bildungsroman*, or adopt elements of detective fiction, the philosophical novel, the romance, the realist novel or even the epic. Whereas some works of mountaineering literature are clearly characterised by a dominant generic pattern, mountaineering literature as such is a protean phenomenon marked, like most literature, by the syncretism of generic forms.

The literary merit of a given work depends, of course, on the author's literary talent, but the scope of its readership, especially within the mountaineering community, is also determined by the exceptionality and intensity of the narrated feats. This does not seem to hold as much for the genre of the work: the work's generic structure seems to depend mostly on the author's type of personality.

Theorists and historians of mountaineering, but also mountaineers themselves, have been interested in detecting not only the possible sources of motivation for mountaineering but also the various types of mountaineers, depending on the explicit motives for their endeavours or on their understanding of the essence or purpose of mountaineering. The most common result is the simple binary opposition between athletes and romantics (as it is employed, for instance, throughout Ante Mahkota's 1979 book *Sfinga* [The Sphinx]).<sup>2</sup> Henrik

Tuma's book *Pomen in razvoj alpinizma* (The Meaning and Development of Alpinism) and Klement Jug's essay 'O smotru alpinizma' (On the Purpose of Alpinism) discuss two additional motives and hence types of mountaineers: the aesthetic and the religious one. One can encounter other suggestions, including the scientific motive (originally in relation to cartography, later on tied to medicine), but only as auxiliary motives for mountaineering which do not have a central place in the typology of the modern alpinist.<sup>3</sup>

Reading modern Slovenian mountaineering literature, which started to develop rapidly as Slovenian climbers gradually gained prominence in the world of mountaineering, we can detect all the four central types, which appear in several variations and combinations. However, these types do not have equally dominant intertextual proto-patterns or models. It turns out that a condensed bi-polar typology is the most appropriate starting point for a typology of mountaineering literature with regard to its intertextuality. As demonstrated by Mitja Košir, the two basic types of Slovenian mountaineering stem from two formidable and ground-breaking, now legendary and inspiring mountaineering personalities: Klement Jug (the ethicist) and Nejc Zaplotnik (the romantic and aestheticist), both of whom have articulated their experiences and notions of mountaineering (see Košir). This article starts from the hypothesis that their mountaineering writings established two typological foundations, or generic proto-patterns, which the majority of modern Slovenian mountaineering literature references (more or less directly and recognisably).<sup>4</sup> In what follows, I will try to outline the basic features of these two generic templates.

\* \* \*

**3**  
The cartographic motive can be observed in some of Jug's writings. Jug would also try to use his experience of the mountains for new discoveries in the field which we would now call *psychology*. Moreover, Himalayan expeditions have played a significant role in the advance of high-altitude medicine.

**4**  
It would be possible to find other generic lines, including a kind of *autreflexion* starting with Ivan Bučer (his 2008 novel *Koča na robu* [The Hut on the Edge] includes a fictional character whose features are reminiscent of Jug) and leading to the most recent work, Milan Romih's 2019 novel *Skozi trave oblakov* (Through the Leaves of Clouds), whose fictional character seems to have borrowed his main features from Slavko Svetičič. Nevertheless, this line, which only includes a small number of works, is not based on the typology of the author, nor does it have a really prominent or influential proto-text.

The first distinct type of Slovenian mountaineering literature was set down by Jug. He contributed a series of articles about his ascents, whose features became ever more recognisable; at the same time, he suggested some guidelines for this sort of writing in his article 'O smotru alpinizma'. He based them on his understanding of alpinism, which had developed after his first major ascents. In his view, 'striving for victories, for prominence', is the primary motive, the 'core' of mountaineering, and this type of alpinism ('alpinistika', as Jug called it) 'educates and strengthens the character' (Jug: 24). Therein lies the real *purpose* of alpinism, according to Jug: 'it is the testing ground for will, for comradeship; hence, it tests, trains, perfects the strong characters who engage in it' (ibid.). This morally educational goal holds true 'for society at large, too': 'Alpinism is capable of giving us workers with a strong will to overcome every obstacle, including those instigated by our own base instincts, workers with a sense of comradesly loyalty, disciplined workers who will stand their ground in any profession and be of service to the nation and to humanity. We do not need humble and meek people, it is strong people we need!' (Ibid.: 24-25)

This, according to Jug, is 'the higher, ethical and central cultural purpose of alpinism' (ibid.: 25), which is why he believes mountaineering to be more than just a sport although that is predominantly what it is. This educational purpose of mountaineering self-evidently presupposes mountaineering literature (since 'the masses' do not engage in mountaineering themselves they can only come into contact with it and its values through literature). Therefore, in this programmatic essay, Jug develops several guidelines for this type of writing. It ought to educate and improve both young mountaineers and hill-walkers in general:

*This growth concerns the alpinist's abilities, which mountaineers can enhance by describing their experiences to each other, or the development of the ethical and thereby cultural moment in alpinism, that is, the strengthening of character, which true alpinism requires by itself through courage, sacrifice for one's companions, loyalty, renunciation of comforts and other pleasures, and self-willed discipline which in the cultured human being must replace obedience. Vivid accounts of our mountaineers' experiences will be of great importance to the nation; history demonstrates that nations kept strong only as long as they knew sacrifice; but when so-called civilisation softened them and made them dependent on pleasure and individual happiness, they collapsed. (Ibid.: 26)*

These guidelines are in line with Jug's generally ascetic, moral(istic) outlook (for which, see Virk) and with his strict, though perhaps not entirely consistent, ethics, which was torn between egocentrism, on the one hand, and the imperative to act for the nation and humanity, on the other. In mountaineering, Jug found an almost ideal synthesis of his egocentric and social tendencies. Mountaineering is his ideal educational tool, as it corresponds to all his main notions about the right way to live: it strengthens the will, imposes selflessness and (self-)sacrifice, raises people ethically and otherwise above others (elitism), shows them how to overcome fear (of death), teaches them determination, discipline and boldness: 'Let us be bold, because only he who can make sacrifices is great, only to his will does destiny bend! The path to peaks, to victories, leads over precipices and through dangers!' (Ibid.: 73). For Jug, the goal lies not – as it does later for Zaplotnik – in the path itself, but purely and solely in the victory, the record. Competition is the essence of mountaineering. But the record-hunting ego trip also has

a community-building element. The insolent record hunter's egoism has, in the final consequence, a common, socially beneficial effect – this is Jug's ingenious formula for justifying his own egoism as an eminently social act. In his early mountaineering essay, he offers this apologia for record-hunting tenacity as a socially valuable trait:

*True, there is something flawed about tenacity and 'record hunting'. But there is much good in it. We must remember that it is the tenacious record hunters who are the most agile and independent people. Without them, humanity would make little progress. In today's age of wide-spread demagogy, this is exactly the kind of people we need. These are the quiet and unassuming workers who care little if their successes are flaunted – by others. Determined and hard-working men who perform their greatest feats out of sheer tenacity and record hunting are still better than rotten, mediocre fog. It is certain that most difficult tours are not undertaken for the beauty of the mountains and suchlike, which is what alpinism usually uses to defend itself, but for the sake of tenacity and record hunting. In this, the impartial alpinist who loves danger and exertion will surely agree with me. Thus, we should not condemn strenuous alpinism, because that is precisely what gives us strong-willed people. And we need them more than mediocrities, of whom there are always more than enough. Humanity is richly rewarded for the victims that are almost inevitable in this process by the people who do not fall. Braggarts are never record hunters, because their aspiration is quenched by their bragging. But the true tenacious record hunter can only quench his aspiration through action. (Ibid.: 52)*

Great achievements are not possible without a strong will and, for Jug, its cultivation is the basic goal of mountaineering. It is a prerequisite for

the attainment of all other virtues. The will to power, which is neither Nietzschean nor nihilistic – its ultimate goal is a strong subject who will dominate others and subsequently assert traditional cultural values from the position of sovereignty – was increasingly at the forefront of Jug's pedagogical project in mountaineering; accordingly, he was planning a series of articles in the months leading up to his death on the self-education of the will through mountaineering. The chief aim of this project was to create a nation made up of individuals of an indomitable will. In moments of greatest enthusiasm aroused by mountaineering, Jug's utopia calls for a nation of daring mountaineers.

Jug proceeded with the application of these views in his own practice as a mountaineering writer although he was unable to compile a book of mountaineering texts because of his premature death in the North Face of Triglav. However, his collected mountaineering texts<sup>5</sup> were published posthumously, accompanied by a foreword written by his classmate, friend and (on one occasion) fellow climber, Vladimir Bartol. These observations – except for the last ones found in his possession when he died while climbing a new route – had previously been published in *Planinski vestnik*, the Slovenian alpine journal.

As far as these texts are concerned, Jug's main merit is having introduced new elements in the description of mountaineering adventures, which subsequently became fairly standard.<sup>6</sup> He described in detail the overcoming of difficult spots on a given route, without false modesty, sometimes emphasising boastfully his abilities and courageous exposure to mortal dangers; in short, the traditional, relatively benign mountaineering genre became greatly diversified and enriched with sincere insights into the subjective experience of the mountaineer and with action-packed passages aimed at building up suspense. On many occasions, Jug openly and frankly placed

**5** The earliest of these texts remain humorous in style (mostly in the tradition of Jan-  
ez Mencinger and Janko Mlakar), more about hillwalking than mountaineering. Nevertheless, it is already here that Jug works out some of the fundamental ethical values which would later form the core of his mountaineering.

**6** For a critique of the discourse of these writings by Jug, see Virk: 356–78.

the daring mountaineer – himself – high above ordinary earthlings (‘semi-mountaineers’ and ‘philistines’ are two of his favourite pejorative labels), and the feelings of euphoria he felt at his daring achievements set the tone for the postulates of his mountaineering philosophy. He strongly emphasised some of the (traditional) virtues of mountaineering – comradeship, the overcoming of the fear of death, strong will, the resolve to transcend limitations, overcome increasing difficulties, and be the best – and he developed a philosophy of mountaineering from them.

If we attempt to define Jug’s writing typologically, it turns out that it is a distinctly heroic-epic, male-centred type of writing. The hero’s deeds, the heroic ethics and the exceptional individual with his achievements are at the forefront, and it is all permeated by a philosophical-pedagogical discourse. If we were to summarise the characteristics for clarity, this might be the list: the ethical dimension of mountaineering as a means to educate the individual; the significance of climbing achievements for the nation and for humanity; the national mission of mountaineering as such; the overcoming of nature; the climber as a fighter facing the mountain; the values of will, comradeship, courage, tenacity and perseverance; the central role of one’s own outstanding achievements; detailed descriptions of the overcoming of enormous difficulties; detailed descriptions of climbing itself; a yearning for the discovery of an undiscovered world; competitive, athletic and record-breaking aspects of climbing; the cultural significance of mountaineering; mountaineering as hard work; the importance of shared goals; relentless criticism of the weaknesses of others; selective (and mostly rhetorical) self-criticism; the masculinity of mountaineering; a patronising view of women and an underestimation of their mountaineering abilities.

Zaplotnik's mountaineering writing belongs to a different, more poetic type – although the two types, including some elements of the two authors' views on mountaineering, overlap at least partially, mostly due to the theme they share. For instance, they both think that climbing should be done as freely as possible, they are both solitary mountaineers, they both stress comradeship as one of the most important values of mountaineering, they both believe that mountaineering is about transcending boundaries, they are both (mistakenly) convinced that they are invulnerable and that danger in the mountains is mainly subjective. But their respective mountaineering philosophies nevertheless differ quite clearly, and Zaplotnik's literary discourse is different from Jug's. This is often true even when there is apparent similarity, as in the following case:

*I was up against a rock face: either mountains or love! I chose the former even though I didn't understand anything. How can anyone love me and at the same time tear me away from the mountains which have become my life? But it's hard to love me, because even my deepest feelings have never bound me to the desolate world of the everyday. On the contrary! They give my dreams and yearnings more drive. I've always been ready to leave everything behind in order to be able to follow the path which I feel is calling me. I met her in the mountains and then she wanted to tear me away from them. (Zaplotnik: 23)*

The passage is highly reminiscent of Jug's writings both thematically and stylistically, and yet there is a crucial difference: Zaplotnik's entire opus is permeated by an atmosphere of love, Jug's by will and duty.

In contrast to Jug's egocentric voluntarism (and its underpinning in the object theory of his philosophy professor, France Veber, which

7

Although it is perfectly obvious that, unlike Jug, Zaplotnik does not justify his mountaineering as a 'service to the nation and to humanity', but rather as his own personal choice and life goal, he does make the following statement when listing the reasons for his efforts in the Himalaya: 'For personal satisfaction? True, that is a reason, but when you come back from a successful expedition, or when you succeed somewhere in the mountains of Europe, you've got the feeling that you've done something that will make people all over the world say the name of Yugoslavia with respect and admiration.' (Zaplotnik: 158)

seeks to control and subdue animate and inanimate nature, including oneself), Zaplotnik's outlook on life and philosophy is a pantheism akin to Asian spirituality and imbued with empathy for others, with sympathy for, and connectedness to, animate and inanimate nature:

*I became part of a universal order which lived in me and in which I lived. [...] You feel the world, you feel the Earth, the Sun, the wind, everything breathes with you and intoxicates you. The friend who is with you is silent, only their eyes are glowing in the centre of their sunken face, and you know without asking that they're experiencing the same thing. That they're experiencing life itself! Without desire, without thinking, you're experiencing the existence of yourself and all the nature around you. [...] And you're lying among the sparse tufts of yellow, sharp leaves of grass, with an open heart, sipping the eternal paths of the stars, counting falling stars, while the wind is slowly covering you with fine sand which crunches between your teeth and sticks to your forehead. And you're overwhelmed by the eternal restlessness of high mountains, the natural flow of life which we've almost forgotten. That's when you feel that Mother Earth gave birth to you, that you're just part of barren valleys, green pastures, broken glaciers, that you're part of the murmuring river and the black, silver-sprinkled sky. (Ibid.: 25, 43, 118)*

Whereas for Jug the focus is on will, duty and the educational purpose of mountaineering, the key concepts of Zaplotnik's mountaineering discourse are desire, yearning, dreams, freedom and the path. For Jug, transcending boundaries signifies ascending towards the status of a superman and therefore acting for the nation and humanity, but for Zaplotnik it means above all a better knowledge of oneself.<sup>7</sup> Jug

advocates record breaking and the athletic, competitive aspect of climbing. When this attitude temporarily takes hold of Zaplotnik, he sees it as straying; for a short while he becomes ‘an athlete’, ‘a stupid craftsman’, a machine (Zaplotnik: 167), but eventually he finds his way back ‘to himself, to his inner self and, through himself, back to other people’ (ibid.: 168). Climbing ‘is not just a sport for me, for me climbing is life itself’, he writes (ibid.: 37), thus continuing the older tradition of mountaineer aesthetes, such as Josip Ciril Oblak and Gene Malovrh (while after Zaplotnik, this thought was most pronounced by Mat-evž Lenarčič). Jug has a clear goal in sight, but Zaplotnik’s philosophy is different: ‘Whoever seeks the goal will remain empty when they reach it, / but whoever finds the path will always carry the goal within themselves.’ (Ibid.: 26) In contrast to Jug, Zaplotnik does not glorify the climber’s superheroism: ‘there are no heroics’, he writes (ibid.: 32). Their attitudes towards death also differ: in Jug, the fear of death should be overcome following heroic ethics, facing death is linked to courage, and death may be necessary for higher goals (for Jug’s discourse on suicide, see Virk). Zaplotnik adopts a different discourse: the proximity of death increases the intensity of life and the desire for it: ‘To move on the edge between life and death is to live truly.’ (Ibid.: 37) The real significance of walking on the edge is to get closer to life itself. Therefore, a different tone prevails from the one in Jug’s writing, even when formulations seem similar, as in this case: ‘They who live in the midst of dangers which they know and are prepared for do not play with life. All human beings need confirmation that they are not just part of the crowd, that they are not just a number, and if they can only find something which lifts them above the crowd, they will cling to it even if others point at them suggesting that they are being unhealthy or even suicidal.’ (Ibid.: 38)<sup>8</sup>

**8** Janez Gregorin (45) and Albin Torelli (55) were among the first to refute the accusations of suicidal mountaineering, similarly arguing that it is an increase in the intensity of life. Later, of course, there were more such examples (including, e.g., Tomazin 1993a: 81). Lenarčič made the most profound philosophical argument for this at the very beginning of his first book, *Smisel in spoznanje* (Sense and Understanding): see Lenarčič: 9–10.

**9**  
Consequently, it may sometimes seem inconsistent, e.g.: 'no ascent is worth a human life' (Zaplotnik: 145), writes Zaplotnik, while simultaneously claiming that he would sacrifice not only his toes, but life itself to reach the summit of Mount Everest (ibid.: 184).

**10**  
Here is an example of actual, not merely rhetorical, self-criticism, which Jug does not know: 'because I'm a prisoner of the path I follow, because I'm selfish, arrogant and overambitious' (Zaplotnik: 112).

