



**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

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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 względu na 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.' (Rybiccka: 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.¹

In Morawski's diary, the most important role is given to the sense of sight. Working in geopoetics, Elżbieta Rybiccka 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 Rybiccka: 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, dishwasher-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 atopia² 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 *topophobia* – 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-mindedness³ 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 *topophobia* 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. (Morawska: 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 Punczewicz) published the second volume containing new interviews with people who stay at home while their dearest ones conquer peaks (see Punczewicz). The number of similar publications – conversations with family members of Himalayan climbers and stories of their families – has been increasing (see Sabała-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*

4
 '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.⁴ 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 himalajstičnih 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, olfaktričnega 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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