

Mountaineers as Writers: The Himalaya and Beyond

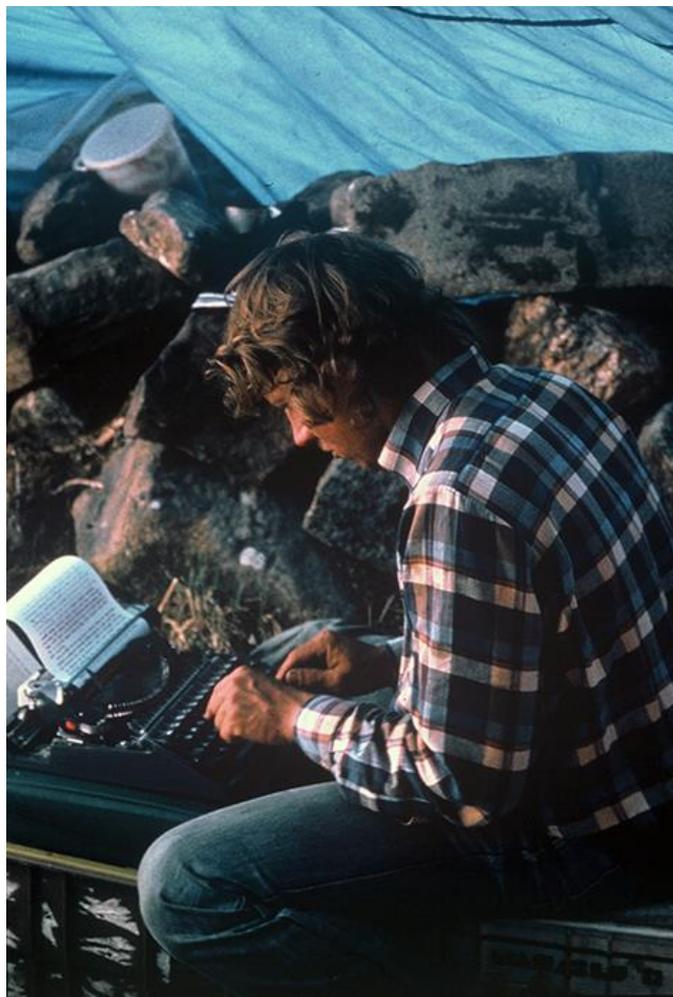
Alpinisti kot pisci: Himalaja in onkraj nje

Online conference of the Institute of Slovenian Literature and Literary Studies,
Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (ZRC SAZU)

17–18 March 2022

Zoom link (with a waiting room):

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89804718698>



High-altitude climber Nejc Zaplotnik typing at
Manaslu base camp, 1983. Photo: Viki Grošelj.

The modern fascination with mountains and mountain climbing has been noticed in such classical texts of cultural history as Georg Simmel's "Alpenreisen," Roland Barthes' *Mythologies*, Paul Veyne's "L'alpinisme," Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man*, and Simon Schama's *Landscape and Memory*. In the process, mountaineering has been associated with "the wholesale opening-up and enjoyment of nature" (Simmel 95), the "old Alpine myth . . . which Gide rightly associated with Helvetico-Protestant morality" (Barthes 74), "the discovery and inventory of the world" (Veyne 41), "the desire to be recognized as superior" (Fukuyama 319), and "a peculiar mixture of self-affirmation and self-effacement" (Schama 498).

No such interest exists for mountaineering literature. Whereas mountaineering has long been recognized as a feature of modern culture, mountaineering literature remains underresearched, despite its obvious potential for a cultural history of mountains and mountaineering. Worse still, whatever scholarly interest in literary approaches to mountains there is, it seems to be limited to canonized poetic thematizations of mountain landscapes, where the mountains are just one of possible themes of poetry.