The same is true of the ethics; in Zaplotnik's work, they are not straightforward, clear-cut, systematic or abstract; they are much more worldly and complex than in Jug's.<sup>9</sup> They both emphasise comradeship as the highest value, but this takes on different meanings for them – Jug is an elitist who puts himself above others, which situates his comradeship closer to patronising, while Zaplotnik is a democratic egalitarian ('People, people! Let's come together and we'll see that we're the same all over the world: we want to live! And do it as well as we can!' [ibid.: 140]). In addition, Zaplotnik is self-critically aware<sup>10</sup> and he admits that 'the climber's terrible yearning' (ibid.: 96) is sometimes stronger than comradeship and mountaineers' written or unwritten ethics. Zaplotnik's ethics of comradeship undergo a dialectical development: from the professed abstract assertion that in the mountains comradeship is essential for him (ibid.: 57), through 'the climber's terrible yearning', which is in fact a negation of the thesis (ibid.: 96), to the synthesis deriving from the experience of the antithesis: 'I'm becoming increasingly aware that comradeship is worth much more than success.' (Ibid.: 136)

Jug's approach to mountaineering is ethico-pedagogical, Zaplotnik's is poetico-philosophical. This difference is clearly reflected in their literary discourses. Zaplotnik's writing style is markedly literary. He uses beautiful, poetic, metaphorically rich language, he does not stick to so-called action, but also focuses on observing nature, people, self-observation. In terms of genre, it is not a homogeneous mountaineering report, but rather a syncretic *Bildungsroman*. His *Pot* (The Path) has a complex literary structure. The many flashbacks and flashforwards make the plot irreducible to a simple story, a good many chapters conclude with a meditative poem, and there are many literary references. He does not describe his extraordinary successes and experiences to highlight his own exceptionality or superiority (and

thus, like Jug, set an example), but to demonstrate the beauty, intensity and fullness of life.

The characteristics of Zaplotnik's writing can be summarised in the following points: poetically formulated narrative; literary references; the yearning dimension of mountaineering; connectedness to nature; the significance of mountaineering in achieving a fuller life; the view that you cannot fight nature and, consequently, you cannot defeat it; the absence of a national mission of mountaineering; the values of comradeship and transcendence of limitations; empathy for fellow human beings; detailed descriptions of overcoming difficulties complemented by poetic descriptions and philosophically meditative passages; dislike for the athletic aspect of mountaineering; the value of shared goals; relentless self-criticism and tolerance of others' weaknesses; criticism of civilisation and urban western culture and compassion for the underprivileged.<sup>11</sup>

\* \* \*

Keeping in mind the purpose and totality of Jug's mountaineering writing project, we come to realise that it has not found a suitable successor in Slovenian mountaineering literature – especially not in terms of making detailed accounts of mountaineering feats meaningful through an elaborate philosophy of life and with an emphasised pedagogical, ethical and national purpose. Only individual elements of Jug's writing have been influential. First and foremost in this respect are detailed descriptions of ascents themselves and the emphasis on the superhuman efforts involved. This becomes the dominant form of mountaineering reporting for some mountaineering writers – including, for instance, Mahkota's *Sfinga* and Ivč Kotnik's 1994 book

**11**  
His naive views of contemporary China (ibid.: 190) cannot spoil this impression.

12

Mahkota is very clear: 'I'm not a romantic mountaineer, but rather an athlete who competes for success, for a record.' (Mahkota: 547)

*Dotik neba* (Touching the Sky) – overshadowing all other aspects. In almost all mountaineering books it constitutes one of the most appealing components, the one that most satisfies the target audience's reading appetites. No less influential have been the focus on the athletic and record-breaking aspects of mountaineering (evident already in Tuma and later in Mahkota,<sup>12</sup> Kotnik, Silvo Karo, Iztok Tomazin et al.) and the awareness of the cultural significance of mountaineering (explicitly in Tuma, Albin Torelli and Karo, and implicitly in most mountaineering works). Jug's legacy includes frequent reflections and comments on mountaineering ethics (see, e.g., books by Tomazin, Pavle Kozjek, Karo, Tadej Golob, Matevž Lenarčič and Marija and Andrej Štremfelj), although they are often different in content from Jug's, as well as research motives for mountaineering ('Research is one of the essential reasons for my mountaineering', writes Andrej Štremfelj [Štremfelj and Štremfelj: 31]), condescending attitude towards 'tourists' or non-mountaineers in the mountains (Kotnik, Mahkota), a patronizing attitude towards female mountaineers and women in general (Mahkota), emphasis on will (see Mahkota: 236), egocentrism and uncompromising criticism of others (Mahkota, Tadej Golob) and the national motive (Kotnik et al.). In general, however, Jug's tradition is most strongly maintained by those mountaineering works in which the male-centred, action-oriented aspect of mountaineering prevails.

Zaplotnik's writing seems to have more immediate successors. The key words of Tomazin's mountaineering books, especially his debut, *Korak do sanj* (A Step towards Dreams) are, similarly, dreams, desire and yearning; he also associates mountaineering with overcoming limitations, especially one's own; according to him, achievement is not more important than experience; there is a perceptible appeal of Asian spirituality (even more strongly in his later works) and the same idea

as in Zaplotnik (as opposed to Jug), namely that you cannot defeat the rock face or the mountain (see Tomazin 1989: 95, 119). *Korak do sanj* in particular is full of poetic, stylistically polished descriptions of nature and meditative passages, and, like in Zaplotnik's book, the high points of experience culminate in a poem (Tomazin later published an aesthetically accomplished book of poems, *Iskanje Šambale* [The Search for Shambhala], which includes a preface by the Dalai Lama). Finally, Tomazin shares Zaplotnik's use of literary references and establishes a strong intertextual connection to Zaplotnik's proto-text:

*Cilja ni.  
Je le vse, kar srečaš,  
začutiš in  
spoznaš na poti do cilja.*<sup>13</sup>

Or, in English translation:

*There is no goal.  
There is only what you encounter,  
feel and  
learn on the path to the goal.*

Other remarkably aesthetic works of mountaineering literature also make part of this tradition: Igor Škamperle's equally contemplative and at the same time nostalgic book from 1992, *Sneg na zlati veji* (Snow on the Golden Bough), Milan Romih's poetic first book, the 1992 volume *Takrat me počakaj, sonce* (Wait for me Then, Sun), as well as, partly, the skilfully narrated books by Marija and Andrej Štremfelj (*Objem na vrhu sveta* [An Embrace at the Top of the World, 2020]) and Franček Knez

**13**

Tomazin 1989: 179.  
And here is Zaplotnik:  
'There is no meaning, there is no goal, only the eternal path is in me, the path and the stops along it.'  
(Zaplotnik: 201)

(*Ožarjeni kamen* [The Glowing Stone, 2009]). Just as Zaplotnik concludes several chapters with poems, Knez concludes them with words of wisdom. Zaplotnik's legacy includes a strong display of empathy, especially towards the locals in the foothills of the Himalaya, notably in Marija and Andrej Štremfelj's book as well as in the many books written by Viki Grošelj. In Grošelj's case, even the literary procedure is often the same as in Zaplotnik's: for instance, a chapter portraying a Sherpa uses his name as the title, setting up a literary monument to him. There are parallels with Zaplotnik's *Pot* even in Karo's *Alpinist* (The Alpinist), the book with a well-crafted plot which is closer in type to Jug's athletic, record-hunting tradition, but as a whole it approaches the structure of a *Bildungsroman*. Like Zaplotnik's novel, it begins with an account of the author's growing up on a farm, his working hard and coping with poverty (see Karo: 15–35, 297; see also Garibotti: 7); the ability in later life to overcome extreme mountaineering endeavours is linked to their early lives by both authors.

Zaplotnik – despite the unfortunate passage quoted above – broke with the nationalist discourse in mountaineering, which had been promoted by Jug. He put the search for oneself at the heart of his motives for mountaineering. In modern mountaineering literature, this personal motivation far outweighs the nationalist one, which is still partly preserved in classical, big-group Himalayanism and its accounts; however, it all but disappeared in later writing. Tomazin formulates this different attitude in an exemplary way: 'For me, risk, toiling, suffering and, in the end, success for "our mountaineering", for "our nation" or for anyone else are not essential. I do it mainly for myself and for my friends, for my dreams, yearnings and needs.' (Tomazin 1993b: 159)

The legacy of Zaplotnik's literary discourse may include various other elements, such as frequent literary references (see, e.g., books

by Kozjek, Tomazin or Lenarčič), and finally, perhaps, the pantheistic tones found in Tomazin and, in a particularly interesting, hybrid form, in Davo Karničar. Karničar employs a paraphrase of the ‘Song of Songs’ in the erotic description of his greatest mountaineering achievement, but he also expresses a sort of pantheism in combination with Christian imagery and an egocentrism reminiscent of Jug:

*I'd love to be a stone, perhaps a seemingly immortal tree on a stormy ridge, I'd like to fulfil my task, become a meaningful fragment of the whole. How? By continuing the species, by giving others a chance through self-denial, by calculatingly enduring the pressures of everyday life and glorifying toys for adults? That's not good enough for me, I was born into this world because there is no better world, and the serpent in the Garden of Eden saw the futility of what it was doing.*

*There really is not much chance left for us not to blush at eternal values, immortality. But there is a path! The meaning of the mountain's existence was only fulfilled when a human climbed it, parachuted from its summit, flew over it in a hot-air balloon, when a skier left a trail on its slopes.*

*I've become a meaningful fragment of the emergence, creation, life and disappearance of our planet. I skied from the highest point to the foothill of the magnificent mountain. I lived up to expectations, my existence won't peter out in the banality of imaginary values. Believing that I too had been entrusted with a special task, I sought it out, revealed it, accomplished it. Although my contribution is insignificantly small, it is an integral part of the history of the planet which will one day, somewhere, be talked about[.] (Karničar et al.: 120–21)*

14

See, for instance, the 2008 Slovenian language and literature syllabus for Slovenian grammar schools (Poznanovič Jezeršek et al.: 54).

\* \* \*

The comparison of the impact of the two generic proto-patterns in contemporary Slovenian mountaineering literature shows that while Jug's athletic, record-breaking, action-packed model of writing was ground-breaking, the more aesthetically ambitious mountaineering writers have been more inspired by Zaplotnik, although – like Zaplotnik himself – they have also adopted some elements of Jug's literary discourse. The popularity of Zaplotnik's model, especially among the more literary-minded (as evidenced, among other things, by their more frequent literary references), is not surprising; the authors' literary preferences have undoubtedly been shaped by the Slovenian literary canon. And if we follow the typology of the Slovenian novel as set out by Janko Kos (see Kos 1991a and 1991b), Zaplotnik's *Pot* belongs to the most characteristic type of novel in Slovenian literature: the disillusionment novel of victimhood and search for happiness. The protagonists perceive themselves as victims (with a trace of romanticism: the hero of Zaplotnik's *Pot* feels he is a victim of the modern urban, industrialised, bureaucratic world, alienated from a primal contact with nature) and their lives follow the path of a yearning search for happiness – exactly like Zaplotnik's. This may also have been the reason why *Pot* was included in the school literary canon.<sup>14</sup> Both models of mountaineering literature are equally important for the Slovenian mountaineering community; however, Slovenian literary scholars favour Zaplotnik's line, which is a more literary one and more in line with the traditional typology of the Slovenian novelistic hero. ♡

*Translated by Andrej Zavrl*

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## Povzetek

Članek predlaga tipologijo alpinistične literature, ki jo slovenski alpinisti in med njimi zlasti mednarodno uveljavljeni himalajski plezalci pišejo znotraj širšega polja planinske ali gorniške literature. Gre za spise, ki popisujejo bodisi posamezen (zvečine vrhunski) alpinistični podvig ali pa panoramski pregled posameznikove (nič manj vrhunske ali vsaj nadpovprečne) alpinistične kariere, pri tem pa posegajo po elementih reportaže, literarizirane avtobiografije, potopisnega, pustolovskega, filozofskega ali razvojnega romana ter celo detektivke in junaške epike. V tem žanrskem sinkretizmu članek izlušči dva prevladujoča tipa alpinistične literature: junaškega oziroma epskega in kontemplativnega oziroma poetičnega. Virom te tipologije članek sledi v razprave v okviru same alpinistične literature, kjer sta na primer že Ante Mahkota in Miha Potočnik razlikovala med alpinističnimi športniki in romantiki, Mitja Košir pa je ta tipa alpinista povezal tudi s paradigmatiskima predstavnikoma, tako da mu je športni tip utelešal Klement Jug, romantičnega pa Nejc Zaplotnik. Članek tako ta tipa opredeli s pomočjo literarnovedne analize Jugovih in Zaplotnikovih alpinističnih spisov. V svojih člankih in zapiskih z začetka dvajsetih let 20. stoletja je Jug poudarjal junaško plat alpinizma, kjer naj bi poveličevanje lastnih dosežkov in kritika neuspehov drugih alpinistov pedagoško služila narodu in človeštvu. Zaplotnik pa je v svoji knjigi z začetka osemdesetih let (*Pot*), nasprotno, v alpinizmu videl samozadostno prakso, na cilj nezvedljivo pot, kjer naj bi tako dosežki kakor neuspehi služili predvsem alpinistovi poti k sebi. Za Juga še značilno izpostavljanje etične razsežnosti alpinizma kot sredstva za vzgojo posameznika torej pri Zaplotniku zamenja poudarjanje hrepenenjske razsežnosti alpinizma; premagovanje narave se umakne iskanju stika

z naravo; namesto samopoveličevanja se pojavi samokritika; podrobno opisovanje tehničnih vidikov plezanja pa nadomesti kompleksen siže z vloženimi pesmimi in literarnimi referencami. V sklepu članek ugotavlja, da imata danes Zaplotnikova *Pot* in osebnost večji vpliv med alpinističnimi pisci kakor Jugov diskurz in mit. To utemeljuje z navezavo na tipologijo slovenskega romana, ki jo je razvil Janko Kos, saj se zdi, da Zaplotnikova *Pot* pripada za slovensko literaturo najznačilnejšemu romanesknemu tipu, namreč deziluzijskemu romanu žrtve in srečoiskateljstva. Junak Zaplotnikove *Poti* namreč sebe doživlja kot žrtev sodobnega urbanega, industrializiranega, birokratiziranega, od prvinskega stika z naravo odtujenega sveta, njegovo življenje pa poteka po poti hrepenenjskega iskanja sreče.

## **Tomo Virk**

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**Writing the Death Zone:  
The Slovenian Case**  
Pisanie strefy śmierci.  
Przypadek Słowenii

The article presents the results of a comparative reading of all Slovenian-language books which entail accounts of expeditions to eight-thousand-metre peaks written by members of those expeditions. Each book is read for acknowledgements of mountaineering books, be they within or beyond the corpus, which have helped inspire a given author to take up climbing. The portion of mountaineering books which entail such intertextual references to older representatives of the genre seems surprisingly large and even grows if statements made by the authors in interviews, contributions to their colleagues' books and other kinds of epitexts are added to the corpus. This enables the conclusion that Himalayan climbing, while being the deadliest of sports, is also the most literary sport and, moreover, the sport whose literature inspires many of their readers to join the ranks of Himalayan climbers and, specifically, climbers who write about their climbs.

MOUNTAINEERING LITERATURE,  
SLOVENIAN MOUNTAINEERING,  
SLOVENIAN AUTOBIOGRAPHY, TRAVEL  
WRITING, INTERTEXTUALITY

Niniejszy artykuł przedstawia wyniki analizy porównawczej wszystkich słoweńskich książek zawierających relacje z wypraw na ośmiotysięczniki autorstwa uczestników tychże ekspedycji. W każdym z tych utworów poszukiwane są odnośniki do innych książek górskich – zarówno z jak i spoza korpusu – które zainspirowały autorów do zajęcia się wspinaczką. Liczba książek górskich zawierających takie intertekstualne odnośniki do starszych reprezentantów gatunku jest zaskakująco wysoka, a dodatkowo wzrasta gdy weźmie się pod uwagę opinie prezentowane przez autorów w wywiadach, ich kontrybucje do książek kolegów oraz inne epiteksty. W świetle powyższego zasadna wydaje się konkluzja, że himalaizm, będący najbardziej śmiertelnym sportem, jest jednocześnie sportem najbardziej literackim. Jest także sportem, którego literatura inspirowała wielu czytelników do wejścia w szeregi himalaistów, zwłaszcza tych piszących o swojej wspinaczce.

LITERATURA GÓRSKA, ALPINIZM  
SŁOWEŃSKI, AUTOBIOGRAFIA  
SŁOWEŃSKA, PODRÓŻOPISARSTWO,  
INTERTEKSTUALNOŚĆ

**1**

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**2**

For the draft of the novel and for the final travelogue entry, see Kozinc et al.: 37–55 and Zaplotnik 2009: 225–31, respectively.

**3**

The verses appear at the end of the poem which closes Chapter 1. Both *Pot* and the genre to which it belongs are predominantly composed of prose texts, which may contribute to the fact that even literary scholars tend to cite these two verses as a prose sentence. Of the 56 Slovenian-language books which give accounts of expeditions to eight-thousanders written by the expedition members (see 'Sources' below), there are only two books of poetry, namely Iztok Tomazin's *Iskanje Šambale* (The Search for Shambala) and Jože Zupan's *Tukaj tam onkraj* (Here There Beyond); the introduction to Tomazin's book was written by the Dalai Lama.

**A TEXT, A SUBJECT, A NATION**

In the spring of 1983, Nejc Zaplotnik was at the base camp of Manaslu, preparing to climb his fourth eight-thousander on a new route while typing his first novel and his first featured travelogue.<sup>1</sup> Both the novel, titled *Peter Simsen*, and the travelogue entries for the prestigious Slovenian weekly *Teleks* were meant to offer a glimpse into the life and mind of a man who, together with his expedition partners, had climbed new routes up Makalu, Gasherbrum I and Everest.<sup>2</sup> Both *Peter Simsen* and the *Teleks* travelogue remained unfinished, however: on 24 April, nine days after his thirty-first birthday, Zaplotnik's life was cut short by an ice avalanche which came off Manaslu. What was intended as novelistic and journalistic debuts became the last writings of one of the finest high-altitude mountaineers Yugoslavia and the world had seen.

When Zaplotnik set out to write his first novel and his first featured travelogue, he had already published his first mountaineering book, entitled *Pot* (The Path). *Pot* uses both the epic breadth of a novel and the economical suspense of a travelogue to tell the story of a sickly boy from a small Slovenian village who went on to become a star of the legendary Yugoslav Himalayan expeditions of the late 1970s and early '80s. Makalu South Face, Gasherbrum Southwest Ridge, Everest West Ridge as well as Kilimanjaro, the Alps and El Capitan are revisited by a voice which serves the path rather than the goal:

*Kdor išče cilj, bo ostal prazen, ko ga bo dosegel,  
kdor pa najde pot, bo cilj vedno nosil v sebi,*

reads a key passage of *Pot* (Zaplotnik 1981: 23).<sup>3</sup> A possible English translation could be:

*Whoever pursues a goal will remain empty once they reach it,  
but whoever finds the path will always carry the goal within them.*

Published in nine editions and nine reprints since its publication in 1981, *Pot* has since become the guiding thread of *Alpine Warriors*, Bernadette McDonald's popular history of Slovenian Himalayan climbing. Writing in 2015, McDonald opens the book with a discussion of the common features of Slovenian high-altitude climbers. While, as she notes, Slovenians in general believe that every Slovenian ought to climb Slovenia's highest mountain, Mount Triglav, she finds that most Slovenian climbers are marked by their country's history, culture and nature as well as, oddly enough, Zaplotnik's book. In a strange reversal where a national community is imagined through climbing while a climbing community is constituted by reading, McDonald seems to suggest that Slovenians are expected to climb Mount Triglav while Slovenian climbers are also supposed to read *Pot*:

*Finally, another thread binds Slovenian climbers. It seems an unlikely one: a man and his book. [...] Although both Slovenian and both climbers, it's hard to imagine two individuals less alike than Silvo Karo and Tomaž Humar. Silvo, the taciturn pragmatist, and Tomaž, the romantic dreamer. And yet they were both in awe of this book and its author. [...] Nejc's words honoured the poetry of the mountains and of alpinism. They searched for answers to the great human questions, and their simple wisdom was powerful. (McDonald: 9, 10, 13)*

But *Alpine Warriors* is not the only book about Slovenian mountaineering which is ripe with passages from Zaplotnik's book. Back in 1998, *Pot* resonated throughout *Pot k očetu* (The Path to the Father), a book about

how Zaplotnik's widow Mojca and their sons Nejc, Luka and Jaka visited his grave at Manaslu in the company of Viki Grošelj. Grošelj was the climber who had freed Zaplotnik's body from the grip of ice and the journey was the fulfilment of a promise he had made to his deceased friend as he buried his body. He produced *Pot k očetu* together with the photographer Joco Žnidaršič and the journalist Željko Kozinc. Kozinc, the main author, writes about the legend of Nejc Zaplotnik as follows:

*The legend was created – how typical for us – by a book. It was achieved by Pot, a collection of Nejc's travel writings, a book which has become [...] a bestseller beyond Slovenian bestsellers. All the copies in public libraries are beat up from endless perusing and reading. [...] Pot satisfies the eternal desire within the readers to be able to identify with just the kind of open-hearted, cheerful and brave but also appropriately and timely disillusioned hero that Nejc turned himself into with his gifted writings. (Kozinc et al.: 15)*

#### **INTERTEXTUALITY**

Hence, the influence of Zaplotnik's *Pot* on aspiring mountaineers in Slovenia has been noted by mountaineering writers in Slovenia (Kozinc) and elsewhere (McDonald). But it has also been acknowledged by the mountaineers themselves. In their own mountaineering books, Urban Golob and Andrej Gradišnik list *Pot* among the formative mountaineering books of their youth: 'It must be a bit difficult – though perhaps nevertheless interesting – to have a son who reads *Sfinga*, Hermann Buhl's *Nanga Parbat*, *Stena* and a diary of our expedition to Everest at the age of ten, and who goes on to read *Pot* three times in a row a year or so later', writes Golob (24); 'I used to read Hermann Buhl,

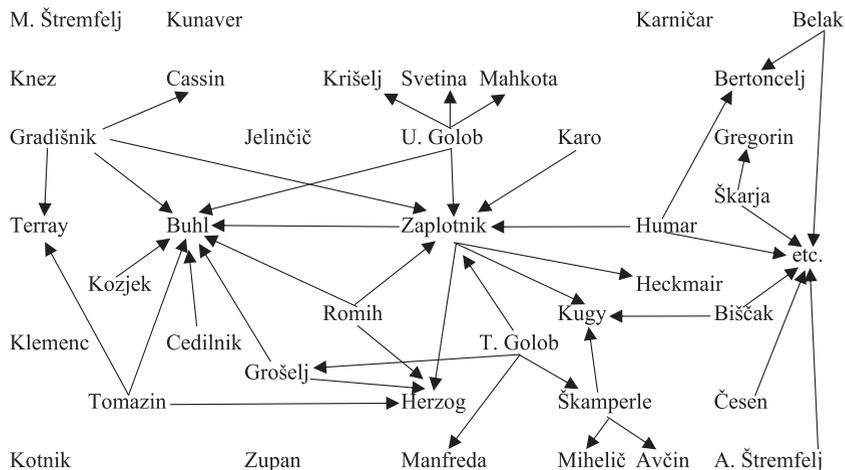
Terray, Cassin and Zaplotnik in my sickbed, using them to conquer walls, to weather storms and inner fears, and to scale mountain peaks in thoroughly suspenseful conditions, long before I would actually return to those heights in person', writes Gradišnik (8).<sup>4</sup> Tadej Golob and Milan Romih say as much about Zaplotnik's *Pot* in their interviews for the Slovenian alpine journal, *Planinski vestnik*: 'If you ask me about mountaineering literature, I grew up on the classics. I used to read books by Viki Grošelj, Marjon's *Ledeno sonce*, Igor Škamperle's *Sneg na zlati veji* – a book which I still consider proper literature – and of course Nejc's *Pot*. Thanks to these books I became an alpinist long before I took up alpinism.' (Golob: 19);<sup>5</sup> 'In elementary and high school I read a lot, and some of the books remain my companions to this day, including Buhl's *Nanga Parbat*, Maurice Herzog's *Annapurna* and Anton Ingolič's *Pretrgana naveza* (Broken Rope Team). Their stories, motives and adventures fed my imagination. I began to feel that I would like to experience something similar as well. And then there was of course Nejc's book, a veritable catapult for anyone interested in these things.' (Romih: 19) Even Marko Prezelj, the recipient of no less than four Piolet d'Or awards, expressed his early admiration of *Pot* in an interview for the *Alpinist* magazine: 'The book *Pot* (The Way) by Slovenian alpinist Nejc Zaplotnik was very influential when I began alpine climbing. At that time I was young and interested in everything connected with mountains. *Pot* was almost like a bible for us young alpinists because Nejc was a good climber, skilled in writing and a sort of rebel. We liked his way of thinking and his way of climbing. Everyone read it.' (Prezelj)

However, less than a generation before his book started to exert its inescapable influence on aspiring mountaineers, Zaplotnik himself was one such mountaineer: 'I used to devour Buhl's *Nanga Parbat*, *Trije zadnji problemi Alp*, Kugy, Herzog's *Annapurna*, and these books poisoned

**4** With *Sfinga*, *Stena* and the Everest expedition diary Golob refers to Ante Mahkota's 1979 mountaineering book *Sfinga* (The Sphinx), Tone Svetina's 1973 novel *Stena* (The Wall) and Marijan Krišelj's 1979 book *YU3DRL-9N1YU*, *Mount Everest Sagar-matha*, respectively. Gradišnik's Terray and Cassin are Lionel Terray and Riccardo Cassin; Terray's 1961 book *Les conquérants de l'inutile* (*Conquistadors of the Useless*) was translated into Slovenian as *Osvajalci nekoristnega sveta* in 1974, while Cassin's 1977 book *Cinquant'anni di alpinismo* (*50 Years of Alpinism*) remains untranslated.

**5** Marjon is the nickname of Marjan Manfreda, the legendary Slovenian mountaineer and author of *Ledeno sonce* (*Sun of Ice*).

**FIG. 1 →**  
The intertextuality of Slovenian autobiographical book accounts of expeditions to eight-thousanders



**6**  
*Trije zadnji problemi Alp* is the title of the Slovenian translation of Anderl Heckmair's 1949 book *Die drei letzten Probleme der Alpen* (The Last Three Problems of the Alps). Julius Kugy is the author of many books, including *Aus dem Leben eines Bergsteigers*, translated into English as *Alpine Pilgrimage* and into Slovenian as *Iz mojega življenja v gorah*.

me completely. I was transported into the bodies of the heroes who had risked their lives to conquer vertical mountain faces and the highest peaks in the world. [...] I wondered what I should do about it, and the path led me to the alpine club.' (Zaplotnik 1981: 13)<sup>6</sup>

However, the otherwise exceptional Zaplotnik is no exception when it comes to the literary origins of climbing. Of the 27 Slovenian climbers who have detailed their expeditions to eight-thousanders in books, as many as 17 mention other mountaineering books as a key source of their deadly obsession, as illustrated by the network in Figure 1.

As we have seen, some mountaineering writers (including Tadej Golob and Romih) pay homage to their predecessors in interviews or are cited to that effect in third-person accounts (like Humar and Karo). Most of them, however, use the pages of their own mountaineering books to reminisce about their early reading habits. We have already seen why Zaplotnik can be represented in the above network

by a node with edges which connect his name to the nodes named after Hermann Buhl, Anderl Heckmair, Maurice Herzog and Julius Kugy; and, in turn, we are able to read the edges leading to Zaplotnik from the nodes representing Tadej and Urban Golob, Gradišnik, Humar, Karo and Romih respectively. But we have also seen that, for instance, Romih acknowledges Zaplotnik's *Pot* alongside Buhl's *Nanga Parbat* (and a book by Ingolič which, however, was not written by a mountaineer) and that *Nanga Parbat* is mentioned also by Urban Golob (alongside books by Marijan Krišelj, Ante Mahkota and Tone Svetina) and Gradišnik (alongside books by Riccardo Cassin and Lionel Terray).

Indeed, *Nanga Parbat*, the Slovenian translation of Buhl's 1954 book *Achttausend drüber und drunter*, appears in seven out of 16 Himalaya-themed mountaineering books by Grošelj as well (see Grošelj 1987b: 39; 1996: 9; 2009: 258; 2010: 9; 2013: 93, 98, 181; 2015: 74, 160; 2017: 106–107), while also being acknowledged in Iztok Tomazin's book account of his North American climbs (see Tomazin 1989: 12–13), in Pavle Kozjek's preface to a book by Tine Mihelič (see Kozjek 2005: 7) and in Krišelj's afterword to Danilo Cedilnik's first mountaineering book (see Krišelj: 114). Kozjek offers perhaps the most characteristic homage to Buhl's book when he writes:

*Many years ago, when I was still trying out my first climbing holds, I came across Hermann Buhl's Nanga Parbat. The title didn't tell me much, but once I started to read it everything became clear to me. I was transported into his climbing world, a world presented with such power, excitement and conviction that I simply was not able to fight it. I read the book in one sitting, with a humble wish that one day, 'when I grow up', I too would be able to experience some of what I had read in the book.*

These kinds of passages about Buhl's book have allowed Grošelj (2015: 74) to offer the following assessment: 'The book is a bible of world mountaineering. It was a revelation for me as well as for numerous young climbers all around the world. Hermann Buhl's impact on world mountaineering is comparable only to Reinhold Messner's.' And as if to echo Prezelj's above statement about *Pot* being a kind of bible of Slovenian mountaineers, Grošelj adds: 'In the Slovenian context one can compare Buhl to Nejc Zaplotnik.'

In Grošelj's case, there is a second bible, as it were, namely Herzog's *Annapurna*:

*One of the first mountaineering books I have read has to be Herzog's Annapurna. It was my favourite one next to Buhl's Nanga Parbat. [...] My respect for the book grew each time I read it, as did my image of the dramatic days spent on the mountain, the heroic feats, the extraordinary comradery and courage, the great victory, and the price with which it came.*

*Later in life I often experienced similar things myself, and I read many other books about the Himalaya and even wrote a couple of them. But Herzog's Annapurna remained for me one of the classics, a book which does not fall into obscurity over the years but, on the contrary, gains in value. (Grošelj 1996: 9)*

As we have seen, Romih and Zaplotnik too list Herzog's book next to Buhl's. The same holds for Tomazin, whose list in the above-mentioned book also includes the Terray book which is also championed by Gradišnik.

Buhl, Terray and Zaplotnik therefore constitute the three nodes with the most edges. To them, one could add a node which represents the genre as such: dubbed ‘etc.’ in Figure 1, this node stands for general acknowledgements of mountaineering literature as they are found in individual books, interviews and third-person accounts. These include the two books in the corpus which, due to their lush colour images, come closest to the genre of coffee table book, namely Tomo Česen’s *Sam* (Alone) and Tomaž Humar’s *Ni nemogočih poti* (There Are No Impossible Paths); they both pay homage to the genre of mountaineering literature within the first two paragraphs (which, due to the many images, are to be found on page 18 in both cases [see Česen: 18; Humar: 18]). Humar is especially clear on the subject: ‘I used to bury my head into every mountaineering book I could find. In the afternoons, I used to admire mountains from afar. Slowly, I would come closer.’ Humar is also one of those authors who single out individual predecessors while also acknowledging the influence of the genre as a whole. Like Bogdan Biščak and Tone Škarja, who reference Kugy (see Biščak: 20) and Janez Gregorin (see Škarja 1975: 7) respectively as well as their common genre (see Biščak: 79; Škarja 2011: 10–12), Humar presents himself – and his mentor, Stane Belak (nickname Šrauf [Screw]) – as students not only of mountaineering books in general but also of one such book in particular, namely Dinko Bertoncej’s 1956 volume *Dhaulagiri*: ‘Bertoncej, Šrauf and I are connected by a book. Šrauf used to get up in the morning and go to sleep at night with Bertoncej’s book in his hand’, he says in a documentary directed by his colleague Stipe Božić (see Božić).

But Belak too references both Bertoncej’s book and the genre as a whole. He does not name Bertoncej, but he has his book in mind when he writes the following:

## 7

See also expedition leader Tone Škarja's citation of a note which Belak made after one of his successful ascents in the Himalaya: Šrauf's entry: "This is how I imagined an ascent of a Himalayan peak in my early childhood when I read books about the Himalaya. [...] Words fail me!" (Škarja 2008: 71)

*Ever since I first read about the Argentinian expedition to Dhaulagiri, which was also my first source of information about the Himalaya, the 'Dhaulagiri' story has come with the aftertaste of something unattainable. The Argentinians failed to reach the summit and they 'paid' for their attempt in the north face with the life of their expedition leader, Ibañez. The story and the mountain found a place in my heart, but I had no idea that one day I myself would dare to approach this capricious (capricious even for Himalayan standards) yet wonderful mountain. (Belak: 123)*

Conversely, when Belak mentions his debt to mountaineering literature as a whole, he starts by naming a few names: 'Look, there is the South Col, the place where Hillary and Tenzing began their victorious ascent. How far back this is now! Back then, I used to read news and then books about the Himalaya, holding my breath like any child who thinks he is reading about big things. Today, I am standing on the top of an eight-thousander myself!' (Belak: 109)<sup>7</sup>

And it is again Grošelj who provides the best summary: 'Bertoncelj's *Dhaulagiri*, published in 1956 in Argentina, in Slovenian, served as the main anchor and guidance for Belak as he planned his expeditions to the White Mountain. His 1981 expedition was well ahead of its time, and among Belak's students and friends Humar was the one whose solo ascent seventeen years later made Belak's dream and vision a reality.' (Grošelj: 2013: 125)

So, in human terms, 17 out of 27 climbers list other climbers' books as a formative influence on their decision to take up climbing. In terms of books (listed in 'Sources' below), 17 out of 56 books feature such intertextual references.

Finally, beyond the network of authors of Slovenian-language book accounts of expeditions to eight-thousanders, two out of four authors

acknowledged by Zaplotnik revisit their predecessors as well. The first one is Kugy, who opens his 1925 book *Aus dem Leben eines Bergsteigers* (translated as *Alpine Pilgrimage*) with an homage to his father's tales of mountain life but also to 'an entrancing book' about the Alps which he had received for Christmas as a child (Kugy 1934: 1).<sup>8</sup> The second one is Buhl, who reminisces about the first climbing adventure he undertook with his friend after he took his stepmother's washing line from the balcony, as proper ropes were too expensive for 'small boys with big ideas in their noddles': 'It did not occur to us that we were the least bit ridiculous; we simply saw ourselves as daring heroes of the mountains, like in the climbing books or in such songs as "With a rope around my breast..."' (Buhl: 13) And here is how Buhl remembers himself as a seventeen-year-old boy: 'My constant companions in the evenings were books, periodicals, accounts of climbs, pictures of mountains in foreign parts, stirring my imagination wildly. My thoughts went winging to those distant peaks; among them I enjoyed the most thrilling adventures.' (Ibid.: 43)

In short, the intertextual network far exceeds Figure 1 and its Slovenian corpus, as Buhl's literary influence alone is acknowledged even by such mountaineering superstars as Reinhold Messner, who writes: 'When I was a young lad, no other character from the world of mountaineering fascinated me quite as much as Hermann Buhl. I knew of his ideas and his name even before I read about him.' (Messner 2000: 11; for the original formulation from 1984, see Messner 1984: 7)

### INTERSUBJECTIVITY

So, on one side, mountaineering claims lives and gives autobiographies, and on the other side these autobiographies give life themselves.