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

WORKS CITED

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PROGRAM

17 March 2022, 09:30–09:40 CET

Jernej Habjan (ZRC SAZU):

Introduction

Mountaineers as Writers, Writers as Mountaineers

17 March 2022, 09:40–11:15 CET

Johann Georg Lughofer (U of Ljubljana):

The Alps as a Style

Alpine Clichés, Critiques, and Corona in German-Language Literature and Media

Sophia Mehrbrey (Saarland U):

Poetics of Verticality in Alpine War Narratives

Marijan Dović (ZRC SAZU):

Slovenian Mountains: The Birth of a Mythical Site from the Spirit of Poetry

17 March 2022, 11:30–13:30 CET

Marek Pacukiewicz (U of Silesia):

The Alpine Style in the Himalaya I: The Basics

Liminal Literature and the School of Vertical Promotion

Ewa Grzęda (U of Wrocław):

A History of Polish Himalayan Literature

Peter Mikša (U of Ljubljana):

Slovenian Routes and Books on Eight-Thousanders

17 March 2022, 15:00–17:00 CET

Jernej Habjan (ZRC SAZU):

The Alpine Style in the Himalaya II: Examples

Slovenian Mountaineering Literature: A Network Vertical Trials in Three Narrative Texts of Slovenian Mountaineering Literature

Alenka Koron (ZRC SAZU):

Przemysław Kaliszuk (Maria Curie-Skłodowska U):

Tadeusz Piotrowski's Account of the Polish–Yugoslav Expedition to Tirich Mir

Elżbieta Dutka (U of Silesia):

Olga Morawska and Piotr Morawski's Four-handed Mountaineering Autobiography

18 March 2022, 16:30–18:30 CET

Julie Rak (U of Alberta):

Recent Books in the Field, and Beyond

Chair: Amrita Dhar (Ohio State U)

On Ang Tharkay's Sherpa and Nimsdai Purja's Beyond Possible

Harald Höbusch (U of Kentucky):

Beyond the "Mountain of Destiny": In the Face of Tragedy—Nanga Parbat and National Socialist Radio

Martina Kopf (U of Mainz):

"What the Mountain Taught Me This August": René Daumal's (Meta)physical Alpinism

Delphine Moraldo (ENS Lyon):

The Spirit of Mountaineering: Towards a Sociology of Excellence

PROGRAM

17. marec 2022, 09.30–09.40

Jernej Habjan (ZRC SAZU):

Uvod

Alpinisti kot pisci, pisci kot alpinisti

17. marec 2022, 09.40–11.15

Johann Georg Lughofer (FF UL):

Alpe kot slog

Alpski klišeji, kritike in korona v književnosti in medijih v nemščini

Sophia Mehrbrey (Uni des Saarlandes):

Poetika vertikalnosti v alpskih vojnih pripovedih

Marijan Dović (ZRC SAZU):

Slovenske gore: rojstvo mitskega kraja iz duha poezije

17. marec 2022, 11.30–13.30

Marek Pacukiewicz (Uniwersytet Śląski):

Alpski slog v Himalaji I: osnove

Mejna literatura in šola vertikalnega napredovanja

Ewa Grzęda (Uniwersytet Wrocławski):

Zgodovina poljske himalajistične literature

Peter Mikša (FF UL):

Slovenske smeri na osemtisočakah in knjige o njih

17. marec 2022, 15.00–17.00

Jernej Habjan (ZRC SAZU):

Alpski slog v Himalaji II: primeri

Slovenska alpinistična literatura: omrežje

Alenka Koron (ZRC SAZU):

Vertikalni preskusi v treh pripovednih tekstih slovenske alpinistične literature

Przemysław Kaliszuk UMCS):

Tadeusz Piotrowski in njegov opis poljsko–jugoslovanske odprave na Tirič Mir

Elżbieta Dutka (Uniwersytet Śląski):

Olga Morawska in Piotr Morawski: štiriročna alpinistična avtobiografija

18. marec 2022, 16.30–18.30

Julie Rak (UAlberta):

Najnovejše knjige iz stroke in onkraj nje

Moderatorica: Amrita Dhar (Ohio State)

Ang Tarkaj, Sherpa, in Nimsdaj Purdža, Beyond Possible

Harald Höbusch (UKY):

Onkraj »gore usode«: pred obličjem tragedije – Nanga Parbat in nacionalsocialistični radio

Martina Kopf (JGU Mainz):

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

Delphine Moraldo (ENS Lyon):

Duh alpinizma: k sociologiji odličnosti

ABSTRACTS

Johann Georg Lughofer

Alpine Clichés, Critiques, and Corona in German-Language Literature and Media

The paper argues that the role of the Alps in German-language literature is embedded both in a socio-historical context and in the topoi that emerged from that context. Using examples drawn primarily from two very different Austrian authors of the interwar period—Joseph Roth and Ödön von Horváth—the aim is to show the literary approaches used to undermine traditional topoi. A brief look at new Austrian perspectives on the Alps will be offered as well.