<sup>8</sup> Kugy no longer remembers the book title as he writes his own book half a century later, but he subsequently identifies it as *Entdeckungsreisen in der Heimat, I, Eine Alpenreise* (Discoveries in the Homeland. Vol I: An Alpine Voyage) by Hermann Wagner (see Kugy 1925: 311).

9  
Grošelj was one of Messner's consultants for his book on the most iconic walls in the history of mountaineering (see Messner: 2001).

Writing is here the medium of death, on one side, and the medium of new life, on the other.

On one side, death is the mediator between the living. It mediates between climbers and the widows of their climbing partners whenever these survivors enter into a kind of modern version of levirate marriage where, in its original version, the brother of a deceased man is supposed to marry the latter's widow. This can be said, for example, of the marriage of Edmund Hillary and June, the widow of his climbing partner Peter Mulgrew; Conrad Anker and Jennifer, the widow of his partner Alex Lowe; Tomaž Jamnik and Mojca, the widow of his partner Nejc Zaplotnik; and Tomaž Humar and Sergeja, the girlfriend of his deceased climbing partner Danilo Golob. But even more often than between climbers and the widows of their climbing partners death mediates between the surviving climbers themselves. In this sense, Zaplotnik acted as a kind of Jamesonian vanishing mediator not only between Jamnik and Mojca Zaplotnik but also between Messner and Grošelj: when Zaplotnik died in 1983, Messner took care to pay his respects to Grošelj already in Kathmandu, thus meeting one of his future writing partners.<sup>9</sup>

On the other side, death is the mediator between the living and the dead. As noted above, many of the best climbers have taken up climbing under the influence of books written by climbers who wrote about their death and who sometimes were dead by the time their book was published. Needless to say, no future mountain climber wants to become a dead climber; instead, what he or she usually wants is to become a climber worthy of the legacy of a dead climber, in other words, worthy of the membership in the community of climbers. 'I sense an affinity with him as with few other climbers', writes Messner of Buhl (2000: 12), 'not as a kindred spirit, but rather because of his willingness to commit

himself completely.' As such, a future climber tends to be awakened by a book about a climber who is not necessarily the kind of climber he or she wants to become but rather the kind of climber in whose name he or she wants to become a climber.

This difference between the other with whom I identify and the other in whose name I identify with someone or something is, in Freudian terms, the difference between the ideal ego and the ego-ideal, the difference between imaginary and symbolic identification, that is, in Lacanian graphemes, between  $i(o)$  and  $I(O)$ :

*[I]maginary identification is identification with the image in which we appear likeable to ourselves, with the image representing 'what we would like to be', and symbolic identification, identification with the very place from where we are being observed, from where we look at ourselves so that we appear to ourselves likeable, worthy of love. [...] The fact that should not be overlooked in this distinction is that  $i(o)$  is always already subordinated to  $I(O)$ : it is the symbolic identification (the point from which we are observed) which dominates and determines the image, the imaginary form in which we appear to ourselves likeable. (Žižek: 105–108)*

A mountain climber is therefore formed by a book about the ego-ideal: a book about a climber in whose name the reader in question wishes to become a climber. Mountaineering books talk about the reader-ship's ego-ideal rather than ideal ego; the ideal ego in turn is narrated in the novel, the genre which, according to Benedict Anderson, serves together with the newspaper as one of the main mediums in which a national community imagines itself (see Anderson: 9–36). As such, mountaineering literature is the medium in which a community

is imagined which is national only potentially; its potential imaginary identification with a national imagined community is overdetermined by its symbolic identification with a climbing imagined community. A member of a national imagined community needs imagination because the community is simply too large to allow physical encounters with all its members. To some degree, this also holds for a climbing imagined community, 'a virtual community of like-minded individuals' constructed in no small part by mountaineering literature, as Alan McNee writes (64); but beyond numbers, the reason that members of a climbing community can never be fully encountered is that they have the habit of being lost to mountains. While it took, for instance, Bernadette McDonald (2013: 10) one visit to the Katowice Alpine Club back in 1994 to meet '[m]any of the surviving great Polish Himalayan climbers [...]': Zawada, Wielicki, Hajzer, Lwow, Majer, Pawlovski, [...] there was also a palpable sadness in the room' – not because the room was too small for the other members of the Polish golden generation but because these members were already dead.

### **INTERNATIONALITY**

Hence, instead of distant compatriots, one should imagine ghosts; and when it comes to what one can see rather than just imagine, instead of more or less tolerated minorities, one sees invited guests. Some of the most legendary national Himalayan expeditions – and, as a consequence, some of the biggest bestsellers written by Himalayan climbers – have their international members to thank for their place in climbing history. The British conquest of Mount Everest in 1953 was in fact executed by an Indian Nepalese and a New Zealander, namely Tenzing Norgay and Edmund Hillary. Seventeen years after the conquest

of Everest, a German expedition to Nanga Parbat, the so-called German mountain of destiny, ended with the tragic traverse by South Tyrolian Italians Günther and Reinhold Messner. *Alpine Warriors*, Bernadette McDonald's book about Slovenian Himalayan climbers, boasts on its cover a group photo of two Slovenians and two Croatians, with one of the Croatians, Stipe Božić, being a regular member of Slovenian Himalayan expeditions ever since the so-called Slovenian route on Everest in 1979 and up to the solo climb of Dhaulagiri South Face which was done in 1999 by Tomaž Humar (the protagonist of McDonald's other book about Slovenian Himalayan climbers [see McDonald 2008]). Still in Slovenia, Steve House, a contemporary of Humar from the United States, took up climbing as an exchange student in the northernmost republic of Yugoslavia and went on to climb some of his, and his generation's, greatest climbs with Marko Prezelj, a contemporary of Humar from Humar's hometown; incidentally, Prezelj received his latest Piolet d'Or for a climb he made together with an American (Hayden Kennedy), a Frenchman (Manu Pellissier) and a Slovenian (Urban Novak). And if Slovenians introduced House to the Himalaya, they hosted some of the last Himalayan climbs of Carlos Carsolio, the Mexican Himalayan legend who, like Messner, contributed a preface to the first edition of Humar's book and a postface to the second, posthumous one. As for Carsolio's early big climbs, they were hosted by the great Polish expeditions of the 1980s. At the same time, the proverbial isolationism of real-socialist Poland was regularly breached from the opposite side as well, as these expeditions rarely included Wanda Rutkiewicz, who tended to turn to international expeditions in her attempt to achieve in the female category what her compatriot Jerzy Kukuczka did not really have the resources to accomplish in his unofficial race with Messner for the status of the first person to summit all 14 eight-thousanders.

But if one of the two men who were the first to set foot on Everest was an invited guest, the other one was a hired hand: Tenzing joined the British expedition as a sirdar, or organiser of porters. Moreover, Tenzing is just the most famous of the numerous Sherpas whose contribution to Himalayan expeditions as high-altitude guides and porters is such that, as Amrita Dhar writes (39), ‘few of us know the extent of the climbing community’s century-long debt to the Sherpas’. This is the dark side, if not the truth, of the internationalism of Himalayan mountaineering.

Returning to the ideal ego and ego-ideal, in the difference between mimicking the hero of a national novel and acting in the name of the hero of a climber’s autobiography might lie the explanation for the strange fact that mountaineering literature is as popular among general readers as it is under-researched in academia. For the kind of literature which, despite all the post- and transnational turns, still gets the most attention in mainstream academia is a far cry from any literature that inspires its readers into acts worthy of ‘conquistadors of the useless’ or ‘life at the limit’ (to cite the titles of books by Terray [1963] and Messner [2014]). While neither mountaineering nor literature can be denied their nation-building achievements, or crimes – depending on which side of the post- or transnational turn we find ourselves on – their amalgam, mountaineering literature, still seems to be too Socratic, too much invested in corrupting youth, to be accepted into the literary canons of nations; too Socratic – and not aesthetic enough, not elevated enough to the level of aestheticism, where pre-national vernaculars can be overridden by and merged into a national language. To keep to the Slovenian case, this is the kind of aestheticism that Rastko Močnik (7–9, 51, 219–26) traces in France Prešeren’s 1847 book *Poezije* (Poems), whose Romantic verses could not be farther from the documentary prose of Zaplotnik’s *Pot*.

But if we return to the level of the text, we must admit that the author is structurally absent both from a mountaineering text and from a canonical literary text. However, only in the former case is this absence thematised as the hero's potential or even actual death, a death due to which the readers cannot act according to the hero's deeds but only in the hero's name. This is quite different from a canonical literary text, where the author is absent simply in the sense that his or her text is irreducible to his or her biography and as such worthy of canonisation in the first place; a canonised literary text is irreducible to its author's biography insofar as it is precisely an aesthetic text. But forget the author's biography while reading a book like *Pot*, and you will forget the book itself. In this kind of book, mountaineering is not just a topic, a theme as susceptible to aesthetic transformation as any other theme the author happens to select: to an author like Zaplotnik, mountaineering is the very praxis that informs his narrative; it is the narrative's end rather than means. As such, the author of a mountaineering text is absent not only from the world of his or her living readers but, paradoxically, also from the canon itself. This paradox is bound to persist as long as it is not explained, which is something which literary studies can be called to do simply as a theoretical practice of explaining paradoxes. And as soon as literary studies does respond to this calling it will become capable of undoing a certain insufficiency of its own, namely the already mentioned academic anonymity of an extremely popular literary genre.

So, just as canonical literature breeds not only new canonical literature but also new members of a nation, mountaineering books engender not only new mountaineering books but also new mountaineers, that is, not only new authors but also new heroes. These heroes, however, far from belonging in the hall of national heroes, are

## 10

See Roeder 2020 for Roeder's enlightening article on the paradoxical co-existence of nationalism and internationalism at work in the establishment of the Union internationale des associations d'alpinisme in 1932, known today as the International Climbing and Mountaineering Federation.

the heroes of the people and as such potential international heroes; the climbing community is a community of the people resembling less a nation than a new International. After all, the very birth of the sport of mountaineering demanded that borders be crossed; to cite the incipit of a blog post by Carolin Roeder (2014): 'To climb is to travel. Even the inventors of the sport of mountaineering had to leave their flat British islands to be able to let themselves go in the heights of Swiss Alps.'<sup>10</sup> And beyond the Island, if not beyond the continent, the idea of 'a European rope' emerged, as Heinrich Harrer writes in *The White Spider*, immediately after the Second World War:

*It is at this point that I should like to remember a man who first conceived the notion of 'A European Rope' – Guido Tonella, the Italian climber and journalist, who lives in Switzerland. In 1946, at a time when nobody was thinking of reconciliation, when the world was still quivering with hate and bitterness against the war and those who were responsible for its origin, he uttered the following message, loud and clear: 'Mountaineering transcends all everyday matters. It transcends all national frontiers. Mountaineers are a band of brothers. They are all one party on one rope.'* (Harrer: 162)

Indeed, if the readers of Prešeren's Romantic *Poezije* make for good Slovenians, the readers of Zaplotnik's *Path* make for good climbers. ♡

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## Povzetek

Članek predstavlja ugotovitve primerjalne analize vseh slovenskih knjig, ki vsebujejo opise odprav na osemtisočake izpod peres članov in članic teh odprav. Analiza teh knjig se je osredotočala na omembe drugih alpinističnih knjig (bodisi iz ali pa onstran tega korpusa), ki so avtorja ali avtorico določene knjige navdihnile, da sta se lotila alpinizma. Delež alpinističnih knjig, v katerih lahko najdemo tovrstne intertekstualne reference na starejše predstavnice žanra, je presenetljivo visok in se celo poveča, če korpusu dodamo primerljive izjave, ki so jih avtorji podali v intervjujih, v dokumentarnih filmih, v spremnih besedilih h knjigam njihovih soplezalcev in v drugih vrstah epitekstov. Med 56 knjigami, ki tvorijo korpus, namreč tovrstne medbesedilne sklice vsebuje 17 knjig oziroma, izraženo z gledišča avtorstva, med 27 alpinisti, ki svoje izkušnje z osemtisočaki popišejo v knjigah, jih 17 omenja knjige drugih alpinistov kot pomemben dejavnik pri odločitvi za življenjsko pot alpinista (edina avtorica v korpusu tovrstne izjave ne poda). Od tod se ponuja sklep, da je himalajizem ne samo šport, ki bržkone zahteva več življenj kakor vsi ostali športi skupaj, temveč tudi šport, ki nam nemara da več avtobiografij kakor kateri koli drug šport, pri čemer prav v teh avtobiografijah del bralstva najde spodbudo za alpinizem in celo za pisanje alpinističnih avtobiografij.

Se pravi, knjige o alpinizmu porajajo ne le nove knjige o alpinizmu, pač pa tudi nove alpiniste; avtorji alpinističnih knjig porajajo ne le nove avtorje, temveč tudi nove junake. Kolikor pa bralec in bralka nočeta umreti za alpinizem, temveč želita postati vredna dediščine ponesrečenih alpinistov in alpinistk, ju pogosto formira knjiga o alpinistu, ki ni alpinist, kakršen bi rada sama postala, pač pa alpinist, v imenu katerega bi rada postala alpinista. Od tod navsezadnje protislovje,

da je alpinistična literatura med najbolj brani in hkrati najmanj raziskanimi žanri. Raziskovanja je namreč še zmerom deležna predvsem t. i. narodotvorna književnost, ki pa je seveda vse kaj drugega kakor literatura, ki bralstvo navdihuje k dejanjem, vrednim osvajalcev nekoristnega sveta, kakor je alpiniste označil eden najbolj branih med njimi, namreč Lionel Terray. Zato bralci Prešernovih *Poezij* postanejo dobri Slovenci, bralci Zaplotnikove *Poti* pa dobri plezalci.

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# **Vertical Trials: Three Narrative Texts of Slovenian Mountaineering Literature**

Doświadczenie pionowe.

Trzy teksty narracyjne  
słoweńskiej literatury górskiej

The present article looks at narrative mountaineering literature as a hybrid genre that addresses mountain climbing, expeditions to mountain peaks and high-altitude skiing as demanding existential trials and offering liminal experiences. In texts written by climbers of Himalayan peaks in particular, hybridity is mostly formed by the interweaving, confrontation and adaptation of such genres as travel writing, life writing and guide books, as well as by the adoption of elements of narrative genres belonging to canonical literature. In terms of case studies, the article focuses on three Slovenian-language books with a marked aesthetic tendency: Dušan Jelinčič's *Zvezdne noči* (Starry Nights, 1990), Igor Škamperle's *Sneg na zlati veji* (The Snow on the Golden Bough, 1992) and Bogdan Biščak's *Igra in biseri* (The Game and the Pearls, 2018). Of particular interest are the aesthetic singularity of these three texts as well as the features they share with narrative mountaineering literature in general.

MOUNTAINEERING LITERATURE,  
TRAVEL WRITING, DUŠAN JELINČIČ,  
IGOR ŠKAMPERLE, BOGDAN BIŠČAK

Niniejszy artykuł poświęcony jest narracyjnej literaturze górskiej jako gatunkowi hybrydowemu dotyczącemu wspinaczki górskiej, wypraw wysokogórskich oraz narciarstwa wysokogórskiego przedstawionych jako wymagające próby egzystencjalne oraz doświadczenia graniczne. Hybrydyzacja owa jest widoczna zwłaszcza w tekstach autorstwa himalaistów w postaci przeplatania się, konfrontacji i adaptacji takich gatunków jak podróżopisarstwo, życiopisanie, czy poradnik, jak również poprzez wprowadzenie elementów kanonicznych gatunków narracyjnych. Artykuł analizuje jako case studies trzy słoweńskie książki o charakterystycznej estetyce: *Zvezdne noči* Dušana Jelinčič'a (Gwieździste noce, 1990), *Sneg na zlati veji* Igora Škamperle'a (Śnieg na złotej gałęzi, 1992) oraz *Igra in biseri* Bogdana Biščaka (Gra i perły, 2018). Szczególnie interesujące wydają się estetyczna oryginalność tych tekstów jak również ich cechy wspólne z ogólnie pojmowaną narracyjną literaturą górską.

LITERATURA GÓRSKA,  
PODRÓŻOPISARSTWO, DUŠAN JELINČIČ,  
IGOR ŠKAMPERLE, BOGDAN BIŠČAK

**1**

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**INTRODUCTION**

Composed of writings on mountain climbing, mountain expeditions and high-altitude skiing, mountaineering literature can be roughly delimited as a subgenre in the wider field of mountain literature.<sup>1</sup> Mountain literature in print media includes writings on hiking on marked and unmarked mountain trails and off-trail hiking, as well as off-piste skiing. In recent years, this literature has also shifted to the internet, where it can be read in blogs, web diaries and forums. Mountain literature in the broadest sense is mostly written in narrative form, although it can also be found in poetic and dramatic forms (see Hladnik and Šček). It has a specifically rich tradition in Slovenian culture; while its beginnings can be traced back to the second half of the nineteenth century, it really flourished in the twentieth century, as evidenced by various surveys (see Munda et al.; Strojín 1995a, 1995b, 1995c, 1995d; Dobnik; Klinar; Pritekelj; Volkar; Zgubin; Lozar).

In principle, mountaineering literature emerged later than the rest of mountain literature, as it speaks of the ascents to the highest and most demanding peaks of our planet. Due to the dangers climbers face at such heights, their physically and mentally exhausting feats can be regarded as liminal experiences. Such climbing achievements only became possible in mid-twentieth century when, as part of the project of modernity, climbing expeditions made use of technology, strategy and international relations to enable a human presence on eight-thousanders (see Dhar: 345). It is therefore not surprising that the success of Slovenian mountaineers in the Himalaya, Karakoram and the Andes has led to the proliferation of writings focused on their achievements. Beyond Slovenia, Bruce Barcott (65) has called mountaineering ‘the most literary of all sports’.

Given the rich production of Slovenian mountaineering literature and its subgenres, it is surprising that there are few literary studies in this field. Recently, Miran Hladnik made a significant contribution to the delimitation, documentation and literary analysis of mountain literature (see Hladnik; Hladnik and Šček), and some of Tomo Virk's writings (e.g., Virk 2017a) are also important, including his research into the work, myth and personality of alpinist Klement Jug (see Virk 2014, 2016, 2017b). Despite these contributions, one can agree with Jernej Habjan's recent observation that mountain literature is 'among the most read and at the same time least researched genres' (Habjan: 259). The fact that this applies internationally can be ascertained by a simple internet search. The present article can therefore be seen as a kind of probe into the formal and thematic features of narrative mountaineering literature of a specific historical environment (the Slovenian one) in an attempt to shed some light on this popular genre from the perspective of literary studies.

### **GENRE HYBRIDITY**

When attempting to reflect on mountaineering literature, the question arises as to how to appropriately label and systematise this type of writing, given that the purposes of climbing in the mountains, including expeditions to the highest mountains in the world, can be so different. Sometimes mountaineers are motivated by research, aesthetic, commercial or scientific intentions, while on other occasions they have sports, nationalist, imperialist, religious or other purposes. However, since mountaineering always involves the movement of individuals in space, it has become a matter of course to include such texts in travel writing, with the important caveat that unlike the classics of this

literature, which have expanded the regions of known space horizontally, mountaineering discourse concerns a vertical journey (see Kaliszuk: 52). Mountaineering literature is therefore travel writing, but is itself divided into many genres, some of which border on reportage and journalism.

Mountaineering literature is not, however, just travel writing. Whereas, in its early development, travel writing initially often concerned an externally oriented exotic adventure and the possibility of encountering other people, it cannot be overlooked that, in modern times, it has been characteristically interiorised; thus, much more than a description of unknown places, modern mountaineering literature is perhaps an opportunity for the encounter of the vertical traveller, the climber, with him- or herself, that is, for an inner search and a confrontation with the singularity of his or her own experience, with questions of self-existence and the construction of identity. These are the topics that are most at home in life writing or autobiographical discourse and traditionally fill autobiographies, memoirs, diaries, letters and even biographies and portraits. It is therefore not surprising that some scholars, such as Delphine Moraldo (2012, 2013), have also tried to illuminate mountaineering literature from the perspective of the autobiographical genre, or, like Przemysław Kaliszuk (54), have even emphasised its ‘hybrid modality’.

Due to its modern discursive anchoring, mountaineering literature is probably best defined as a hybrid genre bordering on literature, in which the heterogeneous discourses of travel writing and life writing, as well as the utilitarianism of handbooks and guides, intersect, meet and confront one another dialogically. On the other hand, there is an interface with canonical literary genres, especially with the novel in the field of narrative. According to Mikhail Bakhtin, who applied

the concept of hybridity to the theory of culture, the novel is itself largely a product of hybridisation and is a deliberate aesthetic hybrid (see Bakhtin). Mountaineering literature is therefore a hybrid genre.

In the present paper, I will not research the historical development or construct a theoretical model of Slovenian mountaineering literature. Instead, I will discuss texts which may not narrate the most important mountaineering achievements in absolute terms, as such a criterion probably does not exist, nor do they document the world-renowned successes of Slovenian or, at that time, Yugoslav expeditions to the Himalaya. I will focus on three texts which, in addition to Nejc Zaplotnik's *Pot* (The Way)<sup>2</sup> and certain others,<sup>3</sup> strike me as being among the most aesthetically interesting works of this kind. These books are by living authors: *Sneg na zlati veji* (The Snow on the Golden Bough) by Igor Škamperle (born 1962), *Zvezdnate noči* (Starry Nights) by Dušan Jelinčič, who is almost a decade older (born 1953), and *Igra in biseri: kako sem hčerki z alpinizmom razložil življenje* (The Game and the Pearls: How I Explained Life to My Daughter Using Mountaineering) by Bogdan Biščak (born 1958). All of the writers are from the coastal Primorska region: Škamperle and Jelinčič are Slovenians from Trieste, while Biščak is from Postojna. They are all acquainted: they tested themselves climbing together (Škamperle and Biščak), they took part in joint expeditions in the mid-1980s (Škamperle and Biščak, or Biščak and Jelinčič), and in the works discussed they are in fact generationally related writers, despite their differences in years. The books by Škamperle and Jelinčič were first published just a few years after their most active period of climbing – *Sneg na zlati veji* in 1992 and *Zvezdnate noči* in 1990 – while in *Igra in biseri* (2018), Biščak wrote about his climbing career more than three decades after its peak.

**2**  
Nejc Zaplotnik's *Pot* was first published in 1981 and was reprinted many times. It is one of the most popular and most frequently cited Slovenian mountaineering books.

**3**  
Among these aesthetically interesting books is another work by Jelinčič, *Biseri pod snegom* (Pearls under the Snow), first published in 1992 and reissued in a new edition in 2009, which is about an expedition to Mount Everest which ended without summiting. *Kam gre veter, ko ne piha* (Where Does the Wind Go When It Doesn't Blow), Jelinčič's 2007 book about his scaling of Gasherbrum II, is noteworthy in this respect as well.

## BEGINNINGS OF THE NARRATIVES

Reading the selected texts, one might expect two basic compositional blocks of the mountaineering narratives: first, an introduction showing the climber's life up to the departure for the Himalaya, and then a climbing-focused mimetic report of the vertical journeys, complemented by the autobiographical details necessary for understanding the experience of mountaineering (see Kaliszuk: 55). In each case, however, contact with the specific text modifies preconceived notions somewhat. The first chapter of *Sneg na zlati veji*, which is Škamperle's first book, is written in the third person, unlike the other chapters with their first-person narrative. It begins with a series of fragments of memories from early youth: the poetically sketched natural environment of Sveti Ivan in the suburbs of bilingual Trieste, holidays with grandparents in Slovenia, skiing lessons in the vicinity of Tarvisio and in Gorje, and so on. The author's most fulfilling early experiences are the first trips with his mother to the mountains, including Triglav. These trips are further encouraged by the popular books of Julius Kugy, which the young Škamperle read passionately. This is followed by the first attempts at climbing and the decision to become a climber himself: 'Climbing is, after all, something more than kicking a ball around. He will be an adventurer in life! A climber. A traveller.' (Škamperle: 38) The chapter concludes with the author entering a new period of life and a decision to study in Slovenia, which is supported by both parents.

In the second, revised and supplemented edition, Jelinčič's *Zvezdne noči* (Starry Nights, originally published in 1990) begins with an extensive accompanying text which has the character of a foreword and was written by the author himself. In it, the author speaks of his writing career and development, the origins of *Zvezdne noči* and the reception

of his works by critics and readers. He also recalls the names of all of his fellow climbers on the expedition described. The real beginning of the text follows *in medias rei*, in the Prologue, which is printed in italics, thus even graphically indicating its distinction from the rest of the text. As a kind of prelude, the Prologue speaks of the moments when the author reaches the eight-thousand-metre peak of Broad Peak, which proves somewhat less than triumphant, like ‘a kind of contrast between the present moment, which is so insignificant that I doubt its existence, and the one which I imagined adorned in heavenly glory’ (Jelinčič: 41). The first part of the book, which concludes with the arrival of the expedition at base camp, again lacks the expected introductory section with a mountaineering narrative illuminating the climber’s previous life. Instead, the author, who is also the narrator, finds himself in Pakistan, in the city of Skardu, from where the expedition will depart. Unlike Škamperle’s narrative, with its initial series of fragments of memory reaching back to childhood, Jelinčič’s work is a more present-day, diary-based narrative with short chapters of just one page or one and a half pages; in the text, which Jelinčič himself refers to as a novel in his accompanying essay, the use of the present tense actually prevails. Rather than being dated, as is customary with diaries, the chapters have clear titles which indicate the content of each entry. An insight into the events from the writer’s past life which led to his arrival in Karakoram is established only with brief flashbacks to training and other preparations for the journey.

Like *Zvezdne noči*, Biščak’s *Igra in biseri*, which bears the meaningful subtitle *Kako sem hčerki z alpinizmom razložil življenje* (How I Explained Life to My Daughter Using Mountaineering), begins with an accompanying text, an attempt at a concise explanation of the meaning and ethos of mountaineering. It was written by Igor Mezgec, a member

of the Postojna Four, a climbing group completed by Mezgec's friends Škamperle, Rado Fabjan and Biščak, whose vertical trials and friendships are discussed at length in the core of the book. This is followed by Biščak's own preface, in which he explains certain other personal reasons for writing the book and the circumstances of its creation. The introductory part of the book, again the author's first work, illustrates the two-part structure of the narrative, which is graphically emphasised by the choice of different fonts. The first part at the beginning of the narrative introduces the present conversation between the author and his daughter about life and the meaning of mountaineering and is printed in bold. It starts unfolding on the roof terrace of a boarding house in Peru and runs from early morning to late evening at the end of the book. The conversation forms the axis of the narrative but includes graphically separate, longer retrospective sections printed in a normal font, written mostly, but not exclusively, in the past. These follow one another in linear chronological order and gradually chart the writer's mountaineering career from his youthful beginnings to the formation of the quartet of friends with whom he spent his most care-free period of climbing in the early 1980s.

### **THE CORES AND THE CONCLUSIONS**

The beginnings of the narratives thus already indicate the different narrative strategies used by the authors in their discourses. In the case of Škamperle, who published the book in his thirties, the formative period of his teenage boarding-school years until his departure to study in Ljubljana extends through several chapters. The narrator of these chapters typically switches to the first person and often also uses the present tense. In addition to a series of increasingly demanding and

frequent climbing experiences in the Slovenian mountains, the narrative also includes broader areas of self-searching and trials which form the process of growing up, including spiritual and religious searches, political identification regarding the Slovenian minority and the first experiences of love and sex. The lyrical alpine narrative is thus intertwined with the traits of the *Bildungsroman*. The difficult practice and primary routes on Slovenian rock faces are joined by vertical trials in the Dolomites and the Central Alps. Later, during the author's student years, there are climbing experiences elsewhere in Europe and North America, friendships with fellow climbers, especially Bogdan (Biščak), new experiences with women and a climbing romance with Lidija – the most significant of these experiences, which the author discursively addresses directly, inserting her letters into the narrative – and expeditions to the Andes and the Himalaya. A confrontation with the South Face of Annapurna, which the expedition was unable to conquer due to falling rocks, ultimately brings about the author's decision to bid farewell to climbing. In conclusion, there is the author's accompanying text to the second edition of the book, published some thirty years later.

The central sections of Jelinčič's narrative are, like the beginning (and the Epilogue), constructed with short chapters which carefully escalate the tension, first showing life and events in the base, the tragic accidents of other expeditions close at hand, which increase awareness of the dangers of Himalayan exploits, the narrator's encounters with climbers from other expeditions and acclimatisation ascents, as well as the feelings of triumph and happiness as the first members of his expedition reach the summit of Broad Peak. Jelinčič provides a detailed description of the preparations for his own ascent and the dramatic escalation of physical and mental suffering and strain in ascending to high altitude camps and, finally, to the summit, which he reaches

on his own. The descent with a fellow climber is an even more dramatic ordeal. Despite suffering from extreme fatigue, they have to increase their pace due to bad weather. During the descent, they lose their way and have to bivouac, they are overwhelmed by an avalanche but manage to escape, and they are caught in a snowstorm. They nevertheless finally make their way to Camp 3. Due to the bad weather, they have to make their way down again as soon as possible, and finally, after another night on the mountain spent at Camp 2, they are fortunate enough to complete the descent to the base with the support of fellow climbers. The Epilogue describes the long wait for a helicopter to transfer the climbers back to Skardu and the farewell from Pakistan. There follows a separate appendix with the most important information about the participants and the chronological course of the expedition.

While Jelinčič focuses on a single major achievement in his book, the central part of Biščak's narrative, which is interrupted by somewhat maieutically guided conversations with his daughter, tells of his own mountaineering achievements and those of his quartet of friends, and a way of life which lasted several happy years. Accompanied by Škamperle, Biščak seriously engages with the sport of free climbing, but after some top achievements they realise that their real path is in the mountains. Step by step they string together a series of climbing achievements in the Dolomites and in the routes above Chamonix, and then they depart on their first expedition to Aconcagua. The most difficult ascent of the quartet is a route on the south-western rock wall of Burel, which for Biščak represents a kind of turning point in life and a farewell from youth. The four friends then gradually go their own ways. On an expedition to the Himalaya, none of the participants manage to conquer the summit of Annapurna, but a Patagonian expedition to Fitz Roy and Cerro Torre is successful, despite its participants

experiencing a dramatic encounter with white death during a hurricane-force snowstorm. Biščak's reports on the expedition to Karakoram and the ascents to Broad Peak and Gasherbrum II are initially more fragmentary, but he then supplements his impressions with a more sober, rational assessment of the expedition. The narrative concludes with a report about the events in the French Alps and the Italian Dolomites which caused him to stop climbing for fifteen years, and a loving morning farewell from his daughter.

### **AUTHENTICITY**

An important component of all three of the mountaineering narratives discussed is the striving for authenticity, the writers' effort to use narrative strategies which encourage a referential pact and guarantee the clarity and credibility of the narration. The books are characterised by the intersection of documentary details with an autobiographical perspective, with memories and self-analysis, as well as the stringing together of precise descriptions of ascents, along with the climbing techniques and logistical procedures used during the vertical trials. All of these strategies hybridise the stylistic models of literary and utilitarian non-literary text genres. First-person narration seems to be an almost inevitable choice of the narrator and at the same time the author of the narrative, although exceptions are also sometimes possible, as we have seen in the case of Škamperle. The narrator's I must actually experience that which is shown and establish itself as a witness to the reality of the mountaineer's story. For instance, Jelinčič reflects on one evening at base camp:

*In the evening, by the dim glow of a candle, I write a diary. I want to commit what I have experienced that day to paper. I'm not satisfied. [...] I strain my brain but barely manage to bring to mind a single event which would be worth rescuing from oblivion.*

*I want to understand and finally come up with an explanation: words, seemingly so full of meanings and values, are often empty and false. [...] All day we were engaged in discussion and I thought these beautiful words were illustrating great ideas and sublime thoughts. Now it has all drained away and disappeared. [...] If I want to fill my diary with events, I have to experience them, too! How simple that thought was, but how difficult it was to unearth. (Jelinčič: 130)*

The mountaineer's story is more or less intimate and, due to the very nature of language, often resists objectification. Only that which has been experienced can authentically convey the unique experience of the agreeable horror of vertical travel. In support of the referential and autobiographical pacts in the narratives, readers also encounter the mountaineering sociolect, the amassing of data on weather and climbing conditions, the quality of the rock, snow or ice, descriptions of interpersonal relationships and mishaps with equipment, and the mountaineer's information about his or her own physical state and the changes in feelings which transpire during the journey. Such inventories seem to be a genre constant of mountaineering narrative, but they can become tediously repetitive for readers with different genre expectations. In this regard, an anecdote reported by Škamperle in the accompanying text to the reprint of his book after thirty years is interesting:

*Before the first publication, I had the text read by a well-known Slovenian writer and asked for his opinion. He had a favourable opinion about the style, but thought the descriptions of the climbing ascents were repetitive and overabundant. To him, they seemed unimportant. Of course, I understood him, but at the same time it seemed to me that there were not enough specific descriptions of climbing ascents. I had actually omitted numerous important tours due to the internal structure of the narrative, which demands its own rhythm, even though the omitted tours were, viewed as a whole, important. [...] In this respect, the updated version of the text is enriched with some new entries. With regard to the opinion expressed, it seems to me that the book does not contain enough genuine descriptions of climbing, which are almost too modest from today's perspective. (Škamperle: 236–37)*

It was probably the desire for authenticity which prompted Škamperle to revert to the real names of the characters in the reprint, rather than using the fictional names from the first edition. The figures in the books by Biščak and Jelinčič are, of course, referred to with their real names and not fictitious ones. In addition, the books include photographic material (by Biščak and Škamperle, for instance) not necessarily related to the author's personal memories, biographical information about certain diseased fellow climbers who appear in the text (Škamperle), and various documents to support the authenticity of the author's discourse, for instance, an excerpt from a fellow climber's diary (see Biščak: 146–47). Alternatively, the main text, in which more subjective impressions of the exploit are collected, is supplemented by an objective chronicle of the expedition, where general data is presented along with information about the participants and the chronological course of the expedition (see Jelinčič: 281–83).