Sophia Mehrbrey

Poetics of Verticality in Alpine War Narratives

The paper approaches the Alps as a borderscape separating and at once connecting its inhabitants and visitors across time and space. Case studies of this comparative study are drawn from novels by contemporary writers from the Alpine region where the Alps feature as a realm of memory, specifically the memory of World War II.

Marijan Dović

Slovenian Mountains: The Birth of a Mythical Site from the Spirit of Poetry

The paper discusses early Slovenian poetry and its relation to the mountains, especially the national and poetic potential of Mount Triglav, as well as Lake Bohinj and the Savica Falls. It is shown that Slovenian poetry from Valentin Vodnik (1758–1819), through France Prešeren (1800–1849), to Simon Gregorčič (1844–1906) visibly contributed to making the mountains a mythical national site.

Marek Pacukiewicz

Liminal Literature and the School of Vertical Promotion

The paper 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.

Ewa Grzęda

A History of Polish Himalayan Literature

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 paper traces these transformations by sketching the main stages in the history of Polish mountain climbing.

Peter Mikša

Slovenian Routes and Books on Eight-Thousanders

The paper gives a chronology of Slovenian Himalayan expeditions with an overview of the first Slovenian ascents of eight-thousand-meter peaks. 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.

Jernej Habjan

Slovenian Mountaineering Literature: A Network

The paper presents a comparative reading of all Slovenian-language books which entail accounts of expeditions to eight-thousanders written by members of those expeditions. Each book is read for acknowledgements of mountaineering books that have inspired the author to take up climbing. Himalayan climbing, the deadliest of sports, emerges as the sport whose literature inspires their readers to join the ranks of Himalayan climbers and hence authors of mountaineering books.

Alenka Koron

Vertical Trials in Three Narrative Texts of Slovenian Mountaineering Literature

The paper looks at narrative mountaineering literature as a hybrid genre that addresses mountain climbing as an existential trial offering liminal experiences. In terms of case studies, it 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).

Przemysław Kaliszuk

Tadeusz Piotrowski's Account of the Polish–Yugoslav Expedition to Tirich Mir

The paper presents 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. A coherent narrative identity is shown to be constructed through the ideological and aesthetic conception of the haptic sublime.

Elżbieta Dutka

Olga Morawska and Piotr Morawski's Four-handed Mountaineering Autobiography

The paper presents a reading of *Od początku do końca* (From Beginning to End) by Olga Morawska and Piotr Morawski. The book 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. The combination of two perspectives and two narratives makes the book stand out from the genre of Himalayan climbing accounts.

Julie Rak

On Ang Tharkay's Sherpa and Nimsdai Purja's Beyond Possible

The paper presents a reading of two mountaineering books by Nepalese high-altitude climbers: *Sherpa*, the English edition of *Memoires d'un Sherpa* (1954), an autobiography of Ang Tharkay told to Basil P. Norton; and Mirmal "Nims" Purja's *Beyond Possible* (2020).

Harald Höbusch

Beyond the "Mountain of Destiny": In the Face of Tragedy—Nanga Parbat and National Socialist Radio

Expanding on existing research on the representations of Nanga Parbat in print and film and tracing a third path of Nanga Parbat into the German imagination via radio, the paper will present the coverage of 1930s Nanga Parbat expeditions in the German media as a closely coordinated campaign of German mountaineering and sports officials designed to propagate some of the key concepts of National Socialist ideology.