**IN SEARCH FOR (THE) MEANING (OF CLIMBING)**

Among the prominent features of the works in question are the writers' attempts to make sense of both their own climbing activity and mountaineering in general, although certain interesting differences between the three writers can be observed. For Škamperle, the youngest of the three, a successfully completed climbing expedition is closest to a kind of mystical experience. When he delves into the secret of one of his exploits (together with Biščak), the friendship with his fellow climber is very important to him, but he also says:

*You forget about everything: time, hunger, thirst, all external worries. You approach an unknown world within yourself, which seems to be the only real place to inhabit, compared to which everything else is superfluous. Especially in difficult stretches, where your concentration is most heightened, it seems as if you have reached the world of nirvana; without thought and memory, with nothing but an inner voice. At the summit, you experience fulfilment, satisfaction. Although it only lasts a short time, it is powerful enough for you to feel how, from tired limbs, it spreads to the soul, soothing, calming. You don't know whether time is departing now, too, or perhaps you have caught it and you are both waiting, with eternity placed in your lap. [...] Then, in the midst of the long purple lines which have fallen to the ground, I could sense the image to which I have aspired in an eternal approach. It rested in me and at the same time called me unfathomably far away; an image which was not even aware that I had been walking towards it from an incomprehensible distance, persistent and alone. (Škamperle: 131–32).*

Jelinčič is focused more on the physical and emotional side of the vertical trial than the spiritual side. At the same time, he notes the paradoxical nature of his feelings: on the one hand, he is fascinated by the feeling of freedom in climbing, but on the other, he is aware that he is trapped in his passion, driven by an irreconcilable longing:

*I'm increasingly filled with a sense of freedom. This time until departure is exclusively and completely mine. The tea is in the flask, the food and the backpack are ready. Soon we will be in the grip of exertion, snow, perhaps wind and, after a few hours, a feeling of helplessness, as well. I, on the other hand, will act as if I am completely free, as if I have chosen my path entirely on my own. And yet this is not true. [...] Could you make your way to the summit in just an hour or two? No! This means that I am not free in my choices after all. What binds me to the shackles of this sweet slavery? This damn passion, this unbridled desire, this eternal longing! (Jelinčič: 182–83)*

At the end of the book, when the author attempts, in an imaginary conversation with the stars, to determine why he set out on the expedition in the first place, readers learn that among the strongest motivations for mountaineering is escapism, escape from routine, the emptiness of everyday life, a departure from the well-trodden path:

*Because I wanted to escape from everyday life, at least for a short Himalayan dream, to go to my Garden of Eden and feel the fullness of life for a few unrealistic weeks. For a cosmic second, I wanted to give up our world of tedium, where everyone thinks, reacts and speaks the same. But whoever strays from the well-trodden path is a fool, or at least a freak. [...] We do not seek death in the mountains; on the contrary,*

*we seek the fullness of life. But life is fuller where everyday life fades. More people die from the emptiness of this everyday life than from finding a way out of it. How many have succumbed to boredom, depression, a life without goals! (Ibid.: 264)*

Compared to the previous two authors, Biščak's self-reflections on climbing are more extensive and can be found both in the main text and in the discussion with his daughter Anja. Of the three authors, it is Biščak who explains his youthful decision to climb in the most rational way. In addition to the central existential reason for climbing, he joins Jelinčič in expressing the importance of the radical avoidance of the routine of everyday life:

*My decision to take up climbing was no coincidence. I still remember those sleepless nights when, as a sixteen-year-old, I was unable to come to terms with the conclusion at which I had arrived over and over again in my nocturnal deliberations: that human life in itself has no meaning whatsoever, that there is no general principle that determines its value. I realised that I was completely alone in searching for meaning, and was immediately aware of the responsibility this brings. [...] I somehow instinctively felt that the first thing I had to avoid was the daily routine which slowly draws you in, sucks out your youthful dreams, and gradually transforms you from a young man dreaming his life into an adult whose life is tossed around by coincidence and circumstances. [...] I loved the mountains. I had spent some of the most exciting days of my life in them, and so I chose mountaineering. (Biščak: 21)*

Climbing not only has an existential dimension, but is also an aesthetic and sporting experience co-created by fear, with which the climber has to seek some kind of coexistence:

*In the beginning, fear constricts the spirit, and with it the body, as well. It was the same with me, which is why I initially had to make an incredible effort in every respect. In such a state, it is impossible to talk about freedom of spirit and the beauty of movement in the rock. Moreover, all the way to the top of the rock face there was a complete lack of will to admire the beauty around you. It was only over the years, when fear had become an old acquaintance, when I got used to living in his company, sometimes even making fun of him, that my body relaxed, and only then did the really beautiful moments in mountaineering begin. [...] The fear remained, only our relationship changed. (Ibid.: 47)*

The most beautiful component of Biščak's climbing experiences are moments of complete calm or peace, as 'a mixture of meditation and contemplation' (ibid.: 128) after the ascent. He describes them quite differently from Škamperle, like a kind of secular version of mystical experience:

*In those ten minutes or so after exiting the rock face and before starting the descent from the summit, I had peace from myself, peace from the imperative that forced me to action and danger. I could surrender myself to the satisfaction of the ascent, I could observe the beauty of the mountains, of which I was all too often deprived during the climb, when I had to focus only on the metre in front of me. These were brief moments. Soon they were vanquished by the thought of the descent, and immediately*

*after that by the plans for the next ascent. But they were wonderful while they lasted. Today, it seems to me that the greatest value of my mountaineering is concealed within them. (Ibid.: 127)*

At the end of the book, in an extensively elaborated intertextual connection to Hermann Hesse's *Glass Bead Game*, the writer compares the mountains with glass beads, and mountaineering with a game, especially a game of chess, which requires reason and intuition. According to Biščak, every game requires passion, and this is especially true of mountaineering, which, for him, is the game of all games:

*Mountaineering is a much bigger game than a game with life. It is a complex game. You could say it is a game of chess, a game for which you need intuition and rational reflection. It is a game played with countless variables: weather, time, orientation, knowledge of the rock face, knowledge of yourself and your fellow climber, route selection, equipment, and so on. You have to navigate towards the summit between all of these variables. (Ibid.: 195)*

### **THE BOOK TITLES**

All three of the texts discussed have carefully chosen titles which, along with other features of genre and composition, design and content, as well as style, indicate careful literary design. Škamperle explains the title of his book, *Sneg na zlati veji* (The Snow on the Golden Bough), in the accompanying text for the reprint issued thirty years after the original publication. He connects it to the literary or mythological tradition: the golden bough, mentioned by Virgil in the *Aeneid*, grows on a tree in a miraculous forest and, for the one who tears it off, opens

the door to an unearthly underground world. However, not just anyone can break it; only the one for whom it is intended can enter the mythical world in the parable, and this is a condition for ascending to the true heights of the world and the spirit. The author himself says: ‘With the parable of the snow on the golden bough, I wanted to say that snow had fallen on the bough which enabled me to descend into the mythical land of the underworld and its fairy-tale habitats. Beneath the snow was the key to this mythical underworld. It also suggests that time has now changed and the reality is different.’ (Škamperle: 230)

Jelinčič is an admirer of the stars, and in the moments of peace which he sometimes consciously seeks out during an expedition, he is their solitary observer. This motif is repeated several times in the book. *Zvezdne noči* (Starry Nights) is not only the title of the book, but also of one of its concluding chapters, the one in which the author tries, after the night ‘again gave him its most beautiful gift: the shining stars’ (Jelinčič: 260), to make sense of his participation in the expedition in a conversation with them. Structurally, this chapter therefore has a teleological function and completes the narrative.

Biščak, too, finds the title for his book *Igra in biseri* (The Game and the Pearls) in a literary connection to Hesse at the end of his mountaineering narrative, when he tries to retrospectively express the meaning of mountaineering and his engagement with it. Similar to Jelinčič, his reflection has a teleological function; on self-reflection, the point of the book’s title also crystallises. In the conclusion, the author points out the essential difference between mountaineering in his mature years, that is, the moment of talking with his daughter, and at the peak of his climbing as shown in the previous narrative: ‘Above all, [mountaineering] is no longer the only thing in my life. And I am no longer the conqueror of a useless world, but more its grateful visitor.’ (Biščak: 205-206)

## CONCLUSION

*Zvezdnate noči*, *Sneg na zlati veji* and *Igra in biseri* all focus on the specific characteristics of vertical travel in the mountains, especially those characteristics that shed light on this activity, which the individual undertakes at will as an extreme sport and an adventure, and which unfolds as an escape, or at least a retreat, from the monotony of everyday life. Kaliszuk also recognises avoiding the routine of everyday life as one of the fundamental characteristics of mountaineering literature and of any literature dealing with extreme feats (ultramarathons, high-altitude climbing, long journeys on foot or by bicycle) in hostile environments. According to him, the narration of these voluntary, usually individual ventures, which are nevertheless often practised in large or small groups, intones a kind of ‘promise that we can take control of our own existence’ (Kaliszuk: 61). Judging by the enthusiasm for this type of writing in both print and digital media, this promise, as uncertain as it may be, appears to be of great interest to Western middle-class readers in the twenty-first century. In addition to belonging to the genre of travel writing, each of the books discussed is, in a unique way, an example of life writing, which speaks of their genre hybridity. I have tried to show this through a close reading of the texts, which, with their tendency towards the authenticity of a direct presentation of the experience of vertical trials, as well as with other formal, thematic and stylistic features, reveal their borderline position between literary and pragmatic texts without concealing their sympathy towards aesthetic literature. ♡

*Translated by Neville Hall*

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## Povzetek

Članek se ukvarja z literaturo o plezanju v gorah, o odpravah na gorske vrhove in o (ekstremnem) alpinističnem smučanju kot podžanrom širšega sklopa planinske literature, ki je večinoma v pripovedni obliki, najdemo pa jo tudi v pesemski in dramski formi. V slovenskem kulturnem prostoru ima planinska literatura razmeroma bogato tradicijo z začetki v drugi polovici 19. stoletja in z velikim razmahom v drugi polovici 20. stoletja. Članek podrobneje obravnava alpinistične pripovedne spise slovenskih alpinistov Igorja Škamperleta (*Sneg na zlati veji*, 1992), Dušana Jelinčiča (*Zvezdane noči*, 1990) in Bogdana Biščaka (*Igra in biseri*). Gre za spise, ki tematizirajo plezanje v gorah in odprave na gorske vrhove kot zahtevne eksistencialne preizkušnje in mejne izkušnje. Osredotočajo se torej na specifične značilnosti gorskega vertikalnega popotništva, zlasti na tiste, ki to dejavnost osvetljujejo kot ekstremni šport in hkrati kot pustolovščino, ki poteka kot beg ali vsaj kot umik pred enoličnostjo vsakdanjega življenja. Tudi Przemysław Kaliszuk prepoznava v izogibanju rutini vsakdanjosti eno temeljnih značilnosti alpinistične literature oziroma vsakršne literature o ekstremnih podvigih (o ultramaratonih, o visokogorskem plezanju, o dolgih pohodih itn.) v človeku neprijaznih okoljih. Pripovedovanje o teh prostovoljnih, običajno individualnih podvigih, ki sicer večkrat potekajo v večjih ali manjših skupinah, po Kaliszuku intonira nekakšno obljubo, da lahko sami prevzamemo nadzor nad lastno eksistenco. Sodeč po izpričanem navdušenju za to zvrst pisanja tako v tiskanih kakor v novih medijih, ta obljuba – četudi utegne biti zgolj iluzija – sovpada z interesom bralstva iz srednjih slojev sodobnih zahodnih družb. A vsaka od obravnavanih knjig je poleg predstavnice popotniškega pisanja na svojevrsten način tudi primer življenjepisnega pisanja oziroma primer žanrske

hibridnosti. Zanje so namreč značilni prepleti, soočanja in predelave žanrov popotniškega pisanja, življenjepisja ter neliterarnih priročnikov in vodnikov, posvajajo pa tudi značilnosti kanoničnih pripovednih žanrov. V članku je to prikazano z natančnim branjem besedil, ki s svojo težnjo po avtentičnosti reprezentacije surove izkušnje vertikalnih preizkušenj ter z drugimi formalnimi, tematskimi in slogovnimi značilnostmi razkrivajo svoj mejni položaj med literarnimi in pragmatičnimi besedili, pri tem pa ne skrivajo svojih simpatij do umetniške literature.

## **Alenka Koron**

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# **Between Loyalty to the Original, Customer Expectations and Reader Orientation: Translators' Understanding of Their Roles Using the Example of the German Translation of the Slovenian Classic Book *Pot***

Między lojalnością wobec oryginału,  
oczekiwaniem klientów a  
zorientowaniem na czytelnika.  
Tłumacze i ich rozumienie  
własnej roli na przykładzie  
niemieckiego przekładu kultowej  
słoweńskiej książki *Pot*

This article explores what understanding of the translator's role should ideally underlie modern literary translations. It examines the extent to which functional translation models such as the Skopos theory, which place the expectations of the client and orientation towards readers above fidelity to the original, can be applied to the current professional practice of translating. Selected passages from the German translation of the Slovenian mountaineering book *Pot* will be used to illustrate how the analysis of the target audience can affect the translation process. By means of examples from the translation, it will be demonstrated that loyalty to the source text can be achieved not only by adhering to the wording of the original but also through deliberate changes (in the form of additions or footnotes). Against the background of the findings, contemporary literary translation will be defined as a purpose-oriented, creative, (self-)reflexive decision-making process focused on anticipated reader expectations.

LITERARY TRANSLATION,  
POLYFUNCTIONAL TEXT, SKOPOS  
THEORY, READER-ORIENTED  
TRANSLATION, NEJC ZAPLOTNIK

Niniejszy artykuł poświęcony jest rozumieniu roli tłumacza jakie w idealnych warunkach powinno leżeć u podstaw nowoczesnych tłumaczeń literackich. Tekst poddaje analizie stopień możliwego zastosowania funkcjonalnych modeli translacyjnych w obecnych profesjonalnych praktykach tłumaczeniowych, np. teorii skoposu kładącej nacisk na oczekiwania klienta i zorientowanie na odbiorcę ponad wiernością oryginałowi. Wybrane passusy tłumaczenia na język niemiecki słoweńskiej książki górskiej pt. *Pot* przytoczone są tu dla zilustrowania sposobu, w jaki analiza docelowego odbiorcy może wpływać na proces tłumaczenia. Na podstawie przykładów zaczerpniętych z tłumaczenia zostanie wykazane, że wierność tekstowi wyjściowemu może zostać osiągnięta nie tylko przez trzymanie się brzmienia oryginału, ale także przez wprowadzenie celowych zmian (w postaci dopowiedzeń i przypisów). W tym kontekście współczesne tłumaczenia literackie zostaną zdefiniowane jako celowy, twórczy proces (samo-)świadomego podejmowania decyzji w oparciu o spodziewane oczekiwania czytelników.

TEUMACZENIE LITERACKIE, TEKST  
WIELOFUNKCYJNY, TEORIA SKOPOSU,  
TEUMACZENIE ZORIENTOWANE  
NA CZYTELNIKA, NEJC ZAPLOTNIK

## **1 POT'S OUTSTANDING POSITION IN THE CANON OF SLOVENIAN MOUNTAINEERING LITERATURE**

Since it cannot be assumed that the book *Pot* (The Path), to whose German translation *Der Weg* this article is dedicated, is known to non-Slovenian readers, a brief introduction and genre-specific classification will precede the theoretical and analytical parts. *Pot* was written by Nejc Zaplotnik, one of the greatest Slovenian alpinists of all time. In 1979, Zaplotnik and his climbing partner Andrej Štremfelj made mountaineering history by climbing the West Ridge of Mount Everest via a new route and by becoming the first Slovenians to stand on its summit. *Pot* was first published in 1981 and took the hearts of Slovenian readers by storm. It became an instant bestseller. It is fair to say that this book – just like the author, who unfortunately died far too early in an avalanche on Manaslu in 1983 – enjoys absolute cult status in Slovenia. The unbroken popularity and topicality of the book is evinced by the fact that by 2021 it had already been reprinted ten times and is one of the most frequently cited works on mountain-climbing themes in Slovenia. Generations of young Slovenian mountaineers have grown up with this book and were inspired at the beginning of their careers by the mountaineering passion and dedication that speak from it. It was also one of the most important sources of inspiration for the world-famous climber Marko Prezelj. For him and other young climbers of his generation, the book was ‘almost like a Bible’ (Prezelj).

Internationally, the book has not yet found such great resonance. Apart from my German translation, only Croatian, Italian and Polish translations exist to date. In the Anglo-American world, the book *Alpine Warriors* by the Canadian Bernadette McDonald, which provides a detailed insight into the rich history of Slovenian high-altitude

mountaineering through an intensive examination of some of the key figures in the local climbing milieu, clearly aroused interest. It is not surprising that numerous reviews of *Alpine Warriors* explicitly refer to *Pot*, as McDonald chose Zaplotnik as the connecting thread for her own book and included in her text several passages from *Pot* (translated into English by Mimi Marinšek Čadež). A milestone in the canon of Slovenian mountaineering literature, Zaplotnik's book ranks among the leading works dedicated to experiencing mountains and nature (see Škamperle). This assessment is shared by McDonald, who states that it really welded the Slovenian alpinists, who had previously often acted as lone warriors, into a group that could now unite behind the ideas of Zaplotnik, their spiritus rector.

## 2 MULTIDIMENSIONALITY OF POT IN TERMS OF GENRE

What is it that makes *Pot* so fascinating for the reader (and so difficult for the translator)? First of all, the book stood out pleasantly from the Slovenian mountaineering literature that was predominant until its publication and primarily focused on the heroic or documentary description of alpine adventures (which usually centred on conquering the summit). Miran Hladnik sees *Pot* as a work that is first and foremost literature and not a purely mountaineering, action-based account of experience. It cannot be categorised as belonging to any of the types of books previously known in this genre in Slovenia. It gains coherence and weight from its particular narrative perspective, which seeks to break away from the usual compositional determinant – the conquest of the summit (see Hladnik). At first glance, the chronological order and autobiographical character of *Pot* make it reminiscent of a kind of literary diary. But it is difficult to classify

it in terms of genre, as it is a very hybrid mixture of memoir, fiction and essay writing, travel and expedition reports, as well as dense descriptions of nature and gripping mountain-climbing narratives. In addition, the author's life story, which is synthetically constructed from the past (Zaplotnik's childhood) to the time immediately before the writing of the book, is repeatedly interspersed with reflective and retrospective interpolations, critical comments on the institutionalised form of Slovenian alpinism (meaning the Slovenian Alpine Club, its political instrumentalisation and its organisation of expeditions aimed at international recognition), and (at the end of some of the chapters) also by lyrical passages which raise philosophical questions and contain existentialist elements, revealing the author's psychological and, at times, spiritual maturing process. These existential reflections, stirring descriptions of moments of supreme happiness after a successful climb, as well as the unsparing, absolutely honest disclosure of the most intimate thoughts and feelings – including the dark and negative one such as Zaplotnik's self-doubt that flash up again and again – give the reader the opportunity to participate very directly in the adventures experienced by Zaplotnik and to enter into the emotional world of the writer and his mountain companions (see Škamperle).

In many passages, *Pot* is reminiscent of an autobiographical coming-of-age story narrated by a first-person narrator. Igor Škamperle (ibid.) uses the German term 'Bildungsroman', which I think is quite appropriate if one had to sum up the genre in one word. According to Jürgen Jacobs (14), the decisive features of the *Bildungsroman* structure are 'the development of the hero in a tense relationship to his environment and the tendency towards a harmonious state of balance'. The focus is on the protagonist's confrontation with 'different areas of the world' (ibid.), which contribute to his personal development

and gradual maturation. In Zaplotnik's case, it is above all the mountains, the subjective sensation of the objective circumstances of nature, as well as overcoming dangers and experiencing genuine comradeship (which can turn into ultimate grief when good friends are lost) on the arduous, sometimes death-defying path to the summit, which are those 'areas of the world' through which his personality and character are shaped. In parts, however, *Pot* also reads like a philosophical work aimed at the reader's personal development, like a guidebook for leading the most fulfilled and authentic life possible. In summary, we can say that we are dealing with a polyfunctional work of literature, a complex text which simultaneously fulfils several overlapping functions.

In the following sections, I will explore the question of how my understanding of the role of the translator underlies my translation of *Pot*. Then I will show, using selected comparisons of the source and target text, how this understanding has affected my translation of the most difficult passages.

### **3 THE MODERN TRANSLATOR AS MEDIATOR BETWEEN EXPECTATIONS OF CLIENT, READER AND AUTHOR**

In his accompanying text to *Pot*, Viki Grošelj (in Zaplotnik 2006: 265), a close friend and climbing companion of Zaplotnik, writes that one should not change anything in this 'masterful text', that is, neither add nor omit anything. For the translator, this would mean translating the entire book word-for-word. The idea of such an invisible translator, who places him or herself entirely at the service of the original, is no longer tenable from a translation studies perspective, and this has been the case at least since Lawrence Venuti, who considers such invisibility unfair and impracticable (see Venuti). Unfair, because the

translator's contribution to the new, foreign-language text is not appreciated, and impracticable, because it simply cannot be concealed that another person is interposed between the author and the reader. The most recent research confirms the transformative potential of translations and thus also the visibility of the translator (e.g., Birgit Neumann for German as target language).

The paradigm shift in translation studies took place much earlier, namely, in the mid-1980s with the emergence of the Skopos theory (*Skopostheorie* in German), in the course of which the focus of research shifted from the source text to the target text, thus almost placing the translator in the role of co-author on an equal footing with the author. According to Katharina Reiß and Hans J. Vermeer (96), the core idea of *Skopostheorie* is that purpose is the 'dominant feature of all translation'. The function of translation is to do justice to the intended effect of the target text, which in turn depends on the interaction between translator, client and recipient. Accordingly, the translator is not the transmitter of the message of the source text; instead, the translator's task is to produce a recipient-oriented target text based on the translation assignment (see also Nord 1993: 9 f.). The translator as recipient of the source text, who has bilingual and bicultural expert knowledge and bears full responsibility for the production of the target text, takes centre stage.

*Skopostheorie* also entails a new understanding of the text. For a long time, the source text in its semantic, linguistic and stylistic form was considered sine qua non for evaluating translations, even more so for evaluating literary translations. With the emergence of purpose- and recipient-oriented translation concepts, other evaluation criteria than equivalence between source and target text came to the fore. The static understanding of the text (with a meaning fixed in advance) was

replaced by a dynamic one according to which meaning only emerges through the reception of a text. Heinrich F. Plett (80) sums up this reception-aesthetic view as follows: ‘So many recipients, so many texts.’ The idea behind this dictum is that every text has such great complexity that a single recipient cannot possibly understand all the hidden subtleties of meaning, connotations and allusions. Consequently, the translator is ‘only one of the possible interpreters, a recipient among recipients’ (Prunč: 155). For Vermeer, this leads to the radical conclusion that there can be no such thing as the source text as the basis for a translation and its evaluation. A source text does not exist as a timeless, unchanging instance, since it is always there only for an individual recipient who specifically interprets it at a certain point in time (see Vermeer 42). The text to be translated is nothing other than an ‘offer of information’. Accordingly, translation is ‘an offer of information in a target culture and its language about an offer of information from a source culture and its language’ (Reiß and Vermeer: 103). For translation, this means that it can be described as ‘an offer of information about an offer of information’ (ibid.: 67). But does such a dynamic conception of text not encourage arbitrariness? And can it be applied one hundred percent to literary translations?

In my opinion, the concept of fidelity to the original still has some right to exist and the purpose of a translation cannot be determined by extra-textual factors alone. This view is also shared by Christiane Nord, who brings into play the concept of loyalty, which she understands as the translator’s ethical responsibility towards all the actors involved in the translation process: the client, the target reader and the author. Since all parties have different expectations regarding the translation, the translator must ensure their compatibility by considering, for example, when producing the target text, that ‘the assignment

must not wilfully and knowingly run counter to the author's intentions' (see Nord 1993: 19). The guiding principles of translation practice are not only the intended functions of the target text, but also ethical translation standards such as accuracy and truthfulness, which are precisely laid down in various professional codes. On the basis of these translation norms, not all text transformations are permissible. When making translation decisions, the translator must therefore constantly weigh up loyalty to the author, the client's specifications for the assignment and the expectations of the target audience. The consequences of this complex web of interaction for professional practice can be illustrated very well by focusing on the translation of *Pot*.

As explained in the second section, the special nature of the reading experience is created by the blunt honesty with which Zaplotnik reveals his most intimate thoughts to us and by the stirring language he uses to describe his extreme climbing expeditions on the border between life and death. To provide the target audience with a similar aesthetic experience, I felt obliged to reproduce the peculiarities of Zaplotnik's language as authentically as possible in the corresponding text passages. Of course, the principle of fidelity to the original reached its limits in the case of translating the lyrical passages at the end of some of the chapters. The alienation effects of faithfully translated poetry would simply have been too great. Here I made use of a translation method which Jiří Levý calls the illusionist method. Characteristic of this method is that the translator aims to imitate the original, that is, to create the illusion in the readers that they are reading an original (Levý 1969: 31 f.). The maintenance of the illusion is based on the mutual (tacit) agreement between reader and translator to read the translated text as a (new) original. Of course, though the readers know that they are not reading the original, they

still expect the translation to be of the same quality as the original (ibid.). Thus, it is no longer a question of preserving the work itself but of preserving its value for the reader, without insisting that the degree of experience which the reader of the translation has must be the same as that of the reader of the original (ibid.: 32).

However, the final version of the target text does not come about solely as a result of the translator's intensive engagement (reproducing, adapting and altering) with the source text. The modern production conditions of translated literature also include the fact that the client has quite a big say in the process. After I accepted the translation assignment, my editor at the Swiss publishing house suggested that I modernise my translation of the forty-year-old Slovenian text and tailor it to the expectations of today's German-speaking audience. In everyday translation practice, this desire for modernisation is reflected in the fact that before the book is printed, the translator receives numerous suggestions from the publisher for corrections which are no longer tied to the target text but rather stem from the editor's desire for a more expressive and contemporary German idiom. Some of these corrections can be rejected by referring to the requirements of the original, but in many cases there are no good arguments for this or there is simply no more time for appropriate negotiations with the editor and one simply accepts the proposed solution.

And of course, as a translator, you also must have the interests and cultural backgrounds of the text users in mind. In my case, I anticipated readers who have a basic interest in mountaineering but not necessarily expert knowledge. In no case could I assume that they were familiar with Slovenia and its geography, culture, history and so on, and, forty years after his death, had ever heard of Zaplotnik.

The following example from my translation of *Pot* illustrates how the analysis of anticipated reader expectations can affect the translation.

### 3.1 Example of Reader-related Problem-solving Strategy

At a crucial point in the book, where Zaplotnik describes how he informs the expedition leader Tone Škarja by radio that he and his climbing partner have finally reached the summit of Everest, he uses strongly abbreviated language, expletives, Slovenian colloquialisms and dialectal expressions, probably to recreate the breathlessness and orality of the dialogue. Since the dialectal markers are closely linked to the source language culture and replacing the Slovenian dialect with German dialect was out of the question, as it would distort the readers' diatopic associations, I had to neutralise the oral expressivity of the original. This is a measure which also corresponds to the prevailing doctrine regarding language varieties in translation studies (see Sinner: 265). Besides, if I had wanted to keep the dialect, I would have had to choose a German dialect. None could really be justified. Had I chosen Bavarian to emphasise the Alpine and mountain reference, I could have been reproached for not having opted for an Austrian or Swiss variety instead. Once this option was ruled out, the only strategies left were complete neutralisation (translation of all Slovenian dialectal and colloquial elements through standard German), conditional neutralisation (translation through colloquial), translation through other diasystematic varieties (e.g., a specific sociolect) or development of an artificial language. Since, according to my textual analysis, the focus for the reader at this point should not be on the socio-cultural embedding of the dialogue but rather on the experience of the exchange of information via radio reduced to the essentials, the re-experiencing of the choppy language (due to the difficult transmission),

the breathlessness of the protagonists (due to the lack of oxygen and exhaustion) and the orality of the communication, I decided to translate the entire dialogue, which runs over several pages, into (dialect-free) semi-colloquial German. Here is a short example of a passage spoken, as it were, by Tone Škarja:

*O ja, porkaš! Fnt! [...] Že prej sva mal zajokcala, k sva bla tmle pr žičnci, k sva slišala, da sta čez sivo stopnjo. No, sva rekla, zdej saj nazaj navta mogla pobrisat. Jebe... O ti bog! Krasno! Živjo!*  
(Zaplotnik 2006: 231)

*Oh ja, verdammich [...] Junge! Vorhin, als wir bei der Seilbahn war'n, ham wir beide schon'n bisschen geheult, als wir gehört ham, dass'er über die graue Stufe rüber seid. Na, jetz' könn'se wenigstens nich' mehr zurück, ham wir gesagt. Scheiße noch eins! ... Klasse! Macht's gut, Jungs!*  
(Zaplotnik 2020: 266)

According to Nord (1989: 103–105), this is an instrumental, so-called corresponding translation, since the focus of the translator was not, as in documentary translation, to reflect the communication between the source text author and the source text audience but to achieve a corresponding effect (i.e., breathless orality and casual expression) in the German-speaking target audience. The accusation of disloyalty to the original can be refuted with the argument that the effect intended by the source text author takes precedence over the intertextual congruence between the source and target texts. Of course, one could ask whether this strategy is the right one and criticise it accordingly. But that is not the point here. What is of interest is how translational decisions are made pragmatically. Often, the translator proceeds according

to the process of exclusion. As a result of my textual analysis, I ruled out all other possibilities until only this one remained. And in this case, my decision was not dictated by the text alone but strongly influenced by the extra-textual criterion of desired reader response. However, my translation is also based on a certain calculation regarding the aesthetic preferences of the general German (not the Bavarian, Austrian or Swiss) target recipients, who would probably have been alienated by an Alpine dialect and overly colloquial expressions. And certainly, the desire to reduce my workload also influenced my decision to rule out the options of dialect and artificial language. Ultimately, I was guided in my decision by the principle which Levý (1981: 231) calls the ‘minimax strategy’: maximum effectiveness with minimum use of resources.

### **3.2 Translation as a Strategic and (Self-)reflexive Decision-making Process**

The example in the previous section demonstrates that translation is not a mere passive linguistic transcoding but a decision-making process, and the translator is a professional who must take responsibility for his or her decisions. *Skopostheorie* suggests that these decisions are influenced by various extra-textual factors, first and foremost by the client’s specifications (translation assignment), the recipients’ prior knowledge, as well as their pragmatic expectations. Hans Hönig (1995: 116) goes even one step further and ties his concept of translation almost entirely to the translator who uses his or her cognitive abilities consciously and strategically. His credo is that the functioning of the construction of meaning depends on the intelligent behaviour of the translator during the reception, transfer and production phases. Instead of reflexively adhering to rigid translation rules, Hönig (1986: 230)

calls on translators to reflect on the text, the source and target cultural conditions, the available linguistic means and translation strategies, as well as – and this is what is new – their own personality. Based on insights from cognitive science, Hönig develops a model of translational problem-solving built on the individuality of the translator, at the centre of which is the consideration that translating must always be based on the ‘subject-bound nature of the processes of understanding’ (Hönig 1995: 100). Only when translators are truly aware that their actions are also based on their personality can they fully develop their creative potential; otherwise, they perceive the subjectivity of the mental processes influencing their decisions as a burden (*ibid.*: 61).

Hönig’s shift to the personality of the translator provides the next keyword which plays a decisive role for me in translation (especially literary translation): creativity. Translating without creatively changing the source text is not possible. This attitude is also shared by Paul Kußmaul (see Kußmaul). While not denying that source and target texts should be connected by certain invariances, Kußmaul argues that this connection is not established by slavishly clinging to the sacred source text; rather, it is established by consciously performing certain semantic and grammatical changes if the target culture and language make this necessary. These modifying procedures have long been established in translational practice. I am thinking here of variances such as transformation (e.g., adaptation of syntax due to norm constraints of the target language), transposition (e.g., transferring a word into another word class without noticeably changing meaning), explication (adding new information to make implicit meanings visible), adaptation (e.g., of culture-specific facts by replacing them with facts from the target culture), omissions (e.g., of irrelevant, misleading or redundant information) and paraphrasing. According to Kußmaul,

however, these variances are not a necessary evil of translation but the prerequisite for establishing an invariant relationship between original and translated text. I will illustrate this with two examples from my German translation of *Pot*.

### **3.2.1 Explanatory Additions to Close the Cultural Knowledge Gap**

In the Slovenian text, one repeatedly finds references to Slovenian culture (e.g., certain customs, literature) and to the peculiarities of life in socialist Yugoslavia. At the beginning of the 1980s, when the book was first published, there was no need for special explanations in this regard for the Slovenian reader, since Zaplotnik was simply reflecting the reality of life at that time. The Slovenian reader most likely recognised and understood the references to the socialist reality of life, which sometimes had critical undertones (e.g., when Zaplotnik denounces the omnipresent lack of certain types of fruit or the political instrumentalisation of alpinism by party functionaries). Forty years later, this is no longer a matter of course in Slovenia, and certainly not for German-speaking readers who have not had these socialist experiences, unless they lived in the German Democratic Republic. The corresponding text passages could therefore not simply be translated word-for-word; changes were necessary to enable the target reader to have a reading experience similar to that of the Slovenian reader at the beginning of the 1980s.

In the first chapter of *Pot*, Zaplotnik describes how, during a hospital stay in his childhood, he was the only patient to get bananas and oranges rather than bread rolls like all the other sick children (because he suffered from coeliac disease). But he longed so much for the delicious rolls and the other children for his fruit that they opened a secret barter exchange behind the backs of the hospital staff: for two bananas

or for one banana and one orange each, Zaplotnik received one roll. Here is the beginning of this passage:

Spominjam se [...]. Takrat je bilo še težko za sadje, a bil sem do grla sit vseh pomaranč, banan in drugega opičjega futra[.]  
(Zaplotnik 2006: 9)

Ich erinnere mich [...]. Im damaligen sozialistischen Jugoslawien war Obst noch ein seltenes Gut, doch mir standen die Orangen, Bananen und all das andere Affenfutter bis zum Hals.  
(Zaplotnik 2020: 10–11)

In the Slovenian text (see underlined passage) one reads nothing more than ‘I remember [...]. At that time it was still difficult with fruit’. Zaplotnik could assume that his readers would be able to make sense of this sentence. With a literal translation, German readers would not automatically have known why it was difficult to obtain fruit back when Zaplotnik was a child. Therefore, I decided to add an explanation to this passage (see underlined passage in the target text which, in English translation, reads: ‘I remember [...]. In the then socialist Yugoslavia, fruit was still a rare commodity’) to compensate for the knowledge deficit of the target readers and to convey the cultural background. With the clear marking of socialist Yugoslavia as a bygone era, the target reader is of course deprived of the illusion of being mentally in the author’s time. But because of the great temporal distance (forty years after publication) and the introductory ‘Ich erinnere mich’ (‘I remember’), the German recipient reads this passage anyway as a look back at times long past (at least that was my assumption while translating).