Martina Kopf

"What the Mountain Taught Me This August": René Daumal's (Meta)physical Alpinism

French writer René Daumal's unfinished novel, *Mount Analogue* (*Le Mont Analogue*, 1952), tells of a group of mountaineers who set out to find an invisible mountain, the Analogue. All mountains have lost their analogical power, and thus a new mountain is needed. Daumal's mountain speaks of the desire for a change of consciousness, to be achieved through conquering the mountain. This paper traces the genesis of *Mount Analogue* as an interplay between a physical and a metaphysical adventure.

Delphine Moraldo

The Spirit of Mountaineering: Towards a Sociology of Excellence

Since the beginning of mountaineering, mountaineers have produced a vast literary canon. Amongst these texts, autobiographies hold a special place. The paper shows that mountaineering autobiographies present relevant, even ideal material for a sociological study of excellence in mountaineering. Indeed, they are characterized by a discourse of excellence produced by an elite (both sporting and, to a certain extent, social elite), a discourse that can tell us a lot about the so-called spirit of mountaineering.

SPEAKERS

Amrita Dhar is Assistant Professor of English at Ohio State University. Her research and teaching interests are in early modern literature, disability studies, environmental humanities, and digital humanities. She is also a climber and mountaineer, and works and writes on world mountaineering literatures. Her current book projects include *A Social History of Indian Mountaineering*, an accessible account of Indian Himalayan mountaineering from its colonial “Golden Age” in the mid-twentieth century to the emerging models of the twenty-first.

Marijan Dović is Senior Research Associate at the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (ZRC SAZU) and Assistant Professor at the Postgraduate School ZRC SAZU. His research interests include Slovenian literature, nationalism studies, literary censorship, and literary canonization. With Jón Karl Helgason he has co-written *National Poets, Cultural Saints: Canonization and Commemorative Cults of Writers in Europe* (Brill, 2017) and co-edited *Great Immortality: Studies on European Cultural Sainthood* (Brill, 2019).

Elżbieta Dutka is Professor at the Institute of Literary Studies, University of Silesia in Katowice. Her fields of interest include twenty- and twenty-first-century Polish literature and spatial literary studies, especially geopoetics, new regionalism and mountaineering writing. Her recent publications include *Pytania o miejsce. Sondowanie topografii literackich XX i XXI wieku* (Questions of Place: Probing Literary Topographies of the Twentieth and Twenty-first Centuries [Universitas, 2019]).

Ewa Grzęda is a member of the Institute of Polish Literature at the University of Wrocław, where she heads the Mountain Studies Centre. Her research interests encompass nineteenth-century literature and culture, cultural and literary space, and regional and mountain literature. She is the editor-in-chief of *Góry—Literatura—Kultura*, a yearbook dedicated to the study of mountain literature and culture. She has written books on mythologization in nineteenth-century Polish literature and culture.

Jernej Habjan is Research Associate at the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (ZRC SAZU) and Assistant Professor at the Postgraduate School ZRC SAZU. Most recently, he was Fung Global Fellow at the Princeton Institute for International and Regional Studies, Princeton University. He sits on the AILC/ICLA Research Committee on Literary Theory and is the author of *Ordinary Literature Philosophy: Lacanian Literary Performatives between Austin and Rancière* (Bloomsbury, 2020).

Harald Höbusch is Professor of German Studies at the University of Kentucky. His research interests include twentieth-century German cultural studies, with a focus on mountaineering, and world language pedagogy. He is the author of *“Mountain of Destiny”: Nanga Parbat and Its Path into the German Imagination* (Camden House, 2016) and *Thomas Mann. Kunst, Kritik, Politik 1893–1913* (Thomas Mann: Art, Critique, Politics, 1893–1913 [Francke Verlag, 2000]). Harald is the editor-in-chief of *Colloquia Germanica*.

Przemysław Kaliszuk is Lecturer at the Department of Polish Philology, Maria Curie-Skłodowska University. His research interests include late twentieth-century Polish fiction, modern mountaineering literature, contemporary Polish essay, and Polish science fiction. He is the author of *Wyczerpywanie i odnowa: “nowa” polska proza lat siedemdziesiątych i osiemdziesiątych wobec późnej nowoczesności* (Exhaustion and Replenishment: The “New” Polish Prose of the 1970s and 80s Facing Late Modernity [Wydawnictwo UMCS, 2019]).

Martina Kopf is Lecturer (“Wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiterin”) at the Department of Comparative Literature, University of Mainz. Currently, she is a Humboldt Fellow (Feodor Lynen Research Fellow) at Paris Nanterre University. Martina is the author of *Alpinismus—Andinismus. Gebirgslandschaften in europäischer und lateinamerikanischer Literatur* (Alpinism—Andinism: Mountain Landscapes in European and Latin American Literature [Metzler, 2016]).

Alenka Koron is Independent Humanities Specialist at the Institute of Slovenian Literature and Literary Studies, Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (ZRC SAZU), and Assistant Professor at the Postgraduate School ZRC SAZU. Her research areas include narratology, theory of autobiography, and the contemporary novel. She is the co-editor, with Andreas Leben, of *Literarische Mehrsprachigkeit im österreichischen und slowenischen Kontext* (Literary Multilingualism in Austrian and Slovenian Contexts [A. Francke, 2019]).

Johann Georg Lughofer is Associate Professor of German at the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana. His research interests include German and Austrian exile literature, the Habsburg myth in film and literature, and intercultural German studies. He is the editor of *Das Erschreiben der Berge: die Alpen in der deutschsprachigen Literatur* (Writing the Mountains: The Alps in German-speaking Literature [Innsbruck UP, 2014]) and *Thomas Bernhard* (Böhlau, 2012), among other volumes.

Sophia Mehrbrey is a postdoctoral researcher at Saarland University, where she is a member of the research group “Europäische Traumkulturen” (“European Dream-Cultures”). Building on her dissertation on the representation of infancy in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French literature, which she defended at the University of Rouen Normandy, her postdoctoral project concerns the aesthetic representation of children’s dreamworlds. Another current project looks at the Alps as a realm of memory in contemporary novels on World War II.

Peter Mikša is Assistant Professor at the Department of History, University of Ljubljana. His research interests span the history of Slovenian mountains, from mountaineering and mountain tourism to the so-called national battle for Slovenian mountains and the role of mountains in the construction of Slovenian identity. His books include *Slovensko planinstvo / Slovene Mountaineering* (with Kornelija Ajlec [PZS, 2015]) and *Zgodovina slovenskega alpinizma* (A History of Slovenian Alpinism; with Urban Golob [Friko, Mikša in partnerji, 2013]).

Delphine Moraldo is Research Fellow at Centre Max Weber, École normale supérieure de Lyon. She is the author of *L'esprit de l'alpinisme. Une sociologie de l'excellence, du XIXe siècle au XXIe siècle* (The Spirit of Mountaineering: A Sociology of Excellence, 19th–21st Centuries [ENS Editions, 2021]). Her articles on the sociology of mountaineering have appeared in the *European Studies in Sports History*, *Genèses*, *Sciences sociales et sport*, *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, and elsewhere.

Marek Pacukiewicz is Associate Professor at the Institute of Culture Studies, University of Silesia in Katowice. He is the author of *Krajobrazy kontekstu* (Landscapes of Context [Wydawnictwo UŚ, 2021]), *Grań kultury: transgresje alpinizmu* (The Ridge of Culture: Transgressions of Mountaineering [Universitas, 2012]), and *Dyskurs antropologiczny w pisarstwie Josepha Conrada* (The Anthropological Discourse in the Work of Joseph Conrad [Universitas, 2008]). He sits on the board of the Polish Joseph Conrad Society.

Julie Rak is Professor at the Department of English and Film Studies, University of Alberta, where she holds the Henry Marshall Tory Chair for 2019–2024. Her major areas of research are (auto)biography and life writing, popular culture, and North American literature. Julie is the author of *False Summit: Gender in Mountaineering Nonfiction* (McGill–Queen's UP, 2021) and the co-editor, with Andrew Gow, of *Mountain Masculinity: the Writings of Nello "Tex" Vernon-Wood in the Canadian Rockies, 1911-1938* (Athabsca UP, 2008).

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