In another passage, Zaplotnik describes how, after many completed ascents, he was finally accepted into the elite circle of Slovenian alpinists, which was a rather informal process at the time, concluded by the following ritual: the newly qualified alpinist is spanked by an experienced one. Here is the corresponding passage:

*[L]e na sestanku je Mišo [...] ugotovil, da imam dovolj vzponov in da me bo treba pretepti.*  
(Zaplotnik: 24)

*Mišo [...] stellte bei einem unserer Treffen lediglich fest, dass ich genug Aufstiege gemeistert hätte und es daher an der Zeit sei, an mir die traditionelle Taufe mit dem Strick zu vollziehen.*  
(Zaplotnik 2020: 26)

Although in the source text it only says ‘da me bo treba pretepti’ (‘that I will have to be beaten up’), Zaplotnik could assume that his readers know that this actually means the initiation ritual, since it is generally known in Slovenia and is practised in the mountains even among non-alpinists, for instance, when someone has climbed Slovenia’s highest mountain (Triglav) for the first time. German readers lack this background knowledge. Although it becomes clear in the further course of this passage that Zaplotnik has been spanked, the target reader would be left with the question of how this was done. To avoid any confusion, I decided to add the explicative ‘an mir die traditionelle Taufe mit dem Strick zu vollziehen’ (‘to perform the traditional baptism on me with a rope’).

Another very subjective, reader-related and intensive deviation from the source text is the use of footnotes. Since I used a lot of them in the translation of *Pot*, I feel compelled to justify this decision as well.

### 3.2.2 Footnotes as a Sign of Loyalty to the Source Text?

Normally, when translating literary texts, the unwritten law applies to avoid footnotes so as not to disturb the reader's reading process and to remain invisible as a translator to maintain the illusion that the translated text is an original. If the translator does resort to footnotes, critics see this as the translator's failure to find an adequate solution in the text itself. In numerous translation studies, footnotes are even regarded not as a translation technique but as a last desperate resort by the translator (see Sztorc: 145). Defenders of footnotes argue that in some cases it is only through footnotes that all the details of the source text can be reproduced, thus ensuring loyalty to the author in the first place. Like Weronika Sztorc (*ibid.*: 153), I take a differentiated position in this respect. In translating the passages where Zaplotnik wants to draw the reader into his book with his special, simple, naive and yet captivating language, I have largely refrained from altering the original and from providing footnotes. The same applies to the lyrical passages, where the language itself becomes the carrier of the message. Since the primary aim here was to make Zaplotnik's voice audible to the target reader, I saw loyalty to the original as the more important function compared to reader information and the readability of the text desired by the Swiss publisher. However, *Pot* is not a purely literary work. Zaplotnik also wants to inform and enlighten his readers in many passages of the text, so loyalty in this case can also mean providing the target readers with additional information which brings them to a level of knowledge which is comparable to that enjoyed by readers of the original. From the point of view of the reader-oriented and functionalist approach presented here, I consider footnotes to be useful when there is an obvious gap in knowledge which the readers of the original did not have and this gap cannot be closed

by adaptations of the text, as in the examples in the previous section. For the translator, this means anticipating potential questions from readers, matching them with the general intention of the relevant passage, and deciding on the basis of this analysis whether a footnote is warranted, and if so, what function it should serve. In the case of *Pot*, the decision on the use of footnotes was made easier for me by the fact that Zaplotnik himself uses a great many footnotes, 108 in total. These can be divided into the following functional categories.

Apart from the six footnotes with which he comments on his text, Zaplotnik uses footnotes to explain (listed by frequency): ethnological and religious or spiritual terms, for instance, ethnic groups in the Himalaya and Buddhist symbols (22 footnotes); geographical names, especially of places and mountains abroad (20); names of alpinists or nicknames of comrades (13); alpine terminology, especially for equipment or climbing techniques (13); technical terms for climbing-relevant mountain terrain or rock formations (13); foreign language expressions and quotations (10); climbing route names (8); political, historical events (2); and Slovenian geography (1).

My additional 120 footnotes can be assigned to the following functional categories: not generally known mountains, climbing routes, places, rivers abroad, particularly in the Himalaya (34 footnotes); full name of the person referred to in the text only by nickname (21); mountains, peaks and mountain huts in Slovenia (20); towns, villages, rivers in Slovenia and elsewhere in Yugoslavia (17); other information about Slovenia, such as customs and literary allusions (8); climbing routes in Slovenia not known to the target audience (6); own comments on, for instance, the translation (6); explanations of particularities of socialist culture (4); explanations of not generally known Buddhist and ethnological peculiarities in Nepal (3); and untranslatable Slovenian climbing jargon (1).

The purpose of many of my Slovenia- and Yugoslavia-related footnotes is to bring target readers up to the same level of knowledge as readers of the original and to save them a time-consuming search for places, mountains, peaks, Slovenian customs and literary allusions. This is particularly important in the passages where Zaplotnik invites, as it were, his readers into the Slovenian mountains, because the source reader, who knows many of the landscapes described and the local mountains from own experience, can relate to Zaplotnik's tours in his homeland a lot easier and accompany him mentally much better than the target reader, who lacks this spatial orientation.

Since the book is published by a Swiss publishing house specialising in mountain literature and one can therefore assume that it will be read primarily by people interested in Slovenian alpinism and its protagonists, I also thought it necessary to add the full names of the alpinists mentioned by Zaplotnik only with their nicknames. Zaplotnik is very inconsistent in this respect. Only in 13 out of 34 cases does he inform his readers who he is referring to by the nickname. In order not to create unnecessary questions among readers, I have supplied the missing 21 full names.

With my own 34 footnotes referring to non-Slovenian or non-Yugoslav geography (the focus is on the Himalaya), I have only consistently continued what Zaplotnik himself started with his 20 corresponding footnotes but practised somewhat haphazardly. As a reader of the original, one often wonders why Zaplotnik seems to randomly provide additional information on mountain ranges or peaks when describing hiking and climbing routes. No thought-out system is apparent in the Slovenian text. I wanted to remedy this deficit in my translation. However, apart from basic information (e.g., height of a peak and full name of a climbing partner) I do not provide any further encyclopaedic

or biographical information on all these places and persons. I consider this superfluous nowadays, because if the readers are interested in more background information they can easily find it on the Internet. Sztorc (147), who has taken a closer look at the function of footnotes in literary translations, concludes ‘that rather than supplementing the reader’s knowledge the translator’s task consists in indicating the elements which may require gaining additional information’. Most experts agree that translators who use footnotes to make themselves more visible are in fact misusing them, since the main function of footnotes is to fill gaps in knowledge. They should therefore be written as concisely and objectively as possible so as not to raise additional questions which go beyond the text itself (ibid.: 149). Although it may sound paradoxical, I share Sztorc’s conclusion that ‘genuine loyalty’ to readers can only be achieved by answering their potential questions (ibid.: 153). And in the case of *Pot*, I even see my footnotes as a sign of loyalty to the author, because, after all, I am just following Zaplotnik’s intention. He also wanted to provide his target audience with additional information with the help of his 108 footnotes.

A red line which I would not cross as a translator are footnotes that refer to poetic passages of the original and try to explain their (e.g., rhythmic) peculiarities. In my view, a target text which can only convey decisive qualities of the original by means of additional comments can no longer be considered a translation.

#### **4 CONCLUSION**

In the theoretical part of this article, a critical analysis of *Skopostheorie* shows that functionalist models which tie the production of the target text primarily to the expectations of the client and the target

readers fall short in describing the reality of literary translation. In practice, the fulfilment of ethical standards such as accuracy regarding content and linguistic expressivity of the original, to which the translator feels committed, as well as the translator's personality and creativity, which influence his or her decisions, play an equally decisive role.

The examination of the translation examples from *Pot* shows that the idea of the invisible translator, reduced to the role of a mouthpiece between two languages, can no longer be sustained. It also contradicts the professional self-image of modern literary translators, who are much more self-confident in their dealings with authors and publishers, because everyone involved in book production is aware that the success of a translated book depends on it working in the target language and finding an audience. The idea of unconditionally maintaining the identity of the original is challenged in today's practice by the postulate of orientation towards potential readers, who must be taken into consideration when translating because they are necessary for the success of a book on the market.

Given the polyfunctionality of literary mountaineering texts such as *Pot*, which pursue informative and other goals in addition to aesthetic ones, the translator also has the task of a cultural mediator, anticipating corresponding gaps in knowledge and supplementing the information relevant to the recipients in the target culture through additions or by means of footnotes.

Having a specific readership in mind, the communicative function that the translated passage of the text is to fulfil determines the manner of verbalisation and thus also the level of closeness to or distance from the original. The question whether I shall translate literally or freely (or rather take a middle way) can therefore never

be answered absolutely but always only situationally, in the sense of a specific problem-solving strategy.

Against the background of the above findings, contemporary literary translation can be defined as a purpose-oriented, creative, strategic, (self-)reflexive decision-making process focused on anticipated reader expectations.

And what about loyalty to the original? In this respect, it is certainly not enough to refer to non-committal ethical standards as laid down in various professional codes of conduct. There are many good reasons, especially in the case of linguistically very specific literary texts such as *Pot*, not to stray too far from the original. In the end, it always comes down to the ethical self-commitment of the translator and the question of whether he or she can adequately justify adding, omitting or changing (improving?) something.

I would like to conclude this article with the following question: Is equivalence between source and target text still the right criterion for measuring the successfulness of a translation? In translation studies, this is an extremely controversial concept. And what other evaluation criteria should be used to judge whether a translation is successful? Ultimately, as a university teacher in my translation classes, when I examine individual linguistic and stylistic translation solutions of my Slovenian students, I am dependent on justifying my assessments of their texts translated into German on empirically confirmed findings. And since discrepancies between the original and the translation can be empirically proven very well, the search for equivalence relations is (at least in Slovenia) still a much-practised teaching and evaluation method. ♡

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## Povzetek

V prispevku raziskujemo, kakšno razumevanje prevajalčeve vloge bi moralo biti idealen temelj za sodobne literarne prevode. Najprej na kratko predstavimo slovenski potopisni roman Nejca Zaplotnika *Pot*, na katerem temelji ta prispevek in ki je zunaj Slovenije malo poznan, ga umestimo v kanon slovenske gorniške literature in ga opredelimo kot polifunkcionalno literarno delo. V nadaljevanju v prispevku razmišljamo, v kolikšni meri je mogoče funkcionalne prevajalske modele, kot je teorija skoposa (nem. *Skopostheorie*), ki postavlja pričakovanja naročnika prevoda in usmerjenost k bralcu nad zvestobo izvirniku, uporabiti v sodobni prevajalski praksi.

V analitičnem delu izbrane odlomke nemškega prevoda *Poti* uporabimo za osvetlitev tega, kako sta recepcija ciljnega besedila in predvideno ciljno bralstvo vplivala na prevajalski proces. S primerjalno analizo izvirnega in ciljnega besedila pokažemo, da je zvestobo izvirniku mogoče doseči ne le z upoštevanjem same ubeseditve, temveč tudi z namernimi spremembami (v obliki dodatkov v tekočem besedilu ali pojasnil v opombah). V prispevku odpiramo tudi vprašanje, v kolikšni meri mora biti prevajalec zvest avtorju in njegovemu delu. Ugotavljamo, da sklicevanje na nezavezujoče etične standarde, kot jih določajo različni poklicni kodeksi, nikakor ne zadostuje. Zlasti pri jezikovno zelo specifičnih literarnih besedilih, kot je *Pot*, obstaja veliko tehtnih razlogov za to, da se od izvirnika ne oddaljimo preveč. V primeru *Poti* to še posebej velja za lirske odlomke na koncu nekaterih poglavij in za tiste dele besedila, v katerih naj bi nemško bralstvo tako rekoč slišalo avtorjev posebni glas z vsemi njegovimi jezikovnimi posebnostmi. V igri je prevajalčeva etična zavezanost, v zvezi s katero se zastavlja vprašanje, ali lahko prevajalec ustrezno utemelji to, kar doda, izpusti ali spremeni (izboljša?).

Na podlagi teh ugotovitev sodobno književno prevajanje opredelimo kot ciljno usmerjen, ustvarjalen, (samo)refleksiven in strateški proces odločanja, osredotočen na predvidena bralska pričakovanja.

## ***Lars Felgner***

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# **In Memoriam**





# **A Never-Completed Reading: Boris Paternu (1926–2021)**

The story of Boris Paternu, the sensitive observer of Slovene literature and the advocate of the ‘never-completed’ reading, is intricately linked with the history of literary theory of the second half of the twentieth century. Literary theory, informed by the humanistic thought, is a type of discipline which does not offer indisputable truths about its object of investigation, although it shares two scientific principles with the sciences: namely, that results are not irrefutable since they can be questioned through argumentation, and that the object of observation is not fixed as its proof is dependent upon the observer’s point of view.

Boris Paternu early intellectual inquiry started in the wake of France Kidrič’s literary historical approach, which he soon abandoned to focus on the analysis of the elements that are intrinsic in a literary work. His understanding of a literary text as a creation with its own, inherent laws required the need for a wider array of methodological approaches. In 1949, the Czech American comparative literary critic René Well-ek offered a renewed view of literary theory. His landmark volume *Theory of Literature* (co-authored with A. Warren) became of seminal importance in Western society throughout the 1950s and 1960s (in Italy the book was published in 1956 whereas in Yugoslavia it was published in 1965.) The understanding of the synchronic structure of a text, which stemmed from structural linguistics of the Prague linguistic circle (Mukařovský, Jakobson, Trubetzkoy), Havránek) and Russian Formalism (Tynianov, Eichenbaum, Tomashevsky, Jakobson), gave new emphasis to the hermeneutic analysis of literary texts. In this respect, Boris Paternu remained faithful to the interpretive principle of deep reading throughout his life and sought in the original insights of other, related literary methods those elements that would enable him to expand his own view of the inherent meanings within a literary text.

Paternu's understanding of the underlying factors that shape a literary work and their relations was based on modern theories, although he remained sceptical towards formalism and structuralism. Likewise, he was not a great advocate of linear narrative, and the sociohistorical account of Slovene literature was for the most part alien to him.

Indeed, rather than a narrative that confines a literary work into a pre-determined story (as seen for instance in Kidrič's account of the historical development of Slovene literature through the proverbial 'agonies' - muke and 'procrastinations' - zamude,) he focused on the study of individual literary texts. Focusing on the shifts on a textual level, he sought to find those elements that would mark the development of Slovene literature.

He concentrated especially on the changing semantic dimensions of a literary work which, he thought, transcend the given meaning of words and are, therefore, the basis for new meaning making possibilities. He considered the subtler changes and major turns in literary texts as examples of such productive meaning making possibilities in Slovene literature. Through the refined semantic analysis of literary texts, he uncovered all such changes, constantly aware of all the other factors that have an influence on the continually changing, meaning-making status of a work of art. If formalism studied the evolutionary principles that subtend literary works, and structuralism focused on the relations between personal utterances and the cultural-linguistic system, Paternu believed that literary theory leads to quality reading thanks to its diverse methods to comprehend the various layers of meaning present in a work of art. His approach to literature was scientific in nature: he moved from the analysis of the internal, semantic elements of a literary work, through the insight into their mutually productive relations, to the original interpretation of the

results which he believed would lead the way into interpreting the winding pathways of Slovene literature's development.

Besides literature, Paternu committed himself to several investigations into the achievements and limitations of literary criticism (mainly Levstik). With carefully selected examples, he observed the various shifts in literary criticism from which it was possible to trace the evolutionary and typological nature of Slovene literature. At the basis of such developments, lay the shifts, collaborations and coexistence between tradition and innovation. These shifts are especially visible on the linguistic level where they become examples of an attempt to overcome contemporary literary, linguistic, and cultural contexts. Significant examples include the era of the Freising Manuscripts (*Monumenta Frisingensia - Brižinski spomeniki*) and Protestantism (Trubar, Bohorič and Dalmatin), or the Enlightenment with its classicist refined overtones and its linguistically fruitful collaboration with early pre-Romanticism (Zois, Linhart and Vodnik), as well as Prešeren who overcame the disagreements about poetic language (artificial/common, high/low) and embraced, with critical authority, both the European and national traditions thus affording new possibilities for Slovene aesthetic language.

These shifts and coexistences are also seen in the realism of Levstik and Jurčič. Both authors use language to encourage a sense of national belonging, which is later superseded in the works of Kersnik and Tavčar who break away from the literary, linguistic, and stylistic traditions of rural life. Early elements of modernism (Cankar, Kette, Murn Zupaničič) together with expressionism (Pregelj, Grum) are visible in Jenko's poetry which represents the definitive move from a national-educational literature. After the prolific interwar period of social realism, partisan and insurgent poetry, and a brief post-war

socialist realism, the typological transitions, coexistences and surpassing of aesthetic boundaries continued specifically in the poetic movement of Intimism - *Pesmi štirih* (Poetry of the four 1953) and in Šalamun's *Poker* (1966) which represent a further shift away from the stable parameters of literary models. These examples continue to this day.

Paternu applied a typology of Slovene literature which was based on his critical analysis of veritable texts rather than on an a-priori idea of their development. Central to his investigations were the author and the text, which were not subjected to the postmodern idea of 'the death of the author' as argued by Barthes and Foucault. Paternu argued that what can kill an author is only an ignorant reader. This 'never-completed' reading requires a sensitivity towards language, and a broad knowledge about its layered meanings within our lives. Paternu has brought to Slovene literature his own sensitivity and extensive literary theory knowledge. There is no reason we should abandon these efforts.

*Translated by Deana Neubauer*







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